

January 24, 2023

Edward Bersoff, Chair, Board of Trustees
Patricia Steis, Chair, Academic Affairs Committee, Board of Trustees
Marymount University
Arlington, VA 22207

Dear Dr. Bersoff and Ms. Steis:

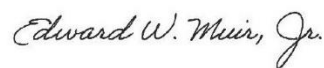
The American Historical Association expresses grave concern about a recently announced plan to drastically cut majors in the liberal arts at Marymount University. Although our particular focus is on the gutting of Marymount's history program, we are astounded by the breadth of the administration's directive. We have written to President Becerra and Provost El-Rewini, expressing our surprise and chagrin that a Catholic institution with a strong liberal arts reputation would so casually set aside its traditional commitment to history education. Without crossing essential boundaries between governance and management, we hope the Board of Trustees will exercise its oversight responsibilities and ask some hard questions about such a radical and short-sighted decision.

Before writing we consulted your mission statement: "Marymount is a comprehensive Catholic university, guided by the traditions of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, that emphasizes intellectual curiosity, service to others, and a global perspective." We find it hard to imagine such an institution without a history major, without opportunities for students to engage in the intellectual curiosities and global perspectives that are so central to history education.

The AHA is fully cognizant of the financial stringencies that have generated this reconsideration of institutional priorities. But eviscerating the liberal arts is not a solution for a liberal arts institution. The AHA has seen this approach to prioritization and restructuring before, and the results have been detrimental to students. Overwhelming evidence shows that employers seek the kind of skills a history degree can provide. This elimination is an especially wrongheaded shift at a time when civic leaders from all corners of the political landscape have lamented the lack of historical knowledge of American citizens. Offering a history major is standard at comprehensive universities, and the elimination of the history major would place Marymount far outside the mainstream of its peer institutions.

And there is little to be gained on the balance sheet. Given that the history program at Marymount University offers only one course beyond the university's liberal arts core, eliminating the major offers no financial advantage. Indeed, it is likely to cause enrollment drops and loss of tuition as students in history and other eliminated majors might transfer to other schools, and future students interested in fields such as history will choose not to attend Marymount.

Sincerely,



Edward Muir
President



James Grossman
Executive Director