

Perspectives

The IU History Department Newsletter, 1999

A Word from the Chair: *Teaching*

Recently the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching issued a report critical of undergraduate education at large research universities. The report condemned these institutions for boasting of the research accomplishments of their world renowned faculty while failing to put these very same people into the classrooms. The report claimed that thousands of students managed to graduate without ever seeing these "world-famous professors or tasting genuine research" and claimed that at some institutions baccalaureate students were merely second class citizens.

Faced annually with the challenge of teaching 8,000 undergraduate students, the department of history at Indiana University, Bloomington has addressed these issues for decades, deeming some practices worthy of continuation and searching for new approaches as well. Departmental tradition has for a very long time encouraged faculty of all ranks to teach undergraduates at various course levels from the large freshman surveys to intensive writing seminars for our senior majors that are limited to enrollments of twenty. During to fall of 1999 Phyllis Martin, a distinguished Halls professor, will teach the introductory survey entitled, "The World in the 20th Century". And outstanding research scholars like Ann Carmichael and Nick Cullather will offer some of the most popular courses on the Bloomington campus. Carmichael's "The Black Death" and Cullather's "The Vietnam War" will enroll several hundred students each. During the past year John Efron's course on the Holocaust attracted over 300 students. Michael McGerr won a distinguished teaching award in 1998, and this year David Pace was one of only four individuals selected nationally for a Pew Fellowship, an award that supports the advancement of undergraduate teaching.

During the past decade the department has made a special effort to create Topics Courses and more undergraduate seminars that foster writing and discussion. Indeed, History has developed more Topics Courses, classes that allow students to examine a special problem like Professor William Cohen's "History of Today's Crises", than any other department in the College of Arts and Sciences. These courses are taken mostly by lower level undergraduates. Honors students can now take a highly successful seminar on historical problems directed by Professor Lynn Struve. During the semester students get a chance to explore the various ways in which departmental faculty pursue history. They look at various methodologies like statistical research, the use of diaries, oral histories, and cultural analysis. Lower level seminars allow sophomores to examine topics like "Modern Revolutions" (taught by Professor James Riley) or "The U.S. Home Front During World War II" (taught by Professor James H. Madison). Juniors and seniors get a chance to research and write papers in upper division seminars on topics such as "World War I" (taught by Professor James Diehl) and "Hellenistic Greece" (taught by Professor Nancy Demand).

Extensive efforts are also being made to improve faculty and student communications. Under the direction of Professor John Hanson, director of undergraduate studies, the department has launched the History Course Web Page Initiative. By posting as many History course syllabi and teaching materials on the web as possible, the department intends to assist faculty and students in adopting new technologies and disseminating information vital to the conduct of our classes. As part of this program, the department has funded the position of Web Page Consultant which will be filled by graduate student, Fran Flavin, who holds an undergraduate degree in Computer Science. Flavin will be joined in his work by Jason Stahl, an undergraduate Honors intern. Both will work under Hanson's supervision to place as many of our course materials as we can on the web during 1999-2000 and link these sites to the History Department home page: www.indiana.edu/~histweb.

The Carnegie report eventually recommended the creation of an "Academic Bill of Rights" which would guarantee students the opportunity to "work with talented senior researchers". The study also advocated more "inquiry based learning" or the employment of research projects rather than lecturing as a tool for undergraduate learning. By expanding our offering in Topics Courses and seminars, Indiana's history department has anticipated some of this reform. It has also attempted to join classroom instruction more effectively to advances in technology. Our goal is to combine the best of our traditional methods of instruction with the most innovative concepts we can find, and grant our students the "rights" they deserve.