Strategic Plan
Department of History
(approved and submitted by Department, December 2011)

Distinctive Features of the Department of History
By demonstrating the depth and breadth of faculty research and teaching interests, our recently-formed thematic clusters distinguish the Texas A&M History Department from its peers in Texas and around the country. Following the recommendations of the external review team, the faculty set out last April to identify and promote wide-ranging areas of departmental excellence, with the goal of reconfiguring the structure of the department from its “four pillars” (U.S., Europe, military/diplomatic, and comparative borders) to twelve thematic “clusters” to better express our strengths, breadth of coverage, and diversity of intellectual interests to ourselves and the outside world. Through extensive consultations among faculty, who by design crafted and organized the clusters on their own initiative, the department rebuilt itself through an open and democratic process, with gratifying results. Some clusters—War and Society and the Southwest and its Borders, for example—grew out of the old four pillars, but others—Religion in History, Gender and Sexuality in History, Race, Ethnicity and Migration—emerged only as the process unfolded, with faculty members discovering common interests through intellectual exchange. On October 19, the faculty approved the final clusters:

Atlantic World-Caribbean; Chicano-Latino History; Empires, Imperialism, and Colonialism; Gender and Sexuality in History; Great Britain and the Empire; History of Science, Technology, Media, and Information; Pre-Modern Culture and Change; Race, Ethnicity, and Migration; Religion in History; Southwest and its Borders; U.S. in the World; War and Society.

How has this reconfiguration process made our department particularly distinctive? History departments rarely specialize in specific programs or subfields, as typified by the University of Virginia’s self-description: “As scholars, the faculty specialize in a wide range of disciplines—cultural, diplomatic, economic, environmental history, history of science and technology, intellectual, legal, military, political, public history, and social history.” But given our middle-of-the-pack national ranking, we need to define ourselves more imaginatively to compete for graduate students and faculty. A handful of other departments—U.C. Davis, Ohio State, the University of Texas—market themselves in a similar manner, but our particular makeup gives us a distinctive identity. With UT, for example, we share interests in gender, race and ethnicity, and religion, but our clusters in War and Society, Chicano-Latino history, and Atlantic-Caribbean history set us apart. Other Texas universities—Rice, North Texas, Houston, Texas Tech—define themselves only by traditional regional or topical fields.

Our new clusters allow us to better serve our students. Because most of them cross traditional divisions and reshape thematic fields, they encourage students to think about comparative, theoretical, international, and transnational dimensions of historical study. Clusters also offer students guidance as to which groups of courses, capstone seminars, and graduate seminars can best provide them the most enriching educational experience, one that includes both breadth and depth of study. That makes our department particularly distinctive, indeed.

Department Strengths
Publishing high-quality books and articles; recruiting, training, and placing graduate students; and diversifying the faculty, graduate program, and curriculum are of the highest importance for history departments at major research institutions. We measure achievement in our thematic clusters on the basis of these priorities and in accordance with the criteria laid out in your memorandum of December 23, 2010: prominence of individual faculty members; graduate student demand, placement, and publications;
research funding, both faculty and graduate students; potential to attract interested donors; resiliency in
the face of potential faculty departures; ability to sustain significant “academic commerce”; and the
likelihood that a targeted investment will lift the cluster into national prominence.

While the faculty as a whole, as the external review team emphasized, continues on an “upward trajectory
as a research, teaching, and service unit that compares favorably with peer public AAU institutions,” and
many members have brought considerable scholarly and professional distinction to their respective fields,
an impartial observer would identify three compelling and complementary areas of departmental strength:
(1) War and Society, (2) Atlantic World-Caribbean, and (3) Chicano-Latino history. War and Society
already competes with peers for national and international prominence, and Atlantic World-Caribbean
and Chicano-Latino history, while at different stages of development, have immense potential to
substantially raise the department’s national visibility. Our intensive process of reconfiguration revealed
not disparate groupings of faculty research and teaching interests but a broad spectrum of interrelated
pursuits, as demonstrated by these three clusters. Each informs and improves the other.

**War and Society** (Professors R. Adams, T. Anderson, J. Bradford, J. Dawson, C. Dunning, B. Linn, R.
Reese; Associate Professors C. Brooks, O. Dror, J. Parker, R. Schloss, A. Seipp) has a strong track record
of achievement and recognition. This cluster includes two of our endowed professors, both of whom are
among the most-published and most-visible members of the department. Faculty have published
numerous high-profile, prize-winning books and articles and received external funding from sources such as
Fulbright, the German Academic Exchange Service, Smith Richardson Foundation, the Wilson Center,
and the Guggenheim Foundation. The abundance of conference papers and invited lectures delivered by
members of this cluster around the world year after year has brought Texas A&M international acclaim.
Faculty have served the profession with distinction as officers, editors, directors, and board members of
scholarly organizations. Members of this cluster have long served our graduate program, and almost half
our current students focus on military and diplomatic topics. In the past five years, students directed by
faculty in this cluster have won major external funding from the Naval History and Heritage Command,
Marine Corps Historical Foundation, Smith Richardson Foundation, Pat Tillman Foundation, and the
German Academic Exchange Service. Many others have published revised dissertations with prominent
university presses, such as Cambridge, Kansas, and Illinois; placed articles in the *Journal of Military
History, Diplomatic History*, and other top-tier outlets; and secured positions in civilian colleges and as
historians at West Point, the U.S. Air Force’s Air War College, the U.S. Army Center for Military
History, and the U.S. Army’s Command and Staff College. Given Texas A&M’s military background and
identity, this cluster offers ample opportunity to reach out to potential donors. No one faculty member
dominates the cluster, making it particularly resilient to potential departures. And, in terms of academic
commerce, the cluster is already in the midst of planning, in cooperation with Oxford University Press, a
major international conference on our campus to mark the centennial of World War I.

Our faculty in War and Society are well-positioned within this field to leverage existing assets toward
growth and national leadership in both the near and long term. A strategic investment in additional
graduate student assistantships would aid this cause, while a new assistant professor would generate a
significant step change in this cluster’s prestige. The addition of a recently-tenured “rising star” would
further enhance its position as a national leader in the field.

Faculty in **Atlantic World-Caribbean** (Professor J. Bradford; Associate Professors T. Bickham, K.
Engel, A. Hatfield, J. Parker, R. Schloss, L. Yarak; Assistant Professors G. Chambers, B. Rouleau, M.
Warsh) have formed a cluster with a firm foundation for the future. Over the last two decades, the
Atlantic World has emerged as a vibrant field of study, in which our group of promising junior faculty
have already made significant contributions. They have published books with prestigious academic
presses (Oxford and University of Pennsylvania, for example); placed articles in such journals as *Slavery
and Abolition* and the *Journal of American History*; and earned distinguished fellowships from the
American Historical Association, American Council on Learned Societies, McNeil Center, and Omohundro Institute of Early American Culture. Scholars in this cluster conduct research in multiple foreign languages—French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch—and have interests that span the fifteenth to the twentieth century in the Americas, Europe, and Africa. An increasing number of these faculty have attracted their own M.A. and Ph.D. students and all are committed to building a first-rate program in the field. The cluster’s strength in numbers and distinction would also allow it to withstand potential departures. The cluster also exhibits strong potential for academic commerce. On campus, the Atlantic World-Caribbean naturally brings faculty into contact with colleagues in other departments and programs, including Anthropology and Nautical Archaeology, Women’s and Gender Studies, Hispanic Studies, International Studies, and Africana Studies. Beyond the university, a growing number of similar programs at Vanderbilt, Ohio State, and NYU, among others, offer multiple opportunities for conferences, workshops, and colloquia. Harvard University’s renowned International Seminar of Atlantic World History makes an especially attractive model.

The Atlantic World-Caribbean cluster also vividly demonstrates the synergy and collaborative spirit uncovered through the reconfiguration and strategic planning processes. Consider, for example, the fruitful relationship between the Atlantic World-Caribbean and War and Society. Many faculty working in the former are invested in the latter in that members of disparate global populations over the centuries have met in the context of imperial wars and proceeded to shape what we now know as the Atlantic World. Similarly, the inventive work of one member of War and Society takes as its focus understudied theaters of war in the Caribbean and under-analyzed processes such as identity formation along axes not only of politics and nation but also race and gender.

With its transnational and multi-disciplinary nature, talented faculty, and ability to attract high-quality graduate students, the Atlantic World-Caribbean has reached a “tipping point” where a targeted investment in the right senior hire could propel the cluster into national leadership.

Chicano-Latino History (Professors D. Baum, J. Blackwelder; Associate Professors A. Alonzo, C. Blanton; Assistant Professors G. Chambers, F. Hinojosa, L. Ramos, M. Warsh) complements the War and Society and Atlantic World-Caribbean clusters in exciting ways. Over the last decade, the history department has significantly invested in this field, and the scholars who form the core of this cluster stand at the forefront of one of the most significant demographic shifts in the state’s, indeed the nation’s, history. Since the turn of the century, the Latino population in the U.S. has grown by 43 percent, and in Texas, Latinos currently represent 38 percent of the population. As a result, Texas has joined California, Hawaii, and New Mexico as states having “majority-minority” populations. Already one of the largest and most promising concentrations of Chicano/Latino historians in the nation, this cluster is uniquely situated to respond to the changing cultural needs of the state, our department, and most critically the student body at Texas A&M by providing the scholarly expertise for comprehending the nation’s past, present, and future growth. Drawn by the excitement and immediacy of the field, a pool of graduate students has already begun to emerge to study the common threads of colonialism, immigration, race, ethnicity, gender, economics, and identity formation that so animate this cluster. Chicano-Latino history also shares much fertile ground with Atlantic World-Caribbean. Both clusters center on issues of migration, transnational flows of labor and capital, and intercultural conflict. More generally, Latino experiences in the Americas are inextricably bound to the human encounters that have characterized the Atlantic World since the late fifteenth century. Both also stand out as fields that can help (and already have helped) the department diversify and internationalize its faculty, graduate students, and curriculum.

With regard to the War and Society cluster, the same rapidly changing demography of our state and student population is also reflected in the changing nature of the U.S. military (not to mention the current Corps of Cadets). Academic commerce? A young scholar in this field from UCLA drew well over a hundred students and faculty to an afternoon colloquium in October. The enormous potential for development seems self-evident as well.
Another hire at the junior or senior level would further raise the national visibility of this cluster.

**Benchmarks and Metrics**

We have identified the following peer and peer aspirant history departments, based on their rankings in *U.S. News and World Report* (in parentheses) and similar areas of strength:

**Peers:** Purdue (71), New Mexico (71), Michigan State (56)
**Aspirant Peers:** University of Texas (17), UC Davis (28), Ohio State (24)

While the Texas A&M history department (85) ranks below these institutions, we believe that we can compete more effectively in our three areas of excellence and, indeed, all our clusters by enhancing our undergraduate and graduate programs, strengthening our national profile through faculty accomplishments and more effective marketing, and achieving greater gender balance and ethnic diversity—as articulated in our four interrelated and complementary core commitments and accompanying strategies and metrics:

**Commitment One: Enhance the Quality of Undergraduate Education.** None of our peers and aspirant peers teach over 5,000 students per semester in state-mandated U.S. history survey courses—not even UT, which offers fewer than half that many seats. While continuing to fulfill our responsibilities to the state, we seek to transform the identity of our undergraduate program to better meet the College’s core commitment to leadership: “We commit to teaching our students critical thinking and analysis, independence of mind, effective written and communication skills, and global awareness.”

**Strategy:** With the additional teaching power gained from the College’s new leave policy, we intend over the next few years to double (at least) the 8 or 9 seminars, capped at 15 students, that we now offer each semester. This will provide more opportunities for our faculty to bring their research and pedagogical expertise into small writing-intensive and honors courses, capstone seminars, and perhaps a new multi-section sophomore-level gateway course currently under consideration—all to the benefit of our students.

**Metrics:** Increase the number of majors we teach in seminars by at least 10 percent per year; supervise at least 10 percent more honors theses per year; increase the number of first-year critical thinking seminars to three-to-five per semester; increase the number of history majors having study abroad experiences by 10 to 20 percent per year; increase, by 10 to 20 percent, the number of majors delivering research papers at appropriate regional conferences, including the Phi Alpha Theta conference that we host in the spring.

**Commitment Two: Build our Graduate Program—Recruiting, Training, and Placement**

**Strategy:** Motivated by the understanding that we must improve our graduate program to raise the department’s national profile, we seek to attract and retain more exceptional students. We have organized the Phi Alpha Theta conference, which targets both undergraduate and graduate students in Texas and surrounding states, to do just that. We also plan to more actively network with peers around the country (e.g., at conferences) to publicize our program, and we will apply for funds from the dean’s office to host an annual recruitment weekend to secure our top prospects. We are restructuring our curriculum to include more research instruction for graduate students with the goal of instilling in them the intellectual and practical importance of presenting their research at high-profile regional and national conferences and publishing in high-quality journals. We have a placement officer (starting this year), who organizes workshops on understanding the job market, preparing application packets, and interviewing, among other topics. We also require a seminar on professional development.

**Metrics:** Increase the number of incoming students admitted from aspirant peer universities (top 50) by 20 percent per year; increase the number of our top prospects who enroll in our program by 25 percent; submit two or three new course proposals per year on cluster-related topics; double the number of research seminars offered per semester; increase the number of conference-paper proposals, grant applications, and article submissions by 10 to 20 percent per year; continue to place graduates at highly-
competitive positions in the Department of Defense; increase by 10 to 20 percent per year the number of students who secure tenure-track positions at four-year B.A./M.A.-granting institutions; continue to strive to place out best graduate students at peer academic departments.

Commitment Three: Strengthen our Faculty’s National Profile

Strategy: We will be more aggressive in our efforts to strengthen our national profile by continuing to build on our strong record of securing prestigious external grants and fellowships; increasing our scholarly productivity; participating in high-profile professional activities; inviting distinguished scholars to our campus for colloquia and conferences; publicizing our accomplishments through university outlets and national venues; and applying for additional tenure-track faculty lines through the Strategic Development Fund, targeting our three areas of excellence initially, but eventually developing our other clusters as well. We will revise our annual review procedures to better reflect these priorities.

Metrics: Increase the number of applications for major grants and fellowships by 10 to 20 percent per year; increase by 10 to 20 percent the number of papers presented each year by faculty at national and international conferences; increase by 10 to 20 percent each year the number of articles placed in top academic journals (which in turn should lead to more books); increase by 10 to 20 percent the number of books, article manuscripts, and book manuscripts that faculty review each year; increase active participation in scholarly organizations (officers, editorial boards, etc.); start, maintain, and distribute an annual department newsletter; set aside $1,000 from our base budget to publicize new faculty and faculty accomplishments in the American Historical Association’s Perspectives and other national journals.

Commitment Four: Increase our Commitment to Diversity

Strategy: We will implement all the new initiatives proposed in our recent Diversity Action Plan and follow the department's Diversity Committee's recommendations for attracting and retaining graduate students and faculty from underrepresented groups. Having lost three women this past year from the faculty (one from each rank), our top priority toward our commitment to diversity is to regain our department's gender balance. We will create diverse pools of job candidates whom we interview and bring to campus for faculty positions, in accordance with DOF policy; mentor our junior faculty from underrepresented groups; employ diversity as a main factor for choosing our department colloquia speakers; nominate our graduate students for diversity fellowships; and recruit graduate students (through the Pathways program, e.g.) with an eye toward achieving greater gender balance and ethnic diversity.

Metrics: Increase by 10 to 20 percent per year the number of history majors from underrepresented groups; increase by 25 percent each year the number of graduate students from unrepresentative groups to whom we extend offers of admission; over the next five years, regain the gender balance in our faculty and advance the representation of underrepresented groups, assuming sufficient hiring opportunities.