Report on Follow-up Review of the History of Sciences Graduate Program

The History of Science Graduate Program was reviewed by a committee appointed by the Graduate Council and Dean of the Graduate School during March 8-9, 2007. The committee reported its observations and recommendations March 26, 2007. The History of Science (HS) program faculty then developed an Action Plan for response to nine key recommendations. This plan was presented to the Graduate Council and the Provost. On November 17, 2009, committee members Robert Duncan (COAS) and Thomas McLain (Wood Science & Engineering) met with History Department chair Jonathan Katz to discuss progress in carrying forward the Action Plan.

These are our findings relative to the Action items that address recommendations made by the 2007 Review Team:

1. “Maintain a critical mass of core faculty in the field.”
At the time of the review (March, 2007), the HS program had 3.0FTE faculty dedicated to course delivery and advising. David Luft has replaced retiring Robert Nye, Anita Guerrini has replaced Mary Jo Nye, and Michael Osborne has replaced Paul Farber. In addition, Jacob Hamblin has been hired in the research area of history of geosciences. In the meantime, Ronald Doel (joint HS and Geosciences faculty member) left for a faculty position elsewhere. This makes 4.0FTE now supporting the program, or an increase of 33% in core faculty. Other Department of History faculty members have research interests in history of medicine (Ben Mutschler, Lisa Sarasohn, Gary Ferngren, Paul Kopperman) and are being included as potential advisors in the HS program. Discussions are also underway in the CLA for development of a Medical Humanities program that would increase course offerings and advising for graduate students in the HS program.

2. “Increase the number of graduate students.”
The graduate student enrollment in the HS program was 5-6 at the time of the review. Today there are 9 students enrolled: 8 students are resident and 1 followed Ronald Doel but will receive an OSU degree. Two new students are expected to matriculate next September. Of the current 8 resident students, 6 are supported financially in their graduate programs.

3. “Increase the number of 500 and 600 level classes.”
Luft, Guerrini and Osborne have each added or proposed at least one new graduate-level (i.e., not “slash”) course to the curriculum. Attention is paid to scheduling at least one 500-level course each term. The larger cohort (8-10 students) ensures that courses will stand a good chance of meeting the new OSU guideline for minimum student enrollment.
4. “Introduce proseminars”.
Chairman Katz remarked that it is difficult to get faculty to take on seminars as teaching assignments because these are viewed as “extra” (overload). The idea here is to institute a regular, year-long student-led seminar for presenting and discussing research progress and methods. Faculty will be present but only to guide or facilitate discussion. COAS and Wood Science have such research seminars, which are run with only small burdens on the faculty of those units.

5. “Encourage cross-disciplinary contact.”
Other similar graduate programs in the US are moving toward an integrated “History and Philosophy of Science” program focus with graduate applicants seeking training in this broader area of scholarship. This trend has led to discussions with faculty in the Department of Philosophy about expanding the HS program. This would increase capacity to advise students and increase course offerings in support of the program. The current review team suggested that it may be possible and desirable to develop a course of wide interest to graduate students in science and engineering that addresses recent concerns of federal funding agencies (e.g., NSF). This might have a title like “Responsibility and Integrity in Science and Engineering”, addressing issues of science, medical and environmental ethics. Funding to develop and delivery such a course might be secured from NSF support. We also discussed the desirability of developing a certificate course in HS for graduate students in natural science subjects. This could be developed and offered in parallel through E-campus.

6. “Increase financial support for graduate students.”
As reported above, 6 of the current 8 students receive financial support toward their HS programs. This comes from GTA support, the Horning endowment, and revenue from E-campus course delivery. This is a significant improvement over the level of student support in 2007. However, full support for graduate students in this area will be difficult to maintain in the current environment.

7. “Increase office space for graduate students.”
All graduate students are currently accommodated in Milam Hall with a desk and computer in shared offices, but more space is needed with anticipated expansion of student numbers. The new “Paul L. Farber” student lounge is intended and used primarily as a common space for graduate students.

8. “Track student placements.”
Chairman Katz agreed this is desirable and is being implemented at the review committee’s suggestion.

9. “Expand employment opportunities for students.”
The Public History initiative was cited as one example of expanded employment opportunities for HS graduates. This effort in applied history (examples focused on coastal communities) could direct graduates toward employment in archives, museums, historical societies and grant writing.