

February 16, 2023

Irma Becerra, President
Marymount University
Arlington, VA 22207

Dear President Becerra:

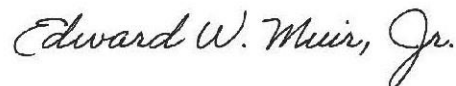
The American Historical Association learned today of your short-sighted decision to propose to Marymount University's governing board the elimination of history and other humanities majors. This decision was made despite receiving a letter from the Marymount student government in support of keeping these majors, the overwhelming support from the faculty council to maintain the program, and the receptive response that the AHA received from Hesham El-Rewini, Marymount University's provost and senior vice president of academic affairs to our letter objecting to this proposed elimination dated January 24 (included below).

We urge Marymount University to reconsider this decision, which undermines the university's commitment to "intellectual curiosity, service to others, and a global perspective." While the university's liberal arts core provides one way of addressing this mission, it is essential that students have the opportunity for the deeper study and mastery of a field that comes with majoring in history and an array of humanities programs. Marymount students deserve to have the opportunity to major in fields like history that prepare them not just for a job but for responsible leadership and citizenship.

Sincerely,



James Grossman
Executive Director



Edward Muir
President

cc: Hesham El-Rewini, Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Sarah Ficke, President, Faculty Council

January 24, 2023, letter from Edward Muir, President and James Grossman, Executive Director of the American Historical Association to Irma Becerra, President; Hesham El-Rewini, Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs; and Sarah Ficke, President, Faculty Council of Marymount University

The American Historical Association expresses grave concern about the plan to cut majors in the liberal arts at Marymount University, particularly the major in history. As a Catholic institution with a strong tradition of liberal arts education, Marymount has a record of high-quality history education provided by an accomplished faculty committed to undergraduate education. As outlined in its 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.” The AHA urges the administration to consider the educational impact of this short-sighted plan, which is likely to weaken the preparation of your students for the global citizenship imperative to economic and civic accomplishment, as well as the lifelong learning essential to occupational and professional success.

The AHA has seen this approach to prioritization and restructuring before, and the results have been detrimental to students. Cutting a core liberal arts degree like history is imprudent. 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.

The AHA is America’s largest and most prominent organization of professional historians, with over 11,000 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 supporting and defending the discipline and its practitioners on university campuses.

To maintain a healthy presence in a university, a discipline requires intellectual and institutional leadership and a strong faculty. Marymount’s recent restructuring eliminated the essential leadership of a department chair and the chair’s central role in promoting and nourishing teaching, learning, and research in history. This has had negative consequences for both faculty and students. Marymount’s previous history chairs had access to the AHA’s online community of department chairs, a particularly active group that enables sharing of data, problem-solving, and conversation about issues ranging from logistics to curriculum. Without this critical position, Marymount’s history program has lost access to important resources that the AHA would be happy to provide through the participation of an appropriate senior faculty member if Marymount demonstrates a commitment to the role of history in the university’s community and curriculum. The further step in eliminating the history major would be just the opposite statement and would make retaining and recruiting highly qualified history faculty difficult. Since every student at Marymount takes at least one history course, this would reduce the quality of teaching for every student at the university.

As experienced administrators we certainly understand the pressure of budgets, and do not underestimate the financial necessities you confront. 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.

This program elimination will have serious and deleterious consequences for both the quality and reputation of undergraduate education at Marymount University. Once programs are eliminated or truncated, they are often exceedingly difficult and expensive to reconstitute. What might be suggested as a temporary solution to an immediate crisis often becomes a long-term problem. The AHA urges the administration to reconsider this proposal and the faculty to reject this plan.