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2 May 1998

Associate Dean Yvonne Ozzello
College of Letters & Science
301 South Hall
CAMPUS

RE: Spring 1998 Assessment Report,
Graduate Program in History

Dear Yvonne:

Attached please find the Spring 1998 Assessment Report of the Graduate Program in History. Please note that I have provided a brief "Report" that summarizes what we have done and where we are headed, and as an appendix, a courtesy copy (in addition to the one you already have in your files) of the detailed Phase One report (minus the extensive quantitative and documentary appendices to that report) entitled "Preliminary Assessment of Graduate Program in History" that we completed in Fall 1997 and presented to you and Dean Certain in December.

As you will recall, the Phase One assessment focused on the financial foundations of the graduate program in History. As you will also recall, the report included policy changes, unanimously approved by the Department of History at its meeting of 12 November 1997 for immediate implementation, to improve recruitment and financial aid for graduate students.

As you will see in the attached report, the changes we adopted appear to have made a large, tangible difference in our graduate recruitment success this year. I will be reporting to Dean Certain on these and other issues in a meeting scheduled for Tuesday, May 26, and will send the fuller documentation about our recruitment success to you later this month.

If you need additional information or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Sincerely yours,

Steve J. Stern
Professor
Director of Graduate Studies
sjstern@facstaff.wisc.edu

xc: Dean Phillip R. Certain
Professor James S. Donnelly, Jr.

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Spring 1998 Assessment Report, Graduate Program in History.

At the graduate education level, the fundamental mission of the History Department is to train leaders in the creation, critique, teaching, and dissemination of historical knowledge. To evaluate how well we have achieved this goal, and how we might improve our graduate program, the Department has adopted a two-phase initial assessment process, to be followed by periodic monitoring designed to foster continuous self-assessment and improvement.

Phase One of the initial assessment process, completed in Fall 1997, focused on the financial aspects of the graduate program. We reviewed contextual data on matriculation, employment, and academic reputation; data on funding offers and acceptance rates in recruitment of prospective students; comparison with the experience and practices of peer institutions on issues of financial aid and graduate student recruitment; the de facto track record of the Department in mobilizing financial aid after students arrived; and the Department's resource potential for devising a more successful financial aid and graduate student recruitment system. We implemented a multi-year packaging approach to financial aid this year, and a more systematic approach to recruitment in general, and have achieved a much higher recruitment rate compared to past years. Our historical matriculation rate, based on the recruitment cohorts from 1990-91 through 1997-98 of prospective students offered financial aid, was only 32% (n = 180 offers). For the incoming 1998-99 cohort, the rate improved to 50% (n = 32 offers). While one year of experience is far too limited to draw firm conclusions, this year's results spark hope that the self-assessment process, and the changes we implemented as a result of it, have already proved worthwhile.

In Phase Two of the initial assessment process, we will focus on the academic aspects of the graduate program. We will explore performance-related data such as average time to complete the Ph.D., academic or degree-related employment within one year of completion of the Ph.D., and publication of a significant book (the predominant genre for research visibility in the discipline of history) within a given number of years after completion of the degree. In addition, we will devise survey and/or exit interview procedures that will help us gain access to student views of their graduate education and experience, and suggestions where we might improve. The surveys will touch on all the major areas of professional education and preparation: curriculum in the early years, quality of faculty and staff advising, the ABD research and write-up experience, financial support, and preparation for successful competition in the job market. As with the financially focused Phase One assessment, we will seek to take practical steps to improve our program based on this assessment.