

Tennessee State University
Evaluation of History Curriculum
and Comparison with Other Colleges and Universities

Scope of Comparison.

The curriculum for History majors at Tennessee State University consists of the following components:

- GENERAL EDUCATION CORE (required of all TSU undergraduates)
- TOTAL CREDIT HOURS (total hours and total upper-division hours required of all TSU undergraduates)
- FOREIGN LANGUAGE (required of all BA students at TSU)
- ELEMENTARY FOUNDATIONAL COURSES (all courses are also options in the General Education Core)
- GENERAL UPPER-DIVISION HISTORY COURSES
- HISTORY WORKSHOP
- SENIOR PROJECT

The History Department has direct control over all requirements except the General Education Core and the Total Credit Hours. This evaluation will look at each department-controlled component separately.

Forty History programs will provide comparative perspective on TSU's program. Most of the schools chosen were PhD-granting schools. Choosing PhD-granting schools allows ready access to data for both undergraduate and graduate programs. Since we hope eventually to develop a graduate program in History, schools with graduate programs may well become our peers at some later date. Furthermore, schools with strong PhD programs might be assumed to provide good preparation for the PhD to their own undergraduates and to assume comparable preparation from applicants to the PhD program. The disadvantage of comparing TSU's History program to those of schools with PhD programs (particularly with highly selective elite universities) is that our students are likely to enter college less well prepared and need a different mix of courses early on in their programs. Programs were selected in the following categories:

- TOP 10 PHD PROGRAMS IN HISTORY: The rationale for including these programs is that they are programs that serve for models for other programs both at the undergraduate and graduate level. They also represent programs that undergraduates wishing to continue their education in History are likely to aspire to.
- PHD-GRANTING SCHOOLS IN TENNESSEE AND BORDERING STATES: These schools are among those our students are most likely to consider for post-graduate study. They also represent the best-staffed and best-funded schools in the region.
- PHD-GRANTING HBCUS: These two schools are likely candidates for TSU's student body. They might also be considered valid models for development of programs at TSU.
- 4-YEAR TBR SCHOOLS: These schools could be considered our current peers in just about every way possible. The TBR common core curriculum means that students coming into the major will have similar background. TBR schools will have similar funding and other constraints as schools in the same state-run system. We are competing for the same body of students from Tennessee high schools.

Specific Program Components

Foreign Language Requirement: TSU's History program is a BA program (Communications, Foreign Languages, and English are the only other B.A. programs at TSU).

This means that students must complete through the end of the second year of a foreign language in addition to the General Education Core requirements common to both B.S. and B.A. degrees. In a recent Academic Audit the reviewers suggested that we consider replacing our B.A. program with a Bachelor of Science program, thus removing the foreign language requirement. Of the forty schools surveyed, 21 require a foreign language (though not always the equivalent of two years of study and one allows a substitution of computer science), two (both TBR schools) give students the option of either a BA (language required) or a BS (no language required but extra science or math requirements). Of the others, several encourage a language and for several the web sites did not make clear whether there was a language requirement. Of the PhD programs, twenty-four require a foreign language and allow no substitution, one requires no foreign language, and the remaining thirteen require at least one foreign language but allow substitutions or waivers depending on the field of study. This suggests that most History departments consider knowledge of a foreign language an important skill for historians at graduate level and less often at the undergraduate level. Several doctoral programs (and a few undergraduate programs) allow students to substitute other skills for a foreign language (usually quantitative skills but occasionally field-work types of skills, such as oral history or archaeological skills). It is notable that no four-year TBR school, other than TSU, allows History majors to skip the foreign language requirement without taking more math or science courses. *Recommendation:* TSU retain its BA in History (with foreign language requirement) but consider developing a BS track in which students substitute other skills for language skills.

Elementary Foundational Courses: TSU History majors must take two History survey sequences (American History 1-2 and World History 1-2) as well as World Regional Geography 1-2. Most programs surveyed required some introductory survey course in History. Many also required or encouraged basic courses outside of History, but a complete listing is difficult without analysis of General Education Core requirements at the schools in question.

Recommendation: Because these courses provide a good foundation for students coming from diverse backgrounds and do not add to the total number of hours needed for the degree, these courses should be retained in the curriculum.

General Upper-Division History Courses: TSU requires History majors to take twenty-four upper-division credits, at least six in U.S. History and six in non-U.S. History. The total number of credits required is similar to the requirements in other History programs. Other programs also have geographical or cultural distribution requirements. Many mirror TSU's division of U.S. and non-U.S. but some make further subdivisions of the non-U.S. courses, such as European and non-Western or even divisions into specific continents or cultural areas outside of Europe (such as East Asia or Africa). Some programs group Latin American History and U.S. History together as the Americas. Howard University, in recognition of its role as an HBCU, has a specific African History requirement. Other schools distinguish between western (U.S. and Europe) and non-Western cultures. A few programs also have students choose among thematic divisions (technology, gender, etc.). Several programs also require a chronological distribution requirement to make sure that students study both modern and pre-modern History. (The dividing line could be 1500 or 1700 or 1800 or 1865, depending on the program.)

Recommendation: TSU should retain some distribution but should consider the rationale for its current distribution requirements and whether it makes sense to modify them at all.

History Workshop: Several schools require some sort of methods or historiography course (sometimes more than one) of their majors but quite a few do not. The consensus of faculty at TSU seems to be that History Workshop provides valuable skills to students but that

other required courses need to reinforce those skills. *Recommendation:* Keep History Workshop but work on encouraging faculty to build on its skills in other upper-division courses.

Senior Project: Almost all programs had some sort of capstone course or seminar. A handful gave students a choice between a traditional senior thesis and a more experiential type of paper. For a program the size of TSU's, however, multiple senior capstone courses would be impracticable. *Recommendation:* Keep a capstone course but consider other capstone options in the event that the program grows.

Other major elements: Several programs had components that TSU lacks. The most notable is the requirement of seminars (and often proseminars) for History majors. Most TSU courses are described in the catalog as lecture courses (either explicitly or by implication). One program had an on-line portfolio (University of Missouri at Kansas City) that allowed students to upload cleaned-up versions of their papers to an electronic file; students were required to include certain types of work (a book review, the senior project) but could add other papers as well. *Recommendations:* TSU should consider adding at least one seminar to our current course requirements. We have considered putting together a portfolio before; University of Missouri-Kansas City could be a model for us if we decide to move forward with that idea.