

Task Force on Disability Final Report

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0. Summary of Recommendations:

In this report, the Task Force on Disability recommends that the AHA:

1. Set standards for hiring re: disability
 - a. initiate education campaign among history departments.
 - b. send out a memo articulating ADA regulations with respect to hiring to DGS/Chairs to ensure faculty knowledge of the legal process
2. Facilitate more content in the program related to disability history at the annual meeting
 - a. Work through the Task Force on Disability and the Disability History Association
 - b. AHA Program Committee: look for possibilities of creating multi-session workshops or thematic strands out of independently proposed panels on disability history when appropriate.
3. Ensure access at the annual meeting
 - a. More sign language interpreters available for conference
 - b. Closed captioning services could also be an option and would help not only those hearing impaired but all audience members
 - c. AHA needs to be more attentive to issue of access for both attendees and presenters, including and especially, those attendees using wheelchairs or sight-assist animals
4. Ensure electronic accessibility within the profession
 - a. If the *American Historical Review* shifts to electronic submissions and review, it should use software that is accessible to people with disabilities
 - b. AHA should also work with the Conference of Historical Journals to increase awareness of disability issues and pressure vendors to develop accessible products.
5. Adopt the Society of American Archivists' document as an official AHA best practices statement and publicize it to the membership.
6. Continue the disability mentorship program
 - a. As part of Disability History Association's work or within another AHA committee
7. Promote the concept of universal design in education to US history departments
 - a. feature universal design ideas in an issue of *Perspectives on History* or send a document to affiliated history departments encouraging faculty and staff to institute as many elements as possible.
8. Post information on AHA website about disability issues and best practices for ensuring equity in the profession
 - a. add a disability resource page to historians.org
9. Recommendations for Divisions:
 - a. *Teaching Division*: Request syllabi on disability history in order to assess and disseminate the extent of teaching of disability history in the academy.
 - b. *Research Division*: Advertise research fellowships in disability history or related areas; facilitate the compliance of research archives and libraries across the US with the Americans Disabilities Act through a set of guidelines or best practices.
 - c. *Professional Division*: Implement disability-sensitive measures in hiring/search guidelines and promotion/tenure guidelines/regulations; lobby presses and

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research facilities to enact accommodations that would make scholarly research and publishing more amenable to people with various disabilities.

10. The work of the task force should continue in some form or another:
 - a. AHA should give the TFD a time extension or establish a more permanent committee on disability within the AHA or fold disability related issues into the mission of an existing committee.

1. Brief background on the formation and activities of the task force

In 2006, the Disability History Association (DHA) contacted the AHA about “more fully integrating disability into the intellectual and functional life of the AHA.” The Professional Division recommended creating a joint task force on historians with disabilities with the DHA, which was approved at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association. The task force (TFD) formally began its work in June 2008. The committee is chaired by Sandy Sufian, Associate Professor of Medical Humanities and History at University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, and consists of the following members: Debbie Doyle, Administrative Manager, Public History Coordinator, & Convention Assistant, American Historical Association; Leisa Meyer, Associate Professor, American Studies and History and Director of Graduate Studies, History, The College of William and Mary; Michael Rembis, Visiting Scholar, Center for Disability Studies, Department of History, University at Buffalo and Jeffrey Cook, Professor of History, North Greenville University. The task force saw the passing of two of its members: Paul Longmore, Professor of History at San Francisco State University; and David Weber, vice-president of the Professional Division, in 2010.¹

The charge of the task force was to gather information about the concerns of historians with disabilities and to propose practical solutions for as many of them as possible. Not only was the task force charged with addressing accessibility issues at the annual meeting, but it was also asked to address problems facing historians with disabilities on the job market and at all stages of their careers. In addition to organizing three open forum sessions (2008, 2009, and 2011) at the annual meeting, the task force held several conference calls to discuss its work and set forth subsequent plans.

In each section of the report that follows, the TFD presents an overview of each of its programs and suggests concrete and practical solutions to the Professional Division for approval and implementation by the AHA and its members. Our goal is to make the field of history a more accessible one and to promote the field of disability history as a rich, rigorous, and exciting sub-field of history.

2. Professional Issues: Results of our Surveys

The TFD created and disseminated three surveys for AHA members to answer about disability-related concerns in the profession: a DGS/Chair survey, a faculty survey and a graduate student survey. The following discussion covers the main themes and results of our surveys.

1. Avoiding and preventing discrimination in the hiring process

In the DGS/Chair survey conducted, 20 percent of those surveyed responded that they provide hiring and search committee and interview accommodations. The majority of respondents replied that they are unaware of discrimination in the hiring process. In contrast to the DGS/Chair

¹ Catherine J. Kudlick, University of California at Davis worked with the task force from 2008–09, and David Ulbrich represented the AHA from 2008–09.

survey, our graduate student survey showed that 74% of students have specific disability-related concerns and strong fears related to interviewing and hiring.

This discrepancy must be addressed by the AHA (see recommendations).

Graduate students claim that misunderstandings related to disabilities lead to discrimination in the hiring process. Graduate students spoke of being fearful of disclosure because of the stigma surrounding mental illness. Graduate students with other disabilities stated that they are reluctant to disclose the details of their disability for similar reasons. Some graduate students feel as though students with disabilities are either forced to fit into a “one size fits all” program or forced out of programs, and that accommodations are only granted “up to a certain point.”

Graduate students and employed faculty stated concerns with arcane lifting requirements; we are unfamiliar with these, but they obviously violate ADA regulations and need to be addressed by the AHA; no teaching position in the academy should require a test related to lifting.

2. Avoiding and preventing discrimination in promotion and advancement

Only 23.1% of respondents stated that they provided accommodations directly in the tenure and promotion process.

Other DGS/Chairs provided other types of indirect support. Nearly 66% provided classroom accommodations; 76.9% provided computer and office accommodations and technical assistance; 15.4% said they provided accommodations for library work. Narratives from the DGS/Chair survey show that departments made scheduling accommodations and provided release from classroom teaching, as well.

All but one respondent believed that the accommodations were successful and their colleagues were satisfied; 79.4% of the DGS/Chair respondents believe they have adequate knowledge of services; and 73.5% were unaware of any instances where discrimination affected a colleague.

In contrast to the responses of Chairs and DGSs, faculty surveyed showed a different picture. Fifty-two per cent of faculty say they are *not* accommodated at work.

More than half (53.3%) of faculty responses reported they encounter issues with classroom accommodations. 23.3% encounter issues with computer accommodations and technical assistance; and 30% have issues with office accommodations – all integral components of the job and required for promotion and tenure.

Faculty state that staff treat accommodations like “favors.” They say they have to ask “repeatedly” for accommodations, sometimes with no results. When arrangements are made, they are “ad hoc.” Many respondents feel disempowered to make access demands because of their tenuous (adjunct or pre-tenure) status at their institution.

One hundred per cent of faculty responses stated that the burden of providing accommodations

falls largely on them, to the point of providing their own health insurance and equipment and software. Faculty is forced to educate colleagues, administrators and students concerning access issues. A majority of faculty said they are forced to plan ahead, and they avoid going to department functions where they know they will encounter difficulties. Faculty survey responses showed that the faculty who have children with disabilities are another area misunderstood and unaddressed in terms of equity, promotion, and tenure.

A faculty member's inability to be an equal participant in the department can affect his/her morale and the tenure and promotion process.

3. General information for history departments, faculty, and students on how to get accommodations

Increase Awareness:

Nearly all (95%) of grad students want the AHA to increase awareness of disabilities and disability-related issues in the profession; 74% of Chairs/DGSs want increased awareness; half of all respondents support mentoring and networking programs.

3. Annual Meeting Policies re: Persons with Disabilities:

The task force has identified several issues relevant to historians with disabilities in relation to the AHA's annual meeting. First, the AHA's formal policies governing annual meeting site selection focus on labor issues and LGBTQ issues but do not explicitly engage issues of access in relation to disabilities; other than in very general language about avoiding locations "where its members reasonably believed they would be subject to discrimination on the basis of age, gender, marital status, national origin, disability, race, religion, or sexual orientation."

See: <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2005/0509/0509dir1.cfm> on AHA policy in terms of site selection (2005) and also <http://www.historians.org/pubs/Free/ProfessionalStandards.cfm> — the 2011 *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct*.

We recommend that the AHA articulate its specific policies in relation to access and people with disabilities far more explicitly and visibly in relation to the annual meeting and to do so much more regularly than is the current practice.

Paper Presentations and Panel Sessions:

All members of the AHA have the right to be able to attend and have access to all conference facilities, presentations, and accommodations at the annual conference. This might involve having more sign language interpreters available for sessions. Currently participants may request interpreters "for up to nine hours of interpreting service or a maximum of \$400 per member, whichever is less" and for the General Meeting and Business Meeting. This policy, while cost-saving, might discourage AHA members from attending sessions where this type of accommodation has not been arranged. Closed captioning services could be an alternative and would help not only those hearing impaired but all audience members. The AHA also needs to be more attentive to issue of access for both attendees and presenters, including and especially, those attendees using wheelchairs or service animals. Currently many sessions feature elevated

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platforms for presenters and narrow corridors between rows of chairs for attendees. Other issues to consider are: insuring a smoke free environment (hotels, common spaces, etc.), providing appropriate breaks to accommodate people with fatigue issues and those who may take longer to walk from session to session, considering later sessions for attendees who take longer to get ready in the morning because of various disability-related preparations, making sure the hotel itself is accessible and the host city has accessible and affordable transportation, that designated computer stations for attendees are wheelchair user friendly or vision impaired friendly, etc. We suggest that the AHA pay more attention to these types of access issues in relation to the annual meeting and endorse the staff's plan to develop an internal policy for ensuring accessibility at the meeting.

We also recommend that the AHA make greater efforts, through the Task Force on Disability and the Disability History Association, to facilitate more content in the program related to disability history. We believe that fuller access will encourage more AHA members with disabilities and those working on disability history to attend the annual meeting and to submit proposals for panel sessions. Last, we suggest that the AHA Program Committee look for possibilities of creating multi-session workshops or thematic strands out of independently proposed panels on disability history to stress the broader rubric of disability history when appropriate. Highlighting such sessions explicitly in the program will likely bring more visibility to disability history as well as the issues facing historians with disabilities.

Job Center and Employment Advertising:

The AHA could be more proactive in clarifying both the responsibilities of employers interviewing at the AHA annual meeting and the rights of access and accommodation to which applicants with disabilities are entitled under federal law. For instance, the AHA might provide information to units/employers who are interviewing at the annual meeting as well as add information to its best practices statements on the hiring process about rights and responsibilities including:

- That an employer may tell applicants what the hiring process involves (for example, an interview, timed written test, or job demonstration), and may ask applicants whether they will need a reasonable accommodation for this process. We suggest that the AHA recommend this as a general question that employers *should* pose to all applicants for positions – thus not putting the onus only on applicants with disabilities to raise this issue.
- That an applicant can ask for reasonable accommodation for the hiring process, such as, among other possibilities, a request for the employer to reformat an examination, or a request for an accommodation in connection with a job demonstration or interview. Further, that if the need for accommodation is not obvious, the employer may ask an applicant for reasonable documentation about his/her disability if the applicant requests reasonable accommodation for the hiring process. In other words, the employer is entitled to know that the applicant has a covered disability and that s/he needs a reasonable accommodation under the American with Disabilities Act.

See: <http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/preemp.html>
http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/adaaa_notice.cfm

Electronic Accessibility and Website Access:

We suggest the AHA work to ensure electronic accessibility within the profession. These efforts might start with making sure that the AHA's website is fully accessible for people with disabilities – See the following Chronicle Article on this issue:

<http://chronicle.com/article/Blind-Students-Demand-Access/125695/>

If the *American Historical Review* shifts to electronic submissions and review, it should use software that is accessible to people with disabilities. For example, ScholarOne Manuscript, a market leader, is not accessible to scholars who use screen readers. The Association should also work with the Conference of Historical Journals to increase awareness of disability issues and pressure vendors to develop accessible products.

The issue of electronic accessibility is also on the agenda of the American Sociological Association's Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Allison C. Carey (Assoc. Prof. of Sociology, Shippensburg University) chairs this committee, and she has indicated in a communication with the task force that she would be interested in working across disciplines and collaborating with the AHA on this issue to pressure publishers, manufacturers, universities, etc. Cathy Kudlick, a historian of disability, is also particularly interested in making the AHA web site and publications online accessible to vision impaired historians.²

4. Research

Grants:

The TFD compiled a list of grants for disability history research and fellowships for researchers with disabilities. Some of these fellowships are general and can pertain to non-disability history topics and/or researchers without disabilities but we tried to gather a list that could include and promote disability history as a field, and encourage researchers with disabilities to be cited like women, minority groups, etc. are cited as invited groups in most RFPs. It is clear that researchers with disabilities are an underrepresented group in the list of researchers invited to apply. In addition, very few grants cite disability history as a possible field of interest or include disability history-specific grants. There is definitely a need to raise the profile of disability history as a legitimate field, deserving of specific fellowships and/or worthy of particular consideration cited within broader calls for proposals.

Making research facilities accessible:

² Contact information: Allison C. Carey, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Shippensburg University, Grove Hall 436, 1871 Old Main Drive, Shippensburg, PA 17257, Phone: 717-477-1582; Fax: 717-477-4011, accare@ship.edu; Cathy Kudlick is at UC-Davis. Her email is cjkudlick@ucdavis.edu.

Our survey showed that not all research facilities are accessible to researchers with disabilities. This is especially so in archives abroad, depending upon the country. More than one faculty respondent said that they had to change their research plans because the archives were inaccessible and no one “wanted to help.”

The Society of American Archivists (SAA) has developed a document, “[Best Practices for Working with Archives Researchers with Physical Disabilities](#),” advising archivists how to make their facilities accessible. We strongly recommend that the AHA adopt the SAA’s document as an official AHA best practices statement and publicize it to the membership. In addition, the Association should work with the SAA and the American Library Association (ALA) to further encourage accessibility in libraries and archives. The Research Division should consider collaborating with the SAA and ALA on this effort.

The AHA might be able to assist archivists and librarians with identifying and responding to barriers that persist for researchers with disabilities. For example, the SAA’s best practices don’t mention access to copy machines, an issue mentioned in responses to our surveys. The AHA’s Archives Wiki, a clearinghouse for information about archives around the world, might be an effective way for researchers to share information about facilities at particular archives. An organized effort to recruit postings on archives around the world, organized in conjunction with the DHA, might be necessary to achieve the critical mass of entries to make the wiki a valuable resource. The wiki might even be able to advertise housing/scholar exchanges and informal recommendations for people with disabilities, especially those that need accessible housing, particular medical care or have other travel concerns, while doing their research. Recommendations such as these between scholars would help create a close sense of community within and among AHA members.

5. Mentoring program

To help students with disabilities navigate the challenging waters of academia, the committee established a mentoring program that pairs graduate students with disabilities with faculty with disabilities. Paul Longmore took the lead on this initiative and, upon Paul’s passing, Jeff Cook has taken on the leadership of this project.

The task force issued a call for participants in AHA’s *Perspectives on History*, H-Disability, and other academic venues to those who are interested in volunteering as mentors as well as students who might benefit from the proposed program. Volunteer instructor mentors are either matched with students who are pursuing a degree in the same subfield of history or who have the same disability so as to maximize mentorship in similar areas where challenges exist. The program is based on communications either through email or by phone in order to nurture the mentor-mentee relationship, and frequency of contact is up to the said mentor and mentee. The American Psychological Association (APA) has an established disability mentoring program that can serve as a model. Mentors and mentees volunteer through a web-based application form, and guidelines for a productive mentoring relationship are posted on the web site. (See <http://www.apa.org/pi/disability/resources/mentoring/index.aspx>). So far, through the initial call

and interest expressed through our survey, 13 faculty-mentors have volunteered to assist 8 students.

The committee is optimistic that we could launch a mentoring program this year that would not only benefit students, but would provide faculty with insight into the challenges confronting students today, the opportunity to facilitate a mentee's personal and professional growth, and a chance to enhance faculty's professional skills and growth. Likewise, such a rich relationship will provide personal and professional satisfaction outside the traditional classroom setting.

The task force recommends that this mentorship program continue after the tenure of the committee and either can be enveloped into the Disability History Association's work and/or find a home within another AHA committee (perhaps a continuation committee of the task force's work). This program has great potential to promote the success of graduate students with disabilities and allow faculty with disabilities to help in that pursuit.

6. Universal Design in Education

The TFD recommends that the AHA promote the concept of universal design in education to U.S. history departments. This concept would provide a welcoming environment for students and professors with disabilities as well as students of all types.

The University of Washington has developed a center for universal design in education; it details principles and practices for instituting universal design in postsecondary education. We recommend that the AHA either feature these ideas in an issue of *Perspectives on History* and/or that it send a document to affiliated history departments encouraging faculty and staff to institute as many elements as possible.

See: http://www.washington.edu/doi/CUDE/app_postsec.html. We have provided the document *Universal Design in Postsecondary Education: Process, Principles, and Applications* by Sheryl Burghstahler in an appendix to this report.

7. Resources

Responses to the surveys conducted by the Task Force on Disability suggest demand for the American Historical Association (AHA) to post information on its website about disability issues and best practices for ensuring equity in the profession.

Adding a disability resource page to historians.org would be a relatively simple way for the AHA to address these concerns.

The AHA could easily link to existing resources on disability laws and policies to help historians find information. Many issues of access and accommodation are not unique to the historical profession. Equal rights for people with disabilities are a matter of federal law (<http://www.ada.gov/pubs/adastatute08.htm>), and in an ideal world every campus should have a formal policy on accommodations and a set of clear procedures for obtaining them. (In practice the degree of compliance varies from campus to campus.) The federal government maintains

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several useful online resources, such as the Job Accommodation Network operated by the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor (askjan.org) or the guidelines for implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act posted by the Access Board (access-board.gov).

Other professional organizations have developed resources that could be linked to a resource page or adapted for use by historians. The Modern Language Association, for example, has developed comprehensive guidelines for search committees. In some cases, such as the SAA guidelines on accessible archives, it might be helpful for Council to formally adopt the document as an official AHA policy statement. In others, the Association might approach the authors for permission to adapt the document for use by historians.

The task force identified several areas where the AHA should develop its own best practices documents to address concerns that are unique to the historical profession. Topics might include:

- Model accommodations policies for history departments
- Advice on the job search for historians with disabilities
- Best practices for avoiding discrimination in interviews (could be adapted from the MLA document mentioned above)
- Best practices for avoiding discrimination in hiring, promotion, and advancement
- Advice to history departments on how to find information on university disability policies
- Best practices for ensuring access to information technology, targeted to historical journals and operators of history web sites

The task force also discussed ways to increase the visibility of disability history within the profession. Members suggested actively recruiting articles for *Perspectives on History* and sessions for the annual meeting, perhaps in conjunction with the Disability History Association. Possible topics include:

- Teaching disability history
- Teaching strategies and resources for state-mandated disability history weeks
- Teaching veterans with disabilities
- A state of the field article on disability history

The TFD recommends appointing at least one TFD member to a best practices committee made up of AHA staff and members of the Professional Division to develop the recommended documents.

8. Structure for ensuring attention to disability issues within the AHA

Encouraging collaboration with the DHA:

Two members of the TFD were elected from the Disability History Association's board membership: Paul Longmore and Sandy Sufian. In the first year of the TFD, the Disability History Association provided an important source of information and collaboration for the TFD. In the second year, the DHA continued its linkage with the TFD but in a less intensive manner. The DHA's listserv—H-Disability—served as an important avenue for disseminating task force initiatives and recruiting sessions on disability history. The TFD recommends that the DHA take on a much more active role in organizing sessions at the annual meeting, and that it consider organizing a special volume or AHA pamphlet on disability history as a rigorous and vibrant new sub-field.

After the tenure of the TFD expires, one suggestion may be for the DHA to take on leadership for promoting disability history within the AHA while a TFD continuation committee could focus on professional issues.

Role of the divisions (Teaching, Research, Professional):

We recommend that the divisions implement the various recommendations below. The role of the AHA staff should be to offer guidance on such issues and distribute guidelines on compliance with the AHA to history departments across the country.

With the help of the DHA, the Teaching Division of the AHA should seek to disseminate and/or request syllabi on disability history in order to assess the extent of teaching of disability history in the academy. The Research Division of the AHA could, perhaps, not only advertise research fellowships dealing with disability history (or in whose scope disability history would fit), but also facilitate the compliance of research archives and libraries across the U.S. with the Americans Disabilities Act, making them accessible to a variety of scholars with disabilities.

The TFD strongly recommends that the Professional Division of the AHA take the results of our surveys seriously and implement disability-sensitive measures in hiring/search guidelines and promotion/tenure guidelines/regulations and lobby presses and research facilities to enact accommodations that would make scholarly research and publishing more amenable to people with various disabilities (i.e. provide best practice guidelines for dealing with promotion/tenure and disability; provide history departments with guidelines on how to conduct a disability sensitive search; pressure presses to make their online publications legible to vision impaired scholars, pressure various university archives and libraries to make sure that they are ADA compliant).

As a first step, we recommend that the Professional Division amend section c of the AHA's "Policy on Exhibits, Advertisements, Mailing List Rentals, and Sales," which governs job advertisements in *Perspectives on History*, to read "The AHA retains the right to refuse or edit

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all discriminatory statements from copy submitted to the Association that is not consistent...with the principles of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Restoration Act of the Americans with Disabilities Act 2007.”

The TFD recommends that the work of task force should continue in some form or another. The AHA should give the TFD a time extension, or establish a more permanent committee on disability within the AHA, or fold attention given to professional disability issues into the mission of an existing committee. The TFD believes that the AHA Council should seek counsel with the TFD on what forum is the best and most realistic way to continue the important work of the task force.