Executive Summary

The Department of History is well ahead of its peers in responding to pressures and changes resulting from declining enrolments and challenges to the value of the humanities. That achievement has drawn grant funding from the NEH and AHA, and given the department a prominent place in national discussions about the future of the discipline. The review team commends the department for its resilience and creativity in the face of sharp drops in faculty numbers and endorses the goals articulated in the department's excellent self-study. The existing career diversity initiatives, highly successful Masters in Heritage Preservation program, commitment and contribution to interdisciplinary activity and the university goals of understanding the complex challenges of cities and globalizing the university, and expanding online course offerings represent significant achievements that have justified further support. The department's focus on building out these activities rather than pursuing additional initiatives is also appropriate given that this breadth of activity has fully tapped the faculty, and asking them to take on more rather than growing what they have done would lead to burnout and lower morale. The urgent issues that the Dean and the Provost need to take up are replacing the African American historian who has recently retired, preferably with a cluster hire in this area, addressing the structural impediments to interdisciplinary collaboration, and attending to the research needs of the faculty by exploring possibilities for expanding access to research funding at the College and University levels.

Contributions to the Discipline

Despite a dramatic drop in the number of tenure-track faculty, the department continues to offer a rich and broad curriculum, and pursue a diverse research agenda. The strength of the current faculty is in urban history and southern history rather than the focus on World History that previously defined the department. That new orientation is appropriate for GSU given both the university's focus on the city and its location in Atlanta. Moreover, a focus on World History is not practical at the current size of the department; nor is the concentration as distinctive as when it was originally developed. At the same time, the department still includes a more diverse range of experts in non-Western history than found in many peer departments. That expertise greatly contributes to efforts to globalize the university and is valued by students. Thus retaining it should be a priority. More generally, any further attenuation of the faculty would be detrimental to the ability of the department to meet the needs of its students and further the mission of the
university, especially given the work historians are doing beyond the department in running centers and serving on, and often chairing, multiple university committees.

The one urgent need is for an African American historian to replace a recent retirement. It is inconceivable for a department located in downtown Atlanta with the student population of GSU to lack experts in this area. Both the importance of such faculty to the institution and the challenges of recruiting and retaining faculty of color strongly indicate that African American history should be the Next Gen cluster hire proposed in the departmental self-study. The presence of a community of colleagues and mentors is vital in building a diverse faculty, and would send a powerful message to students.

Looking ahead to sustaining and building on the department’s strengths, the review team recommends that the department and the dean explore joint appointments with Global Studies and Urban Studies. Historians would complement the current faculty in those programs, and provide connections that would foster interdisciplinary teaching and research. Such appointments would require the College develop carefully articulated guidelines on teaching and service responsibilities and tenure expectations and processes.

The other clear strength of the department is the Historic Preservation program. This model program has established ties to agencies and organizations throughout the city and state, and boasts a strong track record in placing its graduates. The focus of its work contributes to the department’s strength in urban history and the university’s focus on cities. Incorporating a public history track has expanded and enriched the department’s offerings, and provided graduate students in the Masters and PhD programs with access to courses that diversify their career options. Building further strengths in digital history will enhance this program. Likewise we recommend that the department and college pursue the heritage tourism curriculum in collaboration with the University of Pretoria in South Africa, for which key foundations, such as a memorandum of understanding, are already in place.

**Undergraduate Programs**

Overall, the curriculum is innovative, and has been responsive to change. The move to mid-level courses with topical and thematic focuses that are attractive to non-majors has contributed to attracting students to these courses in large numbers even as the number of majors has fallen. The pre-education track includes course offerings such as “Difficult Topics in History” that are invaluable to students looking toward K-12 settings. The online courses are extremely successful, with levels of student satisfaction rarely seen with online delivery. The department’s plan to develop a concentration in urban history would highlight this area of strength for both students and the university as a whole.

The review team’s meeting with undergraduate students reinforced the success of the department’s undergraduate teaching. Students were highly laudatory of the dedication of the faculty to undergraduate education. They describe their faculty as sensitive to the unique demands of working students and returning students. Professors are characterized as “flexible,”
“down to earth,” and attuned to the challenges facing students in today’s world. The active Phi Alpha Theta chapter indicates the commitment of students to history, and underscores the effective work of the department with its students. Some students expressed a desire for more offerings in African American history, Native American history, East Asian History, and more ethnic studies offerings generally. In part, these expectations appear linked to past identification of the department with World History, and the need for the department to better articulate its current strengths.

The department website is one obvious vehicle for communication with students; however, faculty expressed considerable frustration at the lack of resources available to maintain and enhance the department’s online presence. Given the low-level of administrative staff in the department, the review team urges the College to explore ways to provide the resources necessary to maintain the website, which is the primary public face of the department.

In evaluating the strength of the department it important to focus attention on overall student numbers rather than majors, given the fact that interdisciplinary departments and majors frequently draw students away from History. Yet, History’s contribution is crucial to those majors being interdisciplinary given the lack of historical perspective within the institutes that offer them. Developing those contributions further requires building stronger ties between the History department and the Global Studies Institute and the Urban Studies Institute.

There are clearly some structural impediments to such interdisciplinary activity. Of particular concern to the review team was the exclusion of the department of History (and the department of African American Studies) from units sponsoring the new Urban Studies major and graduate programs. That absence means that significant areas of strength at the university are omitted, or even being excluded, from those new initiatives and leaves the Urban Studies curriculum ill-fitted to serve the university’s population and community. Because the Urban Studies Institute is located in a different college from the history department, we urge the Provost to take urgent action to foster more inclusive and effective interdisciplinary collaboration in this key initiative. Structural obstacles also exist to building on another opportunity, the otherwise successful initiatives to support Pre-Law students. It is necessary to promote and market the success of history students in law school admittances. To do so requires bringing Political Science to the table for discussions on collaboration.

In addition, there are opportunities to highlight social justice and community focused dimensions of the existing history and historic preservation curriculums; these are not necessarily visible to students, who are increasingly looking to frame their education in those terms. This lack of awareness seemingly also extends to colleagues within the College. History faculty expressed some concerns about possible political reaction against pursuing this focus and this concern emphasizes the necessity for the College to play an active in coordinating initiatives around social justice.

Looking ahead, the review team encourages the department to reconceive programs like study abroad and internships in terms appropriate to GSU and its student population. It’s clear the
work and family commitments of students make the hours involved in traditional internships and semester abroad programs inaccessible. However, students speak highly, and very enthusiastically, of short-term study abroad opportunities in Japan, South Africa, China, and elsewhere as “life-changing,” and formative for careers and job market preparation. Faculty have done a remarkable job of delivering programs that have been transformative for students, but further funding and administrative support is necessary to sustain and expand existing spring break and Maymester offerings (with the heritage tourism collaboration with the University of Pretoria offering some exciting possibilities). In terms of internships, virtual internships in which some work and supervision is done remotely and online are options for providing the flexibility necessary for more students to participate. The department is well positioned to develop such internships given its current, creative initiatives in online teaching and its growing work in the area of digital humanities. The expansion of online course offerings proposed by the department is also a vital initiative in providing the flexibility that GSU students need.

Extending its career diversity initiative from graduate to undergraduate students, as the department is planning to do, will be an important contribution to the university’s new QEP: College to Career. As part of this initiative, the department should consider highlighting, in terms that students can directly transfer to resumes, how the skills developed in history courses serve to make them attractive to employers in many organizations. Collaboration with Career Services on this initiative would offer an opportunity to build ties with this unit. The resulting material could also be used in advising, to help to address faculty concerns that central advising is steering students away from humanities courses, and is unable to articulate the value of the humanities to first-generation college students who see non-vocational courses as a risk. In addition, expanding the undergraduate concentration in public and community history, as the department proposes, and demonstrating how it articulates to the MHP program, would also enhance the QEP. The heritage tourism curriculum adds a global dimension to this initiative, as well as offering potential for collaboration with other departments with relationships with South Africa. Bringing alumni to speak to history students about their careers and pathways would be welcomed by current students, and could be promoted through Career Services as a visible parallel to career fairs offered by other departments.

In maintaining and managing the quality of its curriculum, the department’s heavy reliance on visiting lecturers is not sustainable. The move toward replacing those visiting staff with permanent lecturers is a positive step for the department’s future. The existing permanent lecturers are making extensive and critical contributions to the curriculum and to innovations being pursued by the department such as online teaching. Given that departmental culture, additional permanent lecturers will have an impact beyond simply providing stability and consistency to teaching.

**Graduate Programs**

The department’s graduate program has an orientation that is well-aligned with the university setting, population, and goals, and with current professional expectations, as well as serving the
higher goal of social mobility. The MA program also provides excellent preparation for some students who then transfer to major Ph.D. programs in history, such as Johns Hopkins and Boston College.

It is necessary to be realistic about the academic job market in history. Even major R-1 institutions have been placing Ph.Ds in two-year institutions and smaller liberal arts. It is unrealistic to expect that most institutions will be able to place students at major R-1 institutions. Moreover, the centrality of these institutions to tertiary education is growing. Placing students in teaching focused positions requires instruction in pedagogy beyond experience as teaching assistants and in teaching classes. The department recognizes this need and already offers pedagogical training in its graduate curriculum, and is revising this curriculum in light of its NEH/AHA alternative careers work. Further developing and supporting this dimension will produce graduates who are competitive for the teaching-oriented positions that are a growing part of the careers available to History PhDs. The presence of two-year institutions within GSU as a result of the absorption of Perimeter College offers further opportunities to incorporate experience in this setting in the training of graduate students.

At the same time, the college should consider how to provide more research funding, as well as release from teaching, for graduate students. The current stipend is set a level that produces a significant amount of unmet financial need, and brings with it significant teaching obligations. There is also virtually no funding available for graduate student research. This situation not only seriously affects the amount and quality of research that Ph.D.students can accomplish. Graduate students have had considerable success obtaining funds from outside the university; that should be taken as a justification for better internal funding not a reason not to provide support.

At the same time, some graduate students expressed a desire for more support in developing professional skills in areas such as writing grants, presenting at conferences, and scholarly publication. The graduate student organization has done a remarkable job of addressing these needs itself, and in doing so has offered significant leadership experience to many students and helped create a strong sense of community in the graduate program. Nonetheless, there seems to be scope for the department itself to take on some of this professional training.

The proposed online MA is a key initiative for reversing declining Masters enrolments. The flexibility of online delivery is of central importance to the teachers who are a key constituency for the department and will help prevent them from being diverted to competing programs. The department’s great success in developing and teaching undergraduate online offerings means that it already possesses the technological and pedagogical knowledge and experience to successfully offer online graduate education. It is crucial that resources are provided to support such an initiative. What the department has been able to achieve in its undergraduate online offerings without resources is quite remarkable, and eloquently testifies to the commitment of Jeff Young in particular. It is not realistic to expect a further expansion of online instruction without some commitment of resources by the College.
Looking ahead, there are also opportunities to pursue further cross-pollination of the MPH, MA and PhD programs, and to build interdisciplinary ties based on the students attracted to the MPH from across the university. The MPH’s public history and material culture classes are already a popular option within the MA and PhD; more digital history offerings could occupy a similar place in the curriculum. More generally, more collaboration between the faculty coordinating the MA and PhD and the director of the MPH is necessary, and should be part of the brief for the new director currently being hired. Closer cooperation might also be beneficial as the department moves to implement the fruits of its career diversity work and expand internships and build career diversity into the core graduate course.

**Research Culture**

Most faculty members have a well-articulated and ambitious research agenda that is frustrated by lack of institutional support. In fact, given the lack of a sabbatical program, the research activity is particularly impressive. The initiative launched after the self-study to provide faculty with release from teaching as an alternative to a sabbatical is precisely the kind of program the review team would have recommended and has the potential to address the lack of support, the pessimism of faculty in respect to research opportunities, and the obstacles to advancement faced by associate professors. One member of the department has already successfully applied for this release, and the research record and activity of history faculty should make others competitive for this support. Faculty expressed some concern about how heavy service obligations might mitigate the impact of this new program. The review team urges the College and department to offer some service flexibility to recipients of this support to ensure it has the intended beneficial impact on faculty productivity and morale.

Especially given the lack of sabbaticals, the limited summer funding compounds the problems of inadequate research opportunities and support. For scholars in the humanities, time is the crucial requirement for research productivity. But time is not the only element; adequate financial support is also essential. Because faculty are on a 10-month salary (and salary levels are only just adequate), most faculty need to teach in the summer, compounding the problem of time for research. The review team urges the College to explore ways of increasing the level of summer funding available to the department.

**Summary and Recommendations**

Overall, the review team was impressed with the department self-study and the goals it presents. Those goals align strongly with what we perceive to be the keys to the department’s future; as such they indicate a department - and particularly a chair and associate chair -- well attuned to the challenges faced by the discipline of history and the humanities in general, realistic about the resources available within GSU, and creative in imagining future directions. We endorse those goals; the recommendations below represent what we see as priorities and supplementary actions.
Recommendations:

A. Replace the African American historian who has recently retired, preferably with a Next Gen cluster hire
B. Incorporate the Department of History (and African American Studies) into the undergraduate and graduate curriculums and programs being developed by the Urban Studies Institute
C. Explore joint appointments in history and global studies and urban studies to foster interdisciplinary teaching and research
D. Highlight the social justice and community focused dimensions of the existing history and historic preservation curriculums, and pursue interdisciplinary collaborations around those focuses
E. Reimagine the undergraduate internship and study abroad programs around the work commitments and financial situations of GSU students, focusing on options such as virtual internships and spring break and Maymester study abroad.
F. Develop a heritage tourism curriculum with the University of Pretoria that aligns with the College to Career QEP and the university focus on cities and globalization
G. Develop graduate training in pedagogy that takes advantage of the presence of Perimeter College within GSU
H. Further integrate administration of the MPH and the MA and PhD programs
I. Explore ways to facilitate research opportunities for graduate students
J. Support faculty applications for the new workload reduction program to support research