

TEACHING HISTORY
A Statement of Existing Practice in the Department of History
January 2005

The Department of History has always maintained a carefully conceived, well integrated curriculum, which attempts to meet diverse student needs and to allow faculty members to teach from their scholarly strengths. The broad geographic and thematic scope of this curriculum has been widely recognized outside York University as one of the Department's greatest strengths and helps to explain how it has built up the largest number of undergraduate History majors in North America.

Marshalling the Department's teaching resources effectively to implement that curriculum has involved some strategic choices about the size and structure of courses and the most appropriate instructors to teach in them. Each of the four levels of the undergraduate curriculum requires a different allocation of the Department's human resources to sustain the particular pedagogies deemed appropriate for students at that phase of their undergraduate studies.

1000-Level Courses

In the early 1980s, the Department responded to a new call for a disciplinary first-year curriculum by establishing a set of courses at the 1000 level intended to introduce students to the discipline of History, incorporating basic introductions to historiography, methodology, and theory, and emphasizing essential skills in reading, research, and writing and in use of the library. These courses are aimed in particular at students majoring in History, the number of whom has grown dramatically (by 50 per cent) over the past five years. There is agreement in the Department that full-time faculty members are the best instructors for such important introductory courses, and that a combination of two hours of lectures and a two-hour, thirty-student tutorial is the best format.

Over the years, there have been two models for these courses: the great majority have thirty students and are taught by a single faculty member, while, in a few with larger enrolments, a number of faculty participate in a teaching team and each takes one two-hour tutorial. In 2003-4 there were three of these larger courses, with enrolment ranging up to 450 (one additional course was approved this fall by the Curriculum Committee but will not be offered in 2005-6 because of lack of resources). These larger courses have been deliberately designed to present an unusual breadth of topics, chronology, and geographical focus and bring together diverse scholarly expertise to create a distinctive, innovative first-year experience for our students.

We have always believed the special challenges of teaching in such innovative courses, particularly the need for individual faculty members to synthesize vast amounts of history and historiography well beyond the geographic and chronological boundaries of their own scholarship, justified assigning two or more full-time faculty to lecture in them. Along with their tutorials, their teaching contribution was seen as equivalent to one full course.

In recent years, the design of the 1000-level courses has been slightly altered by adding teaching assistants to some team-taught courses (and thereby adding additional work for faculty members in integrating them into the courses). These have always been senior doctoral students or contract faculty, and their participation has never been seen as an abandonment of the pedagogical structure and goals built into these courses for more than two decades. In fact, early in 2003 the Department explicitly re-affirmed its commitment to the existing guidelines for courses at this level (see Appendix A).

2000-Level Courses

The courses offered at the 2000 level have been designed as surveys to introduce students to the major fields in the Department's curriculum (European, American, East Asian, British, Canadian, and so on). Two-thirds of these offerings now have enrolments of well over one hundred students each (indeed, the Canadian survey course now has some 400 students). In virtually all of them, a single faculty member is responsible for all the lecturing and for supervising and co-ordinating the work of several teaching assistants. In courses of fewer than one hundred, the lecturer also teaches one tutorial, but in larger courses the Department has long recognized that the tasks involved in course administration are sufficiently demanding that the faculty member directing the course is not required to teach a tutorial.

3000-Level Courses

The Department's 3000-level courses are intended to allow students to engage in more in-depth study of particular fields and address the main scholarship of those fields, for which discussion in smaller groups is essential. The Department has always believed that, at this level of their studies, students need and deserve the close attention of qualified scholars, many of whom are later asked to write letters of reference for graduate programs and professional schools. Occasionally a senior doctoral candidate or contract faculty member may be assigned to direct one of these courses, but there are never many of these part-time instructors in any one academic year. In the great majority of these courses, a full-time faculty member meets with a maximum of fifty students. A few courses at this level have attracted sufficient student interest that they have been allowed to grow larger – in some cases, in excess of one hundred students (in 2004-5 there were 4.5 such courses out of thirty full-course offerings). If these courses reach an enrolment of seventy-five, a faculty member receives the assistance of a teaching assistant to teach two of the three tutorials. If they reach one hundred or more, two teaching assistants are assigned to the course, and, as in the case of the 2000-level courses, the faculty member does not teach a tutorial.

4000-Level Courses

The Department offers two kinds of courses at the 4000 level – seminars and colloquia. These are distinguished by the size of enrolment, degree of class participation, and research intensity. A seminar has no more than eighteen students, while a colloquium

may rise to thirty. Both are normally taught by full-time faculty members, though occasionally a senior doctoral candidate or contract faculty member may be recruited to teach one or two.

Graduate Teaching

The Graduate Program in History offers courses that cover numerous geographical and thematic fields. The breadth of these fields enables MA and PhD students to specialize in more than one area. Class sizes are set at a minimum of four students and a maximum of fifteen. Courses that enrol fewer than four students are regarded as Directed Reading Courses and are compensated as such.

Summers and Evenings

The Department of History in the Faculty of Arts does not organize course offerings in the evenings during the September-to-April academic year or at any time in the summer months. Courses offered at those times are scheduled by the School of Arts and Letters in Atkinson. Individual faculty members occasionally arrange with Atkinson to teach part of their load in the summer, but no full-time faculty are ever required to do so.

Overall Workload

As indicated in the Department's statement of 2000 (see Appendix B), full-time faculty members are expected to teach the equivalent of 2.5 courses in each academic year.

For several years, the Department has granted course releases to those with heavy commitments to supervision of graduate students, which go beyond the current YUFA Collective Agreement's provision of 1/6 full-course equivalent per year for four or more "principal supervisions." These are set out in Appendix C.

Appendix A

Curriculum Committee Proposal on 1000-Level Courses

**(Adopted by the Department of History Council,
February 2003)**

In the context of curricular, enrolment, and instructional staff planning for the future, the Department reaffirms, clarifies, and declares its commitment to the following guidelines for its 1000-level courses:

1. The teacher-student ratio will remain 30:1.
2. Course directors will be full-time faculty.
3. Courses will introduce students to the discipline of History, incorporating basic introductions to historiography, methodology, and theory, and emphasizing essential, reading, research, writing, and library skills.
4. When resources allow, tutorials will be led by full-time faculty. When necessary given budget and staffing constraints, tutorials will be led by part-time faculty and advanced PhD students with appropriate specializations and significant teaching experience. If the Chair, Director of Undergraduate Studies, and Graduate Program Director believe that there are no advanced PhD students available, they may turn to qualified PhD students without significant teaching experience. In such instances, the Chair will report to the Department, at its first meeting of the academic year, on the circumstances surrounding this decision. As in the case with all Department courses, MA students will not be hired as teaching assistants.
5. Course directors in particular and faculty in general are responsible for coordinating tutorial teaching in their 1000-level courses. Such faculty will provide guidance to recently hired faculty, part-time faculty, and PhD students who lack extensive teaching experience, ensuring that the educational objectives of the 1000-level program are understood by all instructors. Where feasible, course directors and faculty in 1000-level courses will provide to teaching assistants suggestions for discussion topics, teaching exercises, lesson plans, and other teaching resources.

Appendix B:

Department of History (Arts) Determination of Teaching Load

(Submitted to the Joint Committee on the Administration of the Collective Agreement, April 2000)

The Department of History (Arts) has a teaching load of 2.5 course per year. As we have very few half courses in either the undergraduate or graduate program, the vast majority of our colleagues rotate between three and two-course years.

In September and October the Chair meets individually with each member of the Department to determine teaching loads for the following year. Each colleague's load results from a balance among his/her preferences, the Chair's assessment of the needs of the undergraduate curriculum, and the needs of the Graduate Program in History as decided by the Director. (The Department contributes approximately ten courses to the Program each year and graduate courses form part of the 2.5 course load.)

The Chair is guided by a set of shared principles that form part of the Department's culture: 1) that no colleague is exempt from teaching at any level of the curriculum, 2) that all colleagues are expected to teach regularly in first or second-year courses and that all colleagues, junior as well as senior, have access to upper-level and seminar teaching, and 3) that while colleagues' preferences are to be taken seriously, curricular need is the determining consideration.

The Chair is guided by the nature of History as a discipline, specifically the importance of field specialization within it. This means that surveys are not susceptible to being assigned to any member of the Department and that individuals teach "outside their field" only in some thematic or team-taught courses. This means that surveys cannot be assigned to just anyone, but only to those whose work is in that field. Historians are not by and large expected to teach outside a broad area of expertise for which they were hired or into which they have grown. They are, however, expected to take their turn in service or departmental teaching at the introductory level, whether in field surveys or the first-year problems courses.

In endeavouring to assure that over time all colleagues have as equal a teaching load as possible, the Chair takes into account a number of considerations of course levels, mode of delivery, class size, and total student load, tutorial responsibilities, marking/grading responsibilities, writing intensivity, and special circumstances (such as "short notice"), and how all these balance over time. The Department has long-established, written policy that no colleague may supervise more than three undergraduate directed reading courses and/or honours theses in a single year and that these activities will not be considered part of the normal teaching load. Graduate

supervision is not formally included in teaching load calculations, although there has been an ad hoc system of granting credit for graduate supervision through negotiation between individual colleagues and the Chair. Establishing a formal scale of credit for Graduate supervision is currently under discussion.

Appendix C

Department of History Credits for Graduate Overload Teaching

**(Adopted by the Department of History Council,
5 December 2000)**

Credit for work beyond “normal teaching load” by members of the Department of History teaching in any graduate program at York University will be granted as retroactive compensation according to the following schedule:

- For principal supervisor of PhD dissertations: two completed dissertations earn ½ course release.
- For directed reading courses (one to three students): two full-year reading courses earn ½ course release.
- For directors of completed MRPs and members of supervisory committee for completed PhDs: eight supervisions earn ½ course release.
- For field preparation course with fewer than four enrolled, two courses earn one full course release.

All forms of earning release may be combined. Colleagues are encouraged to claim their credits promptly after accumulating a half or whole course release. The combination of graduate teaching and claimed credits cannot remove someone entirely from undergraduate teaching in any given year.

Exclusive of credits already agreed on whatever scale among the Chair, Graduate Director, and individual involved, this policy is retroactive for the three previous years (i.e., 1999-2000, 1998-99, and 1997-98) and applies in future.