



History, King's University College Final Assessment Report

Faculty / Affiliated University College	King's University College
Degrees Offered	B.A.
Modules Reviewed	Hons. Specialization in History; Major in History
External Consultants	Dr Stephen Bednarski, St Jerome's University, Waterloo Dr Kिरrily Freeman, St Mary's University, Halifax
Internal Reviewers	Dr James E. Crimmins, Acting Dean of Arts and Social Science, Huron University College
Date of Site Visit	March 29, 2018
Evaluation	Good Quality
Approval Dates	SUPR-U: June 6, 2018 SCAPA: Senate:

Executive Summary

The Internal Reviewer and the External Consultants, Dr Stephen Bednarski of St Jerome's University in Waterloo and Dr Kिरrily Freeman of St Mary's University in Halifax, spent a day on the King's campus on March 29, 2018, interviewing History faculty and students, College staff, and King's and Western administrators. They received the Department of History self-study in advance of their visit and came prepared to explore questions they had previously identified as necessary to compile a complete and helpful report. Though they had but one day on campus the Consultants conducted their research thoroughly, sympathetic to the nature of a liberal arts college within a larger research-intensive university. They collected a good deal of information and have provided a judicious report on the undergraduate program offered by the Department of History at King's. It is, in general a very positive report, with a good number of helpful suggestions for improving the program and enriching the learning experience for History students at King's. Both the Department and the Academic Dean at King's have written helpful responses to the Consultants' Report which underscore the determination to improve the History program and to enhance the learning experience of its students.

The Consultants correctly assess the significant strengths of the History program, particularly the accomplishments of its faculty in scholarship and their dedication, passion, and innovation in teaching. They were impressed by the History students at King's and report that the students enjoy a high quality education, and that the core learning outcomes of the program in which they study and the skills they acquire are well aligned with the institutional priorities at King's and the Constituent University, notably "evidence-based research proficiency in historical inquiry; historical consciousness—the ability to analyze historical data and trends and to make connections to the present; knowledge mobilization to the broader community; historiography, theory, and methodologies; communications skills—oral, written, and visual: the ability to assess arguments; sustained focus; and self-awareness." The Consultants note the rigour of the History program, the appropriateness of the modes of assessment used, the appreciation of the students for opportunities for independent study and original research, and the quality and breadth of the library collection.

Where the Consultants see room for improvement they have specified recommendations encompassing modest programmatic changes, teaching a greater variety of courses, broadening the student learning experience beyond the classroom into inquiry-based experiential and study abroad

opportunities, filling gaps in course offerings by hiring new faculty, and addressing the barriers to student mobility between History departments across the Western campus.

The main challenge confronting the History program, recognized by all parties—the Consultants, Department and Academic Dean—is the precipitous decline in program and course enrolments over the past ten years. Not surprisingly the Consultants have wrestled with this challenge but beyond recommending the cultivation of a culture at King’s that is “collaborative [across departments] rather than competitive” and removing barriers to student access to courses across the Western campus, they have not offered a solution to the problem. Rather they have focused on improving the quality of what they conclude is already an impressive History program.

Significant Strengths of the Program

- Talented and accomplished scholars, passionately engaged in research and teaching of high quality and mentoring students.
- Innovative teaching and assessment strategies, including workplace study initiatives and creative assignments.
- High quality of student experience, supported by dedicated scholarships and awards.
- Learning outcomes in line with institutional priorities at King’s and the Constituent University; the program is well aligned with Western priorities of internationalization, experiential learning and decolonizing of the curriculum.
- Quality and breadth of the library collection, its resources and services.

Suggestions for Improvement & Enhancement

The Consultants’ recommendations may be grouped under the following heads:

- 1) Program modifications
The reduction of the number of courses required for the History Major from 7 to 6, and the promotion of the Hons thesis as the culminating capstone of the History program.
- 2) Introducing new and improving existing courses
Introduction of collaborative thematic courses to replace traditional time-bound courses, teaching a greater variety of courses, the elimination of elements of duplication between certain courses, and filling some gaps in the teaching of pre-modern history, possibly including collaboration with research and teaching at other universities.
- 3) Broadening the student experience
Enhancing and promoting student and faculty exchange opportunities, the expansion and integration of experiential learning in relation to courses, and a greater degree of departmental involvement in and encouragement of History student activities, notably the activities of the History Club.
- 4) Hiring new faculty
The Consultants recommend that the College provide two new full-time hires to enhance the variety of courses offered by the Department, particularly in relation to Catholic humanism and the history of the Catholic intellectual tradition, and to buttress the new Minor in Human Rights in the areas of 1) human rights or critical race studies, and 2) gender, sexuality, LGBTQ studies.
- 5) Flexibility in student mobility across campus.
The Consultants recommend that the Department, College, and Constituent University consider greater flexibility for students in the course composition of their degrees by removing or reducing existing barriers, procedural and programmatic.

Both the Department and the Academic Dean strongly support the recommendations grouped under 1), 2) and 3) and are committed to making progress on these fronts in short order.

The two most contentious recommendations relate to 4) and 5).

In Recommendation 3 the Consultants suggest that the College add two new full-time faculty to the Department's current six fulltime members in order to expand the choice of courses and to support the new Minor in Human Rights in the areas of 1) human rights or critical race studies, and 2) gender, sexuality, LGBTQ studies. The Consultants consider "the Department's human resources to be inadequate". The Department, not surprisingly, warmly welcomes this assessment and recommendation. However, as desirable as it might be from the perspective of diversifying the curriculum and filling some identifiable gaps in course offerings, the Academic Dean rightly points out this is difficult to justify at a time of falling History enrolments. Ten years ago there were over 200 students registered in the History Specialization and Major; in 2017/18 that number has fallen to little over 100. During the same period course enrolments dropped from approximately 1300 to about 590. Further, the Academic Dean points out that the Department of History has one of the lowest student-faculty ratios at King's. Finally, the new Major in Human Rights is multidisciplinary in design and does not depend exclusively on the Department of History. Suffice to say that at present the Department can expect little support from the Dean's office for the recommendation that two new full-time faculty be hired.

In Recommendation 6, in order to enhance course selection for History students the Consultants recommend that the Department, College, and Constituent University (CU) consider greater flexibility for students in the course composition of their degrees by removing or reducing existing enrolment barriers. While the Department states that it will address the misunderstanding that History students are restricted from taking History courses at other campuses at Western by advising them otherwise, neither the Department nor the Academic Dean address the larger context of this recommendation—the institutional constraints on the flow of students from King's to the CU and from the CU to King's.

Recommendations Required for Program Sustainability

Recommendation	Responsibility
1. Streamline course requirements reducing Major requirements	Department
2. Increased promotion/communication of the Honours Thesis option to Honours Specialization students	Department
3. Introduce collaborative thematic courses to increase the variety and breadth of course offerings and undertake a review of the current curriculum to eliminate redundancies	Department