

AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Organized 1884

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The New York State Board of Regents recently proposed a modification to the Regents Examinations to allow for greater flexibility in order to improve graduation rates and focus on career training. Since 1988, students seeking a Regents diploma have had to pass end-of-the-year exams in math, English, science, a language other than English, and two social studies subjects, which are Global History and Geography and U.S. History and Government. With the proposed revised exams, students will choose between Global History and Geography or U.S. History and Government, and they will select a fifth exam in accounting, advertising, carpentry, culinary arts, hospitality management, or some other career-focused subject.

The American Historical Association, the world's largest organization of professional historians, recognizes that the Regents Exams have changed many times since their first administration in 1865 to respond to shifts in ideas about education and the imperatives of employment. The halving of the social studies requirement in the proposed revision, however, is out of tune with the circumstances of today's world. These two exams have distinctive goals that are essential to an engaged citizenry and an educated global workforce.

The two social studies courses and exams emphasize critical reading, acquisition of knowledge, and the creation of logical and analytical arguments that employ evidence to demonstrate reasoning. These essential aspects of history education are skills necessary in any profession. In a rapidly changing world, global history and geography are essential to business, science, technology, and industry as well as the humanities and social sciences because these fields encourage students to study changing relationships and understand diverse perspectives. For example, knowledge of global markets— whether their physical locations, their demands for new technologies, or their supply capabilities— is currently integral to an educated workforce. In a state with a large immigrant population, Global History and Geography also teaches intercultural understanding and geographic reasoning; these are skills and traits desired by employers.

The AHA is also concerned that the revised global history test now limits its scope to the period after 1750, setting aside, for example the rise of great religions, and the early development of world-wide trade, the circulation of ideas, and even Christopher Columbus.

The U.S. History and Government curriculum is key to the development of civic participation for all New Yorkers. The curriculum seeks to develop engaged citizens who demonstrate their

understanding of the history of their nation, and for example, the significance of voting, the Constitution, how laws are created and passed, and how people interact with governmental institutions. The preparation to pass the U.S. History and Government exam ensures that students are exposed to the ideals, practices, principles, and history of the United States, its government, and its civil society.

The American Historical Association encourages the Board of Regents to consider a method by which both Global History and Geography and U.S. History and Government remain vital components of the curriculum and the Regents Exam.