

History Department | Diversity Plan Proposal | November 2006

The University of Oregon History Department has a long-standing commitment to supporting diversity at the university and a record of success in areas ranging from curriculum to hiring. However, we are dismayed by the lack of progress made by the university on diversity issues, and we are concerned about the obstacles to maintaining what our department has been able to achieve. Both creativity and new resources will be needed to sustain and enhance our efforts to improve campus climate, achieve a critical mass among students and faculty, and fill the pipeline.

We believe that communicating a historical perspective on diversity must be a key part of the university's effort to develop a culturally responsive community. With respect to undergraduate education, History's commitment to this goal dates to a 1986 departmental policy to encourage our faculty to address diversity issues in their courses. On a programmatic level, in the 1990s we created a 100-level World History sequence to address the general education needs of freshmen and sophomores. Within the History major, we have long required a broad geographical distribution of courses. In 2002, we expanded the range of options outside the U.S. and Europe. We have supported these efforts by shifting faculty resources to new areas of the world: in the 1990s, a position in European history was converted into a new line in African history, and we created a second position in Latin American history. During the same period, our department's program in the history of the U.S. West has developed a focus on gender, race, and ethnicity that gives it a distinctive profile with national visibility.

At present, however, key minority faculty who have helped both the department and the university to advance our diversity goals have departed for positions elsewhere. History has a strong record of recruiting outstanding faculty of color who have played key roles in the college's diversity efforts. We should not be resigned to losing such high-caliber minority faculty; the university needs to make a commitment to be more resourceful in its future retention efforts. Quintard Taylor, Matt Garcia, and Martin Summers (who eventually left for positions at the University of Washington, Brown, and the University of Texas) were leaders in building the Ethnic Studies program and supporting other UO diversity initiatives while maintaining full citizenship in our department. We remain committed to providing strong support for the Ethnic Studies program in the future. In addition, we have recently sponsored two one-year visiting assistant professorships in African-American history, funded jointly by History and the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity. These junior scholars enabled us to maintain the diversity of our curriculum, and their presence on campus has contributed to the critical mass that is central to the diversity plan's goals. At the same time, their reduced course loads and our support for their professional development have contributed to filling the pipeline for minority scholars in academia at large.

The following are our highest priority goals for consolidating and extending these efforts:

1. We need strong support for our commitment to fill two anticipated vacancies, one in African-American history and one in African history. The real achievements of the past fifteen years will be endangered unless we can attract scholars of the caliber we have successfully recruited in the past. This will require funding and other forms of institutional support.
2. We propose converting the two-year experiment with visiting assistant professors in African-American history into an ongoing postdoctoral fellowship. This would be a cost-effective, high-impact way to help recruit future UO faculty members. It would demonstrate the university's seriousness about mentoring and hiring faculty of color in a nationally visible way. It would require a long-term commitment of funds. History can continue to contribute its current share of the funding but would need a commitment of matching funds, or better, from another source.
3. We would like to create a second postdoctoral position on this model in Latino history. This would have the additional advantage of addressing the underrepresentation of Latinos at the undergraduate level while supporting community linkages that will be exceptionally important in light of the growing Latino population in Oregon. Our department's strengths in Latin American history and our strong ties with Latin American Studies would complement this choice, as would our strengths in the history of race and ethnicity in the U.S. West.
4. We encourage the administration to define the open position in Asian Studies as a historian of transnational Asia. Our department has a strong record of providing leadership in the college's East Asia programs and centers, which enrich the university's international diversity in many ways. Given the inherently multi-disciplinary approach of contemporary historical scholarship, a historian would be well positioned to provide connections among the university's offerings in this area.
5. One of the department's—and the university's—most glaring needs is to begin supporting teaching and research on the history of the Islamic world. This can only be done if the university is willing to devote significant resources to this area, including cluster hires and library acquisition, and to take on the difficult OUS-wide issues we understand to be involved.
6. We endorse the diversity plan's assertion that cluster hires represent a crucial strategy for improving the university's record of recruitment and retention, and our department will pursue ways of coordinating future searches with other departments and programs.
7. We are committed to helping to fill the pipeline by increasing our recruitment of minority graduate students. We have taken full advantage of Fighting Fund money, and we have had some success in recent years. Nevertheless, we need improved funding to recruit more competitively, and to help the students we recruit become more competitive in turn. Additional fellowship support for Latino and other minority graduate students would make a critical difference to our

efforts in this area.

8. In the interest of recruiting and retaining women faculty, we recommend strengthening the university's current policy on partner hires. As the diversity plan notes, "studies have shown that partner-hiring strategies have had particular success in increasing the diversity of faculty" (28).

9. Because historical awareness is necessary to understanding the challenge of diversity in the twenty-first-century world, the History Department is uniquely positioned to serve our campus community as the UO diversity plan is implemented over the next five years. With adequate support, we propose to sponsor a variety of events (lectures, films, symposia) to promote the university community's understanding of the local, national, and international dimensions of diversity issues.