

Final Assessment Report

History

Graduate and Undergraduate Programs (reviewed 2020/21)

A. Summary

1. The Department's Self Study was considered and approved by the Senate Academic Review Committee on November 11, 2020.
2. The Review Committee consisted of two external reviewers: Catherine Carstairs (University of Guelph) and Roisin Cossar (University of Manitoba), and one internal reviewer, Hichem Ben-el-Mechaiekh (Brock University).
3. The virtual review occurred on January 26, 28 and 29, 2021.
4. The Reviewers' Report was received on February 27, 2021.
5. The Senate Graduate Studies Committee response was received on March 12, 2021.
6. The Senate Undergraduate Program Committee response was received on March 23, 2021.
7. The Department response was received on March 26, 2021.
8. The Dean of Graduate Studies response was received on March 31, 2021.
9. The Dean of Humanities response was received on April 12, 2021.

This review was conducted under the terms and conditions of the IQAP approved by Senate on May 25, 2016.

Program Outcome Categories:

Based on their knowledge of the discipline, the content of the Self-Study and the interviews conducted during the site visit, the Review Committee gave the programs the following Outcome Categories:

Program(s)	Excellent Quality	Good Quality	Good Quality with Concerns	Non-Viable
MA History		x		
BA (Honours) History		x		
Concurrent BA (Honours) History/BEd	x			
Combined Major (Honours and Pass) History		x		
BA (Pass) History		x		
Minor in History		x		

Executive Summary:

The Reviewers wrote:

This is a well-functioning department that offers a very good undergraduate degree and a good MA degree. The undergraduate outcomes seem comparable to other history programs across the country. The students graduate with excellent communication, analytical and research skills and receive a broad education in global history as well as local history. The MA program is also of good quality, although we had more concerns about the ambitiousness of the learning outcomes, the degree of student satisfaction and the structure of the degree program. It was hard to evaluate the other programs separately as little detail was provided about the specifics of these programs and their outcomes, but the students in the Concurrent Education stream gave the program exceptionally high praise.

B. Strengths of the Program

The reviewers noted the following strengths:

This is a strong program with some unique features, including a long-standing co-op program and digital humanities courses and research. The BA Honours program is flexible for students with a wide array of course offerings and no specific requirements for breadth, allowing students to create their own pathways through the program. Supervision for MA students seems excellent. It is a collegial department and students clearly feel that professors care deeply about their learning. The department also values and protects the autonomy of its faculty members, and members play valuable roles within the Faculty of Humanities and the university as a whole.

C. Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement

Recommendation #1

Strong recommendation that the department prune their course offerings to reflect what they can reasonably offer.

The Department responded:

The Department accepts this recommendation with reservations and while observing that there are a complex number of interrelated factors that influence course offerings. The Department acknowledges that, as a large Department (21 members), it has a correspondingly large bank of undergraduate courses (125), and that there are some courses included in the course bank that have not been taught in several (sometimes many) years. Courses that have not been offered in several years can easily be pruned from the course bank, as we noted in the Review, section 16, point 1b (pp. 224-5). The Department draws attention to the fact that not all courses are offered in any given year, however, and that each faculty member typically has a bank of courses (around 6 per faculty) that are offered on a rotating basis (Review section 5.1 (p. 95)); moreover, course offerings are also impacted by sabbaticals, leaves, and releases, for which several (sometimes more) department members are eligible each year. Thus, Department course offerings do, to a very real extent, reflect what we “can reasonably offer.” The Department does, however, commit to continuing to discuss course offerings as part of recommendation #9 below.

The Senate Undergraduate Program Committee responded:

The committe[e] noted that in accordance with 3.A. 8.3 in the Faculty Handbook, courses not offered over three consecutive years should be deleted from the course bank unless their continued inclusion is justified by the department. It should also be noted that any course number deleted from the course bank cannot be used again until five years have elapsed since its deletion.

The Senate Graduate Studies Committee responded:

This curricular matter actually pertains to the undergraduate courses- recommendation #3 advocates for a greater range of graduate courses and flexibility in program offerings. However, these matters are for the members of the program to consider and not within this committee’s purview

The Dean of Humanities responded:

The Dean supports the Department’s commitment to discussing course offerings.

The Dean of Graduate Studies responded:

This recommendation primarily refers to undergraduate course offerings and therefore falls outside of FGS.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2021/22

Recommendation #2

That the department investigate the possibility of providing more on-line offerings especially in the spring and summer semester.

The Department responded:

The Department regularly offers online courses in spring and summer and we intend to continue to do so as opportunities arise.

HIST 2F90 (Money and Power in the Atlantic World) was offered as a fully online course in spring 2020, while HIST 3M61 (Local Historical Archaeology) was also offered online in summer 2020 as a result of the COVID pandemic; HIST 2F90 has in fact been offered as an online course every year since 2015.

The Department currently has the question of whether to offer more online offerings on a regular basis under discussion (February-March 2021) in the context of the COVID pandemic.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

This recommendation reflects current practice.

The Dean of Graduate Studies responded:

This recommendation primarily refers to undergraduate course offerings and therefore falls outside of FGS.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted for consideration. The Committee recognizes that the Department regularly offers online courses in spring and summer and expects that it is best positioned to determine appropriate strategies to offer “more”.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2021/22

Recommendation #3

That the department consider ways of providing more flexibility for their MA students and reconsider the thesis by “invitation” option.

The Department responded:

Course offerings in the graduate program are determined by the number of faculty available to teach in any given year, which is directly connected to our undergraduate program and by departmental leaves and sabbaticals. Given these constraints, and as the graduate cohort is generally 10 students or fewer, offering a greater range of courses (more than two electives per term) does not seem feasible or practical. Our directed reading (5P80) does, however, offer us immense flexibility, when required.

The department has not refused to take students into the thesis stream when it is requested by a student (‘by invitation’ implies that a faculty member must initiate the request, but this is not always the case, in practice): however, as graduate funding is guaranteed for only a single year (and as most students prefer a one-year program), demand for this stream has been relatively low.

The Senate Graduate Studies Committee responded:

The reviewers made a number of suggestions for faculty associated with the MA program to consider, but SCGS has no role to play in these curricular and program design decisions.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

This recommendation seems to reflect established practice.

The Dean of Graduate Studies responded:

It is interesting that R1 suggests pruning course offerings at the undergraduate, while R3 recommends providing more options. Striking a balance between undergraduate and graduate course offerings seems reasonable and indeed important, especially given the number of graduate students who completed their undergraduate degrees at Brock. However, how the program/department approaches this recommendation is at their discretion.

I also support the recommendation that the opportunity for the thesis option be clarified. This has budget implications for FGS given the difference in overall program length. Graduate fellowship funding from FGS for research-based students extends for the entire program duration - thus, the department response is incorrect. Graduate students should be provided the opportunity to engage in either the MRP or thesis based on their research interest and direction.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted for consideration. The Committee recognizes that the program already offers a fair degree of flexibility through the offering of either an MRP or thesis, based on student research interest and direction. ARC encourages the Department to clarify how the “by invitation” thesis option works and find ways to communicate this to students.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2021/22

Recommendation #4

That the department make more detailed course descriptions and course requirements available at course selection.

The Department responded:

The Department has this issue under discussion. We are frustrated by UPC regulations that constrain course descriptions by its emphasis on curt and concise descriptions. We are considering posting lively descriptions of courses offered in the up-coming terms on our Departmental webpage to both inform students and to aid recruitment.

The Senate Undergraduate Program Committee responded:

The Committee noted that limitations in the length of course descriptions prevent an expansion of course descriptions in the academic calendar, but that the Department may be better able to provide more details about course descriptions and course requirements through the use of departmental communication tools, such as a website.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

The Department does a good job of publishing details about courses well in advance.

The Dean of Graduate Studies responded:

This recommendation appears to be directed towards the undergraduate program.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be not accepted. The Committee recognizes that course descriptions are curtailed by UPC rules on space in the calendar. The Committee expects that the Department is best-positioned to investigate other methods of publicizing course descriptions and requirements.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation not accepted.

Recommendation #5

That department members use their research funds in a targeted way to attract graduate students.

The Department responded:

This is done on a regular basis where faculty use research funds as Research Fellowships that are matched by FGS up to \$3000.

The Senate Graduate Studies Committee responded:

This advice would address the observation that the cohort is currently dominated by Brock graduates and thus would generally be in keeping with Brock's diversity initiatives, and it would enhance Brock's reputation by highlighting the research strengths in the program. It is, however, for the members to decide how to allocate their funds.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

This recommendation reflects current practice.

The Dean of Graduate Studies responded:

FGS provides fellowships for all research-based graduate students and also provides the opportunity for matching funds. I agree that perhaps highlighting the funding opportunities for graduate students would help to strategically attract potential students.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be not accepted. The Committee agrees that this is current practice while recognizing that research funds are the purview of individual members of the Department.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation not accepted.

Recommendation #6

That department and administration rethink the delivery of the co-op program

The Program stated:

This issue has been the topic of discussion in recent meetings with the Coop Office. The Department is frustrated by the poor retention rate of undergraduate Coop students from the first to second year. The Department has proposed that intake of Coop students be extended to students who have completed year one studies.

The Senate Undergraduate Program Committee responded:

The committee noted that the Co-op office should be consulted in the process of submitting program revisions to UPC, to ensure changes are consistent with Co-op office regulations and policies.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

The Dean supports the Department in its further discussion of the delivery of the co-op programme.

The Dean of Graduate Studies responded:

This recommendation is for the undergraduate program.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted for consideration.

Implementation Plan (2nd Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2022/23

Recommendation #7

That the department update some of their course titles to reflect current historical trends and language.

The Department responded:

This has been done on a regular basis since our Departmental retreat in 2016 when the issue of paying more attention to course titles was discussed. The Department continues to give careful consideration to course titles as appropriate.

The Senate Undergraduate Program Committee responded:

The committee noted that should course revisions including changes in course titles be submitted to UPC, we will need to seek guidance to determine whether those courses would need to be renumbered.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

The Department is already giving careful regular attention to course titles and descriptions.

The Dean of Graduate Studies responded:

It is unclear if this relates to both the undergraduate and graduate programs. However, it appears that this is current practice in the department and that they continue to update as needed.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be not accepted as it is already current practice.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation not accepted.

Recommendation #8

That the department undertake an anonymous student survey to learn more about student concerns.

The Department responded:

The History Department identified the potential need for an anonymous student survey as Item #6 in its High priority, short term, actions (1-2 years) in section 16 of the review (p. 226):

Although the Department has been divided on the merits of student surveys in the past, both in terms of methodologies and the interpretation of results, the Department should nevertheless **discuss whether to conduct an anonymous student survey on important pedagogical, curricular, and program issues**; student input on these things could prove very valuable in helping to shape Departmental actions. Initial discussion of such a survey could occur at a retreat.

The Department accepts this recommendation and will work with appropriate University office(s) to facilitate such an anonymous student survey within the identified timeframe (1-2 years). The survey may be discussed and developed at the proposed retreat (see recommendation 9 below).

The Dean of Humanities responded:

The Dean supports the Department's intention to undertake a survey of students.

The Dean of Graduate Studies responded:

It is unclear if this relates to both the undergraduate and graduate students, however, I assume both. I support the department's decision to gather information around student satisfaction.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2021/22

Recommendation #9

That the department organize a retreat

The Department responded:

The History Department identified the need for a Departmental retreat as Item #1 in its High priority, short term, actions (1-2 years) in section 16 of the review (pp. 224-25):

High priority, short-term (1-2 years) action:

Guided by this review, the Department should endeavour to hold a Departmental retreat (or more likely, several retreats) for discussion of important pedagogical, curricular, and program matters including those noted in this self-study as soon as possible following completion of the current self-study, and should endeavour to hold such retreats on a more regular basis going forward.

The Department accepts the recommendation and will endeavour to organize a retreat for its members at such a time as is viable given the current public health guidelines and restrictions for the COVID-19 pandemic, acknowledging that this may not be possible until spring of 2022.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

The Dean supports the Department’s intention to hold a departmental retreat when circumstances allow.

The Dean of Graduate Studies responded:

This recommendation falls outside of FGS’ purview.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2021/22

D. Summary of Recommendations:

First Priority:

Recommendations 1,2,3,8,9

Second Priority:

Recommendation 6

Not Accepted:

Recommendations 4,5,7