

REPORT: History External Review Report

DATE: 7 July 2021

**EXTERNAL REVIEW TEAM MEMBERS (THE “ERT”)**

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**OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE SELF-STUDY REPORT**

**Criteria:** *The Self-Study Report provides a data-supported analysis of the program’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.*

**Standard for Assessing this Report:**

- The programmatic strengths and weaknesses identified in this report are supported by data and on-site findings;
- The Report has appropriate scope, as articulated by the Self-Study Guide;
- Recommendations are supported by data, a clear rationale and on-site findings.

**The External Reviewers:**

<b>Validate the Self-Study Report’s findings and recommendations</b>	
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**Rationale for this Determination:**

We find the self-study report to be an accurate portrayal of this outstanding history department. Faculty, students, alumni, and administrators are all justifiably proud to be part of this innovative and collegial program.

## REVIEWERS' VALIDATION OF THE CHAPTERS OF THE SELF-STUDY REPORT

### CHAPTER 2: Program Currency and Connections

**Criteria:** *This chapter adequately assesses program competitiveness and its connections to the discipline/sector. The assessment is supported by appropriate evidence and conclusions.*

#### Standard for Assessing this Chapter:

- The programmatic strengths and weaknesses identified in this chapter are supported by data and on-site findings;
- The chapter has appropriate scope, as articulated by the Self-Study Guide;
- Recommendations are supported by data, a clear rationale and on-site findings.

#### Additional Recommendations Identified by the ERT—include a rationale for the recommendation:

1. Provide course release for *all* faculty to give them the time to conduct their non-teaching activities.

Rationale: The pressures currently placed on the department's new Indigenous expert (see below) highlight a much wider issue in the department that will need to be addressed. Faculty are currently teaching 4/4 loads, while also conducting a wide range of additional service activities to promote and support the History program, maintain connections both within and outside the institution, create new course content, and pursue the research that is expected of university faculty. In its current form, this model is, frankly, unsustainable, and is likely to lead to increasing physical and mental strain on faculty. In a research university such as UBC, faculty in comparable programs teach a 2/2 load, which allows them the time to work on service and research activities alongside their teaching. A faculty member teaching a 4/4 load *simply does not have the time* to do this (at least, without placing a major strain upon themselves); indeed, time was identified as the most precious and lacking resource by faculty in discussions with the review team. If KPU is serious about being a university rather than a purely-teaching institution, it needs to reduce faculty teaching loads to enable them to engage in the other activities that they are expected to undertake.

2. Hire another faculty member who is an Indigenous expert, and at least two more full-time faculty with expertise outside the regions currently covered by the faculty. These hires should be *in addition to* the replacement of retiring faculty. Non-regular faculty should also be regularized.

Rationales: The student survey data, as well as the review team's meetings with current and former students, clearly indicate that the students want (a) more Indigenous history, and (b) courses studying the history of areas and content not currently covered by the program. With regard to the latter, requests include Latin American, African, and the Middle Eastern content. Expanding the department's offerings in this way would both speak to current student needs and expand the appeal of the program to prospective students.

As noted below, the department's expert in Indigenous history is currently expected to do work far in excess of a regular faculty load. Hiring a second expert in Indigenous histories, and providing both with course release to allow time to work on the various initiatives involved in Indigenization, would go a long way towards addressing this workload issue.

Finally, the regularization of non-regular faculty, in addition to fulfilling the moral requirement to provide a worker with a fair wage and job security, would greatly benefit the program. For students, knowing that a particular faculty member will be teaching on a continuous basis at KPU will greatly increase their confidence in the department providing consistent course offerings from year to year, as well as in the fact that they are receiving the best-quality teaching, as their instructor is not dividing their attention between multiple jobs in multiple institutions. For faculty, job security and liveable wages enable them to perform to the best of their abilities at their jobs, without the distractions that come with not having these or having to hold down unsustainable work levels in multiple jobs simply to make enough to live off. For departments, being able to offer full-time, secure jobs with living wages is vital when recruiting and retaining faculty, and thus facilitates the maintenance of the quality and consistency of their programs.

Note that KPU should enhance the budget of the department to cover the costs associated with the implementation of these recommendations.

**The External Reviewers:**

Validate the Chapter's findings and recommendations	
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**Rationale for this Determination:**

Both the departmental self-study report and the testimonies of faculty, alumni, and current students confirm that the History program at KPU is not merely keeping current but actually *at the cutting edge* of developments in history programs in Canada in a number of ways:

- The department is committed to de-colonizing in a manner that *goes beyond* token land-acknowledgements to actually critically examining how Indigenous content and ways of thinking can be incorporated into the program. Recent discoveries at residential schools across Western Canada have highlighted how important it is for Canadians to learn about and confront the issues raised by the experiences of Canada's Indigenous peoples. The recent hiring of a faculty expert in Indigenous history is a major part of this process, but this faculty member is currently having to manage a full-time teaching load as well as the necessary work on creating and articulating the program's new Indigenous content and other initiatives related to de-colonization. Support will be required to bring this down to a reasonable workload; see our recommendations (1) and (2) above.
- Like a number of other institutions, the department has also increasingly focused its offerings on thematic courses that address issues in world history. This is consistent with current trends at other institutions. This approach is also clearly appreciated by both current and former students, who see themselves increasingly as *world* citizens and are keen to gain expertise in this wider world that they wish to engage with. However, a number of students highlighted the need for the department to broaden its perspective to encompass more areas of the world; see our recommendation (2) above.
- The current pandemic, with its accompanying closures of campuses and consequent limiting of student access to printed resources, has clearly highlighted the need for more of these resources to be available on-line, as well as the need to adopt new ways of studying and presenting materials about history that take advantage of and speak to increasing use of digital technologies. Thus the department's use and crafting of digital resources (such as OERs), and its creative approach in various digital-based assignments used to assess student performance in courses, places it well ahead of the curve in its explorations of digital tools for studying history.

We were also extremely impressed with the department's approach to history *as an applied subject*. This not only includes ensuring that students gain transferable skills that will enable them to follow their chosen careers, but also encompasses the department's connections to and collaborations with both other programs at KPU (such as Asian Studies and Fashion Design) and other institutions such as museums and archives (which also provide hands-on experiences of actually using historical expertise for students). While most history departments engage in a certain amount of public outreach (for example in presenting public lecture series), KPU's History Department is maintaining a level of contact and collaboration that is unusually

impressive. It is worth recalling that the effort involved in sustaining such contacts falls primarily upon faculty who are doing this off the sides of their desks while teaching full loads. Again, see our recommendation (1) above.

It is also worth noting that the department has plans to further promote its program and expand its relations to the wider community. This is commendable, provided that the department receives sufficient support from KPU to make it viable without imposing even greater workload burdens on faculty.

### CHAPTER 3: Quality of Curriculum Design

**Criteria:** *This chapter adequately examines the quality of the program's curriculum and its current relevance to the discipline/sector. The assessment is supported by appropriate evidence and conclusions.*

**Standard for Assessing this Chapter:**

- The programmatic strengths and weaknesses identified in this chapter are supported by data and on-site findings;
- The chapter has appropriate scope, as articulated by the Self-Study Guide;
- Recommendations are supported by data, a clear rationale and on-site findings

**Additional Recommendations Identified by the ERT—include a rationale for the recommendation:**

1. Continue with de-colonization effort of curriculum and program structure, including global content, not just Canadian.

Rationale: The hiring of an expert in Canadian Indigenous content has added significant credibility and promise to this program. Other areas need similar effort in de-colonizing both content and approach to history. American and European histories can always use a de-centering of settler-colonialism, and as recommended elsewhere in this report, the addition of Latin American and African content areas should also serve to minimize the colonial approach to understanding history.

2. Per recommendation number one, continue moving away from geographic approach that features a centre/periphery structure and more towards trans-national and thematic approaches in program structure.

Rationale: The geographic portioning of history programs serves to reify colonial structures. Moving to a thematic approach, which this program has already begun to do, offers a more expansive understanding of historical thought. Courses on migration, health, global moments, the environment etc. allow for historical understanding beyond the Europe/Other dichotomy from which so many of us experienced during our education.

3. Consider adding a lower-level methods course in addition to the 4400 Capstone.

Rationale: students and alumni speak very highly of the innovative 4000-level Capstone course at KPU. All appreciate the practical skills gained in this course and alumni report that it gave them an advantage in graduate studies. A 100- or 200-level methods course as a precursor to this one would be a welcome addition to the program, offering lower-level students the chance to explore historiography, archival methods, and other practical applications in their earlier years of study.

4. In addition to the existing streams of historical study, consider adding an education stream. Many students and alumni identified themselves as headed for PDP or other education programs after their History degree. Creating a specified stream for them would be a useful program expansion.

**The External Reviewers:**

<b>Validate the Chapter's findings and recommendations</b>	
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**Rationale for this Determination:**

The self study report highlights numerous strengths and innovations from this History department. Ongoing efforts to decolonize are vital to the process of reconciliation and the hiring of an expert in local Indigenous histories is a significant step forward for the department and the university. It isn't enough, though. Not only because, as mentioned elsewhere, it is too much of a load for a new, probationary hire to bear no matter how competent they are, but also because Indigenization is a multi-faceted and lifelong process. More hires in the area of de-colonization, especially Global Indigenities, would be another step forward on this path towards reconciliation.

In a similar vein, we encourage the continuation of thematic- and trans-national foci in course development. The courses on martial arts, food, animals etc. are innovative and exciting and provide promise for a future where we don't study history in direct relation to European settler-colonialism. We look forward to seeing more of this type of innovation from this department.

Finally, the turn to digital history and its function in these extraordinary times is clearly creating new opportunities being taken up at the KPU History department. While the covid-19 pandemic may have moved our use and contribution to digital histories along at a more rapid pace than perhaps we might have wanted, it has shown us expanded understandings of how we can read, understand, and write history. KPU should continue along this process that they have so aptly begun.

#### CHAPTER 4: Quality of Instructional Design

**Criteria:** *This chapter adequately examines the quality of the program's instructional design and its current relevance to the discipline/sector. The assessment is supported by appropriate evidence and conclusions.*

**Standard for Assessing this Chapter:**

- The programmatic strengths and weaknesses identified in this chapter are supported by data and on-site findings;
- The chapter has appropriate scope, as articulated by the Self-Study Guide;
- Recommendations are supported by data, a clear rationale and on-site findings

**Additional Recommendations Identified by the ERT—include a rationale for the recommendation:**

1. Retain or even reduce the current caps of 35 on history courses in general, and 25 on seminar courses.

Rationale: As indicated below, the small-class experience was highlighted repeatedly by students as a major strength of the program. Students come to institutions with smaller class sizes because they recognize that they will receive more individual attention from instructors, which will help them to learn more effectively; thus raising these caps will have a negative impact on the student experience and may in the process deter students from choosing to study at KPU. History, in particular, is a subject that requires opportunities for in-class discussions and debate if it is to be taught effectively, which is not something that can be done as effectively in large classes.

2. Hire at least two more full-time faculty with expertise outside the regions currently covered by the faculty. These hires should be *in addition to* the replacement of retiring faculty.

While we recognize that we are repeating a recommendation made in the section on Chapter 2, above, this section of the Self-Study Report successfully re-emphasizes some of the reasons why these hires should be made. One of the major requests made by both current and former students is for more diverse coverage in courses. If KPU were to support the creation of new courses through the hiring of additional faculty with expertise in areas not currently covered by the department, this would greatly enhance the appeal of the program for prospective students and thus promote student recruitment. These hires should be made *in addition to* the replacement of retiring faculty, as the aim is to *expand*, not change, the department's current coverage.



**The External Reviewers:**

Validate the Chapter's findings and recommendations	
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**Rationale for this Determination:**

Both the data presented by the department and the testimonies of both current and former students demonstrate that the department's current approach to teaching is outstanding in meeting the needs and expectations of students. This has been achieved despite a number of difficulties that the department has faced (including two faculty retirements and the untimely death of a faculty member), and the department is to be highly commended for continuing to provide such high-quality education despite these challenges.

The department employs a number of methods for assessing the progress of students in their courses, and again is showing itself to be innovative in this regard. Essays, the mainstay of historical academic communication, are rightly here to stay, but the department has also been exploring various other options, in the process continuing to give students the tools that they need (and clearly appreciate) to be successful in the modern, increasingly-digital, world. The effectiveness of this is readily apparent in the success of students both in achieving high grades and finding fruitful employment after their time at KPU. Yet at the same time, the department is continuing to pursue ways to improve its program even further to promote both student recruitment and student success.

Again, one of the strengths of the program that is apparent in both the data and testimonies from current and former students is the experiential learning opportunities that it offers. The department is again ahead of the curve in having made these such an important part of its program, and in the process again promoting the importance of history *as an applied discipline*.

Another strength highlighted *repeatedly* in both data and testimonies is the value of the small-class experience. History is a discipline that is based on knowledge-exchange and debate, and hence it *cannot* be successfully studied without the opportunities to exchange ideas that small classes offer. In addition, the opportunity to be in a context where they will receive personal attention is a major reason why students choose institutions with low caps such as those currently used in the KPU History Program. The department's disappointment that the current caps are under threat is entirely justified; see our recommendation (1) above.

The department has effectively established an awareness of and taken note of student demand for greater diversity in courses, and has started taking steps to address this. However, it will need support from KPU in order to address this properly. See our recommendation (2) above.

We are also impressed with the satisfaction of both students and faculty with the quality of instruction and the wider experience of being part of the program that we see demonstrated in the data. At the same time, we are pleased to see that the department has proposed a number of recommendations that focus on improving and innovating instruction and recruitment, in order to strengthen the program.

## CHAPTER 5: Quality of Services, Resources and Facilities

**Criteria:** This chapter adequately assesses program resources, equipment, software, and facilities from both the student and instructor perspective. The assessment is supported by appropriate evidence and conclusions.

### Standard for Assessing this Chapter:

- The programmatic strengths and weaknesses identified in this chapter are supported by data and on-site findings;
- The chapter has appropriate scope, as articulated by the Self-Study Guide;
- Recommendations are supported by data, a clear rationale and on-site findings

### Additional Recommendations Identified by the ERT—include a rationale for the recommendation:

1. Investigate the disconnect between users and the bookstore.

Rationale: Faculty, alumni, and students all report a dysfunctional relationship with the bookstore. They find it is an impediment to their success at KPU. We recommend fixing this asap.

2. Maintain the functionality of the “History Pod,” and consider adding similar spaces at KPU’s other campuses.

Rationale: Literally every conversation the ERT had over the course of our review featured the functionality of this space. Faculty, students, alumni, administrators all speak highly of this space as an opportunity for building community cohesion that underscores the success of this program.

3. Maintain an External Advisory Committee for this program.

Rationale: Connecting students with the broader community will bring increased relevance to their education at KPU.

**The External Reviewers:**

<p><b>Validate the Chapter's findings and recommendations</b></p>	
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**Rationale for this Determination:**

The external review team agrees with the observations and recommendations expressed in Chapter 5 of the report. Students are more or less satisfied (83%) with the program resources, services and facilities with the exception of the bookstore. The External Review team meeting elicited these responses from current students “The bookstore is a mess and not very helpful”, “Buying online as it’s quicker and cheaper”. There is clearly a disconnect between the cost of textbooks, their availability (on time) and the support from within the bookstore itself. Opportunities need to be explored between the student disconnect and the value of the bookstore as a resource.

Faculty, current students and alumni all expressed how valuable The History Pod was and its importance to the learning environment. Lifelong friendships have been created there that have supported the students throughout their career pathways. Similarly, students can access mentors, faculty, senior students, and other resources by gathering in this space and in the process they are creating and fomenting the type of cohesion that keeps students at KPU. Several students and alumni mentioned that they had intended to transfer to SFU or UBC after second year, but the community cohesion kept them at KPU. It is in the best interest of the institution *and* the students that this space be maintained.

The external review committee would also like to stress the importance of a History External Advisory Committee. The department has indicated that it’s in the plans but has yet to start the process. This committee is essential to departmental strength and maintaining its ties with the various stakeholders and institutional partners. Other departments that have external advisory committees set up could provide valuable resources for the history department’s process.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

It was a pleasure to spend time visiting, learning about, and assessing this program. The KPU History faculty is a vibrant, innovative, and dedicated group of educators who clearly care about their work. We were particularly impressed by the group cohesion among faculty and enjoyed our time learning from them (we very much wished there were a pub event directly following our “site visit”). One thing is clear: it is this dedicated group of hard-working historians who bring their passion to the workplace every day that makes this program a continuing success. Students and alumni alike speak highly of their experiences at KPU History not only in terms of learning and understanding the subject matter but also in terms of building strong relationships and being part of a cohesive community. Every bit of input that we witnessed in our two days of meetings spoke to the positive experiences students have feeling connected to one another and to their instructors.

In planning for the future, we have highlighted issues such as Indigenization, digitization, continued community connection, and program expansion as the crucial components. It is clear that there are individuals in the department who are the driving force in the creation and maintenance of both cohesion and innovation. We urge *all* department members to take on these roles as they plan for retirement replacements and new additions as they expand the program. We also recommend future searches to include emphasis on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in order to make the program more accessible and current.

We similarly urge the University to consider the time constraints placed on faculty. A 4/4 teaching load is all-consuming and yet the expectations of service and research loom over the heads of all faculty. Teaching release for research projects, curriculum development, and service projects alike is needed to maintain such a functional, collegial department and to avoid faculty burnout and/or resentment.

We are aware that our recommendations throughout this report will at times require significant investments of budgetary resources by the KPU administration to bring them to fruition. However, we would urge the administration *in the strongest terms* to make these investments. The History Department at KPU is a model of excellence for departments throughout the province and Canada, and investments made in it by KPU would make it a major draw for students seeking a top-quality education.

We finish with our sincere thanks for the opportunity to visit, assess, and collaborate with our KPU colleagues.

**APPENDIX 1:**  
**SITE VISIT AGENDA**

*Provide the agenda for the Site Visit (e.g. the stakeholder groups with whom the ERT met)*

**Kwantlen Polytechnic University**  
**History Program**  
**External Review Virtual Site Visit Agenda**

June 17 & 18, 2021  
Via Microsoft Teams

Thanks to External Reviewers:  
Sally Mennill, PhD  
Niall Christie, PhD

Jamie Lamont, Dip. Landscape Design Installation (KPU), ISA Cert. Arb.

Day 1: Thursday, June 17, 2021

9:00 - 9:50	Introductions and Interview with Program Chair
9:50 - 10:00	Break
10:00 - 11:00	Meet with Program Faculty
11:00 - 11:10	Break
11:10 - 12:10	Meet with Students
12:10 - 12:20	Break
12:20 - 13:00	Meet with Dean

Day 2: Friday, June 18, 2021

9:30 – 10:30	Meet with Alumni
10:30 - 10:40	Break
10:40 - 11:30	Meet with University Services Panel (Library Services and Faculty Advising)
11:30 - 11:40	Break
11:40 - 12:20	Final Meeting with Program Chair
12:20 - 12:30	Break
12:30 - 13:00	External Review Team meets to discuss findings and coordinate their review.