

Report of the Academic Program Review Panel  
for the Department of History  
Memorial University of Newfoundland

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 PROGRAM REVIEW MEETINGS

The Review Panel members met with the Memorial University APR Coordinator, Kim Myrick, with the Dean of Arts, Dr. Lynne Phillips and the Head of the Department, Dr. Sean Cadigan. We also met with a majority of the faculty members, many of whom we met as members of Undergraduate Studies and Graduate Studies Committees in the Department of History. Because of the busy time in the academic term, we were unable to meet with all department members in a pre-arranged meeting.

A meeting was arranged between the Review Panel members and a small group of graduate students, all but one of whom is currently enrolled in the MA program. We had an impromptu meeting with three undergraduate students, which was arranged spontaneously, because the previously scheduled meeting was affected by a half-day university closure because of snow. We met one of the Department of History's two administrative assistants.

Towards the end of the review process, we had an opportunity for a number of scheduled exit meetings, including one with the Dean of Arts and another with the Department Head. An exit meeting with the Head, faculty members, students and staff was well attended, despite the fact that it was scheduled at 4:30 p.m. on a Friday afternoon at the end of March. We had an opportunity to tour the space that is allocated to the Department of History, but we did not see the archival or library facilities available, and we did not speak with library staff.

In addition to these scheduled meetings, members of the Review Panel were provided sufficient time to meet and confer with each other during the two days on campus.

The Review Panel members are appreciative of the efforts undertaken to coordinate this Review and of the willingness of students, staff and faculty to meet with us.

## 1.2 MUN AND THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

The particular character of the History Department can only be understood in the larger context of the university. This character is, in many respects, *sui generis*, and consequently comparisons

with other institutions need to be made with this in mind. For the purposes of the *Maclean's* report, the university self-identifies as a middle-sized, “comprehensive,” institution, comparable in size and purpose to universities such as Brock (Ontario) and Simon Fraser (British Columbia). Yet it also has a medical school, several well-established PhD programs, and is exploring the feasibility of setting up a Law Faculty. In some important respects, then, the institution has more in common with large “medical/doctoral” institutions such as McGill (Quebec) and the University of British Columbia. And in the context of provincial life, MUN has a centrality and significance surpassing that of those larger, wealthier, and (supposedly) more prestigious institutions. Other universities assert the importance of civic engagement with their surrounding communities, but none does so with such conviction, nor with such evident success, as MUN.

MUN's multiple identities are a product of history and “place,” a word that occurs frequently in discussions of the institution. Its polymorphous character is a potential strength, but it can also create a confusion of purpose, and the reviewers found some evidence that this is the case in the Department of History. Some of its members identify themselves as researchers first and foremost and give a high priority to graduate supervision (the “medical/doctoral” institutional model); others identify themselves primarily as undergraduate teachers (the “primarily undergraduate” or “comprehensive” models). Any well-functioning department should be able to accommodate a variety of approaches; the problems arise when particular approaches are represented as “central” in a way that implies others are peripheral or non-essential. This is a recipe for tension and fragmentation. Fortunately, this does not seem to have led to a serious breach of collegiality in the department, thanks to the good sense of its members and the deft diplomacy of the current Head; but, some of the warning signs are there.

The centrifugal tendencies of the Department have been compounded by a lack of institutional direction from the University as a whole, which has meant that the Department, to a large extent, has been left to its own devices. That situation is changing as the university formulates a coherent strategic plan. The final touches have yet to be applied, but the direction is clear. Equal weight is accorded to teaching/learning and research/scholarship, with a significant emphasis on public engagement. The newer, as yet untenured, members of the department (an excellent and energetic cohort) are *au fait* with these expectations, but their specific parameters need to be

more clearly articulated, especially at the decanal level, in order to alleviate anxiety about requirements for promotion and tenure.

Generally speaking we were impressed by the Department, and especially by the leadership provided by its Head of Department, Dr. Sean Cadigan. There is certainly room for improvement, but (as we make clear in the recommendations) many of the changes we would recommend require action from senior office holders in the University, and are outside the control of the Department.

## 2. SERVICE AND MENTORING

This is a well-run academic department, with an effective administration in the Head and the two administrative staff members. The role of the Head is imperative to departmental success, although the effectiveness of any department should not rest exclusively on this Office. Presently, the Department of History has a complement of twenty Academic Staff Members (ASMs), seventeen of whom are tenured or tenure-track. There are three contractually appointed teaching staff members, with contracts that vary in length, from eight-months to three years.

The Head is appointed by the Dean of Arts. Dr. Sean Cadigan is Head and is approaching the end of a three-year term.

The department has devised its own Terms of Reference to govern department committees, policies and procedures. These are consistent with the Collective Agreement and govern the composition, nomination and election and responsibilities of the Departmental Council and Departmental Committees (i.e., Nominations and Elections, Policy, Undergraduate Studies, Graduate Studies and Tenure and Promotion), as well as specific departmental matters, including teaching evaluations and course additions. The Terms of Reference document was last revised on 15 November, 2011. Membership in the Departmental Council also includes undergraduate and graduate student representatives. Department-wide participation on the Council is reportedly good.

### 2.1 UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

We were impressed with the energy of the members of the Undergraduate Studies Committee with whom we met and with the work they have carried out to date, including a thorough process of curricular revision (i.e., eliminating some ‘parked’ and ‘inactive’ courses and regularizing undergraduate courses).

We are struck by the fact that the bulk of this labour is being undertaken almost entirely (with one exception) by contractually-appointed and untenured ASMs. Although Committee members appear to work well together on shared objectives, we are concerned about the heavy service

levels involved with this work, as are some Undergraduate Studies Committee members. Given the heavy workload of this committee, its responsibilities should not fall disproportionately on the junior ranks. Senior tenured faculty should be represented on the committee. This would better incorporate their knowledge and expertise and permit contractual and untenured faculty members more time to engage in research and publication activities.

Amongst untenured faculty members more generally, there seems to be confusion about 'where the benchmarks' are and the emphasis that is being accorded to teaching and research activities for the purposes of tenure and promotion. We are confident that ASMs are receiving sound advice about information related to Tenure and Promotion expectations from the Head. However, we worry about a lack of other university initiatives, outside of the non-decision year review process, to mentor untenured ASMs and support the development of strong tenure and promotion files.

We are aware that the Department of History has participated in the development of a Faculty of Arts-wide process to develop indicators of research success. The department would benefit from the further development of a set of discipline-specific performance indicators. These research performance indicators should also take into consideration the number of untenured and tenure-track faculty in the Department.

The Undergraduate Coordinator, Dr. Marica Cassis, reported spending a considerable amount of her time advising undergraduate students. There is confusion about the roles and responsibilities of advisors in various locations across the university. Undergraduate advising is available from: the Departmental Undergraduate Coordinator, the Head of Department, the Academic Advising Centre, the Office of the Dean of Arts, the Office of the Registrar (often in the form of a course audit request) and appointed positions in campus residences. Members of the Undergraduate Studies Committee are unclear about the various roles and responsibilities associated with each of the advisors in these locations. The undergraduate students with whom we spoke are confused about Arts and program requirements and are unclear about where to seek advice.

## 2.2 GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

The Department is aware that there are some pressing issues surrounding graduate student recruitment, program structure and curriculum (and in particular, the balance between predictability and flexibility in coursework), and the importance of clear communication with graduate students. Members of the Graduate Studies Committee are also aware of these pressing issues. The graduate students with whom we spoke said that many of these issues are being resolved in relation to their individual program of study.

Numbers for the MA program have remained constant over the last seventeen years. The PhD numbers have had greater variance, with a rather sudden drop in 2012. In terms of graduate recruitment, there needs to be attention paid to issues of gender and equity distribution, areas of specialization and the distribution of graduate supervision. At present, only three of the twelve MA students are being supervised by female ASMs and none of the PhD students. While four of the nine students enrolled in the PhD program are women, at the MA level it appears as if women only comprise two of the twelve students. The PhD gender ratio is in keeping with the 2009-10 national statistic of 41.9% for history (*CAUT Almanac of Post-Secondary Education 2012–2013*, 48), however the MA program falls badly behind the average of 65.8 % for the percentage of MAs awarded to women in the humanities.

Unlike the Undergraduate Studies Committee, members of the Graduate Studies Committee are (with one exception) tenured ASMs. The division between the composition of the Undergraduate and Graduate Committees, and the fact that not all ASMs teach graduate level courses and supervise graduate students in their research areas, lead to unevenness. This unevenness permits some faculty members greater involvement in the graduate program than others. Instead, there must be a common sense of ownership of the graduate program as one in which everyone contributes. This is indeed a challenge as PhDs are presently only permitted to work in the areas of Newfoundland, Canadian and Maritime history.

One suggestion is to separate the administrative responsibilities of the Graduate Coordinator from graduate teaching responsibilities, which will permit other faculty members greater involvement. This could also address the limited breadth in doctoral level studies. Another



suggestion is to permit the addition to a thematic, graduate level seminar course, which would also provide curricular breadth. Another suggestion is to involve all ASMs in the development and delivery of professional development workshops for graduate students, including workshops related to funding opportunities, particularly SSHRC.

SSHRC is an important funding source in the discipline of History and the MA SSHRC application process is falling through the cracks. This issue needs to be addressed through the joint auspices of the Undergraduate Studies Committee *and* the Graduate Studies Committee. One possibility is to include a guidance session in the Honours Seminar. MA fellowships from SSHRC should be recognised as important sources of graduate student funding and supported enthusiastically.

### 2.3 DEPARTMENT HEAD

The department has benefited from the commitment of the current Head of Department. We are confident that the current Head has a good working relationship with departmental Committees and a good understanding of Committee work. This commitment needs to be enforced at all administrative levels. There is an ongoing need for transparencies and clarity in terms of the responsibilities of the Head.

We are aware that there is a Search Committee underway for a new Head. The distribution of ASMs through the ranks, and the fact that the Department is comprised of a disproportionate number of new scholars, is of concern, and indicates to us that succession-planning for the position of Head and academic leadership needs to be more widely instituted. A lack of succession planning is likely to hinder ongoing departmental initiatives and may stifle necessary changes.

### 2.4 SERVICE TO THE UNIVERSITY

Service beyond one's own department and faculty is an important component of the development of academic leadership and is essential for university life. The contributions of the members of

the Department of History are uneven in this regard. Newly appointed ASMs are often not expected to make significant contributions in this area. However, we note that contributions to university services are strikingly uneven across the upper ranks of ASMs. There are a few ASMs who contribute regularly to a wide range of university-wide committees and initiatives and who provide leadership. Others appear to contribute little, outside of that which might be considered of benefit to their own research. Tenured ASMs should be encouraged to recognise the importance of university service, to make contributions and to provide leadership in this area.

One way that this service to the university could be enhanced is through the institution of a regularly scheduled series of scholarly presentations and talks. We understand that this has happened irregularly in past years. A regularly scheduled speaker series would benefit undergraduate, Honours and graduate students in History and in interdisciplinary research across the university. It could highlight the Department of History's success in attracting Post-Doctoral Fellowships, which are not mentioned in the Self-Study. And, importantly, it could facilitate wider reaching research collaborations amongst ASMs, including with those who are already cross-appointed with other departments and faculties.

## 2.5 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The department is well aligned with the university's Public Engagement Framework. Indeed it was pre-aligned, because the department from its founding has embraced its mission as the focal point for transmitting knowledge of the history of Newfoundland and Labrador – with all their political, cultural, and economic shifts – to the province's inhabitants and the wider world (Some sense of the Department's commitment is evident on its website with its links to the Maritime History Archive and the "More than a List of Crew" project.) The department has not wavered in its public mission, and its current members have extended it by seeking to enlighten the public on issues of historical and cultural importance that go well beyond provincial borders.

Members of the department participate in local organizations such as the Newfoundland Historical Society and the Family History Society. One ASM currently serves as Vice-Chair of the Provincial Historic Commemoration Board. On the wider front, another has extensive involvement with UNICEF. History ASM's support outreach initiatives from other university

sectors, such as MUN's global seminar series and the Blue Castle Salon Speakers' Series, a community-based event organized by contractual staff and ASMs in the Departments of English and Gender Studies.

An impressive number of ASMs offer their expertise to print and electronic media outlets, including *The Globe and Mail* and CBC radio, discussing issues such as First Nation concerns, mine safety, the lessons of the Spanish flu epidemic, and Social Gospel traditions in Canada. The connecting message is that historical context is essential for public understanding of issues of current concern.

One exciting departmental venture is the "Time Talks: Community Conversations in History" series. The initiative makes productive use of a grant from the "Scholarship in the Arts Initiative of Memorial University."

The committee, while recognizing that the department's obligations to public engagement, are amply fulfilled, has two recommendations: (i) that those ASM's (probably a minority) not currently involved in public engagement should be encouraged to participate and (ii) that an ongoing source of funding be sought for the "Time Talks" series, so that it can become a permanent feature of the department's public profile.

### 3. RESOURCES AND SPACE

#### 3.1 PHYSICAL SPACE

Because of the relatively large size (in the Faculty of Arts) of the Department and the encroachment of nearby administrative offices, the Department of History is spread across three locations. The Arts Building (4<sup>th</sup> floor) contains offices for some ASMs and contractual teaching staff. This space also houses the department's administrative space, which is comprised of two (joined) administrative offices, the Head's office and a small library that also serves as a meeting room and a space for consultation, as needed. Additionally, there are two graduate student workspaces and a department conference room. The latter is a well-equipped room, but it is a tight space both for Department meetings for a Department of this size and for some seminar courses.

In addition to this, some offices are located in the basement of the Arts and Administration building. This office space is used mainly by retired ASMs appointed to the ranks of Professor Emeritus or Honorary Research Professor. Some offices are also located in the basement of the Henrietta Harvey Building, which also houses the Maritime History Archives.

The Department sees itself as short of space. We received mixed messages about the suitability of this academic space and about the use of satellite offices. Some ASMs with whom we spoke were relatively satisfied with this arrangement and with the office space available to them. Others were less satisfied and would prefer to have the Department, in its entirety, located elsewhere. There was no consensus around this issue.

There are two issues that are related to physical space that require serious attention. First, asbestos abatement is ongoing in one of the spaces used by the Department. We were told that communication regarding this abatement was not clearly communicated to the Head and to ASMs affected by it. Better communication with the Head and department members is advisable. Second, the photocopier is located in the main administrative office, which limits faculty access to opening hours; this is inconsistent with the current Collective Agreement.

There is space in the department for graduate student workspace, which is positive. There are eight desks in one room, and four in another. However, this space might be better organized, in consultation with the graduate students, as one of these offices appears to be well utilized and the other one does not.

Faculty members might also consider the possible use of the history library as a lounge, especially if there are to continue to be satellite offices for the department..

Currently, there is shared office space available for Professor Emeritus and Honorary Research Professors in the basement of the Arts and Administration Building. It is unclear how the Department will be able to continue to accommodate (even shared) office space for these two groups, if this practice is to continue in future. The issue of office space for those holding these appointments needs to be addressed at the University level, and not as a department policy.

### 3.2 LIBRARY RESOURCES

We heard a high level of satisfaction from students and faculty about the University libraries and archives, but we did not have the opportunity to meet with QE II Library staff. We have some remaining questions about the ways that pressures affecting all libraries are playing out at Memorial University.

We would recommend that the library continue to enhance and preserve its archival collection and continue to build its monograph collection, given their importance to the discipline of history. The Dean of Arts noted that a committee has been formed to address the issue of archival materials across departments in the Faculty of Arts.

### 3.3 WEBSITE

The Department of History is aware of the current limitations regarding its website. Some of the content is outdated. This resource, which serves as an increasingly important graduate recruitment tool, does not reflect the research profile of members of the department, or convey the innovativeness of departmental initiatives, including web-based initiatives.

An Administrative Assistant with whom we spoke is also aware of this problem. She suggested that the content needs to be re-written and revised by an ASM in the Department. A Website Coordinator, or a Department Committee, should be appointed to oversee the website and should be responsible for generating and updating relevant content. This Committee and/or Website Coordinator should also make use of resources (i.e., computing and communications resources) that already exist in the Faculty of Arts.

### 3.4 ANTICIPATED RESOURCES

The Department of History has submitted a four-year Staffing Plan (2013-2017) to the Office of the Dean of Arts. The Department of History notes this plan was devised in the absence of the Strategic Plan for the Faculty of Arts. Anticipated resources outlined include four, tenure-track appointments, all of them in areas for which justification is provided.

In our assessment, these requests are reasonable. A position in the area of indigenous history is consistent with Memorial University's *Research Strategy and Themes*, (endorsed by Senate, September 13, 2011) and with ongoing efforts to develop a Major in Aboriginal Studies in the Faculty of Arts. Positions in the areas of Ancient and Medieval History, and Global and Conflict History maintain the existing undergraduate curriculum and directly support the research of some untenured ASMs. A fourth position, in the area of early modern history, or American History, could enhance future graduate program recruitment and expansion.

## 4. GRADUATE TEACHING

The Department has an impressive history of graduate training and is now at an important crossroad.

It is likely to remain a relatively small program as it shares the challenges of most Canadian universities – outside of (largely) Ontario – in trying to offer competitive packages to attract and retain graduate students. Indeed, students coming to Memorial from outside Newfoundland require more generous packages, for although tuition is low there are considerable costs in moving, especially for a one year MA.

### 4.1 RECRUITING

In light of the very real financial challenges, greater effort must be focused on recruiting potential students. The current website does not highlight the research interests of faculty and does not facilitate potential students looking for graduate programs. The website also says nothing about the current graduate students enrolled and what they are working on. The department appears to be very aware of this challenge and is currently reworking the website.

The students we spoke with were pleased with the amount of support they had received from the university, department and faculty members in attending conferences and this could be noted in advertising.

One of the challenges that the department faces is gender equity in student recruitment, particularly at the MA level. The decision to focus on environmental and military history may have unintentionally skewed the pool of those students the Department is likely to attract, as these areas of specialization tend to be more popular among male students.

Based on the information provided to us by the Department, the number of male graduate students is greater in both the MA and PhD and graduate students are more likely to be supervised by male faculty members.

There are currently nine PhD students; five are men; four are women and all of these doctoral students are supervised (and in one instance, co-supervised), by six male faculty members, one of whom is located at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University. To some extent, the distribution of supervision is indicative of the designated areas of specialization at the PhD level, but it also points to the potential for fragmentation amongst faculty members that we have mentioned elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

These differences are more obvious in the MA program. Based on the information provided to us, there are twelve students currently enrolled in the MA; only three of whom are women. Graduate supervision at the MA level is being undertaken by six male faculty members and three women faculty members. Particular attention needs to be given here to ensure that the MA program appeals to the widest possible group of potential students and supervisors.

Of the twelve current MA students, half completed their undergraduate degree at Memorial University. This means that half of the MA students were internal applicants of sorts.

There is some tension between the need to recruit from MUN undergraduates and the possibilities for recruiting PhD students from the MA program. MA students with Memorial degrees are not suitable candidates to recruit into the PhD program as discipline conventions discourage three degrees from the same institution. The department needs to adopt a two-pronged strategy to feed both the MA program and the PhD stream respectively. The Graduate Studies Committee notes that MA program has a high level of acceptance into the program and a very high yield. This might reflect the dynamics of internal recruiting where students and faculty are mutually known to each other.

This year, it appears rather exceptionally, there were particular problems in communicating with MA students about program requirements and expectations. This had a serious and negative

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers provided by the Faculty of Arts indicates that there are five PhD students while the Department indicated that there were nine. We assume that each unit has a different method of counting.



impact in the fall term but it is also clear that important steps were taken to address the problem and the students we spoke to were pleased with these efforts. We believe this was a one-time problem but it cannot be repeated.

The committee observed that in the division of responsibilities between the graduate and undergraduate program the responsibility for undergraduate students applying for SSHRC fellowships (MA level) seems to be falling between the cracks. One of these committees, or perhaps jointly, needs to offer workshop for undergraduates in fourth year. This could be undertaken as part of the Honours program.

#### 4.2 MA PROGRAM

The MA program currently has twelve students enrolled with seven pursuing the thesis option and five, the MA by course. Eight graduate students are working broadly in the area of Newfoundland and Canadian history and eight are in their first year of the program. While conducting the review we received the impression that the MA by coursework was encouraged. At the MA level it is also puzzling that only one student appears to be working on a Newfoundland-based topic. In light of the considerable expertise and resources available, faculty members need to explore the relationship between Newfoundland and Labrador-based casework, and MA level research and theses.

The Department is aware that there are issues around recruitment, program structure and curriculum and the importance of communication between faculty and students, and professional development opportunities for graduate students.

The course and thesis MA program clearly value flexibility and freedom and makes considerable effort to cater to students' individual research interests. However, this admirable objective causes problems, as within a small program there is considerable divergence in research interests. This flexibility may end up catering to specialization at the expense of breadth. Indeed, students might have preferred predictability, with courses being decided in the spring when they are selecting graduate programs, rather than arranged once students have arrived in September. Broad thematic courses can be set in the spring at the time that offers are made and it might be

possible to adjust particular readings once students have arrived. This dilemma of matching student interests with course offerings is common throughout most history departments, but students need to be told in advance what their options are at the MA level. Students tend to adapt to a limited choice of courses. The Department needs to consider the possibility of establishing a thematic seminar each year in the spring term.

In interdisciplinary graduate courses, some attention needs to be given to providing a more equitable composition of classes. At present, Masters of Employee Relations (MER) students are required to enroll in a graduate level course in labour history, and graduate students in History report feeling overwhelmed by the number of student in the MER Program.

At present, the teaching of compulsory graduate seminars in the MA program is not separated from the administrative function of coordinating the graduate program. This separation would expand the number of ASMs involved in the graduate program and might be a strategy to address the issues of gender inequity in MA and PhD supervision. There has to be a sense of common ownership of the graduate programme as one in which everyone contributes.

There are concerns about the availability of resources for funding and retaining MA students. While this is a similar situation at other universities, there is a clear sense that the current resources are insufficient, especially in comparison to universities in Ontario and Alberta.

#### 4.3 PHD PROGRAM

The PhD program is very small and the department is limited to supervising dissertations in Canadian, Maritime and Newfoundland history. At present there are nine students enrolled ranging from one student who began in January to a student enrolled in year eight. This means that each student may form his or her own cohort. This notwithstanding, the American Historical Association's *Directory of History Dissertations* indicates that twenty-one dissertations have been completed since 2001. Some of these graduates are teaching on the faculty at Memorial University, University of Alberta, Cape Breton University, Simon Fraser University and on the staff at Parks Canada. This is an impressive record and it speaks to the PhD program's reputation.

The present demographic composition of the department, however, possesses particular challenges. There are only six faculty members at the rank of Full or Associate Professor teaching and researching the areas where the PhD is offered. It would be unusual, and perhaps inappropriate, for assistant professors to take on a significant supervision load. Until the cohort of assistant professors progresses through the ranks, the intake and number of PhD students is likely to be limited.

There are also challenges with areas of research and teaching specialization. As is the case in other research-intensive universities in Canada, not all faculty members are likely to be involved in direct doctoral supervision as their scholarship may not fall within the area of Canadian, Newfoundland and Maritime History. Notwithstanding, all ASMs should be encouraged to participate actively in dissertation committees lending their thematic, theoretical and/or methodological expertise.

The department is already considering the present sequencing of the doctoral program and this needs to continue. We urge the department to continue thinking about the order of requirements and the establishment of clear timelines and objectives to keep students moving through the program, especially during the period during which they are funded. Clearly articulated expected timelines and adherence to them are important and in particular, it may be important to re-order the PhD program requirements so that earlier comprehensive exams can catch students who are not suitable for doctoral study. Some consideration should be given to comprehensive exam completion prior to the dissertation proposal submission. Reading fields, therefore, need to be launched as soon as possible and there does not appear to be justification for current delay. During their first term, doctoral students undertake the preparation of a SSHRC grant and a course, which is not an overwhelming workload.

Beginning immediately, oral comprehensive exams should be recorded so that some kind of record of work exists and we urge the department to consider supplement written assessment. This is particularly important in the instance of a possible graduate student appeal. No additional resources are required for this change.

## 5. UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING

The Department is justly proud of its contribution to undergraduate teaching. The panel was particularly impressed with the fact that there are relatively few PCIs at the 1000 level, and that much of the teaching in first year is done by tenured and tenure-track ASMs. The Department has made a significant contribution to University teaching as a whole by making all of its 1000 level offerings Research and Writing courses for students across the Faculty of Arts.

### 5.1 STUDENT SATISFACTION

The self-study indicates general student satisfaction with the undergraduate program as a whole and the quality of specific courses in particular. Most students make their course selections for the right reasons, (i.e. they are interested in the subject matter of the course). A minority, 17% of students surveyed by the Department of History reported that they chose courses on the basis of which professor was teaching it. (The students we spoke to assured us that it was the quality of teaching, not the easiness of the course, that was the determining factor here.) Conversation with the students suggests there is a negative corollary to this statistic: some students avoid courses if they are taught by certain professors. This might have the effect of compounding inequities of workload; if so, this is a problem that needs addressing.

A majority, 71%, of students surveyed by the Department of History reported that they went to the department website as the principal tool for choosing courses. This underscores the necessity to improve and update the website as indicated elsewhere in the report. Student reported that they had no problem getting into the courses they needed and that scheduling rarely conflicted. However, students did convey to us that there is a lack of clarity about where to receive academic advising, which may be a problem that is related to the Faculty of Arts more generally.

## 5.2 SYLLABI

The undergraduate syllabi demonstrate considerable diversity in course workload expectations, details around evaluation, and course content. There appears to be no consistency around expectations according to year of study and on occasion very sparse information about what might happen in the course is provided. There seems to be no discernible pattern around the use of exams, research essays or even weekly expectations of course reading.

Many course syllabi indicate that a strong research emphasis was being promoted among undergraduates and two general courses on historiography and methodology take advantage of local resources to explore wider themes within the discipline. In light of the rich research resources that are available locally and the considerable expertise of faculty in the area, it might be possible to renew some courses by exploring broader themes while still grounded in a local context.

The self-study proposes “a specific forum/ space” to discuss issues of pedagogy (p.70). The likelihood is that only those who are already strong undergraduate teachers would participate, which might have the effect of compounding the tendency to departmental fragmentation. An alternative would be to establish a more formal “teaching committee” whose responsibilities would include the following:

- (i) maintaining departmental consistency in evaluation.
- (ii) establishing anticipated learning outcomes, ideally for each course, but certainly for each level of the program. (When are students expected to have a sophisticated grasp of historiography? When are they expected to engage seriously in critical reading as distinct from reading for information? What level of primary research is appropriate for each level of the program?)

This recommendation is consistent with recent discussions in Faculty of Arts meetings about establishing learning outcomes based on course level.

First-year teaching has specific challenges. It might be useful if first-year instructors developed some common course objectives and met at least once a year to address them.

The intention with all this is not to impose “a cookie cutter” approach; the current laissez-faire climate has enabled some inspirational teaching. But there is a need for standards, goals, and objectives that are transparent and clear to faculty and students alike.

### 5.3 HONOURS PROGRAM

The Department takes justifiable pride in its Honours program and the Department appears to do an excellent job at training students and offers important opportunities for undergraduate research. The Honours program is more structured than the major and students are required to take historiography and methodology courses as well as write an honours thesis. A large number of ASMs are involved in supervising honours theses. Two issues were raised about the assessment of the otherwise successful and popular Great Books course: (i) the course evaluation is partially undertaken by those not instructing students, and concern was expressed that these instructors may not be familiar with the books taught; and, (ii) the present form of the oral exam offers no means to reassess the mark, and we suggest that exams should be recorded in case of grade appeals.

## 6. RESEARCH

### 6.1 RESEARCH OUTPUT

As a discipline, History does not use research metrics. Research success is primarily gauged through the publication of books and monographs, although journal articles are used as a means to flag new and ongoing research. Since the model for research success in History is different from both the prevailing social science and physical/life science models, it is important for the Department of History to clearly define what it judges to be research success and research excellence. It is important for the Department of History at MUN to discuss, produce and publicize its own discipline-specific definitions of research success.

The Department as a whole has a good research profile, and compares favourably with history departments in other research intensive and comprehensive universities. There is clearly a research culture in the Department, although research success and outputs are unevenly spread. Participation in academic conferences is also uneven, although this may also be related the availability of travel-related resources, especially in the case of graduate student participation. A Department-level discussion of the benchmarks for research success, by providing guiding principles for faculty and students, may help deal with this unevenness.

While graduate students are presently understood to be a vital part of the Department's research culture, it was evident that considerable original research is being undertaken at the undergraduate level. This is occurring not only in Honour theses and research papers, but also in class projects, such as websites. A shared understanding of research that extends from undergraduates to faculty should be both celebrated and employed to promote a research-oriented common culture.

### 6.2 NETWORKS

With some noteworthy and important exceptions, many ASMs do not participate actively in the life of the profession beyond Newfoundland and Labrador. The active participation in scholarly networks is essential for scholarly exchange and graduate student recruiting. Likewise within the

university, relatively few Department members had demonstrated leadership outside the department outside MUNFA, the First Year Success program and interdisciplinary programs.



## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The panel was very impressed with the History Department at MUN. This is a unit that the University can be proud of.

Below we have listed our recommendations for improving the operation of the Department. These include recommendations for action from not only the Department, but also from various branches of the University.

### 7.1 SERVICE AND MENTORING

1. ASMs in the Department expressed concerns that they were not given clear information by the University on strategic directions. The University needs to provide the Department with clearer information on strategic priorities.
2. A major concern amongst tenure-track ASMs was the lack of clearly stated guidelines on what is expected of them during the promotion and tenure process. There is a need for clear guidelines and statutory mentoring procedures for tenure-track ASMs at the Faculty and University level.
3. The service load on tenure track and term appointment faculty in the Department needs to be reduced. There is also uneven contribution to service from tenured ASMs. Tenured ASMs should be encouraged to recognize the value of University-wide service.
4. The Department needs to clarify the role of the Head in relation to the responsibilities of the other office-holders in the Department, and clear succession strategies for the appointment of new Heads need to be formulated.
5. Public engagement is one of the Department's many strong suits. To continue to improve this area we recommend: 1. that all ASMs in the Department be encouraged to become involved in public engagement; and 2. that on-going funding be found to support the 'Time Talks' initiative on a permanent basis.

## 7.2 RESOURCES AND SPACE

1. During the ongoing asbestos abatement process in the Arts and Administration Building there needs to be clearer communication to the Head and the Department from the appropriate authorities.
2. ASM access to the photocopier needs to be extended beyond office hours.
3. The Department and graduate students need to discuss ways of optimising the graduate office space.
4. University policy is needed to address the problem of office space for Professors Emeritus and Honorary Research Professors.
5. The website needs to be upgraded, and a website coordinator or committee appointed to manage its content.

## 7.3 GRADUATE TEACHING

1. The value of the financial packages offered to graduate students may not be competitive, and should be reassessed by the School of Graduate Studies.
2. Recruitment strategies for graduate students need to address both the gender imbalance in students and the reliance on the recruitment of MUN undergraduates for the MA program.
3. The flexibility in the offerings in the MA program is leading to uncertainty amongst the new graduate cohort about what courses are being offered in the Department. Students need to know earlier what courses they will be taking during their first year.
4. The Graduate Committee should consider whether the current sharing of the Labour History course between MA History students and MER students is working for the History students.
5. Encourage all ASMs, in whatever field, to participate in graduate teaching and dissertation panels so that there is a sense of a common Departmental ownership of the programs.
6. The PhD program would benefit from earlier comprehensive exams that would catch students that were unsuitable for continuing towards a PhD earlier, and also provide a solid foundation upon which thesis proposals could be built.

7. PhD comprehensive exams should be recorded in case there are problems or challenges later.
8. The MA SHRCC application process needs to be started earlier, perhaps amongst the Honours students interested in MA study, in order to maximize the chances that MA students receive funding from SSHRC. This is an issue that could be dealt with by cooperation between the Undergraduate and Graduate Committees.

#### 7.4 UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING

1. Students are confused about program requirements and where to seek advice. The University needs to provide some clarity here.
2. The Department needs to address the problem of students avoiding certain professors, which is compounding the problems in workload inequities.
3. The Department should look into the formation of a teaching committee that would discuss and address issues of consistency in course evaluations and learning outcomes. This might include a forum in which first year instructors could meet to discuss consistency between their courses.
4. Oral exams in the honours program should be recorded in case students should appeal grades.

#### 7.5 RESEARCH

1. The Department must articulate a discipline-specific definition of research excellence.
2. The Department should consider restarting its seminar series.
3. ASMs should consider increasing their involvement in scholarly networks outside of Newfoundland and Labrador.
4. Consideration should be given to involving more of the undergraduate community in research.