

## External Review Report of the Department of History

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### External Review Committee

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### Executive Summary

This is a remarkably strong Department that is ably fulfilling its academic mission. It has dedicated faculty who are skilled teachers and renowned researchers. It boasts academically robust programs with well- designed core courses, healthy enrolments at the undergraduate level, highly efficient staff, and a strong student community. It has successfully weathered storms that have becalmed other programs in the social sciences and humanities, thanks to the creative and laborious efforts of its faculty and the strong leadership of its chairs.

Department faculty are active, valued contributors to historical scholarship in Canada and beyond, publishing ten monographs and dozens of articles over the past seven years. They have won dozens of grants and fellowships since the last review in 2017, including some large collaborative projects of considerable public import, twelve SSHRC Insight grants, and many smaller-scale, but high impact, internal and external grants. Faculty emphasize that these smaller grants have been crucial for the completion of projects that don't require SSHRC-scale funding, and they expressed concern about the declining availability of internal grants.

Despite its many successes – or, indeed, in part because of them – the Department faces some emerging challenges. Undergraduate enrolment growth and faculty turnover require the timely addition of new faculty members, as well as careful planning for new hires as current members retire. Rising enrolments combined with shortages of qualified teaching assistants have raised questions about course learning outcomes and the design of assessments to measure student learning. Continuing sessional instructors, with tenuous job security, teach a large number of courses and students. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced new challenges and opportunities for history pedagogy that the Department has yet to fully engage.

Faculty and students agree that the MA and PhD programs remain excellent, delivering rigorous training in history, valuable co-op and internship opportunities, and degrees that serve students in both academic and professional career tracks. That said, changes to the university's graduate funding model in 2020 have significantly reduced History's ability to attract and fund graduate students. Declining intakes of new students have reduced the number of dedicated graduate courses offered and produced recurring shortages of qualified teaching assistants. The Department and Deans of Humanities and Graduate Studies need to work together to determine a viable path forward for the graduate programs. While robust graduate cohorts are desirable in themselves, they are also necessary to provide the teaching assistance needed to balance undergraduate enrolment growth with program quality.

Though there is a healthy spectrum of views on how best to meet these challenges, the Department's robust collegiality and deep commitment to its collective success positions it well to address them head on. We recommend that the Department enhance its already strong collegiality and deepen collaboration through periodic retreats and other avenues for collective deliberation and decision-making.

All of these challenges also require the engagement and support of the University Administration, including the Deans of Humanities and Graduate Studies. The Department and the Administration should give careful consideration to the objectives and optimal size of undergraduate and graduate programs in History, and then work collaboratively to achieve them. The Department will need to plan collaboratively and creatively to ensure its continued success. The Deans will need to support the Department via timely hirings, strategic budgeting, and increased graduate funding.

#### Key Recommendations:

1. That the Department enhance its already strong collegiality through periodic retreats and other avenues for collective deliberation and decision-making. Various models might be pursued, but we suggest that annual (or biannual) retreats, supported financially by the Faculty and assisted by outside facilitators when needed, would be useful venues for revisiting the departmental hiring plan, addressing the challenges facing the undergraduate and graduate programs, and grappling with the discipline-specific disruptions of AI—amongst other ongoing and emerging issues.
2. That the Dean approve hirings in (a) Indigenous Studies and (b) African Diaspora as soon as possible.
3. That the Department revisit its hiring plan, including in the discussion how best to integrate the work done by continuing sessionals.
4. That the department members collectively revisit the learning outcomes articulated in the self-study in order to build consensus around them, to develop a plan for integrating them into the curriculum, and to use them to track and enhance program quality.
5. That the Department seek strategies for sustaining and strengthening the graduate program by:
  - a. working with the Deans of Humanities and Graduate Studies to optimize funding offers to graduate program applicants, including guaranteed TA and grant-supported RA funding that can make funding packages more attractive;
  - b. optimizing graduate course offerings through strategic scheduling, cross-listing, and inter- university collaborations. These may include: scheduling the historiography course in the fall term; offering the public history seminar every other year and/or widening it to include methods relevant to all MA programs; scheduling an MA methods course every other year and/or integrating it into the existing public history seminar; identifying other graduate courses across the university suitable for cross-listing and/or history credit;

- identifying and encouraging opportunities to take grad courses elsewhere through the Western Deans Agreement; developing part-time offerings.
- c. taking stock of the barriers to timely completion in each graduate program stream and considering adjustments to program requirements, mentoring, and funding, as appropriate and feasible.
  - d. considering the addition (or shift) of a service role to coordinate and promote the public history program.
6. That the University restore internal, small-scale grant opportunities for research projects with significant potential but modest financial requirements, without requiring the grants to seed some larger grant application.
7. That the Department consider ways to make its communications with students more effective (e.g., with a Brightspace site or weekly email digest).