

University Core Development Committee

October 23, 2001

Gasson 105, 1:30 p.m.

Minutes

The following members of the committee were in attendance: Chair Richard Cobb-Stevens, Patrick Byrne, Clare Dunsford, Paul Gray, Rob Gross, Maggie Kearney, Ourida Mostefai, and Sandra Waddock.

The History Department sent representatives to discuss their core with us: Professors Robin Fleming, Prasannan Parthasarathi, Paul Spagnoli, and Michael Sullivan, and teaching assistants Shawn Lynch and Damien Murray. What follows is a summary of the information gleaned through our discussion.

- The History core comprises two kinds of large sections, of roughly 140 and 240 students each, and small sections taught by post-doc's, who have been teaching assistants for three years and attended a year's colloquium.
- The Department has attempted to make the core more engaging by the use of visual aids and technology, such as Powerpoint and WebCT.
- The Department is satisfied that students develop skills of thinking about history rather than merely an acquaintance with dates and facts, thus ensuring that the History core presents a more complex view of history than students typically receive in high school. Moreover, the History core courses teach a global perspective on history.
- This latter point speaks to the sophisticated way in which the traditional European history core has been revised by the Department to reflect the changes within the discipline. Including issues of race, class, and gender, the B.C. History core is less Eurocentric than many students seem to think, judging from some of their comments to the Core Committee.
- The reading list of most courses includes both primary and secondary sources, with an increasing use of the former.
- The Department is committed to assigning substantial writing in the core, often in the form of weekly 1-2 page papers. These frequent short papers visibly improve students' analytical and writing skills.
- Regarding staffing: full-time faculty teach about 1400 of the 2000 students taught yearly in the core. No part-time or adjunct faculty teach the core, except in an emergency. Teaching assistants are at least second-year Ph.D. students; on an exceptional basis, as needed, one T.A. slot may be filled by a masters student. Professors meet with their teaching assistants regularly and set the agenda for section meetings.

Submitted by Clare M. Dunsford