

UTC Academic Program Review – Baccalaureate Program
Department of History
Narrative Report
April 2022

Part 1 – Learning Outcomes

The History Department of the University of Tennessee Chattanooga has clearly articulated its program mission, vision, and learning goals, each of which can be readily found on its website. The statements clearly establish the purpose of and are appropriate for the undergraduate major.

History Department members have developed five key learning outcomes that align with the current expectations of the historical discipline. While in the UTC program, history majors learn how to synthesize a body of historical knowledge with range and depth in terms of period, region and perspective; to assess causation, contingency, and change over time in a variety of historical contexts; to analyze, interpret and evaluate primary and secondary source materials; to generate significant, open-ended questions about the past and devise and carry out research strategies to answer them; and to understand and use the formal styles of writing, narrative construction, and argument specific to the discipline of history.

Each of the History Department's five learning outcomes are broken down into multiple objectives in order that a fine-grained picture of student performance may be gained during the annual assessment process. Outcomes are assessed on a rotating basis. Each year, the department selects two to three outcomes for assessment. During the assessment process, a representative sample of student work (primarily essays and research papers) from two or three courses is evaluated by a faculty committee (none of whom were the instructors of the selected courses) on a four-point scale. Success is defined as 50% or more of students receiving scores of "proficient" or "excellent" for the learning outcome in question. Faculty members use performance metrics to identify areas of student learning that need improvement and refine their course materials and assignments to target those areas. Since the institution of its new curriculum in 2016, assessments demonstrate a distinct improvement in student performance. In addition, the satisfaction reported by history students during this period (as evidenced by NSSE surveys and course evaluations) equals or exceeds those of UTC students overall.

As the overall number of student artifacts examined in each course is somewhat low (samples range between 10-15), it may be helpful to survey a broader sample. For example, drawing

samples from all offered sections of HST 1110 rather than from a single section would give a more complete picture of performance at the introductory level. Another potentially useful model of assessment would be to assess samples from all sections of “HST 2100: Research and Writing in History” and of “HST 4020: The Historian’s Craft: Capstone in History” in a particular year. That would enable department members to compare student performance at the beginning and end of the upper-level curriculum, providing insight into how the new curriculum guides students toward mastery of key historical skills and their readiness for graduate study and/or post-collegiate professional endeavors. As expanding assessment across all sections would be quite a labor-intensive enterprise, I would also suggest that the committee of faculty members charged with assessment receive a stipend or the equivalent for their time.

Part 2 – Curriculum

The History Department launched a new curriculum in 2016. All of its courses have been incorporated into a tiered “pyramid” structure carefully designed so that students can build upon the knowledge they have acquired as they move from base –introduction-- to pinnacle--mastery of historical skills. Enrollment caps at each level ensure that students are able to receive appropriate faculty attention and feedback. The associate department head is charged with scheduling a regular rotation of courses to ensure students’ timely completion of the degree. Teaching modalities include online as well as face to face classes.

The sequence of courses offered by the department is coherent and clear. At the base of the pyramid are survey courses that are part of the General Education requirements and that also provide the foundation for further work in history; these classes are designed to promote critical thinking, analytical reading, historical understanding, and comprehensive engagement with broader historical processes. At the intermediate levels, students hone their analytical and interpretive skills through frequent writing assignments and exposure to primary sources. Rigorous capstone seminars (4000-level), which require students to identify a significant historical question, locate and analyze an appropriate body of primary sources to answer that question, and present their findings in a well-crafted research paper, are an opportunity for history majors to demonstrate their command of the program’s five learning outcomes. Majors are also required to take an additional research-intensive course or its equivalent (an independent study or internship) to further fortify their historical skills and understanding. Internship opportunities, which are a particular strength of the department’s curriculum, are reviewed in Part 3.

The pyramid organization of the History Department's curriculum is an ideal structure for the completion of the history degree. It is in keeping with the American Historical Association's recommended program of study, as outlined in the History Discipline Core. Similarly, it fulfills UTC's mandate to provide its students the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills, to learn research strategies, to hone their written and oral communication, and to enhance their computer and technology-related skills.

The curriculum is reviewed and revised annually by the History Department faculty. This ensures that student learning outcomes are being appropriately met. Annual review also offers the opportunity for faculty members to incorporate student feedback from course learning evaluations, to propose new courses for the university catalog, and to maintain a curriculum that reflects both faculty research interests and disciplinary standards. It may be useful to discuss eliminating infrequently-taught courses from the UTC catalog during the department's curricular review; this would help to manage student expectations about when/if courses are offered.

Part 3 – Student Experience

History Department members at UTC are deeply invested in the progress of their students and regularly seek feedback regarding the students' educational experience. History students are given ample opportunity--a three-week window at the end of each semester-- to provide formal evaluation of individual courses and faculty members by participating in the online surveys managed through the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Institutional Research. Given the considerable body of research that has demonstrated how implicit bias regarding the gender and/or race of the instructor can negatively impact the outcomes of such student evaluations, some individual faculty members in the department have also taken on the task of reviewing their own course learning evaluations through administering optional midterm evaluations. Instructors also solicit direct input from the Student Advisory Board, which is comprised of 10-15 History majors, minors, and Africana Studies minors.

Both current history majors and alumni speak in glowing terms of their educational experience in the UTC History Department. They appreciate the chronological, geographical, and thematic range of course offerings, the dynamic teaching of their professors, the collegiality of faculty, staff, and fellow students, and the individual attention that they receive(d) while enrolled. They particularly value the internship opportunities available through the department, in which students can put into practice the skills that they have learned in the classroom. Internship opportunities available through the department are varied and introduce students to diverse perspectives. Over the last five years, UTC students have interned at sites throughout the

region such as the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, the Ed Johnson Project, the East Tennessee Historical Society, Red Clay State Park, RISE Chattanooga, and the Duncan, Hatcher, Holland, and Fleenor Law Firm. All alumni who participated in the External Program Review reported that their internships were not only valuable educationally but were instrumental in helping them to succeed in their chosen careers. Community site supervisors were equally enthusiastic about the interns with whom they worked; they lauded the preparation that the students had received, which enabled the students to make immediate and meaningful contributions to the work of the site, and they were extremely complimentary regarding the outreach and support provided by the History faculty (particularly that of Department Head Michael Thompson, who also serves as the department's Internship Coordinator). Given the demonstrated value of these internship experiences to students' later professional success, expanding the department's portfolio of internship opportunities is recommended. However, as liaising with sites and placing and supervising approximately twenty internships a year is already a labor-intensive endeavor – it is further recommended that the department designate an Internship Coordinator (who is not the already over-extended department head) and provide remuneration for the position in the form of a stipend or a course release.

In addition to internships, UTC history students have a variety of extra- and co-curricular learning opportunities available to them. These include participation in Primary Source Workshops (which showcase student research), Phi Alpha Theta, the national history honor society, the History Club, movie screenings, and a history book club, among others. Lecture series such as the Africana Studies and the Latin American Dialogues series regularly feature renowned speakers with diverse backgrounds and experiences. The department's "Lunch, Learn, and Link" series offers students professional development opportunities. A dedicated History Advisor provides academic support for all majors and that support is supplemented by faculty mentors. The department's mentoring system is a relatively new arrangement, first instituted in 2019. Students and faculty alike report that it remains a work in progress. Some students seem unsure about how the role of faculty mentor differs from that of major advisor; faculty mentors report some difficulty in getting students to respond to invitations to gatherings and meetings (even when there is free pizza on offer).

Part 4 – Faculty

The dedicated, accomplished faculty members of the Department of History are a credit to UTC. Tenure track faculty and lecturers alike hold the terminal degree in the field from some of the most respected doctoral institutions in the United States (and occasionally beyond). Part time

instructors each hold at least a Master's degree and many are pursuing also PhDs while they adjunct at UTC. The faculty as a whole are prolific researchers who publish books and articles at an impressive rate, present at scholarly conferences, give public talks, and engage with community partners on public projects. They are at the same time deeply invested in their students, devoting much attention to advising honors projects, mentoring, directing internships, and supporting interdisciplinary programs across the university such as Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Africana Studies, Asian Studies, and the Honors College. Indeed they contribute so widely to the vibrant intellectual life of the university that colleagues outside of the department—who deeply value the History Department's energy and commitment—express concern that their History colleagues will burn out if they continue to engage at their present rate.

The UTC History Department comprises ten tenure track faculty (one full, four associate, and five assistant professors), five lecturers, and eleven adjunct instructors. Curriculum offerings are impressively broad, including courses on American, European, Asian, Latin American, and Native American history, public history, food history, and queer history. Tenure track faculty teach a 3/3 load, which they report finding manageable if not ideal for research productivity. Department members at every level are dedicated to teaching and to developing new curricula; providing support for participation in professional development opportunities that center on teaching would be welcomed. Conferences or workshops that focus on professional growth and renewal would be particularly energizing for mid-career faculty.

Lecturers in the Department of History are assigned a 4/4 load, but because their base salaries are so low (despite a 2021 raise) they find that they need to teach overloads to make ends meet. The actual teaching load of many if not most lecturers in the department, once overloads and summer classes are included, is 5/5/2. Research has demonstrated that high course loads are not only difficult to sustain for faculty members but even more importantly, are detrimental to students' learning experiences. It is recommended that lecturer salaries be increased so that overloads are no longer necessary for this dedicated yet undercompensated group of faculty members.

The History Department has been intentional in its efforts to increase the diversity of its faculty. However, its efforts to increase the number of faculty members from underrepresented groups have had limited success, particularly when it comes to recruiting faculty of color. History faculty, students, and community partners agree that greater representation is a critical need. The department reports that recent offers to non-white candidates have been declined due to UTC's relatively low salaries and provision of other benefits (such as course reductions or additional research funding). Given the current hiring landscape in academia – that is, relatively

few candidates of color and many universities vying to hire those candidates—it is likely that recruiting efforts will continue to fall short unless additional college and/or institutional support is provided. It is recommended that the History Department consider advocating for a diversity cluster hire in College of Arts and Sciences as well as working to persuade administrators that recruiting diverse candidates to UTC is vitally necessary at this historical moment. Hiring a faculty member of color who could serve as the permanent Director of the Africana Studies Program would serve programmatic needs, enhance the existing curriculum, garner student enthusiasm for the History curriculum (thereby increasing majors, minors, and student credit hours earned) and help to strengthen connections with community programs and internship sites across the greater Chattanooga region.

Part 5 – Learning Resources

The History Department is housed in Brock Hall, an aging building that is scheduled to be renovated in 2024. The renovation is eagerly—very eagerly—anticipated by faculty, staff, and students alike, as Brock’s offices, classrooms, and common spaces are inadequate to current needs. The poor condition of the building compromises the department’s educational mission. Its temperature is poorly regulated, making it uncomfortable throughout. Classroom equipment and furniture is in poor condition and faculty and staff report that Facilities is often unresponsive to repair requests. There are space issues as well; History Department faculty offices are scattered between the second and fourth floors, impeding ready communication among faculty and staff. Adjunct lecturers must share one small office, a converted maintenance closet with no access to natural light. It is to be hoped that UTC will dedicate sufficient resources to the renovation of Brock Hall to address its condition issues. Furthermore, architecture conveys meaning. If the current condition of Brock Hall suggests to students that the History Department is not valued by UTC, it makes it far more difficult for faculty to recruit majors.

Campus partners provide critical support and resources for the History Department’s faculty and students. Faculty agree that they have benefited greatly from the teaching workshops offered by the Walker Center as well as the funded opportunities for research support available through the College of Arts and Sciences and the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. Current students report that they take advantage of tutoring at the Writing and Communication Center to bolster in class instruction and that they find the research tutorials given by UTC Library staff to be valuable. The UTC Library’s databases and holdings are essential to both faculty and student research. Libraries serve as the laboratories of the humanities and need to be resourced at adequate levels. Holdings at UTC have been expanded in recent years, thanks to the advocacy of the history faculty and the support of their library liaison, but there are still

considerable deficits (particularly regarding books and research materials from outside of the U.S.). Dedicating greater resources for subscriptions to primary sources databases as well as more online journals would facilitate faculty and student research productivity.

Part 6 – Support

The History Department does a lot with a little. Its most pressing resource needs include securing adequate funding to fully renovate Brock Hall; to increase library holdings both print and digital; to increase lecturer pay; and to support faculty research and professional development more robustly. It is strongly recommended that its operating budget, which has remained at the same level for over five years, be increased to enable more faculty and student travel as well as greater research material and equipment expenditure. In addition, securing resources for an Internship Coordinator (who is not the already over-committed head of department) and an Assessment Coordinator is recommended. These are both essential roles; providing stipends or course releases would ensure that faculty members who take on these labor-intensive positions are adequately supported.

The department serves local, state, regional, and national needs. Its curricular offerings are wide-ranging, particularly considering the size of the department. It offers upper-level courses that speak to the current historical moment, such as those on the Civil War and American Memory, as well as a broad range of surveys that introduce students to all corners of the globe. Faculty members lead study abroad trips to locations both near (Birmingham AL, Charleston SC) and far (Eastern Europe); former students report that such travel opportunities were life-changing. The department's internship program, which connects the department to the city and region, is exemplary. Current students, alumni, and community partners from local and state organizations all speak of their experiences in glowing terms.

Part 7 – Summary Recommendations

The strength of this program lies in the dedicated faculty who have created a community that is centered at Brock Hall but extends beyond the region. Over the past five years, and despite the challenges of the pandemic, History Department faculty members have worked together to improve and enhance their program. They have developed innovative curricula, instituted a new mentorship model for their students, hired dynamic new colleagues, embraced college initiatives, offered timely public programming, and produced exciting research. Colleagues across UTC regard the History faculty as campus leaders, current students appreciate their

commitment to teaching, alumni recognize how the department prepared them for professional life, and community partners value their engagement.

The weakness of the program is the same as its strength: its faculty. This is a group of faculty members whose work enhances that of the entire university. Yet, they have finite time and energy (despite all evidence to the contrary) and it is necessary to provide resources so that they can sustain their level of engagement and productivity. They are the present of UTC; they require some respite and support so that they can also be its future.

Over the next five years, I suggest that the History Department pursue the following goals:

1. Increase faculty diversity by hiring a permanent Director of Africana Studies. The interdisciplinary Africana Studies minor (and future major?) is appropriately housed in the History Department, where there are many colleagues whose fields of study would dovetail with such a program. A hire in Africana Studies would enable the History Department to increase its commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion as well as to draw additional students to the major. As there is considerable student appetite for courses on Southern history and the history of Sub-Saharan Africa, as demonstrated in enrollment data, consider hiring a faculty member in one of these subfields. This goal could be accomplished with an additional faculty line granted by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.
2. Develop a Public History track within the history major. There is considerable interest among current students for such a course of study and it would build upon the department's highly successful internship program. Many components for a Public History track are already in place, including student interest, faculty expertise, course offerings, community partners, and relationships with internship sites throughout the region. This goal would not necessarily require additional financial resources at the outset but would demand attention from the department's curriculum committee and those faculty members developing new curricula.
3. Work to increase major/minor numbers and course enrollments. Faculty members and administrators have expressed some concern regarding recent numbers, but one or two data points does not constitute a trend, especially in these Covid years. To address a decline in history majors at UTC, consider expanding the choices of spoken languages that students may take to fulfill the B.A. requirement and also consider whether programming and/or mathematical languages might fulfil this requirement (statistics, Python, etc). To increase student credit hours in the department, it would also be worthwhile to bolster efforts to retain majors (currently below UTC averages), to

increase the number of history minors, and to attract students outside of the department to history courses. This goal would not require additional fiscal resources.

4. Increase support for faculty research and development to ensure faculty retention and well-being. The university is fortunate to have these dynamic, committed professors on its faculty. Supporting their innovative work in the classroom, campus, and community will only enhance UTC. This goal could be achieved with financial support from Academic Affairs.

Respectfully submitted,

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