Expected Outcomes: Historical Knowledge

Doctoral students will exhibit a sophisticated and detailed knowledge of the content and scholarship of their respective major and minor fields.

Assessment methods

Method: Preliminary Examination Performance

Students in the PhD program must pass a series of written and oral examinations in order to advance to candidacy. Do students pass their preliminary doctoral exams in their major fields on their first attempt by demonstrating a degree of expertise and professionalism considered appropriate by the department?

Findings:

In academic year 2011-2012 all but one Ph.D. level students attempting preliminary exams for the first time passed on their first attempt. (The student subsequently passed the oral examination on the next attempt.) In a trend that the Department’s Graduate Committee is working to address, some students are slower getting to the point of attempting preliminary exams than faculty hope.

How did you use findings for improvement?

Assessment efforts in the last two years reflect the consensus that earlier and more regular monitoring of graduate student progress is necessary, and as a result the graduate committee began conversations around this goal in the spring of 2010 and continued those discussions as part of a broader conversation occasioned by the opportunity for Academic Program Review. The Graduate Committee has developed plans for formal and centralized annual reviews (as opposed to current practice conducted by major professors)–and incremental semester reviews–to identify Ph.D.-track students who may need remediation strategies or who may need to terminate their studies at the MA. level if it is clear they will not be in a position to pass prelims. These plans, and a number of revised policies designed to expedite Ph.D. students’ progress to preliminary exams following conclusion of coursework, will be debated and ideally adopted by the History Department faculty in academic year 2012-2013.

Additional comments:

Following the awarding of 10 Ph.D. degrees in academic year 2008-2009, 4 more in the 2009-2010 cycle, and 2 during the 2010-2011 cycle, the Department had 2 additional students complete the Ph.D. in 2011-2012. All indications point to significantly more Ph.D. degree conferrals in the 2012-2013 assessment cycle, likely 5 or more. As has been the case in recent assessment cycles, the Department still faces challenges of getting more of our students who advance to candidacy to research, write, and defend their dissertations in a timely manner. The Graduate School’s Continuous Enrollment Policy, fully implemented in the Fall semester of 2011, has already helped several of our ABD students to conclude their dissertations in an expedited fashion, and the aforementioned programmatic reforms designed to speed up the degree time line should cut down on the time to degree for our Ph.D. students going forward.

Expected Outcomes: Public Presentation of Historical Scholarship
Graduates of the doctoral program will be contributors to historical scholarship.

**Assessment methods**

**Method**: Graduate Colloquia Performance

A committee of faculty evaluate the level of scholarship of Ph.D. students based on presentations of their research at an annual research colloquium. Awards are given for outstanding scholarship. In the spring of 2012 two Ph.D. students and one M.A. student were recognized for their excellent paper presentations and the research that informed them.

**Findings**:

The awards committee and the Graduate Committee continue to discuss the fact that some students perform far more capably at the Colloquium than others in terms of organizing and delivering their scholarship in a public forum.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**

The Graduate Committee in 2011-2012 recommended to the full Department that delivering a presentation at the Colloquium be formally required of all graduate students, Ph.D.-track and M.A.-track alike (was previously only required of PhD students), and the Department endorsed that recommendation which is now included in graduate program policies. The Graduate Committee and faculty members continue to discuss the desirability of having students present orally during more courses and continue to encourage graduate students to present their work at historical conferences. A number of graduate students have presented at regional and graduate student conferences in recent months, and more are slated to in the months ahead, including one student presenting at an international conference.

**Additional comments**:

As part of the construction of a graduate student tracking database the Graduate Committee will survey both current and former students in the months ahead to assess the extent of those students’ publication and presentation records. The GPO and Graduate Committee in 2011-2012 committed to making such gathered data accessible and easier to analyze, and concrete plans are in place to construct fully the database in the 2012-2013 academic year.

**Expected Outcomes**: Placement

Graduates of the doctoral program will be highly competitive on the job market. Graduates of the doctoral program who are pursuing an archival career will exhibit a strong knowledge of the theories and practice of the archival profession.

**Assessment methods**

**Method**: Placement

Both formal survey of graduates of the Ph.D. program and informal canvassing of recent graduates for placement data, with attention to placement results for those Ph.D.’s who had a field in archival studies and who are seeking a job in an archival field.

**Findings**:

Ph.D.’s have had mixed results in the immediate past year. One recent Ph.D. secured a tenure-track posting at the University of Virginia’s College at Wise. One of the Department’s two most recent Ph.D.’s was already employed full-time as a high school teacher, and the other has managed to secure adjunct work at three campuses, but has thus far not received an offer of...
full-time employment.

How did you use findings for improvement?

Although placement of graduate students has been quite good given the inhospitable job market, evidence suggests that the Graduate certificates in Archives and Public History is enhancing our graduate students' chances on the job market. The Department is also continuing to explore possibilities for a more mentor-based approach to teaching training utilizing both department and university (i.e., the Biggio Center) resources.

Additional comments:

None