

# Department of History

**BA Hist, BA (Hons) Hist, BA (Joint Major ENGL/HIST; Joint Major HIST/POLS; Joint Major HIST/WMST), BA (Minor HIST), MA (HIST)**

Faculty of Indigenous Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities

Reviewers are asked to provide a report that:

- Identifies and commends the degree program's notably strong and creative attributes
- Describes the degree program's respective strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for enhancement
- Recommends specific steps to be taken to improve the degree program, distinguishing between those the program can itself take and those that require external action
- Recognizes the institution's autonomy to determine priorities for funding, space, and faculty allocation; and
- Respects the confidentiality required for all aspects of the review process

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## PART 1 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Executive Summary will be made publicly available on the Provost's website.

**ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT:** HISTORY

**DEGREE PROGRAMS UNDER REVIEW:** MA IN HISTORY, BA IN HISTORY (INCLUDING MINOR, MAJOR, HONOURS, AND JOINT MAJORS)

**CHAIR/DIRECTOR:** DANA WESSELL LIGHTFOOT

**DATE OF DEGREE PROGRAM(S) REVIEW:** January 29/30, 2025

**DATE OF THE PREVIOUS DEGREE PROGRAM(S) REVIEW:** 2014

**INTERNAL RESOURCE PERSON:** Administrative Coordinator, Selina Ross

### REVIEWERS

UNBC member of the review committee; Dr. Angèle Smith, Chair and Professor, Department of Anthropology

External - **Darlene Abreu-Ferreira**  
Professor, Department of History  
University of Winnipeg  
Winnipeg, MB

External - **Jennine Hurl-Eamon**  
Chair and Professor, Department of History  
Trent University  
Peterborough, ON

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## I. SUMMARY OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF DEGREE PROGRAM(S) PROCESS

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The External Review of the Department of History BA and MA degree programs was understandably delayed beyond the normal period due to a number of factors beyond the Department's control. This past autumn, the Department held two retreats to facilitate the production of a self-study with a coherent vision. The resulting document was made available to the Reviewers on 18 December 2024.

The Reviewers visited the University campus on 29 and 30 January 2025. The site visit was very well planned and supported by Interim VP Academic and Provost Bill Owen, Academic Operations and Quality Assurance Director John McNeill, Dean Kriston Rennie, and Administrative Coordinator Selina Ross. Over the two days, the Reviewers met with the Department faculty members, undergraduates and graduate students, the Department's student advisor, and its administrative assistant. These meetings were very engaging and productive, though the Reviewers found that the half-hour allotted to individual meetings with faculty went by far too quickly; an hour would have allowed a more in-depth discussion. They also sat down with chairs of joint majors and the head of the Northern British Columbia Archives and had tours of the campus, including the Library. Throughout the site visit, the

Reviewers were accompanied by Anthropology Department Chair Angèle Smith. Professor Smith proved knowledgeable and sensitive to areas that might need additional explanation, and was an indispensable asset.

Following the site visit, the Reviewers were given six weeks to fill in the report template. Throughout the process, they have been well informed of the University's strategic plan, review policies, and report procedures. The final Reviewers' report is submitted to the Provost, who then circulates it to the History Department; the Dean of the Faculty of Indigenous Studies, Social Sciences, and Humanities; and the Vice President, Research. The History Department prepares a response that includes an Action Plan. The Dean prepares a response that includes comments on this action plan, all of which are then discussed with the Provost, who then submits a final response. These responses are submitted to the Senate Committee on Academic Affairs, along with the Executive Summary, for further discussion and advice. At 12-, 24-, and 36-month intervals, the Provost's office checks the progress on the Action Plan. The results are reported to Senate.

## **II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

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### **Major Strengths of the Degree Program**

The Department of History boasts a dedicated group of faculty members able to offer exceptional mentorship to undergraduate and graduate students in a collegial environment buttressed by a strong network of institutional support staff. The rewards of this pedagogical focus are evident in the success of its graduates. The students with whom the Reviewers met on the site visit were intelligent, articulate, and engaged. They spoke very highly of the Department and are a tribute to their professors.

The Department has also fostered a warm and collegial environment for faculty. As the self-study makes clear, this unit has survived a very turbulent period with significant faculty turnover. Thanks to the dedication of existing faculty, and to forward-thinking investment by University administrators in recent years, the Department hired three new faculty members and created a more cohesive and optimistic atmosphere. This will help to ensure stability for students, staff, and faculty associated with the program going forward.

Finally, the Reviewers commend the research productivity of the tenured and tenure-track faculty members in this Department. Featuring distinct thematic concentrations in historical fields such as gender and sexuality, law, and colonialism, these professors have a vigorous and sustained scholarly record. All five faculty members have received prestigious research and publication awards. Their performance is at a level commensurate with History faculty working in the leading research universities in Canada.

### Significant Areas of Weakness or In Need of Further Development

The Reviewers found three areas of weakness, or in need of further development:

First, the Department of History ought to have a historian who specializes in the history of British Columbia and/or the North. Such a faculty member would give credence to the University's foundational claims that it exists *for* and *with* the people of northern B.C. Although current faculty can cover some of this area, only a specialist can give northern B.C. its proper due, and show in tangible terms that northern communities – and their histories – matter. The students we met spoke of this neglect.

Second, the Reviewers noted a common thread of dissatisfaction among sessional staff, adjuncts, and archival staff pertaining to insufficient communication between them and the Department of History. Although few wished to complain too openly, the gist of their concerns pertained to not being consulted and utilized as resources for faculty and students alike. All spoke of loving the work they did, or had done, but wished to be consulted and integrated more consistently, and to have their abilities recognized more concretely.

Third, the Reviewers were struck by two seemingly connected concerns: high rates of attrition in the first and second year, and the reported low levels of available internal funding for undergraduates. We suggest that through creative fundraising efforts, the Department and University at large could increase its appeal for undergraduate students by offering financial assistance as an incentive to continue with their studies.

### Comments on the Future Direction of the Degree Program(s)

As stated above, the future hiring of a specialist in the history of northern British Columbia would strengthen the Department's position in relation to the University's goals of serving and representing the needs and aspirations of northern communities. In the interim, before obtaining a cross-appointment for an East Asian historian, the Reviewers recommend that the Department make use of Dr. Xin Chen, and engage all adjuncts and sessional staff more directly. The Department could also take the temperature of its faculty members in an annual retreat to strengthen the voices of junior faculty in deciding future directions.

In relation to the degree programs more directly, the Department should avoid unnecessary degree requirements, for this could become cumbersome with only five tenure-stream faculty members. Most Canadian universities have breadth requirements (requiring graduates to have courses from different temporal, geographic, and thematic areas) instead of fixed course requirements. If UNBC's History Department adds breadth requirements on top of its current compulsory methods courses, its degree pathways may become unnecessarily complicated. This could result in a reduction of honours students and a decline in joint majors. Students doing the joint major told the Reviewers that they already find it challenging to get all their requirements.

Finally, the Department and the University at large could engage a development officer to help with fundraising to supplement financial assistance for undergraduate students. As the University enters its 35-year milestone, the Department needs to capitalize on the growing number of alumni as a potential source of support in fundraising efforts.

### III. SUMMARY OF THE REVIEWERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS	DESCRIPTION OF THE RECOMMENDATION
<b>One: Acquire professor to cover history of British Columbia</b>	The Department needs to complement its course offerings by acquiring a specialist in the history of B.C. and/or the North. This new position would reflect well on the Department's commitment to its student body, most of whom come from northern British Columbia, and substantiate the University's premise that "UNBC is a regional university with a focus on the economic and social needs of the North." (READY Roadmap, p.8)
<b>Two: Increase collaboration between the Department, Archivists, and Adjuncts.</b>	Explore new avenues to increase collaboration with non tenure-stream instructors, as well as the Northern British Columbia Archives staff. Strategies could include issuing invitations to sessional faculty to become adjunct and integrating existing adjunct faculty and Archives staff into Department communication and graduate student project planning.
<b>Three: Find alternative ways to encourage breadth in undergraduate program.</b>	Investigate whether adding more undergraduate degree program requirements is truly necessary "to create temporal, geographic, and thematic depth."
<b>Four: Increase Fundraising</b>	Financial Assistance for undergraduate students needs a boost and creative fundraising, perhaps through the help of generous and supportive alumni (per survey).

## **Department of History**

### **History (B.A. Program)**

### **History (M.A. Program)**

Faculty of Indigenous Studies, Social Sciences, and Humanities

**Chair: Dr. Dana Wessell Lightfoot**

**Dean: Dr. Kriston Rennie**

**Interim Provost and Vice President, Academic: Dr. Bill Owen**

**Date UNBC Received the External Review of Degree Programs Report: March 6,  
2025**

**Please Note: The Responses to the External Review of Degree Program(s)  
Report, Action Plan and the 36 Month Action Plan Progress Report are made  
publicly available on the Provost's website.**

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## **PART 1 – ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT’S RESPONSE TO THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF DEGREE PROGRAM(S) REPORT**

May 14, 2025

### **I. Overall Impression of the Summary of Findings and Recommendations from the External Review of Degree Program Report**

The Department would like to express its gratitude to the external reviewers for the care and time taken to develop this report. We agree with the strengths identified of our programs and see the overall report as positive. In terms of the recommendations, the Department has a mixed response. Some of the recommendations are outside the purview of the Department and fall under other units at UNBC, in particular Recommendation #4 related to fundraising. Others do not reflect departmental needs or take into account aspects of our program that are currently in development (Recommendation #1: Hiring a specialist in the history of B.C. or the North). Nevertheless, the Department has developed creative and relevant responses, and accompanying action plans, to address all four recommendations which are outlined below.

### **II. Correction of Factual Errors or Areas of Misunderstanding in the Report** No errors were found in the report.

## PART 2 - ACTION PLAN

What steps does the Academic Administrative Unit intend or propose to take in response to the recommendations from the *External Review of Degree Program(s) Report*?

UNBC Responses to the External Review of Degree Program(s) Report			
1	Recommendation	Acquire professor to cover history of British Columbia and/or the North	
	Action	The external reviewers recommended that department complement its course offerings by hiring a specialist in the history of B.C. and/or the North. We do not support this recommendation and do not believe it is reflective of departmental needs. Two of the faculty members in the department already include content relevant to the history of B.C. and/or the North in their courses and have plans to develop future courses specific to those areas. Both faculty members also are engaged in or planning relevant research projects related to the history of British Columbia. To expand local history opportunities for students which also reflect UNBC's READY plan in relation to experiential learning, the Department plans to develop a series of courses on Barkerville, Fort St. James, the North Pacific Cannery, and on history of ranching in the Americas.	
	Person(s) Responsible	Dana Wessell Lightfoot, Max Hamon, Barrie Blatchford, and Jacqueline Holler	
	Target Implementation Date	Summer or Fall 2026	
	Implementation Details	12 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	
2	Recommendation	Increase collaboration between the Department, Archivists, and Adjuncts	

	<b>Action</b>	This recommendation asks the department to explore new avenues to increase collaboration with non tenure-stream instructors, as well as the Northern British Columbia Archives staff. The department chair met with Dr. Xin Chen in May to discuss an adjunct appointment with the department and received a positive response. The chair also plans to explore this option for our other regular sessional instructor, Dr. Domingo Aviles. We will add the profiles of adjunct instructors to our departmental website. We will also invite all adjunct professors to departmental meetings. In terms of the Northern British Columbia Archives, we look forward to reinforcing existing ties and expanding their engagement in our courses. We will also invite the Archives' team to have a representative attend department meetings and plan to highlight student projects that have relied on the Northern British Columbia Archives on our departmental website.	
	<b>Person(s) Responsible</b>	Dana Wessell Lightfoot, chair	
	<b>Target Implementation Date</b>	Fall 2025	
	<b>Implementation Details</b>	12 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	
<b>3</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	Find Alternative ways to encourage breadth in undergraduate program	

	<b>Action</b>	The reviewers cautioned the department against adding further degree requirements to encourage breadth. To provide students with expanded breadth opportunities, the department is committed to establishing a series of experiential learning courses offered on a rotating basis from all faculty members. Noted above are ones related to local history and history of the Americas. We also plan to develop a collaboratively taught course on the history of the Iberian peninsula which reflects the expertise of three faculty members (Wessell Lightfoot, Holler, and Farhan). Secondly, as the department has had three new faculty members join since 2021, we are long overdue for a curriculum review to better reflect our current expertise and strengths. We will also explore potential changes to our Honours program in order to attract more students.	
	<b>Person(s) Responsible</b>	All members of the department	
	<b>Target Implementation Date</b>	Curriculum Review (Fall 2025); Experiential Learning Courses (Starting in Summer or Fall 2026); Honours Program (Fall 2025)	
	<b>Implementation Details</b>	12 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	
<b>4</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	Increase fundraising	
	<b>Action</b>	The reviewers noted that financial assistance for undergraduate students should be boosted through creative fundraising.	Access to sufficient funding for undergraduate and graduate students is an institution-wide issue at UNBC and one for which we have a dedicated office with the expertise to assist students in this area. The department remains committed to providing opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students to work with faculty as research assistants. We will continue to apply for large-scale research grants to make accessible funding available to undergraduate and graduate students in that vein. As this specific recommendation came out of concerns about retention of undergraduate students (again a university-wide issue), we would like to request a data pack from institutional research in three years to determine if the concerns raised by the external reviewers about retention in the History Department are related to pandemic conditions or other factors. We will also explore the development of a mentorship internship program for History students which would provide opportunities for senior students to act as peer educators for first-year students.
	<b>Person(s) Responsible</b>	Application for funding RA positions for students (entire department); Future request for data pack (Dana Wessell Lightfoot, chair)	Peer mentorship program (Dana Wessell Lightfoot)

	Target implementation date	Application for funding for RA positions (annually); Future request for data pack (Fall 2027)	Peer mentorship program (Winter 2026)
	Implementation Details	12 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	

## FOLLOW UP DATES

As per the *External Review of Degree Program(s) Procedures*, the Academic Administrative Units are responsible for submitting Action Plan Progress Reports to the Dean on the following dates:

- 12 month Action Plan Progress Report: \_\_31 May 2026\_\_
- 24 month Action Plan Progress Report: \_\_31 May 2027\_\_
- 36 month Action Plan Progress Report: \_\_31 May 2028\_\_

## PART 3 – DEAN’S AND PROVOST AND VICE PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC’S RESPONSES

### I. Summary of the Degree Program Review Process

Professors Darlene Abreu-Ferreira (University of Winnipeg), Jennine Hurl-Eamon (Trent University), and Angèle Smith (UNBC) conducted their on-site review of the History program on January 29-30, 2025. Their final report, submitted on March 6, 2025, identified several major program and departmental strengths including a collegial environment, a strong network of support staff, engaged students, a robust curriculum, and excellent research productivity. Areas of weakness were also identified, in addition to comments on the future direction of the degree program, which together have shaped the above action plan and my additional comments/recommendations below.

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### II. Dean’s Response to the Recommendations and Action Plan

May 26, 2025

In their written report, the external reviewers’ recommended that the History program:

1. Hire a full-time faculty member in the specialized area of Northern B.C. History;
2. Address ‘a common thread of dissatisfaction among sessional staff, adjuncts, and archival staff...’ by increasing collaboration and improving communications;
3. Avoid unnecessary degree requirements in meeting the desired goal of increasing breadth and depth in the History undergraduate program; and,
4. Increase fundraising efforts to address rates of attrition and improve recruitment;

The Program’s Action Plan addresses the above recommendations in a measured and thoughtful manner.

While I agree in principle that a teacher-scholar of Northern B.C. history ‘would help the Department fit more into UNBC’s strategic plan’ (**Action #1**), hiring another faculty member in the program does not align with the Faculty or Department’s current plans, disciplinary needs, or financial realities. Strategic hiring decisions within the program over the past three years have successfully staffed the department to a sufficient level for the current student numbers. As a result, the Department is now able to leverage its expertise to expand local history opportunities for students through new courses and experiential learning, as well as pursuing research projects into northern B.C. The proposed timeline for these objectives reflects an implementation date that builds on existing and ongoing development work in the program.

The reviewers' recommendation to increase collaboration with the Northern B.C. Archives (**Action #2**) speaks to the potential within the Department of History for expanding internal and external relationships. I agree that there are significant opportunities, which depend very much on creating sufficient time, energy, and capacity to realize the collective outcomes. Building on existing relationships within the university will certainly benefit students if more opportunities can be generated to accommodate the growing level of interest. The Department's alignment with this mission exists already through undergraduate courses that partner with several organizations outside the institution; such partnerships will also continue as part of the program's curriculum renewal, a strategy intent on optimizing student involvement, participation, and training.

Proposed curriculum revisions, which the program acknowledged as long overdue, will be undertaken to reflect the current and renewed faculty complement in the Department (**Action #3**). These steps will include expanding experiential learning opportunities for undergraduate students across several courses. A full review of the History undergraduate curriculum, aided by the impetus of this external review and its recommendations, as well as by leadership and support within the department, will ideally address the reviewers' concerns against imposing a rigid structure in the History undergraduate degree. I agree, in principle, with the caution against creating unnecessarily complicated breadth requirements and pathways, having every confidence in the program's ability to assess their curriculum wholesale to meet disciplinary objectives and robust (international) standards. The proposed implementation dates for these core activities follow a logical path of progression, starting as soon as Fall 2025.

The recommendation to increase fundraising was tied to a strategy for improving student retention. The possibility of generating new and more awards for History students through a concentrated development campaign might assist with this objective, which would be a collective responsibility initiated at the Faculty and institutional level, with support from the Chair and members of the program. As the reviewers mentioned, working together with the UNBC administration in creative ways could help strengthen financial opportunities for more students. Higher rates of grant success, as briefly noted, would also expand the opportunities for more graduate student and post-doc recruitment into the History Master's program.

And finally, the reviewers also noted opportunities for revenue generation through heightened marketing campaigns, which again requires sustained and centralized support; the program's very recent update to their website addresses (as a first critical step) the reviewers' suggestion for greater visibility and impact, thereby laying a strong foundation for driving interest to the program and what it offers. The suggestion for a peer mentorship internship scheme to develop support for first-year students is directly tied to the departmental initiative and responsibility for strengthening recruitment and retention, with a deliberate focus on student experience, training, and well-being. One final element to this plan (**Action #4**) includes a holistic approach to gathering and interpreting institutional data around student enrolment, which is being done on an ongoing basis as part of day-to-day operations, in addition to the proposal for taking a more long-range view over the next three years.

### III. Provost and Vice President, Academic's Response to the Recommendations and Action Plan 13 August 2025

Regular and comprehensive degree program reviews support the commitment of the university and its faculty and staff to the quality, accountability, sustainability, and continuous improvement of UNBC's degree programs and academic service units.

Thank you to the review committee, the department faculty, staff, and students, central administration, and the Faculty Dean for their participation in the program review for the Department of History.

I have carefully read the reviewers' report, the departmental response, and the decanal response. A meeting with the dean and chair on 13 August 2025 provided important additional context. I want to underscore the authority and responsibility of the dean and department for a large majority of the recommendations.

I broadly agree with the recommendations of the external review committee and how these recommendations have been incorporated into the departmental action plan. I also appreciate that the Department has already taken steps that align with the key recommendations. Following our conversation, I would emphasize my endorsement of action item #3 on the necessary need for a full curriculum review.

- **Curriculum review:** A curriculum review needs to ensure that the core curriculum is not based upon who the members of the department are, but rather on the necessary graduate attributes and learning outcomes relevant for History and the success of History graduands.

As is usually the case, the external review committee has made recommendations that may have some degree of resource implications. Whereas I broadly support suggestions to not only review but to develop new programming for example, recommendations and actions that necessitate acquiring new resources or reallocation of resources will take some time to achieve and must align with the strategic direction and goals of the department and faculty.

I look forward to seeing the department's work on the action plan and to hearing about the positive impact on the program.

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