

Summarized Assessment Report

Department: History
DEGREE: Ph.D.
CIP: # 450801

1. Centrality/Uniqueness of the Degree.

The History graduate program has been carefully configured to maximize the expertise of a relatively small faculty in its efforts to offer specialized program emphases with a unique regional and national profile. The commitment of the department to military history – to broad questions of “war and society” -- is unparalleled in the United States: this program emphasis has no peer within the region and few within the nation. Indeed, it is typically cited as one of the top three such programs in the United States. Moreover, this emphasis has been notably enhanced by the inauguration of the Institute for Military History and 20th Century Studies. The Institute has allowed the department to forge a relationship with the Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth that has brought new doctoral students to the program and, simultaneously, further enhanced the department’s expertise in military history by bringing CGSC faculty into the instructional mission as adjunct professors.

Nor is military history the only field of expertise. The departmental emphasis in environmental/agricultural history is not only in a traditionally understood land grant area, but it is primed to take full advantage of interdisciplinary connections with the natural sciences and with agriculture, connections that render it distinctive in the region. The department’s noted emphasis in religious history draws an extremely able group of doctoral students from across the nation who are drawn by the reputation of its central faculty member, a reputation that includes a record of legendary mentoring. Finally, the department’s broad research expertise in modern social, cultural, political, legal, and diplomatic history provides a notable resource for students seeking to combine their primary research interest with other thematic aspects of history. In all areas of its graduate education, the department is known for the accessibility of its faculty, a feature not necessarily common in graduate programs.

2. Quality of Faculty.

The foundation of excellence in graduate education is the scholarly productivity and professional involvement of the faculty. The level of productivity of the History faculty in these areas is very high. During the past seven years alone, the faculty has published twelve monographs, most by university presses. These works cut across the spectrum of faculty specializations and include studies in military, environmental/agricultural, diplomatic, constitutional, religious, colonial American, and institutional history. No fewer than four of these works have won prizes. In addition, faculty members, serving as sole or senior editor, have also published several anthologies, sourcebooks, and specialized encyclopedias. The list of publications over the last seven years also includes numerous articles.

Moreover, a significant portion of the faculty occupy positions of responsibility within professional associations, serve on government boards pertinent to history, and provide professional (and unpaid) assistance to academic presses and scholarly journals. Finally, the faculty has been notably successful in attracting individual grants and fellowships that enable the researcher to travel to archives or participate in professional workshops.

3. Quality of Students

Admissions at the doctoral level are given even greater scrutiny than those at the master’s level. The Committee assesses the applicant’s master’s work, demands high standards for the writing sample, and considers very carefully whether the applicant has realistic and well developed objectives as well as whether the department can in fact meet those objectives. For even applicants of the highest quality, the department will not admit unless it determines that there is a “goodness of fit” between the applicant and department. For the past five years, the department has averaged around 20 applicants (though that number is clearly on the rise); overall, the rejection rate for the same period is around 45%. Roughly

half of those admitted decide to attend KSU; the single greatest obstacle to attendance is the shortage of graduate assistantships and, relative to other institutions even in the region, the woefully inadequate stipend. Should the funding situation improve, the department is confident that more of the very best students would come to KSU. For admitted students, the average score on the verbal portion of the GRE has steadily risen over the years; for the latest class of admissions, the average score is above the 80th percentile. This represents a long-term and significant improvement in the department's ability to attract high quality applicants.

4. Employer Demand.

The department notes with satisfaction that it holds a near 100% placement record for doctoral graduates. Though the job market in history is far from booming, most graduated Ph.D.s with academic aspirations have been able to secure employment at their preferred type of institution; in the last few years, the department's advanced doctoral candidates have experienced great success as well. A few graduates are employed at research universities, but many have preferred smaller institutions with a greater emphasis upon teaching. Recent doctoral graduates occupy positions at smaller state universities (e.g., Ft. Hays State University, Sam Houston University in Texas; Washburn University; the University of Wyoming; Will Rogers University in Oklahoma); at small liberal arts colleges (e.g., Lee University in Tennessee); at military schools (e.g., The Citadel, Norwich University); at religiously affiliated institutions; and at community colleges. Teaching positions in educational institutions affiliated with the United States military have been especially attractive to some graduates who specialized in military history: a recent Ph.D. as well as an advanced ABD have just joined the staff of the Command and General Staff College. Options outside teaching have been attractive to some: several work as independent scholars and grant writers and one has just become the Director of Special Collections at Southern Mississippi University. Finally, active duty military personnel began entering the program four years ago and have been admitted in every subsequent year. The cohorts are progressing nicely, and the department expects that within just two to three years, the first group will begin graduating with KSU History doctorates.

5. Service Provided by Degree Program.

In the last decade in particular, the Department of History has focused the graduate program in such a way as to maximize its unique attractions to students in the region and across the nation. Its growing reputation, particularly in the field of military history, has undoubtedly enhanced the visibility of Kansas State University by providing an exceptionally strong program within the humanities. Moreover, the doctoral program in particular provides the penultimate professional stepping-stone to both academic careers and to command-level careers in the military of the United States.

6. Cost Effectiveness.

Faculty time – for both direct instruction and individual mentoring – constitutes the primary cost of history graduate education. It is a cost borne by the entire faculty. All seventeen members of the faculty, including the most junior, are members of the Graduate faculty. In any given year, the majority of the faculty will teach a graduate seminar and all are involved in graduate committees: some carry huge committee assignments. In addition, the department has in recent years been allotted nine graduate teaching assistants; doctoral students typically teach independent sections of courses. Given the well-known inadequacy of KSU graduate student stipends, this instructional cost is particularly low.

Graduate education in history centers upon the development of sophisticated analytic thinking and archival research, and as such, the technological cost of such education is extremely low. The department's "expansion" to Ft. Leavenworth is the solitary exception: most graduate courses are now video-conferenced to the post, necessitating some equipment costs. Finally, costs for graduate student research are typically borne by the student (as is typical in history research). In recent years, the department's fundraising efforts have centered upon enhancing departmental awards for graduate student research and all graduate students are actively encouraged to apply for research grants.