

Final Assessment Report
Submitted by SUPR-G to SCAPA

Program:	History	
Degrees Offered:	MA, PhD	
Approved Fields:	Culture and Society Business and Economics International Relations and Conflict Public History The Atlantic World The Americas Europe	
External Consultants:	Dr. Penny Bryden University of Victoria	Dr. Marcel Martel York University
Internal Reviewers:	Dr. Catherine Nolan, Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) Don Wright Faculty of Music	Ms. Jenna Loruso, PhD student Faculty of Education
Date of Site Visit:	December 7-8, 2015	
Evaluation:	<i>Good Quality with report in one year</i>	
Approved by:	<i>SUPR-G on May 9, 2016</i> <i>SCAPA on May 25, 2016</i>	

Executive Summary

The review of the graduate program in History included stimulating discussions about graduate education in history and in the humanities overall. The significant presence of Digital History in the program aligns well with Digital Humanities at large, and the Department, described as “visionary” in relation to Digital History, is encouraged to continue to expand its resources in this area.

The reviewers were positive about the program’s articulation and mapping of learning outcomes, the range of course offerings, and the commitment of the recently appointed Graduate Chair.

In this summary, I will refer to three notable features of the review.

1. Proposals for the introduction of two changes to existing programs by adding new program options:

- a 2-year (6-term) MA in History with thesis option (in addition to the current 1-year (3-term) with cognate essay option)
- a 4-term MA in History, Public History with a cognate essay option (in addition to the current 1-year (3-term) with internship option)

The current MA in History is a 3-term program that requires 6 0.5 courses plus a cognate essay (milestone). The proposed change will provide students with a more intense research experience, and will offer stronger preparation for PhD studies.

The current MA in History, Public History, is a 3-term program that requires 6 0.5 courses plus a Public History internship (milestone) consisting of 12 weeks of full-time paid or unpaid work under a Public History Professional. The proposed change of these will allow students the option to extend their MA program by one term, during which students will write a cognate essay.

The two proposals are strongly supported by the reviewers, and the Department is committed to moving forward with these proposals as soon as possible.

2. Funding of PhD students:

The issue of year-x funding is a familiar one in all graduate programs, but it is an especially deep concern for faculty members and students in History. The reviewers understand that the provincial funding formulas do not allow for extension of the 4-year period of funding for doctoral students, but they make a number of suggestions that were welcomed by the Graduate Chair in his response to the reviewers' report. These suggestions include: continuing conversations about funding for year 5 through systematic documentation of time-to-completion in relation to funding; restructure funding packages to provide additional writing and research time in years 3 and 4; extend annual progress meetings to years 1 and 2; create new dissertation completion awards (in effect, internal "postdocs") for students who complete the program in a timely manner; encourage the University to find some means to reduce tuition fees for doctoral students beyond year 4. The last suggestion is not within the purview of the program, the Faculty of Social Science, or SGPS to implement, of course, but the outcry from this review, echoed across other programs, makes it appropriate to include as a remark in this summary.

3. Wellness of students:

The reviewers regard this as a serious concern because of the volume of students who spoke about it: this was not a concern of just a few disgruntled students. A widespread theme among PhD students was serious anxiety over the comprehensive examination, anxiety about financial security once funding has run out, and anxiety about whether they really belong in the program. Some of these anxieties are common to all graduate students, but they seemed elevated here. The reviewers noted concerns expressed by students about the culture of the History graduate program, including lack of empathy toward graduate students, especially female graduate students. The Graduate Chair is to be commended for his genuine concern about these matters (which evolved prior to his leadership), and has organized a new support group for dissertation writers, with plans for future sessions on mental and physical wellness, and on mentorship and the advisor-advisee relationship. The Graduate Chair is well aware of Western's numerous resources for student wellness and mental health, including the Wellness Education Centre and Teaching Support Centre. A faculty member of the History Department, Dr. Katherine McKenna, a university-wide Teaching Fellow with the Teaching Support Centre for the 2016-17 academic year, with a special focus on mentoring female graduate students, has proposed plans for improving mentorship, support, and improvement of communication channels within the History graduate program for female students and faculty.

Significant Strengths of Program:

- **Public history (one of only 3 programs in Canada)**
- **National leadership in Digital History**
- **High quality and size of faculty**
- **Exemplary physical and human library resources**

Suggestions for improvement & Enhancement:

- Approval of the proposal for a 2-year (6-term) MA with thesis option (in addition to the current 1-year (3-term) option)
- Approval of the proposal for a 4-term MA in Public History with a cognate essay option (in addition to the current 1-year (3-term) with internship option)
- Simplification of fields from the current seven (see above) to about four or five areas of excellence

- Streamline the Comprehensive Examination and dissertation proposal defense for PhD students by making all guidelines and expectations clear in the graduate handbook and orientation materials
- Streamline the Annual Progress meetings and reports for PhD students by implementing these for first- and second-year students as well as upper-year students
- Reduce PhD completion times
- Continue to address wellness and mental health of students.

Recommendations required for Program sustainability:	Responsibility	Resources	Timeline
Introduce a a 2-year (6-term) MA with thesis option	Department	None	September 2016
Introduce a 4-term MA in Public History	Department	None	September 2016
Simplification of fields	Graduate Chair	None	1 year
Streamline the Comprehensive Examination and dissertation proposal defense	Graduate Chair	None	1 year
Streamline the Annual Progress meetings and reports	Graduate Chair	None	Ongoing
Reduce PhD completion times	Graduate Chair Associate Dean	None	Ongoing
Continue to address wellness of students	Graduate Chair All program members Associate Dean	None	Ongoing
Enhanced communication between students and faculty members	Graduate Chair	None	Immediately and ongoing