

July 28, 2019

Dr. Janel Curry  
Provost, Gordon College  
255 Grapevine Road  
Wenham, MA 01984  
via email: [Janel.curry@gordon.edu](mailto:Janel.curry@gordon.edu)

Dear Provost Curry:

The American Historical Association expresses grave concern about the dramatic restructuring of academic departments announced by Gordon College in May, notable especially for the elimination of the history department as an independent entity, and its absorption into a broader department of Political Science, Philosophy and History. The AHA is dismayed both by this loss of independent existence and the elimination of faculty positions. This diminishment of history's presence at Gordon will severely weaken the ability of our colleagues to maintain the pedagogical and research standards that we consider essential to teaching and scholarship. We urge you to consider the impact of this short-sighted reorganization, which is likely to impoverish the preparation of your students for the lifelong learning essential to occupational success, as well as for the global citizenship equally imperative to economic and civic accomplishment.

The AHA has seen this approach to reorganization before, usually as a cost-cutting measure in the guise of the intellectual virtues of interdisciplinarity. Oddly enough, rhetoric aside, this sort of restructuring often is more a cause of the decline of history enrollments than a result. To maintain a healthy presence in a college a discipline requires intellectual and institutional leadership. The elimination of full-time, tenured faculty, in particular, will seriously compromise essential geographic and chronological coverage necessary to foster basic historical literacy in liberally educated citizens. Moreover, at a time when history enrollments have started to increase in many private colleges after a period of decline, it is ironic (and disappointing) to see Gordon laying out plans to reduce the discipline's curricular footprint.

The AHA is America's largest and most prominent organization of professional historians, with over 12,000 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 does not at all preclude support for initiatives that break down disciplinary boundaries and promote interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary work. These are worthy goals and we encourage (and have promoted) efforts in this direction.

Interdisciplinarity, however, is not the absence of disciplines, but rather their interaction. A thing must exist and have intellectual integrity if it is to interact effectively with another thing. Eliminating departments will weaken, not strengthen, interdisciplinarity.

Our concern 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. Gordon's history chair has 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.

As experienced administrators we certainly understand the pressure of budgets, and do not underestimate the financial necessities you confront. This reorganization, however, may have serious and deleterious consequences for the practice of historical work and hence the quality of undergraduate education at Gordon College.

Sincerely,



John R. McNeill  
President



James Grossman  
Executive Director

July 28, 2019

Dr. D. Michael Lindsay  
President, Gordon College  
255 Grapevine Road  
Wenham, MA 01984  
via email: [president@gordon.edu](mailto:president@gordon.edu)

Dear President Lindsey:

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Sincerely,



John R. McNeill  
President



James Grossman  
Executive Director

July 28, 2019

Herman Smith  
President, Board of Trustees  
Gordon College  
103 Sagamore Ave  
Medford, MA 02155

Dear Mr. Smith:

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John R. McNeil  
President



James Grossman  
Executive Director