

To: History Department Faculty

From: Ad Hoc Committee on Enrollments and Curriculum (Lindsay Braun, Julie Hessler, Jeff Ostler)

Re: Interim report on decline in enrollments and majors

Date: December 10, 2013

The ad hoc committee has completed a preliminary assessment of the recent decline in our enrollments and majors. This interim report is intended to provide the department with our findings on two related questions: (1) How should we interpret the recent decline in enrollments/majors? Are these declines a problem, a crisis, or a return to normal? (2) What explains these declines?

1. Trends in enrollments and majors:

After reviewing Associate Dean McNeely's September 30 memo to John McCole, which provided data on enrollments and majors from 2006-07 to the present, many colleagues expressed the view that we need to view the trends shown in that memo over a broader period of time. Accordingly, the ad hoc committee requested information from CAS about enrollments and majors beginning in 2000-01.

a. Enrollments:

As shown in table 1, enrollments, as measured by student credit hours (SCH), increased from 2000-01 and were generally stable for the next seven years (2001-02 through 2007-08). They then increased to record levels in 2008-09, falling only slightly through 2010-11. Since then, we have seen a sharp decline. In 2012-13, our enrollments returned to the level of 2000-01. (Fall 2013 SCH were 6,600, slightly lower than the previous low of 6,800 in fall 2000.)

Table 1
History SCH, 2000-2013

2000-01	21,800	2006-07	25,000
2001-02	23,100	2007-08	24,400
2002-03	24,400	2008-09	28,300
2003-04	23,000	2009-10	27,200
2004-05	24,200	2010-11	27,100
2005-06	24,600	2011-12	23,200
		2012-13	21,800

It might be possible to interpret our recent decline in enrollments as a “return to normal” if they had dropped only to the level of 2001-02 through 2007-08, but they have now fallen below that level. Furthermore, as we know, our enrollments have declined during a period when the number of students at the University of Oregon has increased. Though some of these “new students” may for various reasons be especially disinclined to take general education courses in the social sciences and humanities, students are still required to fulfill general education requirements and continue to do so through CAS courses as shown by a 26% increase in CAS undergraduate student credit hours from 2006-08 to 2011-13.

The decline in the department’s enrollments has been experienced at all levels of our curriculum, though it has been sharpest at the 100/200 level. A comparison of SCH for the most recent three years (2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13) with the previous three years (2007-08, 2009-10, 2009-10) shows a decline of 16% at the 100/200 level, 6% at the 300 level, and 8% at the 400 level.

The decline has also been evident in most geographical areas of our curriculum. A comparison between the same two periods for undergraduate courses at all levels shows declines of 12% for U.S., 15% for Europe, 15% for East Asia, and 35% for Latin America. Enrollments in Africa have increased dramatically (up 403%), primarily because of the increase in the number of courses being offered, and enrollments in all other courses (including World, Islamic World, South Asia) have risen as well (up 7.3%), for much the same reason.

b. Majors:

As shown in table 2, our majors have followed a similar trend. We note, however, that the recent decline in our majors has been sharper than the decline in enrollments. The number of declared majors at the beginning of fall term (272) is lower than at any time in the past 13 years.

Table 2
History Majors 2000-2013*

2000	307	2007	500
2001	330	2008	495
2002	371	2009	497
2003	415	2010	485
2004	416	2011	429
2005	435	2012	349
2006	432	2013	272

*figures are for beginning of fall term and do not include majors not registered that term.

2. Factors behind recent trends:

To try to understand why enrollments and majors have declined, the committee pursued several lines of inquiry.

a. Survey of other History departments:

To what extent are the trends in our department similar to those in other departments, and what might we learn from other departments' experiences? To answer these questions, the committee emailed the chairs of 22 History departments around the country, asking them whether they had experienced a decline in enrollments and/or majors, and if so, what they thought had caused their decline and what, if anything, they had done to reverse the trend. We received 21 responses.¹ Of these 21, 19 reported a decline in either enrollments or majors, with most reporting a decline in both.² Many also reported that they were aware of similar trends elsewhere in the country. Departments that did not report a decline in enrollments appear to be in university environments where history is either a requirement for all undergraduates or much more central to general education requirements than UO.

The department chairs identified a number of factors behind declining enrollments and majors. Some of these were locally specific, but four factors seem broadly applicable: (1) a sense among students and parents that there is little career value in majoring in history; (2) a sense among students that history offerings are unappealing; (3) relatively low numbers of women in history courses and the major; (4) an increase in History credits being granted at the high school and community college levels. (These chairs also provided us with a wealth of information about how history departments are addressing their problems, which we expect will help us formulate recommendations as we proceed.)

b. Survey of our majors:

As you know, David Luebke and Bob Haskett undertook a survey of our current majors. Two questions were designed to elicit information about why students might not want to major in history (question 29, "what kinds of things required by the history major, or an academic concentration in history, do you think might keep other students from majoring in history" and

¹We contacted Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Cornell, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio State, Penn State, SUNY Stony Brook, Texas, UC Davis, UC Irvine, UC Santa Barbara, Utah, Virginia, and Washington. SUNY Stony Brook was the only non-respondent.

²A downward trend in history majors nationally is confirmed by recent data reported by the AHA in *Perspectives* (April 2013): "History accounted for 2.24 percent of all degrees conferred in 2007, but only 2.02 percent in 2011, which is lower than all but five of the past 25 years."

question 32, “In conversations with your friends and acquaintances, what reasons have you heard people give for deciding not the major in history?”). Three consistent themes emerge from the responses to these questions: (1) a history degree is perceived to be of little value in finding employment; (2) history is perceived to be a boring subject; (3) the workload in history courses is perceived to be too heavy.³

c. The impact of History credits earned outside UO on lower division enrollments:

From what we heard from colleagues (confirmed by reports from other history departments), one possible explanation for the recent decline in our enrollments, especially at the lower division level, is the increase in the number of credits being awarded in history through high school programs (AP, IB, etc.) and community college transfer courses. CAS was unable to supply data prior to 2010, though we were informed that credits from such sources increased in the few years before 2010. As shown in table 3, the number of credits earned from outside sources since 2010 has been fairly stable (showing a decline in Western Civ, little change in World, and a slight increase in the U.S. survey).

Table 3
SCH in History from Outside UO

	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>
HIST 101/102/103 (W Civ)	3037	2834	2555	2481
HIST 104/105/106 (World)	1267	1331	1404	1319
HIST 201/202/203 (U.S.)	6890	7626	6590	7362
TOTAL	11194	11791	10549	11162

It is possible that the pre-2010 increase in outside credits may have dampened enrollments beyond what they would have been otherwise (if so, our historically high enrollments in 2008-09, 2009-10, and 2010-11 would have been even higher). However, the fact that the number of outside credits has not increased since 2010 indicates that this factor does not explain the decline in our lower division enrollments since then (though it may mean that they would not have fallen quite as far as they have).

d. The impact of online courses:

We also gathered information on online courses being offered in other departments. Although we were unable to obtain data over time, we do know that SCH earned through CAS online courses has recently increased. In 2012-13 several social science departments (ANTH, ECON,

³It is likely true that the workload in history courses is higher than average and that the major itself is more difficult (especially because of the 407 seminar requirement), though we note that our exploration of a related hypothesis, that our department has tougher grading standards than other departments in the social sciences, indicated that the average GPA in our 100, 200, and 300 level courses is about average and somewhat higher in our 400 level courses.

GEOG, LING, PS, SOC) offered online courses; three of them (ANTH, ECON, PS) collected 2,500 or more SCH through such courses. We also note that a few humanities departments (COLT, FLR, REL) have begun to offer such courses. The growth of online courses is probably not having an impact on our majors, though its effect on enrollments is harder to evaluate. Online courses may be drawing some students away from our lower division courses, though it does not seem to be a major factor in explaining recent declines. Nonetheless, a trend toward more online courses is likely to continue and is something the department should be aware of.

e. The impact of new CAS majors on History majors:

From what we heard from colleagues, one possible explanation for the decline in History majors is the growth of new CAS majors such as General Social Sciences and Cinema Studies (according to information CAS provided us, GSS had 397 majors in fall 2012; CS had 252).⁴ Information provided to us by Reuben Zahler indicates that GSS is drawing the bulk of its students from Pre-Business, Economics, and Sociology and that its impact on the number of history majors has been slight. We know less about CS, though it seems that it has likely drawn mostly from potential majors in the humanities.

3. Conclusions:

Information we have gathered indicates that the recent decline in our enrollments and majors is not unique to our department but is part of a national trend. In a context of economic anxiety and increasing costs of education, students and parents perceive that history has weak career value and are choosing other majors. At the same time, taking history courses to satisfy general education requirements seems less appealing to many students. Another national pattern, gender imbalance in history majors and students taking history courses, is probably not a major factor in explaining downward trends nationally or in our department (such an imbalance has been a constant for many years),⁵ though it does present the discipline and our department with an opportunity to reach out.

Although recent trends in our enrollments and majors are related to broader economic and social factors over which the department has little control, the committee nonetheless believes that the department has some capacity to address them. Doing so is important because it represents an opportunity to undertake curricular reform for reasons that exist independently of recent trends, and we note that many members of the department are already pursuing initiatives along these lines. Addressing the problem of declining enrollments and majors is also important because of

⁴We are informed by Reuben Zahler that GSS had 592 majors in fall 2013 and that this number has risen to 650.

⁵*Perspectives*, April 2013, reports that “representation of women among new history degree recipients has been comparative flat, with a slight decline over the past two years, from 40.7 percent in 2010 to 40.5 percent in 2011. The proportion of women earning undergraduate history degrees peaked in 2005 at 41.2 percent, and has been flat or declining ever since.”

the department's commitment to expose undergraduates to the value of studying history. Finally, it is crucial that the department take action because we risk losing resources if we do not reverse recent trends. Exceptionally low enrollments during the initial registration period for winter 2014, particularly in a couple of our survey courses, would seem to confirm the seriousness of the problem.

Finally, the committee believes that the problem we are facing is a collective one. It is true that some large surveys or geographical areas have experienced larger declines than others; it is also true that some courses have continued to draw consistently high numbers. Despite these variations, however, our overwhelming sense is that recent trends are general and require a department-wide response. This will involve all of us participating in efforts to revise our curriculum and better plan our course offerings from term to term and year to year. It will also require a renewed commitment toward workload equity. There are considerable disparities in the number of students faculty members teach, and the department will need to devise better ways to ensure that substantial numbers of students are learning from every one of its members.

4. Next Steps:

The committee is continuing to try to find answers to questions colleagues have raised, including the extent to which our lower division courses recruit majors, whether or not we have become too reliant on NTTF, whether or not we are offering too many courses of particular types or at particular levels, and how we might improve our scheduling practices in view of existing constraints. We have also begun discussing what we have learned from conversations with colleagues, reports from the regional group meetings, chairs of other history departments, and innovations undertaken by the Anthropology department.

We hope to be able to make recommendations to the department by the middle of winter term. From what we learned from conversations with colleagues and reports from regional groups, we see a strong consensus for focusing on (1) identifying promising directions for recruiting and retaining majors; (2) pursuing ideas for curricular reform (some of which is already underway); (3) developing incentives and support for curricular reform; (4) finding ways to better manage and coordinate our course offerings; and (5) clarifying departmental expectations about workloads, especially for tenured faculty. We are also exploring other issues that have emerged, including (1) suggesting possible changes in the major requirements; and (2) considering modifications in our practices for hiring adjuncts and one-year visitors. Our intention as we formulate recommendations is not to be overly prescriptive, but to highlight problems and opportunities and to suggest processes for the department to address and pursue them.

As we proceed, we welcome questions and suggestions.