

Summarized Assessment Report

Department: History
DEGREE: M.A.
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 and enhance its efforts to offer specialized program emphases with a unique regional and national profile. The commitment of the department to military history is unparalleled in the United States: this program emphasis has no peer within the region, and indeed, it is typically cited as one of the top three in the nation. The 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 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. And, the department's broad research expertise in modern social, cultural, political, legal, and diplomatic history provides a notable resource for regional students seeking to extend their history education beyond the baccalaureate. 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

Master's work in history has a somewhat exploratory quality to it; this is typically the level at which students hone advanced analytic skills and refine their specialized interests. Admissions to the master's program are based upon the totality of the student's record: undergraduate grades, GRE scores, recommendations, a submitted writing sample, and the maturity of an applicant's statement of objectives are all considered. The Admissions committee gives careful scrutiny to master's applicants, but is more open at this level (than at the doctoral level) to applications indicating promise as opposed to advanced accomplishment. Although the numbers fluctuate from year to year, roughly one third of all applicants are rejected outright. Of those admitted, approximately one half choose to attend. Over the years, the quality of students admitted to the master's program has steadily improved. In the most recent round of admissions, the average GRE score in the verbal category is above the 80th percentile; nearly half of the most recent class of admitted students rank above the 90th percentile.

4. Employer Demand.

Roughly half of the department's M.A. students intend to enter the workplace upon completion of the degree. The master's degree in history is in high demand for government positions and for the advancement of careers in education and the armed forces. For example, among recent M.A. graduates, one now works for the Defense Intelligence Agency, another for the Environmental Protection Agency, still another is an active duty Air Force officer. Several have advanced their careers in the public schools; one is teaching in Japan.

The other primary goal of the master's program is to prepare students for doctoral work, either here or elsewhere. Roughly one half of all recent master's students, and virtually all who want to do so, are admitted to doctoral programs – a clear sign of the rigors of the program and the quality of faculty supervision. About two thirds of those who go on to the doctoral level are master's students attracted to the department's well-known emphases and wish to stay here; the other third go on to other institutions. For example, the two most recent master's graduates completed research outside the main emphases of the program and were awarded full fellowships to the excellent history departments at Northwestern and the University of Iowa.

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 master's program in particular furnishes a broad array of possibilities for career enhancement (for those in education and government service in particular) and professional development (for those interested in pursuing the terminal degree in history).

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. Graduate courses are taught to both master's and doctoral students, a circumstance that maximizes limited instructional resources while increasing the necessity of active and involved mentoring. In addition, the department has in recent years been allotted nine graduate teaching assistants; usually a third of those positions go to the most promising master's students. The expense of those positions is offset by their assistance in the instructional mission: some provide assistance in large survey courses, allowing the department to increase the size of those classes. Others (all doctoral students) teach independent sections. Given the well-known and woeful 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. Moreover, 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.