



Final Assessment Report for the Cyclical Program Review of the BA in History (Waterloo and Brantford)

Submitted by: Dr. Michael Carroll, Dr. Bruce Arai, Dr. Heidi Northwood, Dr. Pat Rogers, Dr. Deborah MacLatchy

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PART ONE: EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

A) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REVIEW DOCUMENTS (SELF-STUDY, REVIEWERS' REPORT, UNIT RESPONSE)

In its Self-Study, the History program took note of the following:

- In the early 2000s, the Department shifted away from its traditional geographic and temporal focus by adding faculty in new areas (including the Classical, medieval, and early modern periods; African history; aboriginal history) and is moving to deepen its focus on cultural history
- A core strength remains in the area of military and international relations history
- The Department had 14 FT faculty in 2003, and over the next ten years this increased to 22 FT faculty (with much of the increase coming during the double cohort boom)
- The Department has kept 400-level capstone courses capped at 15 through double-weighting those courses; these courses are reading and writing intensive
- Departmental enrolments have been falling, mainly due to a decline in students taking History courses as electives (though the number of students declaring a History Major in 2012 was up slightly from the number in 2008)
- Academic learning objectives have been established for each year of study in the program in ways that align with Laurier's Degree Level Expectations
- The Department has recently introduced a Research Specialization Option for students intending to pursue graduate studies in History
- The Department supported initiatives on the Waterloo campus to enhance student learning and good pragmatic practices both by incorporating a number of high impact teaching practices and developing two travel abroad courses, and also by teaching a disproportionate number of Faculty of Arts First Year Seminars and by maintaining a Residence Learning Community linked to History
- Most Waterloo Department faculty expressed broad satisfaction with the resources associated with the Library, IT, Teaching Support Services, etc. but nevertheless expressed concern that existing resources might prove inadequate as research in History becomes increasingly digitized

- Department members have been very active across a wide range of professional associations and have played important editorial roles in connection with a number of journals
- The faculty are productive; 19 of the 22 FT have written at least one monograph with 16 written in the 7 years covered by this review

External Reviewers' Report

The external reviewers were Dr. Gregory S. Kealey (Dept of History, Faculty of Arts, University of New Brunswick) and Dr. Christine Alksnis (Psychology Program, Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Brantford). The reviewers visited the Waterloo Campus on March 24, 2014 and the Brantford Campus on March 25, 2014.

The reviewers made the following points:

- There is a good fit between the program's outcomes and Laurier's mission statement and Academic Plan
- The program structure described in the Self-Study is commendable, though it seems to describe mainly the Waterloo experience
- The program appears to exist as "two solitudes" at Waterloo and Brantford and more should be done to harmonize the two instances
- The reviewers had praise for several recent initiatives including: the double-weighting of 4th year seminars, the broadening of the temporal focus of the curriculum, and the Research Specialization
- The move to courses conceived in thematic not geographic terms is too new to be evaluated, but probably needs to be promulgated among History students more clearly
- The rationale for maintaining the honours thesis is not strong; few students have taken the option over the past eight years; and its inclusion is likely misleading to students; for these reasons, the option should be eliminated
- The recent experiment with Community Service Learning in one History course should be expanded, possibly in connection with the new Community Engagement Option in Arts
- The Laurier Centre for Military, Strategic and Disarmament Studies (LCMSDS) is an important differentiator for Laurier, and ties with the History program – especially at Brantford – should be enhanced

- History enrolments over the last year reported (from 2012-13 to 2013-14) have increased, and this is encouraging, especially in light of the decline in History enrolments nationwide
- There has however been a decline in online enrolments; the department should look at online offerings as a way of encouraging enrolment growth
- Enhance experiential learning opportunities through community service learning and travel abroad courses offered through the LCMSDS
- Research funding obtained by the department is acceptable but not outstanding
- The proportion of “A” grades in 100 and 200 level History courses is slightly higher at Brantford compared to Waterloo
- Students on both campuses think highly of the faculty
- The publishing records of faculty on both campuses is strong
- There is some concern that the department is trying to cover too many fields, and that collaboration with the History programs at the Universities of Waterloo and Guelph might be useful
- The reviewers applaud the move on the Waterloo campus toward digital methods and training

Unit Response to Reviewer’s Report

- The Waterloo Department was disappointed that the tone of the report seemed negative despite all the positive things said
- The single most important concern of the external reviewers is that the program offered at Waterloo and at Brantford be harmonized
- Unfortunately, the reviewers focus on the relationship between the two programs as offered on each campus rather than on the structure of the program at Brantford
- Several of the concrete suggestions made by the reviewers for harmonizing the two experiences (video conferencing in particular) are seen by the department to be problematic as a learning experience
- Other concrete suggestions (greater use of Waterloo TAs at Brantford) are problematic unless accompanied by additional resources (e.g., paying for transportation costs)
- The reviewers seem to want to create identical programs on both campus and fail to recognize the barriers to this (the fact that Brantford wants to develop, but hasn’t

yet developed, its own strategic plan; that Brantford is more heavily dependent on CAS to teach their courses; etc)

- Course sizes differ at the two campuses (more on this later in this report)
- The Waterloo program accepts the recommendation to include more pre-modern courses in their offerings, and has already done this
- The Waterloo department wants to keep the Thesis option since it is a high impact practice that incurs no great cost
- The Waterloo department is actively engaged in developing new online courses and commits to eliminating the duplication of online and intramural courses, and faculty on both campuses are beginning to explore greater use of blended courses
- As a way of harmonizing class sizes, Brantford proposes that first and second year courses be capped at 100; third year courses at 40-50; and fourth year courses at 15
- Tutorials in first year Brantford courses should be provided as soon as possible in courses with 65 or more students
- Provide a wider range of course offerings for students at Brantford
- The two programs have, subsequent to the review, created a four member Multi-Campus Coordinating Committee (HMCPSS) in accordance with the Senate policy on Multi-Campus Governance
- Resources should be made available to facilitate travel between the two campuses as a way, in part, to facilitate greater collaboration on common grant applications
- Space on the Waterloo campus for the undergraduate History Society and space for CAS members on both campuses should be enhanced
- The Department agrees that the library budget for monographs and electronic resources should be enhanced
- The reviewers recommend that grade distributions over the two campuses be monitored; Brantford will do this; the Waterloo department will maintain its commitment to quality but also work to enhance student success
- The Brantford program would have liked the reviewers to show more concern for the especially high percentage of Brantford History courses delivered by CAS members

B) IDENTIFICATION OF PROGRAM STRENGTHS

- There is a strong research culture at both campuses and faculty, on both campuses, have a strong publication record
- The close ties between the Department of History and the LCMSDS is an asset and those ties should be enhanced
- There is a good fit between the program's defined outcomes and Laurier's Mission Statement and Academic Plan
- Students on both campuses are generally satisfied with their program

C) OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

Although both the Reviewers and the Unit Response regularly talk of "programs" (plural), this is potentially confusing. There is in fact only one History program, and it is a program offered at both campuses (with the Faculty of Arts being the originating Faculty). This understanding provides a context in which to address some of the reviewers' recommendations. In particular, the Senate document on Multi-Campus Governance recommends that – because there is only one History program – courses at the first and second year be harmonized as much as possible on both campuses. That same document, however, also envisions allowing for more curricular divergence at the third and fourth year to reflect the specific programming that makes most sense at each campus (given the expertise found there; the strategic plans adopted by the local unit; etc).

We recommend that faculty on both campuses talk with CTIE about the value and benefits of well-designed courses that make use of videoconferencing, and discuss ways of implementing such courses in ways that meet with the approval of faculty on both campuses. As well, use of TAs across campuses using technology-enabled learning pedagogies (videoconference, social media, the learning management system, etc) is strongly encouraged. There is an opportunity for Laurier to become a true leader in multi-campus delivery by faculty and TAs of undergraduate curriculum. A proposal for a pilot, supported by CTIE staff, would be welcomed by the deans, AVP: T&L and VPA.

Many of the recommendations made, either by the reviewers or the units, are in effect requests for resources. This includes the Waterloo program's request for retirement replacement positions; the request for subsidized transportation between the two campuses; and Brantford's request for TAs. Simply making these requests is never grounds for automatically granting these requests. Especially in the current climate, both the Dean of Arts and the Dean of Liberal Arts will have to assess requests for more resources against (1) the claims made by other units in each Faculty and (2) the availability of resources in a period of increasing financial constraints. Hopefully, the results of the IPRM process will help

in making decisions about the allocation, or more likely, the re-allocation of resources within each Faculty and across the University.

D) PRIORITIZATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS APPROVED FOR IMPLEMENTATION

One of the recurring issues raised in the report is the issue of harmonizing class sizes on the two campuses. At the moment, the program at Waterloo tends to have higher course caps in first year and slightly higher caps in second year, while at Brantford the program has higher course caps in the third year and much higher caps in the fourth year.

One issue overlooked in the discussion – by all parties – is that course sizes and course caps cannot be assessed independently from the matter of overall teaching loads. In this regard, one thing that makes direct comparison difficult (but not impossible) is that while Waterloo faculty teach mainly History courses, Brantford faculty are more likely to split their teaching across History and some other discipline (or disciplines). Still, with that in mind, it would seem to make sense to bring course caps, and so course sizes, at the two campuses more in line with one another.

The first year caps for Waterloo, while higher than first year caps at Brantford, are not at all unusual for first year courses in the Faculty of Arts generally. Given this, it might make sense to raise the caps a bit at Brantford. We suggest that this be left up to the Dean of Liberal Arts. Additionally, this cap will need to be considered in relation to actual enrolment limits in History courses at the Brantford campus. Specifically, classroom sizes may prevent higher limits, and raising the cap above realistic expectations of course enrolments accomplishes little.

Course caps at the second and third year are sufficiently similar that, at least for the moment, they can be left intact and revisited in a year or two.

A critical issue, and one especially important for Brantford, is the dramatic discrepancy in caps at the fourth year (15 in Waterloo, 30 at Brantford). At the start, it should be noted that History Waterloo's 15 student cap for fourth year seminar is unusual (indeed unique) in the Faculty of Arts, where the typical limit for 400 level seminars is 20 or 25.

The argument put forward by the Department of History, and supported by the reviewers, is that such a cap allows 400 level History seminars to be capstone courses that can incorporate high impact teaching practices in a way that would not be possible with classes that were any larger. A further justification for the 15-student cap is that these 400 level seminars are double-weighted for students (but not faculty). Thus, for students, a one-term seminar is worth 1.0 credit while that same seminar counts as 0.5 credit in determining faculty workload.

There are two issues that need to be raised here. First, it's not clear why increasing the class size, at least a bit, would make it impossible to incorporate the same "high impact teaching practices" now in place, especially if – as seems to be the case – these classes depend heavily on students working on their own projects. Thus, according to the History Self-Study:

Fourth year courses . . . promote discussion of historical literature and research on specific historical periods and themes. Seminars are a form of learner-centred instruction. Students take responsibility for preparing their weekly readings for class discussion and for researching their primary-research papers, thereby empowering themselves through independent study. They hone their skills of oral and written expression by sharing their ideas and writing with other seminar participants. The instructors guide students in their exploration of the monograph literature and in their research in primary documents.

Again, it's not clear why this sort of student-driven pedagogy could not similarly be used in a seminar that was at least slightly larger.

A second problematic issue has to do with the rationale for double weighting. To quote from the Department's Self-Study (p. 64):

Double-weighting, by which students pay fees for a full-credit course taught in one term mean [sic] that History students are paying for the privileged [sic] of small classes. This innovative approach ensures the practicality of small class sizes in capstone courses while profiting university revenues.

If double-weighting is in the end mainly a way of "double paying" to keep class sizes small (which, taken at face value, is what this seems to be saying), then we have to ask if the net effect is to achieve small classes sizes by, in effect, offering a BA that is less than the true equivalent of a 20 credit degree.

We imagine that most programs would like to keep their fourth year seminars small. That said though, and putting aside the "double-paying to have a small class" argument, there do not seem to be strong grounds for 400 level courses in History being so *much* smaller than comparable courses in other Arts departments and in the Faculty of Liberal Arts. This seems especially true given that these courses have been structured explicitly to shift responsibility for the course to the students themselves.

Accordingly, our recommendation is:

- that the Dean of Arts raise the caps in 400 level History seminars to at least 20, and possibly higher after consulting with the department and taking overall workload into account.

Whether 400 level course caps at Brantford should be lowered is certainly something that the Dean of Liberal Arts might consider. We recognize, however, that it is possible that the

Dean will determine that this step is not appropriate given comparative workloads in other programs in Liberal Arts, and budget constraints.

The reviewers suggest that additional office space be made available for History CAS members in Brantford. This request is not feasible because CAS members are supplied with the office space set out in the CAS Collective Agreement, and allocations are made on a Faculty-wide basis.

The reviewers recommend that the Honours Thesis be phased out mainly because too few students take advantage of this opportunity and because it causes some confusion among students. The department argues for its retention because it is useful for the few students who take this option and entails no great cost. Since the reviewers do not really establish a clear basis for the claim that the Thesis option creates confusion, we see no strong grounds for deleting this option.

PART TWO: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Recommendation to be Implemented	Responsibility for Implementation	Anticipated Completion Date	Additional Notes
Review caps for first year courses in Brantford	Dean of Liberal Arts	December 2014	Classroom sizes, internal equity and budgets will need to be considered in any discussion of caps.
Review caps for fourth year courses in Brantford	Dean of Liberal Arts	December 2014	Classroom sizes, internal equity and budgets will need to be considered in any discussion of caps.
Raise course caps in fourth year courses in Waterloo to 20, and possibly higher after consultation with the Department.	Dean of Arts	December 2014	
Develop a strategic vision for harmonizing course offerings at the first and second year as much as possible.	Chair, Department of History Program Coordinator, Brantford	Winter 2015	