

History Department Vision:  
Commentary on Departmental Goals Listed in the Catalog  
Respectfully submitted by John Sagers, Chair

**In successfully completing a major/minor in history, a student will possess:**

- A sensitivity to the values and attitudes of other times and places.
  - With the rapid expansion of travel and communications technology, people today are finding that the global community impacts their lives to an unprecedented degree. Understanding the history and values of other cultures is therefore crucial to many careers and responsible citizenship. The department currently offers courses, including Jan Term travel opportunities, covering a significant part of the world, but additional faculty with expertise in Africa, the Middle East, and/or the Indian subcontinent would be welcomed.
- An appreciation of basic continuities in human affairs.
  - In spite of the rhetoric claiming ‘revolutionary’ breakthroughs in many fields, the study of history suggests that change in human endeavors is most often gradual and incremental.
- The ability to observe and analyze significant change over time.
  - Ideas that many as timeless may have undergone significant evolution in previous eras. Current courses organize historical texts to document these changes, but there is room for growth in experiential learning activities such as the Evergreen Aviation Museum internships that give students the opportunity to analyze original sources to construct their own historical narratives.
- An awareness of multiple causation.
  - In an age of quick fixes and easy answers, it is important for students to recognize the complicated and multifaceted nature of the human experience. History courses encourage students to weigh political, economic, social, intellectual, cultural, and other factors and to integrate various perspectives into coherent explanations. With the recent hire of a historian specializing in the American West and the environment, we look forward to better understanding how the interaction between human beings and the natural world has influenced history.

- The recognition that history is an ongoing and incomplete search for truth.
  - Critical thinking is among the most important skills that students develop at a liberal arts college, so we must nurture the ability to distinguish theses supported by evidence from those based on conjecture. With the information explosion associated with the internet, students must take particular care in evaluating their sources.
- An understanding of the relativist character of the discipline.
  - Debunking myth is a distinguished tradition in historical studies. While there may be some timeless truths, they are certainly not as numerous as political and religious elites would have people believe. Fostering a healthy skepticism and an appreciation of diverse viewpoints among students is a central goal of history courses.
- The skills necessary to research and write well.
  - Most courses in the department require students to analyze source material, formulate theses, and argue them persuasively. In the Historical Methods and Senior Seminar courses, students are especially encouraged to take on original research projects. The Thomas Branigar award helps to fund student travel to historical archives and the Phi Alpha Theta history honor society conferences allow students to present their ideas at a professional conference. Several faculty members have also worked with students through the college's summer collaborative research program. Expanding opportunities for original research and professional presentations to include more students should be a priority.

In spite of budget and personnel constraints, the history department is generally meeting its goals. With the addition of a new full time faculty member in 2007, we plan to considerably expand course offerings in US and environmental history. We would also like to explore ways to better use information technology in class, for student research, and in our scholarly work if adequate funding and technical support becomes available.