

# Strategic Initiative      History Department

## Final Draft, May 2009

### Section 1

#### 1.1.1. Mission, vision, and goals

The History Department consists of 7 tenured and 1 tenure-track member (3 specialize in Europe, 3 specialize in the United States, 1 specializes in Latin America, and 1 specializes in East Asia). We have approximately 75 to 90 majors in any given year. On average we enroll between 450 and 500 students each semester in our courses.

#### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Department of History's mission embodies the liberal arts by nurturing students to think about history through critical inquiry, reasoned written and oral arguments, and in a context that incorporates comparative history and global perspectives. Thinking historically requires understanding change and continuity over time; recognizing that "facts" only have meaning in historical context; knowing how to interpret, synthesize, and critique *historical* sources; and being able to construct arguments based on historical evidence.

#### **VISION STATEMENT & GOALS**

To actualize our mission statement, the History Department has identified four major goals. First, we will emphasize more comparative, global, and environmental history. Second, we will encourage greater information and technological literacy germane to historical inquiry and a liberal arts education. Third, we will foster greater application of theoretical, methodological, and analytical tools of history, such as recognizing how social constructions of race, gender, class, and ethnicity shape history and how such constructions produce differences in historical perspective. Fourth, we look forward to adding faculty who can expand our department's and the college's international focus by including the critical areas of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

**RATIONALE FOR OUR VISION STATEMENT:** Given increasing globalization and interdependency (economic, social, political, environmental, cultural, intellectual, etc.), we believe that future students must have greater sophistication in understanding history from global and environmental perspectives. The increasing use of digital technology, electronic databases, and other forms of communication will shape how current and future students access information; thus we believe that history, both in curriculum and pedagogy, needs to offer greater information and technological literacy for students. Students also need to possess a greater understanding of the analytical, methodological, and theoretical approaches to history to better understand why people can and do

disagree-- a disposition we believe is useful in understanding human society past, present and future.

The first goal will require changes in curriculum, pedagogy, and personnel. Curricular changes include teaching “national” history in a broader frame, either by region, themes, or time. In addition, we will develop more comparative history courses in order to develop a more transnational and global historical perspective. Accomplishing these curricular changes will require new approaches in pedagogy, specifically, more team taught courses in discussion based courses.

We will actualize the second goal by emphasizing greater technological and information literacy throughout the history curriculum, but with particular focus on upper-division courses and the history methods course (History 200) required for all history majors. History 200 will be the foundation course where students will learn the relationship of information literacy to critical thinking, especially to assess and evaluate which online sources are appropriate for research purposes. Students will learn how to use on-line databases, how to define search parameters, and how technological changes affect how historical scholarship is produced and consumed.

Our third goal helps us understand differences (or diversity) by focusing on race, gender, class and ethnicity. It helps us move students away from the commonplace--”people are the same wherever you go”—to a more sophisticated appreciation of differences in perspective. In short, thinking about these issues helps us understand why people can and do disagree. This is obviously useful in understanding human societies past, present, and future. We will accomplish this third goal by offering opportunities in all of our classes--especially History 200 and our 300 level seminars--for our students to encounter and apply various analytical frameworks such as the concept of historically contingent social constructions of race, gender, class, and ethnicity.

Our fourth goal is critical to the college’s fulfillment of its commitment to a truly international curriculum. We cannot be a serious player in excellent liberal arts education without courses that engage students in a study of Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East.

## **1.2 Programs**

The History Department Offers 2 majors (a regular major and an Honors Track Major) and one minor. We contribute extensively to most of the college’s interdisciplinary programs, including Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies; Japanese Studies; Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean Studies; Peace Studies; Russian Studies; and Scandinavian Studies. The department offers courses in fulfillment of the general education requirements in Historical and Philosophical Studies, Non-Western Cultures,

and Biblical and Theological Studies. We also offer courses which fulfill part of the Writing Intensive and Writing in the Discipline requirements. Finally, the department regularly staffs Curriculum 110 and First Term Seminar.

### **1.3 Support Relationships**

As indicated in 1.2, the History Department has key support relationships with most of the college's interdisciplinary programs. In addition, the department lists two courses from the Classics Department which are allowed to count as courses toward the History Major and Minor. The department also plays a critical role in offering required courses for the Social Studies Teaching Major.

## **Section 2 Strategic Review**

### **2.1 Strategic Issues**

#### **Strengths of the department**

The History Department is proud that it is recognized for its excellence in teaching. All eight of the history faculty are master teachers who routinely receive rave reviews from their students. History faculty are continually engaged in course review and revision in their efforts to enhance their effectiveness in the classroom. Each of the history faculty also has an ongoing program of research, much of which supports his/her work in the classroom. We involve our students in active learning which involves a significant amount of critical writing. We believe that our primary responsibility is to foster genuine intellectual curiosity, and to achieve this we provide our students with extensive individual attention.

We are particularly proud of our Honors Track Major and of History 200, the required history methods course for our major. Both of these have been successful additions to the quality of our program; and both of them have been admired and to a certain extent copied by some other departments.

We believe that the interdisciplinary interest and focus of the history faculty are vital to the education of today's students. This is an important value in our pedagogy and it is reflected in our participation in most of the college's interdisciplinary programs.

History is an essential core of any liberal arts education, and our department honors its commitment to general education in every way. We are also a service department with all that entails.

## **Weaknesses of the Department**

We have always been a relatively small department given the size and quality of this excellent liberal arts college. After waiting decades for the opportunity to add more diversity to our department's offerings, in more recent years we have finally been awarded tenure track positions in Latin American and East Asian history. This still leaves important areas of the world uncovered, primarily South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. This remains a weakness for the department, but also and more importantly for the college as a whole.

Our facilities are inadequate, especially as our courses have become more discussion-based and as we move toward encouraging greater informational and technological literacy. We trust that this will be remedied within the next few years with the construction of the college's new academic building.

Our department has tended to offer courses that have a more traditional chronological and/or geographical concentration. We need to move in the direction of more comparative, transnational, global, and environmental history as is happening in most excellent liberal arts colleges. Failure to move in this direction would constitute a significant weakness for the department.

## **Opportunities**

As with all disciplines, the teaching of history continues to change in very profound ways. New trends and developments offer us great opportunities to develop and reshape the department. In American higher education today we see more interdisciplinary and comparative approaches to history and more global history. There is also greater and greater focus on the use of wonderful new technologies to enhance teaching and research. Finally the discipline has changed dramatically in just one or two generations. It is more student centered now with more emphasis on undergraduate research and more opportunities for students to present their research both on and off campus. We also want the department to become more involved in bringing scholars to campus for conferences.

## **Challenges**

Obviously all opportunities bring with them their own unique challenges. Our efforts to use new technologies and to use them effectively depend very much on our ability to secure a new building for the department. The current Social Science Center hinders us in so many ways from achieving our goals and seizing new opportunities. We all need to learn about new digital resources and new programs and related tools that are parts of the digital age. Keeping up with new technology is a constant and necessary challenge.

As regards to our concern for more global and more comparative approaches to history we recognize the paradox that increased specialization in graduate history education runs somewhat counter to efforts to provide broader perspectives and approaches in pedagogy.

Our resources as a department are often stretched very tightly. Our efforts in developing an even better program for our majors and devoting sufficient time to those efforts are often frustrated by the outside demands on the department. These include our responsibilities to interdisciplinary programs, Curriculum II, First Term Seminar, and other general education courses. All of these often make it difficult for us to prioritize our many goals.

## **2.2. Barriers**

We prefer to use the word “challenges” rather than barriers to describe those things that may make some of our goals difficult to achieve. Besides the challenges suggested in the preceding section, we would add several more here.

Adequate financial resources continue to be the biggest challenge to anything we wish to accomplish at this college and in our department. We do not have the funds to bring prominent historians to the campus on a very regular basis for lectures, consultations, etc. The lack of financial resources is obviously reflected in the fact that we have been housed in less than adequate facilities for 35 years. Form does indeed follow function, and our current building has not enabled us to realize our many dreams and aspirations.

Building a strong faculty that is not only recognized for excellent teaching but also scholarship requires substantial funding for research. Although digitization has made it possible to do some research from our offices and homes, most of our research has to take place in archives to which we must travel. Our research takes us necessarily, not simply because we like to travel, to Argentina, to Serbia, to England, to Boston, and many other places. The costs of travel and living expenses during research trips are substantial, but outside funding sources for humanities research are few and not richly endowed. Thus, modest resources in general for professional development are a major barrier. Junior faculty, expected to publish in order to be tenured, are particularly ill-served by the lack of a regularized pre-tenure leave program. We fear that these barriers, persistent over several decades, will only become greater given the current economic crisis in the world.

Our efforts to build an even finer department devoted to adopting new approaches to history and new ways of engaging our students in vigorous intellectual inquiry depend on a student body that is increasingly excellent and dedicated to the life of the mind. An enormous challenge is presented by our current economic climate and the real demographic data that suggest fewer graduating high school seniors and much more competition for excellent students in the coming years. We fear a possible decline in the

quality of students in this critical and competitive climate. Moreover, as we compare ourselves with a number of peer institutions of relatively similar size, we find a certain disjunction between what we would like to do and our declining ability to do so. Here we reference in particular the growing emphasis on global perspectives in history and in education in general and our inability to cover some very critical parts of the world. Finally, the increasing threats to our library budget are alarming. For student research, we need resources devoted to the library as much as scientists need lab equipment. Without adequate library resources, we are impoverished as teachers.

### Section 3 **Strategic Initiatives and Recommendations**

Goal 1: An increased emphasis on comparative, transnational, global, and environmental history

Strategic Initiative 1.1 This goal will require changes in existing courses and in the development of additional courses. We will teach “national” history in a broader framework, either by region, themes, or time. In addition, we will begin to offer new or substantially redesigned team-taught courses, emphasizing active learning and student discussion, taking these approaches.

Strategic Initiative 1.2 This goal will require changes in pedagogy. Specifically, we need to offer more team taught courses in discussion based courses.

Goal 2: An increased emphasis on information and technological literacy germane to historical inquiry and a liberal arts education.

Strategic Initiative 2.1 This goal will require changes in pedagogy in existing courses. As we incorporate comparative and transnational/global approaches, we will substantially alter many courses. We will incorporate team-teaching, materials available through new technologies, and service learning. We will emphasize greater technological and information literacy throughout the history curriculum, but with particular focus on upper-division courses and the history methods courses (History 200) required for all history majors.

Strategic Initiative 2.2 History 200 will be the foundation course where students will learn the relationship of information literacy to critical thinking, especially to assess and evaluate which online sources are appropriate for research purposes. Students will learn how to use on-line databases, how to define search parameters, and how technological changes affect how historical scholarship is produced and

consumed.

Goal 3: Greater application of theoretical and analytical tools of history, such as recognizing how social constructions of race, gender, class, and ethnicity shape history.

Strategic Initiative 3.1 More effective ways of understanding race, gender, class, and ethnicity help us understand differences (or diversity). It helps us move students away from the commonplace --"people are the same wherever you go"-- to a more sophisticated appreciation of differences in perspective. In short, thinking about these issues helps us understand why people can and do disagree. This is obviously useful in understanding human societies past, present, and future.

Goal 4: We look forward to adding faculty who can expand our department's and the college's international focus by including the critical areas of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

Strategic Initiative 4.1 A little less than half of the world's population live in these areas for which we do not have history courses at Gustavus. It is obvious that adding expertise in these critical areas of the world is vital to our students' education and to the fulfillment to the college's goal of genuine internationalism in our curriculum.

#### Section 4 **Assessment**

Goal 1: In order to demonstrate that we have achieved Goal 1, faculty will prepare a brief annual report, submitted to the chair, in which they reflect on the courses taught during the school year and (1) identify pre-existing comparative and transnational/global elements in their courses which they have continued, (2) describe and evaluate initiatives taken to add comparative and transnational/global elements to pre-existing, and (3) identify new courses taught for the first time in order to achieve this goal.

Goal 2: In order to demonstrate that we have achieved Goal 2, the instructor of HIS-200 will design one assignment intended to measure student technological and information literacy. This assignment will require students to use electronic databases, define search parameters, identify potential research materials online, and critically assess those materials. The student papers resulting from this assignment will be shared with the entire department (with names removed).

Goal 3: In order to demonstrate that we have achieved Goal 3, as part of the annual report described under Goal 1 above, faculty will indicate on-going and new initiatives in courses taught during that year that apply the theoretical and analytical tools named in the goal statement.

Goal 4: In order to demonstrate that we have achieved Goal 4, we will complete searches and hire new faculty in the fields identified in the goal statement. This goal will require changes in pedagogy in existing courses. As we incorporate comparative and transnational/global approaches, we will substantially alter many courses. We will incorporate team-teaching, materials available through new technologies, and service learning.