

November 18, 2020

Carol Moore, President
Edward C. Winslow, III, Chair of the Board of Trustees
Ione Taylor, Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees
Guilford College
5800 W. Friendly Ave.
Greensboro, NC 27410

Dear Dr. Moore, Mr. Winslow, and Dr. Taylor:

The American Historical Association notes with alarm the dramatic restructuring of academic units and program prioritization announced by Guilford College on November 6, 2020, including the elimination of the history program. As a Quaker institution with a strong tradition of liberal arts education, Guilford has a 100-year-old history department and a strong record of high-quality history education provided by an accomplished faculty committed to undergraduate education. We find it odd that instead of taking pride in this accomplishment and building on it, Guilford is squandering a valuable resource and tradition. The AHA urges the administration to consider the educational impact of this short-sighted plan and reorganization, which will serve to weaken the preparation of your students for global citizenship, as well as the lifelong learning essential to professional success and civic engagement.

This ill-considered plan not only diminishes the quality and reputation of a Guilford degree; it also identifies the college with employment practices counter to its own ethical commitments and out of step with American higher education. The college will terminate two tenured and one advanced tenure-track faculty without adhering to its own contractual Faculty Handbook, not to mention generally accepted ethical guidelines—an especially striking embarrassment for an institution committed to Quaker values and steeped in Quaker history. Additionally, the administration apparently conducted the program review under false pretenses, driven by a desire to cut costs to close a \$7 million budget gap, but claiming that the decisions were “based essentially upon educational considerations.” The faculty committees charged with making educational decisions regarding curriculum and program found no educational reasons to close departments or programs and recommended that none be cut.

Cutting a core liberal arts program like history is short-sighted. The AHA has witnessed this restructuring strategy before, and the results have not been impressive. There is overwhelming evidence that shows employers seek the kind of skills a history degree can provide. Eliminating the history program is an especially odd move at a time when civic leaders from all corners of the political landscape have lamented the striking lack of historical knowledge among American citizens. The elimination of these faculty positions will render the college unable to teach modern European history, or any American history—both essential to the basic historical literacy that one ought to be able to expect from a Guilford education.

The AHA is the largest organization of professional historians in the world, with over 11,500 members engaged in the teaching and practice of history at colleges and universities, secondary schools, historical institutes, museums, and other institutions. Our role as an advocate for the study of history in all aspects of American intellectual life extends also to the roles of the department leadership. The AHA offers particular resources to our department chairs because of their central role in promoting and nourishing teaching, learning, and research in history. Guilford's history chair has access to the AHA's online community of department leadership, a particularly active group that enables sharing of data, problem-solving, and conversation about issues ranging from logistics to curriculum.

As experienced administrators ourselves, we certainly understand the pressure of budgets, and do not underestimate the financial imperatives you confront at this particular moment. This reorganization, however, is likely to have serious and deleterious consequences for the practice of historical work and hence the quality of undergraduate education at Guilford College. Once programs are eliminated or truncated, they are often exceedingly difficult and expensive to reconstitute. What might seem attractive as a temporary solution to an immediate crisis often becomes a long-term problem. We urge you to reconsider.

Sincerely,



Mary Lindemann
President



James Grossman
Executive Director