History Department Proposal

Where do we see our program in five years? What do we want our faculty and students to be able to do that they are unable at the moment?

Mission Statement:
The mission of the History Department at Westmont College is to prepare students for lives of thoughtful, compassionate, and therefore fruitful service in the world. We aim to do this by teaching them to understand the world historically, in all its diversity and complexity, convinced that such understanding is foundational for Christian engagement with contemporary societies. The Perspectives in World History course is the core of our program for doing this for the student body as a whole, while our majors receive more advanced training in thinking historically and a deeper and broader understanding of global history.

Student Learning Outcomes:
The articulation of our Student learning outcomes is a work in process. Our assessment work has allowed us to develop our programs’ goals for students skills further than other sections of our outcomes.

1. Skills
   • History graduates should know how to read a primary source historically and critically. More particularly, they should be able to ask basic questions of the source; assess how their own background shapes their interpretation; and draw conclusions about the reliability and usefulness of the source.
   • Graduates should be able to read books and articles by historians with confidence and competence. More specifically, they should be able to classify a secondary source; summarize it; identify its main thesis or argument; engage in informed criticism; and make a final assessment of its value. These skills are important not only for written assignments, but also for class discussions.
   • To be effective historical researchers, graduates must be able to select and appropriate research topic; locate relevant sources; and determine the character of the existing historiography on their topic.
   • To write a good history paper, graduates must be able to develop an argument; make use of different forms of historical writing; write in an appropriate manner; and provide the requisite scholarly apparatus.

2. Content
   • Students will acquire a knowledge of the chronological context in world history.
   • Students will grow in their knowledge of people unlike themselves: they will study primary and secondary literatures featuring the many cross-cultural encounters of world history, placing them in chronological context. This entails the study of global trade routes and transactions, expansion and cultural policies of world empires, migration, colonization and global diasporas, propagation of world ideologies and
religions, and various forms of nationalism (ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious).
Examples of literature that fosters such awareness include:
  o Travel logs, memoirs, and recorded observations of explorers, traders, 
colonial administrators, indigenous observers, missionaries, etc.
  o Studies featuring the mutual perceptions and critiques of members of 
different races, cultures and religions.
  o Studies of migration, immigration, and global diasporas, both within and 
beyond the United States.
  o Scholarship on African, Middle Eastern and Latin American responses to 
colonialism.

• Students will understand and appreciate differences of ethnicity, gender, race and 
culture primarily through 1) expanded course offerings in non-Western history, 
particularly in African, Middle Eastern or Latin American contexts; but also through 
2) Courses highlighting the multifaceted character (i.e., stories of ethnic minorities, 
cultural pluralism, and immigration) of European and North American histories. 
Such courses could address topics such as:
  o South African apartheid and freedom.
  o Sub-Saharan and/or coastal African history.
  o Latin American revolutions.
  o Islamic responses to Western imperialism.
  o Non-white immigration in America and Europe.
  o Women’s history courses within various world contexts.

• Students will learn from and critique theoretical perspectives of feminist, post- 
colonial, and social historians. They will employ categories of analysis such as social 
class, gender, ethnicity and culture in their historical studies, and will recognize how 
these categories impact all formulations of knowledge.

• Students will develop in their knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith 
and understand the value of historical study for the Christian believer. In particular, 
they will consider the differences their Christian faith makes for their perspectives on 
the past, and they will develop their own philosophy of history in relation to their 
current faith commitments. They will draw more immediate connections between 
Biblical teaching and the global and cultural complexity of world history.

3. Attitudes and Virtues

• Students will develop into lovers of learning for the rest of their lives, certainly for 
their own sake, but also for the benefit of those around them, and ultimately, for the 
kingdom of God.

• Students will develop a sense of Christian vocation.

• Students will draw connections between their historical study and their 
responsibilities within the larger world.

• Students will be attuned to the multifaceted nature of explanation

• Students will develop a healthy skepticism about easy answers or easy solutions to 
historical problems.
**In Five Years:**

1. In five years, our department would like to be able to continue assigning significant written work in History 10 so as to guarantee the quality of this course for all students on campus. This is in line for the college’s desire to emphasize writing throughout the curriculum, and is necessary in History 10 since students need to do more than memorize data, and are asked to process the significance of what they learn in light of their Liberal Arts education goals (for the range of goals in this class, see the beginning of the syllabus attached). For examples of work currently assigned in History 10, see the attached syllabus — notice that the three exams are mostly essay (70% of the grade is determined by students’ performance on the essay for each exam; for the class, 75% of the class grade is determined by students’ performance on written work) — see pragmatic plan, item 1.

In the past two years, the department has been engaged in assessing the effectiveness of this course and has articulated outcomes that are consistent with the General Education document, and with the mission of the department. It has become even clearer that the goals of the class cannot be met by administering multiple choice tests. We remain convinced that our students would greatly benefit from smaller classes (our enrollments last Fall were all over 55, and they continue to be high in the Spring). Furthermore, one of the professors offered an in-class honors option - in a class of 56, 14 students chose this option and wrote between 25 and 55 pages for the class (see description of the work at the end of the proposal). It would be wonderful to offer this Honors section as a separate section — sadly, but realistically, this Fall, no one in the department offered to repeat this “in-class honors” experiment.

Student have repeatedly commented to the faculty on how much they like the class, but how much more they would benefit from it if it were smaller. The faculty is deeply committed to continue teaching through writing, but cannot help but feel the tension between this commitment and the large enrollment in the class.

2. In five years, we would like to see our students have more options for classes in pre-modern and non-western history. In the past five years, the extra courses the department has been able to offer in non-western history have been compensated for by course reductions for reduced load or administrative work — mostly from Rick Pointer and Marianne Robins. This has allowed the department to serve its majors in non-western history and to add a few sections of History 10 (three sections this year), but has compromised our offerings in pre-modern history (medieval, early modern and ancient). As a result, our graduates have very rarely chosen this field as their area of emphasis, for instance in their senior paper (only one project in 2005, one in 2006, none in 2007, and none in the two years before that). Once Marianne resumes her normal schedule of classes, we won’t have nearly as many non-western classes offered, and potentially no extra help with History 10. This is not tenable in the long run — see pragmatic plan, item 3.

3. In five years, our department wants to serve the General Education program more effectively, and without compromising the quality of its offerings for History majors — see pragmatic plan, item 2.
4. In five years, our department wants to be much more effective in achieving its goals for advanced historical skills among our majors. –see pragmatic plan, item 4.

5. In five years, our department wants to embody more efficiently the college’s ideal in shaping globally minded students, in and outside the major discipline. –see pragmatic plan, item 5.

Pragmatically, in five years’ time, our department wants to be able to:

1. Offer 8-10 sections of Perspectives on World History (HIS10) per year (including two in May Term), capped at 35 students per section (the cap is now at 55). Ideally, we would like to offer a separate Honors section of the course.

2. Offer a greater number of Thinking Historically classes per semester at both lower- and upper-division levels.

3. Offer Thinking Historically courses relevant for non-history majors more frequently (e.g. French history, British history, Latin American history).

4. Offer our capstone course, Historical Method, Bibliography, and Research (HIS198), every semester, and cap it at 15 students.

5. Offer a greater variety of regular courses in non-Western history to our majors and to other students committed to understanding the world in all its diversity.

What resources do we need to make this possible?
This proposal stems from the knowledge that we could pursue these goals much more effectively with an additional faculty member, in particular an additional faculty member in non-Western history (Africa, Latin America or the Middle East). Our request grows out of multiple conversations the department has had in the last three years at least, and is connected to both our vision for the department and to our assessment results.

Why Another Faculty Member?

The history department’s desire for a fifth tenure-track position stems in large measure from our conviction that perhaps nothing will enhance the overall effectiveness of our department more than reducing the class size of some of our courses. We are persuaded that smaller class size will benefit the students in those courses in a range of ways and at the same time, contribute to the sustainability of our department faculty, who currently service among the highest numbers of students per faculty member among academic departments in the college and do so semester after semester (according to the 2003-2004 statistics available on the Westmont provost website, the history department had the second highest average enrollment per course of any department at 27.5 students). This past semester, it rose to 29 students per class.

Specifically, we believe that a fifth faculty person would allow us to reap the benefits outlined above regarding providing a more truly global departmental curriculum and reduce the size of both our HIS 198 senior capstone course and our HIS 10 Common Contexts sections.
The number of our majors (from 17 declared majors in the fall of 2000 to 30 declared majors in the fall of 2006, to 33 this semester) and to our department’s decision four years ago to require HIS 198 of all our history majors (in addition, it is required of Social Science majors who concentrate in history), our enrollment in HIS 198 has significantly increased, reaching 17 in the fall of 2006. Such an enrollment makes the seminar aspect of the course less effective and makes the task of mentoring all of those students in their major research projects (the main assignment of the course) very challenging. As part of our self-assessment over the last several years, improving the quality of this course has been a primary goal.

One strategy for improvement has been to increase the level of one-on-one mentoring of students. The rising number of students in the course clearly renders that strategy more difficult. Therefore, we think that this course needs to be offered both semesters so that the number of students might be more on the order of 10 or less per semester. In addition to allowing for more effective mentoring, by being able to offer the course both semesters we would have less conflicts with students who wish to do off campus programs in the fall, and it would result in having a higher percentage of the students enrolled in this capstone course be seniors. Currently, when a student anticipates being off campus the fall of their senior year, he/she takes HIS 198 as a first semester junior. This is less than ideal since in many cases they have not taken very many upper division history courses and are therefore less well prepared for this capstone course.

While offering a second section of HIS 198 would benefit our history majors and the history faculty, teaching smaller sections of HIS 10 would benefit the student body as a whole. Here we imagine sections of 35 students replacing our current sections that are typically in the 45-65 range. Students will benefit from this class size reduction by having more opportunities for input and interaction in the course as well as a greater degree of “visibility” proportionately in the class. They might also reap a somewhat greater degree of faculty time and attention during the course of the semester.

As an institution that promotes itself as having small classes and given our institutional requirement that students take this Common Contexts course at Westmont, we believe it is in the best interest of the college and our department’s ability to fulfill our mission to have smaller sections of HIS 10. Moreover, the multiple purposes or goals that HIS 10 has been asked to fulfill within the General Education program, including introducing students to the Christian liberal arts, have a much better chance of being realized with a group of 35 students than with a group of 60 students. As a department we have been committed for many years to making our world civilization courses as academically rigorous and intellectually challenging as we would expect them to be regardless of the size of student enrollments. Hence, there has always been a strong writing component to student exams and assignments within these courses. The net effect of that reality upon faculty workload in the department is enormous. The plain fact is that teaching a class of 60 students that requires essay exams and usually multiple papers is extremely labor intensive. We believe we are right in suggesting that we are among the few departments teaching courses of this nature with these types of enrollments. Continuing to do this work into the indefinite future will certainly come at a price for the faculty in the department, as is has in the past. Thus, the
prospect of smaller sections as a result of an additional department member would go a long way towards enhancing both student learning and faculty sustainability.

*Why a non-western Historian?*

The History department has strongly emphasized the need for Westmont College graduates to be literate in world history. Early on, and long before many other Christian colleges, the history department has argued for the requirement in the study of civilizations to be a World History requirement, as opposed to a Western History survey. This is grounded in our belief that, to be agents of redemption in the world, our students need to understand cultures beyond their own. This commitment is in line with our college’s learning standard on diversity. In hiring a non-western historian, we would strengthen the quality of our World History offerings (History 10 in particular, but also History 9, a class required from Liberal Studies majors).

In an effort to train our graduates more extensively in non-western history, we added a requirement in this area in the Fall of 2003. To avoid putting extra pressure on one of our department members teaching in this area (in South Asian history), and to diversify offerings in non-western history, we hired two different faculty to teach one course per semester: since the Spring of 2004, Perry Ritenour has taught courses in the History of East Asia (China, Japan, Vietnam) and since the Fall of 2005, Monica Orozco has taught a class in the History of Latin America. In the Fall of 2007 and the Spring of 2008, Monica has taught three classes for the department. The classes have proven very popular among majors and non-majors, especially the class in contemporary Latin America, since it draws students who can bring their study of the language or/and the culture of this area. A Latin Americanist would helpfully complement the college’s offerings in Spanish and Latin American studies (in anthropology for instance).

We believe the hiring of a non-western historian would complement nicely other parts of the college’s curriculum, be it in anthropology, communication studies or religious studies. This is self-evident for our language programs in French and Spanish if we hired a Latin Americanist or an Africanist. This would also be the case if we hired a specialist in Muslim history, since the Religious Studies department now offers a May-term in the Middle East and classes in Islam taught from an anthropological perspective. We would look forward to further collaboration between our department and all the programs that would benefit from this hire.

If indeed our identity as a college is defined by the term “global”, then another non-western historian makes plenty of sense. Finally, the department has a strong track record of seeking minority candidates: it hired Chandra Mallampalli, has consistently extended offers for part-time and full-time teaching to Monica Orozco, and is bringing Dr. Kenya Davis-Hayes to speak on campus for women history month in 2008 (Dr. Hayes is currently employed at California Baptist University). In our last search, we found it very difficult to identify candidates of color, given the field of specialization we were interested in (Modern Europe). However, we feel that Alister Chapman has been a wonderful addition to the college. We
hope that, in seeking to fill a non-western position, our chances of identifying a minority candidate would be much greater.

In conclusion, our identity as a department has been shaped by a long tradition of service to the institution in the General Education program, in administration, in scholarly pursuits (both Rick and Marianne published a book in the last two academic years, and Alister is finishing editing one), and in advising. We are proud to be a “service department” because we understand our responsibility to be to our students generally speaking, and not just to our majors. This is why, perhaps, we continue to advise so many undeclared students (as well as many of the social science majors). Yet we cannot help but feel very stretched at the present, and we wonder if we have not short-changed our majors in the process. We hope that this position could offer us a bit of the room to breathe we have been waiting for.