

To: Tom Morgan  
From: Jacqueline deVries, Phil Adamo, Don Gustafson, Michael Lansing, and Bill Green (on leave) -- all full-time members of the History Department  
Date: October 20, 2006  
Re: Connections to the Mission of the College

*“No community can survive and no institution can function without constant reference to past experience. We are ruled by precedents fully as much as by laws, which is to say that we are ruled by the collective memory of the past.” – J. R. Strayer*

History is at the core of the liberal arts. Without knowledge of the past, we have no perspective on our own age. Without memory, we have no sense of who we are. A college without a History department is like a ship unmoored.

The members of our department have whole-heartedly embraced the Mission of the College as articulated in *Augsburg 2004* and other documents. We have made great efforts to embed Mission components in our courses and programming, and we believe that these efforts have produced a major that is rich, provocative and effective.

### **Based in the liberal arts ...**

History is one of the oldest disciplines in the current liberal arts canon. The professional study of history developed with the university itself; in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Leopold von Ranke of the University of Berlin initiated the seminar-style of teaching, focused on active and applied learning for the students. Our department builds on this tradition. For first and second-year students, we offer at least seven different LAF courses each year, including surveys of U.S. History, Western Civilization, and Non-Western Cultures (HIS 101, 102, 103, 104, and HIS 120, 121, 122). Each of these courses offer students opportunities to use primary sources, visit archives, and engage with the cities' cultural resources.

While building on tradition, our conception of the discipline is far from static. We are constantly invigorating our curriculum with new approaches and areas of study. Our courses encourage students to think comparatively across continents (e.g. HIS 150/350 Modern Latin America; HIS 352 Modern Germany; HIS 323 Modern China; HIS 436 South Asia); engage with a variety of approaches and methodologies (HIS 282 The History of Women; HIS 316 Environmental History); and to make interdisciplinary connections (HUM 120 Medieval Connections; HIS 349 Designed Environment; HIS 354 Modern Britain and Ireland.)

Our department takes seriously the quest to nurture future leaders for service. Our two required courses in the major – HIS 280 (The History Workshop) and HIS 480 (Seminar/Keystone) equip students with essential and transferable skills, such as writing, speaking, critical thinking, and researching. They introduce students to a range of career opportunities and applications for their history degrees. Even more importantly, these courses ask students to think deeply about the field of history – its goals and uses – and to articulate their own intellectual and personal commitments.

Ultimately, history seeks to understand what it means to be human. Stories of past lives and events instruct us and provide perspective for our current challenges. While keeping a healthy tension between the past and present, we seek relevance in all that we teach.

## **Shaped by the values and faith of the Christian church ...**

Members of our department take religion seriously, both as historical tradition and as a set of values that shape our students' lives. Several of our faculty members focus their research on the history of religion (Phil Adamo on medieval monks; Jacqueline deVries on gender and contemporary religious issues in Britain.) In addition, three of our members are engaged in writing histories of individual congregations (Michael Lansing of Mount Olive Lutheran in Minneapolis; Don Gustafson of First Lutheran in St. Peter; and Jacqueline deVries of Westminster Presbyterian in Minneapolis.) Nearly all of our members have participated in Lilly funded programs exploring vocation, and we became one of the first departments to offer a Keystone course. We agree that this focus on faith and learning – which, in our discipline manifests itself as the exploration of past beliefs and practices -- enriches the curriculum and provides students with a broad context within which to situate their own faith.

## **in the context of a vital metropolitan setting ...**

Our vital metropolitan setting serves as an invaluable laboratory for exploring history. The residue of the past is visible all around us. Connections with the area's historical past are obvious for courses on Twin City or Minnesota history, but History faculty have found creative ways to connect students with the community and help them "see" the influence of history on our region in courses as varied as Early Modern Europe and Modern Latin America.

From our LAF courses through our senior seminar, our courses help students engage with the area's social and cultural resources. The majority of our LAF courses contain either a Service Learning or Engaging Minneapolis component. Phil Adamo partners with Campus Kitchens in HIS 101 (Beginning of Western Culture), using the opportunity to help students understand the connections between human and material resources in the ancient world; Michael Lansing takes students in HIS 120 (America to 1815) to the Gardens of Eagen and West Bank Community Peace Garden to enrich class discussions of food, property, agriculture and social relations in colonial society; students in Jacqueline deVries's HIS 102 (Shaping of the Modern World) study the architecture of several downtown Minneapolis churches in order to understand the theological transformations of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation; and these are just a few examples. In our two required courses for the major – HIS 280 (The History Workshop) and HIS 480 (Seminar), students are introduced to dozens of libraries, archives, museums and other public history sites in the Twin Cities. Our connections with many area organizations also provide students with internships and career opportunities.

## **with an intentionally diverse campus community ...**

Our curriculum, teaching methods, and extra-curricular commitments all stem from a core commitment to understanding and appreciating diversity. Time itself is a category of diversity. As L. P. Hartley once quipped, "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there." Students in History courses explore the historical construction of differences, analyzing for example the development of racial categories, class relations, and gender and sexual identities. "I see the world differently now," is not an infrequent comment from students in History courses.

In our teaching methods, we are ever mindful of the College's commitment to both access and excellence. History faculty members accommodate a wide range of learning styles in our lectures, class discussions, visual and aural aids, walking tours and site visits. Several years ago

we made a commitment to serve the weekend college population and now offer the only History degree in the Twin Cities tailored specifically to working adults.

Our department also strives to translate what we do for wider audiences. Each March we partner with the Minnesota Historical Society to host a regional History Day competition, which brings hundreds of high school students to our campus. In the summer we collaborate with the AP Institute to offer two week-long workshops for teachers of Advanced Placement U.S. and European history. We see the study of history as essential to the development of a richly diverse and democratic society.