December 21, 2009

TO: Linda Buckley, Vice President for Academic Planning and Educational Effectiveness

CC: Provost Sue Rosser
    Joel Kassiola, Dean of College of Behavioral and Social Science

FROM: Barbara Loomis, Chair, Department of History

RE: History Department Response: APRC Report

The History Department thanks the APRC for their careful evaluation of our M.A. program. We are especially gratified to learn that our Department, which was named a “Center of Excellence” in the fifth cycle program review, has maintained that standing in this focused analysis of our graduate program. As the external reviewers noted in their own appraisal, our graduate training “has a well deserved national and international reputation for excellence.” We are pleased that the APRC has recognized many of the strengths of our department.

Nevertheless, there are some misconceptions about the characteristics of our curriculum in the APRC Report that we would like to address. These misconceptions concern the contribution of undergraduate coursework to the M.A. degree, the role of History 700 and the Comprehensive Exam in the integrated plan of the curriculum, and the appropriate place of extra-disciplinary coursework in the completion of a Master’s in History.

After clarifying these elements of our graduate program, we will enumerate some of the decisions that we have made about changes to the program and our hopes for the future.

**Contribution of Undergraduate Coursework to the M.A. Degree**

The History Department adheres to the requirements of the California Administrative Code of Regulations: Title 5, Section 40510, which states that “Not less than one-half of the units required for the degree shall be in courses organized primarily for graduate students.” At a minimum, five of the student’s ten classes must be at the graduate level, five may be undergraduate courses. This blend of coursework is very much in keeping with the guidelines and practices of our profession. Our primary
professional organization, the American Historical Association, recently published a comprehensive set of standards for historical training at the Master’s level, “Retrieving the Master’s Degree from the Dustbin of History” (2005). The AHA report identified five “elements of mastery” which should be the aim of every M.A. program:

- A base of historical knowledge.
- Research and presentation skills (including the ability to conceptualize a survey course or other synthetic presentation of the past).
- A solid introduction to historical pedagogy (in the broadest sense of how learners obtain their understanding of history at all ages).
- The foundation for a professional identity as a historian/history educator.
- The ability to “think like a historian.”

Allowing students to enroll in undergraduate courses enables them to expand their “base of historical knowledge.” The issue is not so much one of “breadth” but sufficient coverage of chronology and historical themes. In our department, for example, the field of American history is divided into six upper-level chronological classes (soon to be seven). An undergraduate from our department whose primary field was U.S. history would possibly have taken three of those classes, at most, and students who earned their undergraduate degrees elsewhere might have acquired even spottier background in the field. (This is not enough “generalist education” to “last a lifetime” if a person is moving into post-baccalaureate training in History.) It is entirely reasonable to ask M.A. students specializing in American history to take at least two or three more of those classes—not as remedial classes, taken conditionally before acceptance to “real” graduate work, but as an integral part of their Master’s training. As a result of such coursework, their “ability to conceptualize a survey course or other synthetic presentation of the past” is significantly enhanced.

According to the AHA, this ability to synthesize disparate kinds of historical information into coherent presentations is the distinguishing mark of a Master’s education, as compared to either the bachelor’s level or the Ph.D. They write: “How does a master’s degree differ from a Ph.D.? How does it differ from a bachelor’s degree? One answer, we want to suggest, is that most historians with master’s degrees focus their professional activities on synthesizing and presenting history (as opposed to consuming history or even producing new historical knowledge at the leading edge of archival research), so their training should focus on synthesis and presentation as well.”¹ The undergraduate lecture courses provide the building blocks of information that make such a synthesis possible. For Master’s students, enrollment in such courses is not simply “more of the same” undergraduate experience of consuming history; their career choices allow them to make a different use of the material presented in the lectures, as they begin to craft lectures of their own and to design study plans.

The APRC is mistaken in imagining that these lecture courses could consist of seventy students, forty of whom are juniors. At most, our undergraduate courses that might attract graduate students to their ranks number about forty or forty-five students. Furthermore, these are not “paired” courses and should not be critiqued for failing to meet University requirements for paired courses. Our external evaluators recommended

¹ Philip M. Katz and David S. Trask, “Retrieving the Master’s Degree from the Dustbin of History,” 11.
that we proceed to create paired courses as a way of maintaining the strength of our curriculum in the face of University demands to move away from the 50-50 distribution of graduate and undergraduate classes. The evaluators’ main concern was the paperwork that such a procedure would entail; they thought that the actual structure of our curriculum was exemplary. However, we were not permitted to create any paired courses, so any kind of complaint about them is not relevant to our M.A. program. True, a lecture course is not as complex and nuanced in its discussion of issues as a graduate seminar might be, but each mode of presenting information has a part to play in achieving the “elements of mastery” set out by our main professional organization. All of the faculty of the History Department, as part of their own training, completed undergraduate courses in our Ph.D. programs; this is simply standard practice within our discipline.

Because students enter our M.A. program with a variety of historical backgrounds, it is very important that they have a wide range of options in selecting the undergraduate courses that will help them build their “base of historical knowledge.” The APRC vision of a couple of graduate level “breadth classes,” offered to a collective cohort of students during the same semester, fails to provide the diversity of options that is part of our current curriculum. One student may be missing a background in post-World War II U.S. history, another may have avoided learning about the High Middle Ages, a third may have studied modern Asian history but neglected traditional China. Our program allows them to select the specific undergraduate courses that will fill in the gaps in their training and will assist them to craft the larger narratives that are the expected product of an M.A. in History.

Permitting students to enroll in undergraduate courses while they are working on their M.A. degree enriches our program rather than delegitimizes it. Furthermore, this is accepted practice throughout our profession, and it is completely in harmony with the goals and guidelines that the profession has established for Master’s level education. Compare the SFSU requirements with those of two other departments, one of which is a sister campus within the California State University system--San Diego State University, and the other is the largest producer of history M.A. degrees in the nation, the University of Wisconsin at Madison. SDSU’s graduate program is very similar to our own. It consists of an introductory methods course, parallel to History 700, two graduate reading seminars, and a graduate research seminar. However, the total number of graduate units is eighteen, while twelve units come from undergraduate classes, so the campus requires a 60-40 balance of graduate coursework. The remaining six graduate units are derived from the M.A. thesis, which the department there (unlike our own) strongly encourages. According to their graduate handbook, the initial work on the M.A. thesis most often begins in the graduate research seminar. What this means is that at SDSU, fully half (nine units) of the graduate level work ultimately grows out of the same project. The final twelve units of coursework are completed in undergraduate classes. The structure of graduate education in the History Department at the University of Wisconsin is much more complicated. At that institution, most students are accepted into a Ph.D. program, although some become “terminal masters” along the way. Graduate Division rules require at least sixteen graduate units for an M.A. degree, although a department may require more--and some of the historical subfields at U.Wisc. require as many as twenty-seven.
(A student who goes on to earn a Ph.D. at U.Wisc. needs only eighteen units for an M.A. in many of the History subfields, but if that student ends study at the M.A. degree, he or she must complete twenty-four units, combining graduate and undergraduate coursework.) Each subfield has its own rules for including undergraduate coursework as part of the curriculum; some enumerate the courses that must be completed, others are merely permissive. The institution as a whole does not specify the balance between graduate and undergraduate courses. Instead, students are required to take at least one graduate class each semester, and their remaining classes may be undergraduate ones if they choose. As students approach the requisite number of graduate units for their subfield, they signal their readiness to receive their M.A. degree by filing a petition, and then move forward to take their qualifying exams or to end their training at the M.A. degree. The crucial point in both of these examples is that undergraduate coursework plays a central, unapologetic role in constructing the basis of the M.A. Rather than diminishing the “graduate experience” of students in an M.A. program, the combination of graduate seminars and undergraduate lecture classes helps students to acquire the skills and expertise recommended by our main professional body.

That being said, our Department has decided to move to requiring a 60-40 distribution of graduate to undergraduate courses, and the new language to that effect will appear in the SFSU Bulletin for 2010-2011. In establishing this new requirement, we have tried to preserve what we consider to be strengths of our older pattern, including flexibility and multiple options. The APRC recommendation for creating “graduate breadth courses” that “are not seminars” does not fit the expectations or conventions of our discipline, and we find that suggestion to be unworkable. Instead, we will adopt a multi-layered approach, consisting of the following:

• An expanded number of graduate seminars each semester;
• Advising strategies that encourage students to take two graduate seminars in their second and third semesters;
• Regularly offering Hist. 785, College Teaching of History, which will count as additional graduate coursework;
• Adding Hist. 897, Directed Reading in History, to our curriculum. (Hist. 896, which currently bears that name, will be renamed, more accurately, as “Comprehensive M.A. Exam.”) History 897 will be a one-unit, “added value” course, taken in conjunction with enrollment in an undergraduate lecture class. It may be repeated up to three times. Students will be expected to meet the established requirements for the undergraduate course. For their additional unit of Hist. 897, they will research and write a fifteen-page historiographical essay on one of the central issues of the course. This skill--the ability to identify the key writings upon a topic and to analyze and compare authors’ interpretations--is one of the central elements of our discipline and also one which many students struggle to achieve. Repeated practice at crafting historiographies will strengthen students’ ability to “think like a historian”; it will provide excellent preparation for the M.A. Comprehensive Exam, and it will supply an element that we had worried was missing from our program, which was sufficient training in historiography.

To summarize this first section, the History Department insists upon the value of including undergraduate lecture courses as part of its graduate curriculum. However, we
believe that the “base of historical knowledge” that students acquire in these classes could be further enhanced by additional coursework in Hist. 897. Concurrent enrollment in an undergraduate class and Hist. 897, repeated three times, will result in a 60-40 distribution of coursework, if our other requirements remain the same. However, our goal is to create a variety of ways to move to the new distribution of graduate and undergraduate courses. We will also promote additional enrollment in graduate seminars and encourage all eligible students to take Hist. 785. These strategies together will maintain the variety and flexibility of our graduate program, allowing us to meet the diverse needs of our students, while improving our ability to train students in the unique aspects of historical thinking.

**History 700 and the Comprehensive Exam**

For history graduate students, the experience of completing Hist. 700 is somewhat legendary; this is the course that provides the rite of passage from being an undergraduate history major to an aspiring graduate professional. Hist. 700 is the central pillar, the bedrock foundation, of our graduate training. The APRC’s characterization of the course as “atypical,” outside of the basic elements of a graduate education in History, is the result of a misunderstanding or a metaphor run amok. The course is both “typical” in the sense that its structure and contents are akin to the initiatory course in most M.A. and Ph.D. history programs, and it is a “typical” class in our own graduate curriculum. The class is not “meta-methodological”—whatever that means—but it is an in-depth introduction to the discipline and methods of studying History, as they are currently conceived. For historians, “methods” cannot be understood outside of critical engagement with the systems of knowledge from which they have historically emerged, and to suggest otherwise reveals a lack of understanding of our discipline. In Hist. 700, methods, content, and the practice of historical thinking are intricately interwoven. In this course, students build upon their base of historical knowledge, they develop their professional identity as historians, and above all they learn to “think like a historian.”

Perhaps the most important point to be made about the course is that it is a proven vehicle for preparing students both for the M.A. and for further Ph.D. studies. The evidence to support this assertion comes from three places. First, we as a department have noted that students who have taken Hist.700 prior to other graduate courses are on the whole far better prepared to handle difficult material. Second, our former students who have moved on to Ph.D. programs report that they feel they are much better prepared than other students in their classes, even those who have graduated from more prestigious institutions. A number of first-rate Ph.D.-granting institutions, recognizing the rigor of Hist. 700, excuse our students from taking the equivalent class at their institution, although the course is required for other students. Third, our ability to repeatedly place our students in major research programs (U.C. Berkeley, U.C.L.A., Harvard, Columbia, Princeton, University of Michigan, Johns Hopkins, Stanford, just to name a few of the places where our students have been accepted in the last ten years) is evidence that they arrive well prepared and have established our program’s reputation for excellence.
The centrality of Hist. 700 in our program has led us to make a very difficult decision. The current recession, with its uncertain job prospects, has caused the number of applicants to our graduate program to soar. This year, we accepted more than we had ever accepted before, and many of them enrolled, pushing our numbers up to 120 students. The administration’s decision to halt spring semester admissions gave us a little breathing room, so that we could provide for the students who were already here. We have come to the realization that we cannot handle more students than can complete Hist. 700 early in their graduate career.

•Beginning in Fall 2010, we will limit admission to graduate study in History to 30 students in Fall, and 15 students in Spring, using a Waiting List to help manage our admissions numbers. We will accept no more students than can be comfortably accommodated in two sections of Hist. 700 in Fall and one section in the Spring.
•We will insist, more strenuously than in the past, on the successful completion of Hist. 700 within the first or second semester of enrollment.

While Hist. 700 provides students with the analytical methods and skills to pursue their degree effectively--in essence, it gives them the tools of analysis as well as the sense of how to dissect historical arguments, the M.A. Comprehensive Exam asks students to piece their field back together in a synthetic way. This is a fitting culminating experience for training at the Master’s level, and it is very much in keeping with the standards of our profession. (The APRC complained that they had not received an example of the M.A. exam. In fact, each exam is unique, designed to help individual students synthesize the elements of their own field while addressing central issues that any well-trained historian in that particular specialty should have under control. An assortment of exams is included as Appendix A in this report.) We stress that preparation for the M.A. Exam is “typical” in its insistence upon coverage and synthesis; it is, above all, a “content course at the graduate level,” and it is integral to our program. The components of our M.A. curriculum make a carefully integrated set of experiences that help our students achieve the “elements of mastery” identified by the AHA.

Our team of outside evaluators noted that Americanists in the department (and, increasingly, faculty in the field of Europe and the Mediterranean before 1500) bear a disproportionate responsibility for preparing students for the M.A. Exam, since those are currently the two most popular fields, probably accounting for 80 percent or more of graduate students taking the exam. The suggestion that committees might typically consist of two, rather than three, members, did not seem to lighten the burden of those two members. The History Department will continue to discuss ways to fine-tune the administration of the exam and its ideal structure and contents. It seems highly probable that the practice of developing historiographical knowledge in Hist. 897, discussed above, will ease the need of the Exam Committee to supervise that kind of preparatory exercise, and that the material covered in Hist. 897 will become one important part of the exam.

Extra-Disciplinary Coursework in the History Curriculum
The APRC report notes that the History Department has not moved in a “systematic” way to encourage enrollment in graduate courses outside the Department, although that suggestion has been made in the past and is repeated here. After our Fifth Cycle review, we surveyed our students to learn if they were interested in pursuing extra-disciplinary coursework, and we detected almost no interest in this possibility, excellent though the courses might be. Nevertheless, our graduate guidelines do make this option available; students may enroll, upon advisement, in one outside course in their primary concentration and one outside course in their secondary concentration, if the courses are sufficiently historical. Not surprisingly, the most satisfying experiences of our students in outside departments has occurred when the instructors, like Prof. Amy Sueyoshi in Ethnic Studies and Sexuality Studies, Prof. Fred Astren in Jewish Studies, and Prof. Nan Alamilla Boyd, in Women and Gender Studies, received their Ph.D.s in History.

Returning to the five “elements of mastery” that our main professional organization insists should be the goal of education at the Master’s level, it is easy to see why the option of extra-disciplinary coursework has proved to be unattractive to our students. They might be able to build their “base of historical knowledge” in these courses, although that purpose will not have been primary in the instructor’s mind as she or he designed the curriculum. And they might be able to use the course as an arena in which they can pursue research and the presentation of their findings, although the instructor might not guide them to meld their discoveries into a larger historical synthesis. We would not expect that classes, outside of the History Department, would train their students in specialized historical pedagogy, or provide the foundation for a professional identity as a historian (except in the way of contrast), or try to nurture their students to “think like a historian.” That is not their purpose; outside departments expect to socialize their students into the ways of thinking of their own discipline. Every discipline has its own methods, and even when two of them cover the same material, they do it differently. For individual students with specialized interests, enrollment in courses outside of the History Department has provided an additional set of data, a additional way of viewing the world, and their academic progress has benefited from the experience. But for average graduate students in History, their needs are best met by courses within the discipline. We reject the recommendation that “systematic” enrollment of history students in courses in other fields would make their “graduate experience” more “legitimate.”

Finally, we should note that many of our graduate courses are interdisciplinary already as our faculty have a wide variety of interest as well as knowledge and expertise in other disciplines which they then incorporate into their course design. It is not uncommon for our graduate courses to incorporate readings written by anthropologists, sociologists, archaeologists, scholars of religion, art historians, literary critics, and political scientists, among others. But the seminars also take care to place these readings in a historical context, something which we cannot expect other departments to do as that is not their mission.

In many other aspects, the APRC’s evaluation agrees with our own assessment of the program’s strengths and weaknesses, and we thank them for their support and
encouragement. The remaining sections of our response will deal more briefly with their suggestions and it will report on revisions that we have already undertaken.

Training in the Distinctive Pedagogy of History

At the time that we wrote our self-study for the Sixth Cycle Review, we were aware that we were not providing sufficient training in “the distinctive pedagogy of history,” even though the AHA stressed the centrality of such training in a well-designed Master’s curriculum. As a result of our conversations with our outside reviewers, we began to imagine a way to create such a course and to make it a regular part of the curriculum. Our trial run for the course, pioneered by Prof. Laura Lisy-Wagner, took place in Fall 2008; seventeen students enrolled. The feedback we received, from students and faculty alike, was extremely positive. We repeated the course under our internship number in the Spring, and then regularized it as Hist. 785: College Teaching of History, in Fall 2009. We will continue to offer the course each semester. Enrollment in Hist. 785 will be another way for graduate students to achieve the 60-40 balance of graduate to undergraduate coursework.

We have also begun outreach to community colleges, in hopes that our M.A. students will get additional experience teaching at that level. We have placed apprentice teachers in two community colleges, and we have opened communications with other History Departments scattered throughout the Bay Area. We plan to work at expanding teaching opportunities for our neophyte teachers.

Other Curricular Changes

• We have created Early Modern Europe as a separate concentration at the M.A. level.

Student Experience

We have found our assessment methods to be quite useful in the findings that they have produced, and we are pleased that the APRC concurs.

One exciting, new indicator of the strength of our program (and this is the first public announcement of this news) is the forthcoming publication by the University of Nebraska Press of an anthology of articles written by our students. Jointly edited by Professor Robert Cherny, Mary Ann Irwin (M.A., 1995) and Ann Marie Wilson (M.A., 2003), the volume will be entitled California Women and Politics: From the Gold Rush to the Great Depression, and will include articles by fourteen different SFSU history grads. We hope that the publication of the volume will provide the basis for a conference to be held here at San Francisco State, bringing together former graduate students from the 1990s and the early twenty-first century and involving our current cohort of students.
too. This is the kind of alumni event which would be particularly meaningful to History majors.

Other practices, created to enhance the experiences of students within our program, include:

• A specialized graduate student website which is up and running.
• We have continued to sponsor our workshops to help our students apply to Ph.D. programs.
• As in years past, we hosted a Fall party for new and returning graduate students.
• Beginning this Spring, we will sponsor a special orientation meeting for newly accepted graduate students, to help them plan their course of study within the department.

Civic Engagement

The APRC encourages the department to augment its Public History offerings. We think this is a good idea, but at present lack the resources to make such an effort possible. In the meantime, we have begun a preliminary conversation about the possibility of raising money for an endowed chair in California History, which would include a Public History component. This idea is worth talking about further.

Equity and Social Justice

We have created and launched the first installment of the Bay Area Social Justice History Website. We hope to add a second chapter to the site in the near future.

Internationalization

As the APRC notes, the creation of a concentration in Modern World History has boosted the internationalization of our curriculum. This concentration still needs additional staffing, including a specialist in East Asia (Japan/Korea), a specialist in the Atlantic World, and possibly a specialist in the Mediterranean and North Africa.

The Faculty Experience

One of the action items in the Fifth Cycle MOU was the pledge “in consultation with the Dean and Provost, [to] increase the number and percentage of tenured/tenure-track faculty.” At that time (2001), our full-time equivalent faculty numbered 23; in Fall 2010, when Prof. Molly Oshatz joins our department, we will have 20 FTEF. Obviously, we have not been able to grow as we have wished or as we were promised. The tragic loss of Prof. Jules Tygiel, who was deeply involved in the graduate program, has rendered us very short-handed, especially in our ability to cover Twentieth-Century U.S. History; the conclusion of Prof. Robert Cherny’s FERP will cut even more deeply into our staff of Americanists. At the same time, the most rapidly growing concentration in the department is Europe and the Mediterranean before 1500, and that field relies on the
efforts of just three faculty members: Prof. Jarbel Rodriguez, Prof. Megan Williams, and Prof. Richard Hoffman, who is in the second year of his FERP. And, as mentioned above, we need additional faculty to teach in the Modern World concentration.

We understand that in the current budget climate that growth in our faculty is not likely to happen immediately. However, we hope that we will be permitted to search to fill our vacancies very soon. Furthermore, we hope that as a proven “Center of Excellence” on the campus that we will be given extra protection against the vicissitudes of the budget crisis. The APRC cites the former provost as saying that “when things get really bad, you don’t just cut everything, you decide what is centrally important and good, and you help it grow.” We hope that our very successful record in producing M.A.s has earned us the ability to keep our program intact, that our FERPers will be allowed to serve for their full terms, especially since they teach in our two most popular graduate concentrations (American History and Europe before 1500). Their loss would severely hinder our ability to serve those students adequately. Moreover, we hope that we will be authorized to search immediately to replace them when they retire. The History Department’s graduate program has truly acquired a national reputation for excellence, and we trust that SFSU will provide the resources to allow us to maintain a high-quality program.

**Interdisciplinarity**

The APRC recommends that we should consider substituting the methodology courses of another social science for our auxiliary skills requirement. After lengthy discussion, we have decided to move in the other direction—to abandon our Computer Skills/SPSS option for acquiring an auxiliary skill and to insist that all candidates for an M.A. must have a foreign language, equivalent to second year, second semester (intermediate). Individual exceptions will be made for students who demonstrate that a particular auxiliary skill would further their work in researching a topic for a thesis. However, since most of our students choose the exam rather than a thesis for their culminating experience, we expect that the number who takes advantage of this exception will be small. The Department has also decided to do much more of the testing for language competency in-house, setting aside a single day each semester for departmental language exams. While the department wants this, it does place an additional burden on our already hardworking faculty.

**Resource Support**

When we wrote our Self-Study, we requested a committed and secure source of funding to run our programs, such as guaranteed access to our concurrent enrollment revenues. Our Outside Evaluators called this a “modest request.” It is symptomatic of the grave budget situation that the APRC agrees that we need a regular source of funding but fears that the fiscal crisis will prevent us from having one. Still, we would like to assert our need for a guaranteed revenue source to support our program.
Alumni Relations

We have begun to design a website aimed at our alums, and we have also set up a Facebook page. Our first departmental newsletter to keep alumni informed of departmental events is nearing publication. We hope to be more systematic in cultivating ongoing relationships with our alumni, although we need additional resources in order to be completely successful.

Conclusion

We are proud to be able to say that our M.A. program has been deemed, by our primary professional organization, to be the best “stand-alone” M.A. Program in History in the nation. With that commendation in mind, we do not feel that we need to undertake measures to “legitimize” the experiences of students in our program. They come to us, expecting us to deliver a high-quality experience, and we do not fail to meet their expectations. However, we are always ready to modify our program when we can think of ways to serve our students more effectively or to meet our profession’s standards more fully. This response enumerates some of the changes that we have instituted or are contemplating in the near future. We hope to maintain our standing as a distinguished, first-rate M.A. program. We trust that SFSU will provide the kind of support that will sustain the quality of our program.