



Professor Lorri Glover  
Bannon Endowed Chair of History  
3800 Lindell Boulevard  
Adorjan Hall, Room 313  
St. Louis, MO 63108-3414  
Phone: 314-977-8610  
Fax: 314-977-1603  
lorri.glover@slu.edu

---

**SAINT LOUIS  
UNIVERSITY**

Tennessee Technological University  
Department of History Program Review  
April 2-4, 2018

The Department of History at Tennessee Technological University has been evaluated three times in eight years, which, as their program overview suggests, is perhaps excessive. But this review also offers TTU and the State of Tennessee an opportunity to reflect on and learn from an academic unit that is succeeding at every part of their mission.

This review meets TTU and the Department of History in a period of significant transition. The shift from oversight by the Tennessee Board of Regents to operating as a Locally Governed Institution under the Focus Act remains in flux. Changes are emerging but still in some regards undefined. For certain, there is a tremendous opportunity to develop on-line course options. The Department of History seems to be at the forefront in terms of innovating for the College of Arts and Sciences. Faculty members are energetic, open-minded, and eager in regards to this opportunity. But they need a stronger support system. The campus teaching center is, in the opinion of some faculty, suffering from turnover and not consistently reliable as a place to seek constructive help. With on-line degree programs already thriving (BSN, MBA), Tennessee Tech seems well positioned to foster peer-mentoring between faculty in those programs and teachers in the Department of History, among other academic units. But there should also be a stronger institutional apparatus for achieving this expansion of on-line courses. Ideally, administrators could offer buy-outs for courses to enable faculty to thoroughly train themselves and reimagine their courses. This would ensure that the high quality of education history professors currently deliver can meet the differences and opportunities of technology. One faculty member explained it succinctly: there is too much DIY required to create and deliver on-line classes. It is likewise unclear what policy innovations the new board will undertake. Board members seem to have not yet earned the full confidence of the faculty.

The Department of History (and TTU more broadly) is confronting as well the transition in state allocations, begun around 4 years ago, from enrollment-based funding to outcomes/milestones-based funding. Adding to that is the "Drive to 55" program. Both initiatives focus on moving students through to degree completion. What that emphasis will mean for the high standards the history professors have set for themselves and their students remains to be seen.

What is clear is that the history professors at TTU are ready to meet whatever changes and challenges emerge. The culture of the department is collaborative, collegial, and inspiring. As

scholars, they are productive and capaciously minded. It's unfortunate that the matrix for reviewers does not allow for clearer acknowledgement of faculty research achievements and professional visibility because their scholarship merits exceedingly high praise. Faculty members are also supremely dedicated to student success, to rigorous course standards, and to teaching excellence. It is easy to believe that students at Tennessee Tech find the history faculty both more caring and more challenging than most other departments. Additionally, department members' level of service is admirably high and universally shared. Collectively, members of the history faculty are providing a prodigious amount of professional service and academic outreach: to the department, college, and university; in the City of Cookeville, region, and State of Tennessee; for the historical profession and academia generally.

Every person I talked to during my campus visit praised the Department of History for being highly successful in research, teaching, and service. And they are team-minded. This is a difficult pairing to pull off. The department has made excellent hires over the years and been able to maintain a uniquely strong, collaborative department culture. The chair of the History Department, Jeffrey Roberts, deserves a significant share of credit for this achievement. Sixteen years into his chairmanship, he retains the full confidence of the faculty and of the administration—a singularly strong commentary on his leadership skills. Roberts fosters an attitude of service-mindedness, high academic achievement, and collegiality. The department benefits as well from an outstanding administrative assistant, Amy Foster. Faculty and students are unanimous in their gratitude for Foster's professionalism, kindness, and responsiveness. The students I talked to expressly told me to write down how grateful they were for her: she is always welcoming and encouraging.

The Department of History has strong financial support for its lecture series and for student travel. The range of off-campus opportunities faculty create—from study abroad to class-based day trips—is very impressive. They are able to do so in large part because of alumni donors—a strong indication of a healthy, successful department. There seems to be less funding for the vital expense of faculty research travel. For humanities scholars generally, research is not an add-on or luxury. Strong teaching and active research are mutually reinforcing. The past academic year witnessed a stark drop-off in research funding at TTU, and it is very much hoped that administrators will be able to reverse that pattern, enabling history faculty to maintain their high level of research productivity and, therefore, their cutting-edge teaching. Conference travel funding seems more consistent, but faculty members sometimes find the process of reimbursement onerous, even to the point of discouraging conference participation. To do their jobs as teachers and scholars, faculty members need stronger library holdings, in particular the database Project Muse and the most complete version of J-STOR. The space of the library is fantastic, and humming with students. A few strategic purchases would make it more beneficial for student and faculty historical research.

Upon reviewing departmental materials, I was initially concerned to see that TTU seemed to be following the national trend regarding full time vs. part time faculty. In 1999, the department employed 12 full time and 2 part time teachers. In spring 2018, that number had tilted: 9 full time and 6 part time faculty. However, upon arriving on campus I learned the great news that TTU had approved the History Department to hire two new colleagues, both working in African American history and African American historians. In fall 2018, TTU students will have a richer

intellectual experience because of these hires, the CAS faculty will be more diverse, and the History Department will stand out in the national scene for its success in maintaining full time historians in the classrooms. The culture of the History Department is ideally suited to welcome these new members of the TTU faculty and to mentor them toward successful careers.

The arrival of two new colleagues throws into high relief the pressing spatial needs of the History Department. TTU must find good office space for the two newly appointed historians on the same floor as other history faculty and the departmental office, and officials need to do so within the next month. Being in close proximity to Professor Roberts and history colleagues will be vital to welcoming the new historians and to their retention. Students need to know where to find their newest teachers, and the new historians need to have quick and regular interactions with their colleagues. There seems, from the outside, an easy if perhaps not entirely comfortable solution: relocate the language faculty who have moved outside their home department and into the history wing of Henderson Hall. If that is not the solution, then another needs to be found by the end of the spring 2018 term. Less easily solved is the problem of access to a large classroom. Large enrollment history courses are relegated to off-hours in other buildings. It strikes me as a problematic model generally to allow departments to control access to the limited number of large classrooms on campus. I am impressed that the History Department has maintained its numbers of majors in the wake of the 2008-2009 financial setback (most humanities departments lost significant numbers of majors after 2009), despite having their main recruiting courses scheduled in off hours and distant spaces.

History faculty members also need more tech support in their classrooms. The individual responsible for Henderson Hall is, by all accounts, stellar. But he is stretched too thin. The practicalities of technology in the classroom should be easily remediable and so represent a frustrating and unnecessary obstacle to sustained integration of technology in the classroom. The history students mentioned this as the only problem they encountered in the History Department.

Overall, the History Department is thriving and committed to excellence with a strong process of self-evaluation. As their program review indicates: "Quality assurance is an ingrained feature of departmental culture." (p. 24) Quality assurance occurs on multiple levels: classroom visits, end-of-year evaluative conversations, informal interactions that foster collaboration, individual self-evaluation, student evaluations, and the chair's annual reviews.

Going forward, I would offer some suggestions. Currently the History Department has no formal, structured mentoring process for junior faculty. In the past, the department has operated quite successfully following an informal, collaborative process. This is an organic outgrowth of the strong, team-minded culture of the department. The chair lead on practical matters such as classroom observations and annual reviews, and everyone else volunteers to read works-in-progress, offer advice about teaching, and introduce new colleagues to the processes and academic culture at TTU. Before the new hires arrive on campus, it might be worth a conversation to see if this is the best practice going forward. I would offer that two African American junior faculty entering an all-white faculty might view the spontaneous model differently. They might not, of course. But it's worth discussing, especially since the department has a very healthy and productive process for self-evaluation, with their end-of-the-year assessment meetings. These focused conversations have served the faculty well in building

consensus on a variety of issues, including retaining the BS/BA tracks and weighing universal standards and common textbooks.

There is a minor matter with outcomes for 4990. The historiographical essay remains an option to the original research paper, despite the fact that no one on the current faculty allows this option (some were unaware it remained) because it runs counter to their focus on original research. This seems to be an inadvertent holdover from past patterns and is easily removed.

Regarding both 3410 and 4990, the history faculty might also consider allowing, even encouraging students to present their original research in forms other than the tradition footnoted paper. Given the expertise of the faculty, it seems a missed opportunity to not at least think about a website design or other digital humanities project, a documentary film, a public history project, even an historical novel. Every student won't want to try something different, of course, nor will every faculty member want to experiment with every form—or even at all. But given the career tracks of the History Department alumni, it would make sense to align 3410 and 4490 projects and outcomes with the rich diversity of approaches to historical scholarship currently being practiced by the history faculty (and in the profession of history more broadly). A museum display created with one of the partners in the internship program or a documentary film would, if properly mentored, meet all the standards for 4990 if the faculty changed only one word: replace “paper” with “project” in Learning Outcome #5. The department might get strong student buy-in for this innovation and it could help advance the goal of increased social media presence.

It is probably time to internally evaluate the internship program. Eight years in, it is highly successful, offering a tremendous opportunity for students to build professional connections, try out careers, and take learning outside the campus classroom. The program is a built-in advertisement for the department and a great way to recruit majors. How might the department expand on that success? Are there opportunities to fold internships into Maymester or summer? That would allow a geographic broadening of venues. Would varied timetables allow for more student opportunities in Nashville, particularly with the state government? Could you use the reports in the Lyceum? Students sharing their internship reports might encourage others to try interning and it would give presenters experience with oral presentations.

History 3410 offers another opportunity for self-evaluation and innovation. It would seem advantageous to students for the faculty to clarify the parameters and expectations of 3410. Teachers are trying to achieve a great deal in one semester, and emphases and expectations can vary from semester to semester. Some faculty members adopt a “boot camp” approach, while others seek a nurturing model. Sometimes 3410 is highly structured, other times more freeform. Some teachers incorporate career preparation and advice while others focus on the mechanics of research and writing. This seems to track with diverging faculty viewpoints on the nature of history; a healthy divide exists within the faculty between tradition and innovation. (Another reflection of traditionalism is the concern for “coverage” in survey courses and in teaching fields.) More importantly, it is not clear when history majors should take 3410, and some students I talked to felt they started too early, so they withdrew and reenrolled in a later semester. It seems wholly appropriate to leave learning outcomes in survey courses and upper level topical courses to the discretion of individual faculty members. The department has closely, thoughtfully weighed greater regimentation and opted instead to retain flexibility to reflect the diversity of

fields and approaches of the history faculty. But 3410 is a bit different, more akin to 4990. It would be better, in my opinion, if the department developed some uniform rubric for 3410 that matched the learning outcomes integrated into 4990, whichever faculty member teaches it.

The history faculty might also use 3410 to advance career preparation and advice in a more systematic manner. This issue was raised in their alumni survey (p. 20). Current students mentioned that they received great career advice when they sought it. Some teachers embed career preparation and advice in their classes, but that is not uniform in 3410 and 4990 (taken by every major). Events such as the workshop “So You are Interested in Law School” draw healthy numbers of students and should be continued. While there is perhaps some room to improve regarding systematic integration of careers into classrooms, it is hard to argue with the impressive success of departmental alumni.

The diversity of careers pursued by history majors offers powerful evidence of the department’s educational success. Alumni are working in business and industry, as entrepreneurs and small business owners, in health sciences, with local, state, and federal governments appointments, in the military, foreign service, and intelligence agencies, and in the arts and media, as well as the more traditional fields of law, education, museums, and academia. History majors go from TTU into some of the nation’s top law schools and most competitive PhD programs. Departmental alums are working right now as a Russian translator in D.C, at a winery in California, curating the Naval Museum in San Francisco, and as a physician in San Antonio. History Department alumni reflect the wide-ranging benefits of studying history and of a humanities education.

During my campus visit I had an illuminating conversation with a group of undergraduate history majors. They were forthright and credible. The principal takeaway was that the students know their history professors are supremely committed to their education and academic success. The faculty members make learning engaging and relevant, and they have created for undergraduates a vibrant intellectual community: in class, with visiting scholars, through internships and study abroad, with the Lyceum and the study room in Henderson Hall. It was abundantly clear in my conversation with students that faculty members are innovative, passionate, rigorous, and accessible. The only problem the students raised centered on the aforementioned classroom technology difficulties. Undergraduates have no difficulty getting into the classes they need when they need them and once enrolled encounter a rich variety of topics and approaches. Students also had consistently glowing things to say about academic support services, both informal and formal, in the History Department and beyond. In addition to praising the mentoring offered by history faculty, they singled out CAS advisors as very responsive. Peer tutoring is thriving among majors. The students seem to imbibe the admirable model set by their history professors.

Thank you for inviting me to visit TTU’s campus and Department of History. I appreciated the opportunity to reflect on such a healthy, collegial, and successful department. If you need anything more or different, please let me know.



Lorri Glover  
8 April 2018