Ph.D. Program in History
First Exam Assessment Review

1) Statement of the learning goals for the assessment that you are reviewing.

The primary learning goals for the First Exam in the PhD Program in History is to allow the student to demonstrate proficiency in the history and historiography of his or her major field of study by writing three scholarly responses (generally divided along chronological lines) within a four-hour timed exam. Students generally take the First Exam after they complete a two-term literature course in their major field of study. Students are also expected to do additional reading of recent and classic secondary works in their major field.

In each major field, First Exams are written and graded by a three-person committee. Each committee member blind marks all parts of the exam. In fields with literature courses, the committee consists of the three faculty members who have most recently taught the courses. In the fields without literature courses, the EO appoints the exam committee. Decisions on the grade for each part are by majority vote. If a student fails more than one part they must retake the entire exam. If s/he fails just one part, s/he must retake that part only. Students who fail the exam or any of its parts are given written comments by the committee members. They are asked to meet with the EO to discuss the exam and encouraged to meet with each of the members of the exam committee to develop a course of preparation for their reexamination. Students must pass the exam the second time they take it or they are asked to leave the program.

2) A description of what data or other information you are drawing on to conduct your review (e.g. students’ exam results, students’ job placements).

The First Exam has been a major device for identifying students with serious deficiencies. Nonetheless, the program expects that most students will pass the exam the first time they take it. When unusual patterns of exam results occur, the program tries to determine their cause and consider whether they stem from problems with the courses in which students were prepared for the exam or possibly with the exam itself and make appropriate adjustments. For instance, the conditions and requirements for the written exam were revised about 10 years ago in response to the concerns of faculty and students. Another consequence of this self-generated, internal review was that the literature course was added to provide students with a better background in their respective fields. In August 2012, 4 students failed the exam in its entirety, 1 had to retake one section, 6 passed, and 1 passed with distinction. In January 2013, 3 of the 4 students who took the exam for a second time passed, 1 was asked to leave the program.

3) Your findings. Is the assessment (and preparation for it) effective?
The PhD Program in History is currently reviewing this form assessment and student preparation for it. Two committees – one ad-hoc group primarily consisting of students, the other the formal Curriculum Committee, have met to discuss the possibility of changing the format and timing of the exam.

4) **Proposed changes, if any, to the assessment, the learning goals for it, the curriculum/preparation leading up to it.**

The PhD Program in History is considering replacing the traditional First Exam with a final exam for the first semester of the Literature Survey and then a more comprehensive exam- one that includes one question that is comprehensive- for the second semester of the survey, this one preferably a few weeks after the last days of the semester.

5) **The next steps that will be taken. (There should be a follow-up on these in the report for the next cycle.)**

In addition to the committees, the program is in the process of surveying the students to get feedback about these potential changes. Preliminary results indicate support. A decision will be made by the end of Spring 2013.