The Department of History has pursued a broad range of activities to encourage diversity in its faculty and student populations, in its relationships with external communities, and in its curriculum and research. Over the last dozen years or so, its efforts have become increasingly systematic as reflected in strategic and other planning efforts.

Since the 1960s, the study of history in the U.S. has changed dramatically so that people who had been largely invisible in historical accounts—e.g., people of color, workers, the poor, women and children—received significantly more attention. UW faculty in History responded by focusing substantially more on groups and issues that had earlier been submerged. Now, virtually every class that we offer addresses in some fashion at least one of the following topics: race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity, culture, and indigenous status. At the undergraduate level, moreover, History has long required each major to take at least one course in “non-western” history, so that students cannot graduate without looking beyond Europe and the United States in their coursework. Indeed, since 1977 the Department has awarded Maurice D. and Lois M. Schwartz Scholarships for students whose coursework focuses particularly on Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The Department, moreover, has traditionally been particularly strong in its coverage of Asia, due to the University’s location on the Pacific Rim and its ability to tap certain types of federal funding during the Cold War.

Momentum for a more concerted focus on diversity arose in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A string of new faculty appointments brought in people who wanted to heighten attention to diversifying the faculty, curriculum, and student population. Our most effective strategy was to focus on curriculum. By committing ourselves to teaching a much larger number of courses concerned about women’s history, African American history, Native American history, Asian American history, labor history, and African history, and focusing greater attention on matters of gender, race, ethnicity, nationalism, class, and colonialism more generally, the Department served notice that it wanted to research and teach about an even wider variety of peoples than before. The next step was to ensure that many of our new faculty appointments served those areas of study. The
candidate pools generated in these searches proved more diverse, and we were able to make a greater number of appointments of underrepresented minorities. The College and University assisted in this effort by creating new positions (e.g. in African American history and the history of the Philippines) where none had existed before. Today, the Department is substantially different—in its makeup and in its curricular focus—than it was ten or twenty years ago. (See Appendix One.)

Although a lot has changed, and although state resources are particularly constrained just now, History has not grown complacent in its diversity activities. This past year, the Department hired a Latina to fill a position in the history of Latin America. History faculty have long been involved with programs (such as the Ford Foundation initiative) to transform the curriculum by paying greater attention to race and ethnicity. Currently, four faculty members in U.S. history—with assistance from the College’s Curriculum Transformation Project—are working to develop new lower-division courses in American history that will focus much more centrally on matters of race. Others are developing new courses on comparative colonialism, comparative labor, and comparative gender in history. In short, we aim to develop more and more courses that encourage comparison and contrast between different parts of the globe. In terms of research, three faculty members are part of a quite successful interdisciplinary research group on The Modern Girl Around the World. And in terms of training educators, two professors in Chinese history recently received $2 million to enrich the teaching about Asia in the Undergraduate Asian Studies Initiative. The Department of History is truly committed to covering as much of the world as possible, and ensures that students at both the graduate and undergraduate levels do not focus too narrowly on just one region or country.

While much of what History has done has not been that unusual around the campus, it is possible that the nature of our relationships with external communities has been somewhat distinctive. Some faculty members have been extraordinarily active in community groups such as Seattle’s Central District Forum, for instance, while our African historian regularly speaks in secondary-school classrooms about disease in Africa. Working through the UW Office of Educational Partnerships and Learning Technologies, our Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest has joined with Indian tribes and others around the state to develop new learning materials and cultural facilities. At the graduate level, the Department is raising funds to support graduate students in African American and Native American history—two areas in which the Department has faculty strength. In terms of fund raising more broadly, we have established a good record of attracting support in areas that heighten attention to diversity. Besides our Schwartz Scholarships for “non-western” history, we have cultivated private support for the York-Mason Award, an annual paper prize for undergraduate and graduate students conducting research on African Americans in the North American West; the Aldon Duane Bell Endowed Fellowship in Women’s History for graduate students; and the Bryan Phillips Fund to support disabled students who are history majors. Our Visiting Committee is one of our key connections to the community. We recently appointed a Native American to it, and added another woman member as well.
The Department of History has had extraordinary success reaching out to the elderly by attracting and cultivating relationships with Access Students. We have one of the most active Access programs on campus, and we make a point of courting and assisting students in it. We provide social occasions for Access Students (an annual reception and a book group) and we solicit donations from them as well. Several Access Students have gone on to join our Visiting Committee.

In seeking greater diversity, the Department of History has recognized that it would increase its success through partnerships. For that reason, it has reached out regularly to form relationships with other units on campus. The Department regularly appoints 15-20 adjunct members of the faculty. Many of these members come from units—such as American Ethnic Studies, American Indian Studies, and Women’s Studies—that enable History to diversify its faculty and curriculum. Our partnerships with the Comparative History of Ideas and Romance Languages increase our students’ chances to study abroad. And our partnership with Political Science in hosting the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies ensures regular attention to matters of class, among other things. Members of the History faculty frequently have assumed leading roles in Jackson School programs that focus attention on far-flung parts of the world—such as Southeast Asia, Africa, China, Japan, Korea, South Asia, Russia, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and Western Europe. Currently, for instance, Professor Carol Thomas directs the Jackson School’s European Studies program, and is also working to develop a program in Hellenic Studies. Such programs bring a rich array of visiting scholars to campus, and ensure that students and faculty learn about diverse areas of the world.

Appendix One

The demographic composition of the faculty is but one measure of diversity, and we don’t want to make too much of it. But it serves as one indication of how History has changed over the last dozen years or so. In 1990, History had 34 tenure-track faculty members with 100% appointments in History. History had at least six additional tenure-track faculty members with joint appointments in the Jackson School. By 2002-2003, History had 38 tenure-track faculty members. These faculty members were from diverse backgrounds including: Hispanic, African American, and Asian American. .”

Appendix Two

Attached please find an explanation of the Department of History’s approach to recruiting diversity among graduate students.
For nearly a decade now, the History Department has been reshaping itself in ways that make it more attractive to students from a diversity of backgrounds. We have added specialists in African history, American slavery, African-American intellectual history, Asian-American history, along with leading scholars of the African-American experience in the 20th century West, and the history of the Philippines. This year, we are hiring professors of Latin American and Middle Eastern history. Thanks to these hires, we have been able to develop new graduate fields of study in African-American History, Asian-American History, The Indigenous Peoples of North America, the History of the Philippines, Comparative Gender, and Comparative Colonialisms. We believe that these additions to our faculty and curriculum make our department one of the most exciting places in the United States to explore questions of diversity in the human past. In addition, we are now in our fifth year of giving applicants the option of submitting a personal statement as part of their application materials. The number of students submitting such statements increases every year, which helps us to identify students from historically underrepresented groups, particularly as fewer and fewer students seem to be identifying their ethnicity on the application forms.

As part of our effort to attract minority and non-traditional students, we are in the process of upgrading our website to include a greater emphasis on diversity. This includes making it easier for students to access information about our diverse faculty and fields, links to diversity-support programs and offices, and information about diversity-related fellowships and awards. We are also planning to implement changes in the way that graduate fields are formulated and combined, thereby making it easier for students to develop non-traditional fields of study and creative combinations of fields that better suit their needs and interests. Finally, we are developing a new award for the best graduate and undergraduate papers on the history of African-Americans in the American West. Coming with a cash prize of $1,000, we hope to begin offering the award this coming academic year.

Our general departmental policy is to do our utmost to ensure that all students receiving financial recruitment offers for their first year of study receive essentially comparable support for three additional years provided, of course, that they show evidence of satisfactory academic progress. We regularly commit departmental resources to students whom we recruit (in the form of teaching assistantships or departmental fellowships) during their second and subsequent years in the program. Because we do not offer teaching assistantships to incoming M.A. students, and because most of our departmental fellowships are tied to specific fields at the donors’ requests, awards like the GOP give us a much needed flexibility in responding to opportunities to recruit students from underrepresented groups. In keeping with the aforementioned policy, we continue to fund GOP recipients for as long as they are in the program and proceeding satisfactorily towards their degree.

In the process of recruiting, we strive to demonstrate the sincerity of our interest through a series of personal contacts with our applicants. The Graduate Program Coordinator telephones the candidates to express broad departmental interest; in addition, we make sure that pertinent specialists within the Department are also in phone contact. We have
also identified faculty with a special interest in recruitment of underrepresented students and enlist them in our recruitment efforts. Moreover, in instances in which we sense that a campus visit might make a difference in recruiting a candidate, we regularly employ departmental funds as well as monies from the Graduate School GSFEI funds to make such visits possible. We include our current graduate students in the recruitment process by routinely facilitating communication between recruits and graduate students already in the program. They host visiting recruits, provide them with transportation and housing, and organize social opportunities for them to meet with their peers.

For students who accept our offer of admission, we work actively to enfold them into the life of the Department in ways that we hope will increase the likelihood of their persevering in the program and shortening their time to degree. Our Graduate Liaison Committee (elected by our graduate student body) instituted a peer mentoring program in which each incoming student is paired with a volunteer mentor from among our returning graduate students. Mentors not only make contact with incoming students before they move to Seattle, but also meet with them throughout the year to provide practical advice and encouragement. Moreover, the Graduate Liaison Committee organizes student workshops and social events (including a welcoming reception for new and returning graduate students and faculty) and thereby contributes positively to the Department’s inclusive atmosphere.