I. History Discipline Mission Statement

The History discipline supports and fulfills the Mission of St. Norbert College in virtually all of the Mission’s goals:

History has always been integral to the concept of the liberal arts. Through the study of history, we understand the breadth and diversity of human existence, analyze and appreciate the effects of change and continuity over time in human society, and compare and contrast economies, political systems, cultures, etc. from around the world. Thus we come to understand ourselves better by gaining a deeper awareness of people in other times and places. The study of history and the historical method also help develop the intellectual skills so long valued in the liberal arts tradition.

Regarding those intellectual skills, history students “develop skills in critical and analytical thought, quantification, synthesis, problem-solving, and communication.” More specifically, history students become especially adept at assessing evidence and drawing conclusions (notably, from primary sources), comparing and contrasting, analyzing and explaining continuity and change over time, and writing effectively.

Regarding values, the study of history encourages students to “identify, test and strengthen their moral convictions, act with personal integrity, develop meaningful personal goals, and build relationships based on mutual respect,” and it does so largely by demonstrating how people everywhere at all times have done, or not done, these things and what the consequences have been for themselves and their larger societies. To study history is to examine and reflect upon what individuals can and cannot do, and the human response to circumstances and choices. Thus history is “spiritually and personally challenging.”

The History discipline contributes to the Catholic and Norbertine components of the mission by introducing students to the history of Catholicism. Moreover, because of the unique geographic breadth of the History faculty, students learn not only the origins and development of Catholicism in the Middle East and Europe, but also its spread to Africa, Asia and North America, and its pervasive influence in Latin America. Additionally, we “advance the Catholic intellectual tradition” by sharing in its “search for truth and wisdom.”

The SNC mission statement refers often to the College’s global mission in its general statements and core values. The mission statement requires students to develop
intellectual skills and “apply these as responsible citizens of a diverse, interdependent, changing world.” To study change is to study history, and the history offered at SNC is more geographically diverse than that offered at most other small colleges (including all of our peer and aspirant institutions). Hence our students acquire knowledge of the world that allows them to act as responsible citizens. SNC also “embraces a diversity of persons, perspectives and cultures as components to our collegial community of learning,” strives “to build an international learning community rooted in Christian ideals where persons of all faiths and beliefs are valued contributing partners,” and “extends the Norbertine tradition through learning, prayer and service in response to the particular needs of people throughout the world.” Again, students of history acquire the knowledge, intellectual skills, and attitudes that facilitate the fulfillment of these aspects of the College mission.

Finally, in accordance with the mission statement, “we aspire to *excellence* in teaching, learning, scholarship, creative expression and professionalism.”

**II. History Discipline Vision Statement**

In five years the History discipline will be without its longtime U.S. historian, Dr. Larry McAndrews, whose last semester of teaching will be fall 2013. We intend to hire his replacement in spring 2014. While the future shape of the General Education program may have implications for U.S. history, we nonetheless assume we will be hiring a U.S. historian with a secondary field in modern European history. We will seek no particular U.S. specialization, but rather the best person available.

Within five years, it is our intention to begin offering annually a course in historiography and methods. Our students need a formal, comprehensive introduction to the subject (assessment data suggests that analysis of primary sources is a particular problem). Most of our peer and aspirant institutions offer a historiography and methods course, and in 2006 the CEPC recommended that we institute such a course (which we have not yet done because of the uncertainties surrounding General Education and the likelihood that our offerings in the program will change).

Also within five years, Dr. Kramer seeks to offer a new course on the history of the Ottoman Empire, which is an important need for students concentrating on the modern Middle East.

We fully anticipate that the History faculty will continue to contribute courses to a variety of SNC majors and minors (e.g., International Studies, Religious Studies, American Studies, Classical Studies, Japanese Studies, Peace and Justice, Women and Gender Studies), as well as to the reconfigured General Education program. Moreover, faculty will continue to provide important commentary and analysis to local, regional and national media on events in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.
The History faculty seeks to become more skilled at using new technologies to enhance our pedagogy (e.g., “Moodle,” computer-accessed historic maps and documents on “smart boards,” etc.). To this end, we envision a closer relationship with the technology support staff on campus in the years ahead.

Additionally, in order to understand better our strengths and weaknesses and where we might improve as a discipline, we envision inviting an outside reviewer from a liberal arts college with a national reputation (e.g., Carleton, St. Olaf, Grinnell).

Finally, the History discipline takes considerable pride in our almost unique combination of geographic areas (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and the United States), with courses taught by specialists trained at the top research universities in their fields. We intend to continue such coverage in the years ahead.

III. History Discipline Goals and Action Steps

The History discipline’s goals and action steps are drawn from our teaching experience as well as the assessment data of indirect evidence (provided by OIE) and direct evidence (pre- and post-tests in our lower-level survey courses and research essays in our upper-level courses).

OIE data shows that our total number of majors and minors has not varied much since our last review (2006); the number of History graduates has remained stable; the discipline has scored at or above the college average on SOOTS in all semesters except one; and we have been at or above the college average in virtually all of the 21 SOOTS categories. The Current Student Survey shows that the discipline performs at or above the College level in all categories, with some below-average scores at “two years post-graduate” but above average scores at “six years post-graduate.” In the Senior Survey, the discipline was at or above the College average in 20 of 24 categories (i.e., slightly lower in the areas of class size, ability to find faculty/staff, opportunity to discuss class work outside of class, opportunity to apply learning to the real world.)

Direct evidence derived from pre- and post-tests reveals the expected increase in knowledge of the subjects taught, while research essays in upper-level electives show that the vast majority of our students have achieved virtually all of the desired learning outcomes. Students have shown a marked improvement since 2006 in reaching a logical and critical understanding of the past using the historical method. The only exception to this record of success is in the area of analyzing primary sources, in which a bare majority (58%) has attained an adequate level of understanding. This remains, as it was in 2006, an area of concern for the discipline.

(1) Goal One: Improve students’ skills in primary source analysis.

Action Step: Introduce a new course for the major in historiography and history methods. Such a course will likely be added to the major requirements, resulting in an 11-course
major. The History discipline needs to decide when such a course should optimally be taken during a student’s four-year career. Drs. Kramer and Lamar have agreed to teach the course on a rotating basis, but we have not yet decided whether it will be offered every fall or every spring. The actual organization of the course is (naturally) still uncertain. While History has already made a major purchase for the library using NEH funds, we will require an expanded library budget to order additional materials appropriate to such a course. The discipline will need to determine whether the increased library funding can come from the NEH grant or some other source.

Within the next year, the History discipline will meet regularly to discuss these issues and seek to resolve them. Barring a major disruption of our discipline by the revised General Education program, we should begin offering the new course in the near future, well within the next five years. Numbers in the OIE assessment data and direct evidence data that have prompted our concern about primary source analysis should improve as a result of this course.

(2) Goal Two: Enhance the discipline’s ability to teach effectively with new technologies.

Action Step: Seek a closer relationship with the technology support staff at the College, including arranging training workshops for our faculty as well as appointing a contact person (e.g., a student tech assistant) who faculty might contact on short notice. If additional funding is required to expand the role of our discipline’s student assistant, we will seek this funding in meetings with the divisional Associate Dean.

Within the next year, the History discipline will meet regularly to discuss this issue and seek to resolve it.

(3) Goal Three: Invite an outside reviewer to evaluate our discipline.

Action step: The discipline will contact the review bureau of the American Historical Association to inquire about reviewers from a liberal arts college with a national reputation. The expense for such an outside review will need to be discussed with several members of the College, including the Associate Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness, the A.D. for Humanities and Fine Arts, and the Academic Vice President.

Within the next year, the History discipline will meet to discuss the funding and timing of an outside review. We anticipate having such a review within the next four years, i.e., prior to our next review cycle.