

ACADEMIC PLANNING COUNCIL
Minutes of October 5, 2015
3 p.m., Altgeld 315

Present: Abdel-Motaleb, Coller, Dawson, Douglass, Falkoff, Gordon, House, Howell, Isabel, Jaffee, Klonoski (for Birberick), Mogren, Molnar, Shortridge and Winkler

Guests: Collan Davidson- Student Association-Graduate Student, Chris Parker, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Outcomes Assessment; Jeff Reynolds, Director of Academic Analysis and Reporting; Ritu Subramony, Director of Academic Accreditation;

The meeting was called to order at 3:03 p.m.

Program Review: History

Stephanie DeCicco, Assistant Dean CLAS; Sean Farrell, Director of Graduate Studies & Associate Professor; Valerie Garver, Director of Undergraduate Studies & Associate Professor; Chris McCord, Dean CLAS; James Schmidt, Chair & Presidential Teaching Professor

Announcements: None

Opening Comments from Chair:

The history department is at the heart of the university's research mission. At the same time, it is also at the teaching and service missions as well. I think our department does well to tie these two things together. We are also involved in community engagement.

The meeting was turned over to Geoff Gordon for the presentation of the subcommittee reports.

Strengths:

The report was well written and responsive to the comments given by the Office of the Provost staff over the summer. The department's focus on student writing is commendable. As discussed in the report, this focus helps develop critical thinking skills. Faculty members are recognized for their teaching abilities, as evidenced by rewards received. Faculty members are very active and productive in research and scholarship efforts. Faculty members have published many books and articles. The faculty also value faculty-mentored research efforts, engaged learning, interaction and connections with students through activities such as independent studies, capstone experiences, Study Abroad programs, Research Rookies, and Undergraduate Research day programs. Students completing the MA program enter very good Ph.D. programs in history.

The following questions were asked of the department:

Discuss faculty publishing efforts and your ability to secure grants:

Publishing is a normal part of teaching in history and the department expects faculty to publish as part of the path to tenure. It is something that we do on a very regular basis. Analytics data shows we are at the top of our peers in this area. One of the things that I think worth noting, is the

amount of time it takes to do a full fledge research project which results in a book. This process typically takes about ten years. Most people produce 3 to 4 books throughout their career. The department has been very successful in securing outside grants, which is especially important in a time of declining institutional support.

What do you attribute declining enrollments to, and is it realistic to expect a rebound in enrollments?

There are a number of different ways to look at this. One of the ways to do that would be to look at peer data. When you consider this, although the numbers may be different than ours, the enrollment trends are similar. When you look at the data from the last review, we would be having a very different discussion, with enrollment increasing at that point. If you were to look at enrollments in 2000, we would be having a similar discussion to the one we are having now. Over time, there is a fairly consistent long haul demand for History. It is the heart of the university and the heart of the university education. Looking at enrollment historically, I think there is a very good reason to think that it will increase again in the future. I believe that these things come and go. With that said, this doesn't mean that we are not taking steps to help History. We are trying more to work on direct recruitment. The two most important things that we are doing along these lines is to forge relationships with community colleges and area high schools. I'm very hopeful. It would seem as though our efforts from last year did some good. The curve seems to be stabilizing and it's realistic to expect that we would be able to turn it around. I think like everything in the university, that it is going to take some time to accomplish.

One of the things that several members of the subcommittee noticed was the breadth of course offerings. Has the department considered prioritizing and focusing on certain areas of study? Have you talked to students, faculty and alumni to get their input on this? And on the other side of this, have you considered expanding into classes that would partner with another college or department (like the History of Sports)?

In our field, and in our teaching, we are striving for breadth and depth of learning. And because a large portion of our students are either in or end up getting teacher licensure, so they are going to have to take a content exam with questions from across the board, this type of preparation is very important. I also think that we are committed to this as a discipline, so giving our students exposure to a wide array of topics is something that we want to do. On the flip side of this question, partnering with other colleges or departments is something that we have talked about. I can see that this would be useful and it is something that we will look into further.

There have been a lot of cuts at the university. Has this provided a lack of ability to provide research support, library resources and travel opportunities for faculty in terms of leading to low research output or increased turnover?

To date, I wouldn't say that the rounds of budget cutting has affected any one party. I would fear though, in the upcoming period, that there might be a problem with limited travel. What this suggests, is that we are going to have to become even more involved in development of potential donors.

You had mentioned that, increasingly, students are coming in with more writing difficulties on a whole.

We approach this on a student by student basis and provide individual instruction, particularly for the students that might start out weaker in this area. Our Graduate Assistants also spend a good amount of time working with students in this area.

Recommendations:

Thinking about the department strengths, faculty members produce a tremendous amount of research, but enrollments have declined. When professors leave, would it be possible to focus on hiring more instructors and less tenure-track faculty to cover service classes? Some of the extra resources could then be used to support faculty travel/research.

Continue to focus on student recruitment and retention. This process might be strengthened with a few niches focus instead of trying to serve all needs.

Work towards becoming highly involved in the PLUS Pathway program.

Work on growing the amount of alumni engagement activities in order to increase alumni support.

Create an alumni advisory board that could assist with fundraising and placement efforts.

Consider updating the website as a more immediate priority. Students find and read about programs using the web.

B.A./B.S. in History

Strengths:

The program provides good training in the process of designing, conducting and evaluation of research.

The development of an internship program in history clearly supports the Student Career Success pillar of President Baker and NIU.

Faculty members and staff provide strong support for students in the program, as evidenced by participation in student honors projects and involvement in other activities. Promotions of USOAR and travel abroad experiences provide a great opportunity to students.

Faculty members are active in scholarship and professional activities.

The program serves a wide array of other programs in a multitude of areas.

The program serves a significant role in providing coursework to non-majors (averaging more than 9,700 credit hours in general education enrollment hours between 2010 and 2014).

The following questions were asked of the department:

How have you adapted to the growing number of transfer versus native majors?

There are a myriad of issues that transfer students bring, but at the same time, most come to us very strong. They often come to us well prepared. They are frequently adult learners looking to begin an alternate career. I don't necessarily look at them as transfer students, but instead prefer to look at them as NIU students who started out going somewhere else. The important thing to address is the transition from community college to being here at NIU.

What consideration is the department giving to offering more online courses or an online degree program? Should more emphasis be placed on online instruction?

Our online offerings have been a on a faculty by faculty basis. Expanding this further, is certainly something that we will have to look into.

Recommendations for the Future:

Gather more information from alumni and employers of NIU graduates as to how NIU has done in educating and preparing graduates for careers.

Continue to focus on recruiting and retaining strong students.

Keep working on means to: 1) further differentiate NIU's program from competitors and 2) better publicize why NIU's program is better than competing programs.

Conduct your own surveys of alumni to better gauge what opportunities there are for graduates of the program. Use the information gained in recruiting and retention efforts.

M.A. in History

Strengths:

The department does a good job of enhancing graduate education through many out of class experiences including workshops and student visits to the Newberry Library.

Student achievements are many and varied.

Student have received both internal and external awards.

The emphasis on writing research papers that can be submitted to research conferences or journals is a strength.

The out-of-class experiences help students develop as professionals and complete job searches.

The affiliation with the History Graduate Student Association and sponsoring a conference every year is commendable. As noted, this gives students the opportunity to deliver/receive feedback on their work as well as learn about other students' work.

The following questions were asked of the department:

What percent of history undergraduates from NIU go on for their M.A. in history from NIU?

Roughly 20-25% of our current M.S. program got their undergraduate degrees at NIU.

This comes from a relatively small size though. We are talking about 25-35 master degree students and 25-30 Ph.D. students. A history degree provides the background and foundation for so many other programs. This means that a student might finish up their Bachelor's degree and then not decide to go to graduate school until later in life in a subject that may not be history. In terms of MA to Ph.D. students, we tend to advise our students not to earn all of their degrees from the same institution. This would mean if a student earns their B.A. and M.A. from here, we would advise them to look at other universities for their Ph.D.

Why are students instructed to do this?

It is not in the best interest of the student to have their entire intellectual profile from the same university. The students really need the diversity that attending different institutions can bring. In this way, we hope to avoid some of the idiosyncrasy that only attending one college would bring.

Do you feel like this would be the case for other majors as well?

Yes, absolutely.

What percentage of your M.A. students are attending school part time as opposed to full time? For the student that doesn't go on to their Ph.D., what do they do?

Right now most of our graduate students are full time. That is a product of funding. This is somewhat of a change. In the past, we had many more part time students because they could have been teachers pursuing faculty development. If they choose not to go on to their Ph.D. program, there are a variety of things that they can do. Teacher licensure, working in museums or art galleries, researcher and those types of jobs, institutions and media.

How many master's students get internships?

This depends on if they are in the public history program or not. Roughly ten students typically get an internship.

The number of internships for undergraduate is also very small, correct?

Our internship program is fairly new. We have only introduced it within the last couple of years, but it is increasing every year.

One of the cool things about sitting on APC is seeing the successes that different programs have. One of those successes is seeing internships that lead to jobs after graduation.

We try to provide not only internships, but a whole web of connections that could potentially help our students.

What, if any, are your plans for online courses?

We currently offer blended classes and we are working on expanding this.

Recommendations for the future:

Conduct your own survey of alumni and /or employers to better gauge the effectiveness of the program. Try to get alumni more involved in recruiting and placement efforts.

Do an analysis of schools with growing M.A. programs in History and see what best practices can be adopted here.

Continue to explore opportunities for online classes or other delivery methods.

Continue to develop and implement plans for increasing overall enrollment including evaluating an online degree program.

Ph.D. in History

Strengths:

The department does a good job of helping students build specific skills such as CV writing, presenting and grading.

Current Ph.D. students have done a good job in the publishing area.

The program promotes and supports students' career aspirations in a good variety of professions.

Graduates of the program have many placements as faculty at various universities. Recent graduates of the program have landed high profile teaching jobs at places such as Creighton University and the University of Iowa.

The following questions were asked of the department:

What impact has the change from 90 hours of required work to 72 hours had on interest and enrollment in the program?

This was mostly a technical change to align with peer efforts. Those hours were extra dissertation hours. If there is any impact, it's a good one for our students. If someone were comparing programs and look at our program compared to University of Wisconsin, and they see 54 required credit hours and then they look at NIU and they see 90 required credit hours, they are going to be less likely to choose the much higher hours.

Why should a student come to Northern for their Ph.D.?

First, students get an excellent range of knowledge from our program. Additionally, students tend to choose a program based on who they will be studying with and under, including the research that our faculty are involved with. I think we have a very strong faculty and institution.

Please discuss the time of completion for the degree. Is this a concern of yours?

The Ph.D. program can take five to six years after their master's, but typically takes closer to eight or nine years. This is due to the nature of the research and the length of time needed to write their dissertation. This is an issue that we have been focusing on to make sure that students have appropriate active mentoring and advising to ensure a timely completion from the standpoint of the student.

Recommendations:

Conduct your own survey of alumni and/or employers to better gauge the effectiveness of the program. Try to get alumni more involved in recruiting and placement efforts.

Do an analysis of schools with growing Ph.D. programs in History to see what best practices can be adopted here.

Focus on plans to improve completion of the program in a reasonable amount of time.

Keep getting faculty involved in recruitment and improvement.

Nominations for chair in training for the coming academic year were requested. None were put forward.

Meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanne Essex