This report follows on from the History’s department’s self-study and external review submitted in November 2010. The department’s initial response to the report was submitted in February 2011.

1. Action taken since the program report was submitted.

Immediately after our initial response, the Chair put in place several committees to examine some of the issues raised in the external review. Driven by the planning committee, two departmental curriculum workshops (aided by staff in the Centre for Teaching Excellence) helped us agree on curriculum changes that came into effect 1 September 2013. The department added a fourth ‘international’ field to widen our focus beyond Canada, the United States and Europe. Each of these four field areas consist of two or more second-year survey courses. Honours students can now take one course from 3 of our 4 fields. In addition, General level students are required to take at least 2 courses from each of the 4 fields. This initiative followed on the growing emphasis of ‘internationalization’ at the University of Waterloo. It was also intended to attract a more diverse student population.

Almost a third of the assessor’s recommendations focused on first-year courses. We responded by reducing those offerings, and adding two new courses: Ten Days that Shook the World; and Rock’n Roll in US History. (The latter is oversubscribed for the Winter term of 2014.) The department also organized a first-year departmental course workshop earlier this term (Fall 2013) to explore ways to coordinate offerings and share best practices. Discussions are ongoing as to how best to coordinate first-year offerings with those at the affiliated colleges.

Efforts to provide an ‘international’ experience have included work/travel courses conducted by at least two regular members of our faculty. For the past three years, Dr. Bruce has led a very successful class to Berlin to explore the city’s past through the lens of Second World War, the Cold War, and the post-Cold War. Dr. Hayes has also led a number of battlefield tours of Belgium and France to introduce students to the Canadian experience in both world wars.

In 2011, we were fortunate to hire two Canadianists in areas that the department wishes to develop. Dr. Susan Roy’s work in aboriginal communities has a strong public history component. Dr. Ian Milligan is a historian of Canadian youth who also has an interest in digital history. Courses in Aboriginal, Public and Digital History are now in the calendar. We hope that these will form the basis of even further curricular changes noted below. We also have posted a position for a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Modern Global History. We are anticipating that the Chair would specialize in one of the following areas: health and medicine, science, technology, the environment, or human rights.
The CRC position also draws upon the department’s hiring priorities. They are:

1. Environmental (possibly in East Asia, or Latin America)
2. East Asia (possibly with a Business emphasis)
3. Latin America
4. Islam
5. Technology

A departmental promotions committee also made recommendations to increase our visibility within the faculty, university and wider community. We have followed up with several initiatives. In 2012, we updated our departmental website and created a presence on Twitter. In the fall of 2012 and again this fall, the department invited local high school students and their teachers to a series of lectures, followed by a wider discussion about taking history at UW. A departmental lecture series is now ongoing, with contributions by both faculty and invited scholars. We are also organizing our efforts to encourage promising first year students through a series of informal meetings, and letters from the department. A departmental essay prize, given to the best fourth year paper by a history major, was first presented at our June 2013 convocation.

2. Recommendations not acted upon, but for which action is planned

We need to conduct a comprehensive survey of our alumni that will build upon our recent alumni survey of our graduate program. We know from those findings that our graduates are working in rewarding, lucrative careers in a wide variety of fields. We need to coordinate with alumni affairs to chronicle these success stories more systemically.

The external reviewers further suggested that we examine how we could use TAs more effectively, particularly in first year classes. The chair set another departmental committee to examine this issue. Its key recommendation was to use TAs in our first year courses as ‘skills instructors’. We have decided to hold off implementing this proposal until we have reconsidered our first year offerings.

Our curricular review is ongoing. Yet another departmental committee has worked to define a series of specializations that would highlight our departmental strengths and give students a more distinctive degree in history at UW. An additional proposal for a specialization in Applied History is currently before the department. It would draw upon our recent hires in Aboriginal and Digital History to provide a richer, more applied experience to our students.

We hope in the near future to identify more courses that we should take online. We also need to approach the Co-op department to work out ways to make the Arts and Business program more attractive to history students.
3. Any other relevant information

We realize that the humanities are facing challenges that reach well beyond our university. Students are increasingly diverse. Many are looking to interdisciplinary degree options. History has always attracted potential teachers, but the present teacher surplus is affecting the attractiveness of a history degree.

We are committed to the importance of teaching history. It is a rigorous discipline that teaches important skills that students can transfer to their professional and personal lives. Our department is noted for its superb teaching and scholarship. We are working with other departments and faculties to create a more distinctive approach to the past that will serve not just majors, but students throughout the University.