

July 23, 2020

John J. Hurley
President, Canisius College

Sara R. Morris
Vice President for Academic Affairs, Canisius College

Nancy Ware
Vice Chair, Board of Trustees, Canisius College

Lee C. Wortham
Chair, Board of Trustees, Canisius College

Dear President Hurley, Dr. Morris, Ms. Ware, and Mr. Wortham,

The American Historical Association expresses grave concern about the dramatic restructuring of academic departments and program prioritization officially announced by Canisius College on July 20, 2020, including drastic reduction of the curriculum in history. As a Jesuit institution with a strong tradition of liberal arts education, Canisius has a strong record of high-quality history education provided by an accomplished faculty committed to undergraduate education. The AHA urges the administration to consider the educational impact of this short-sighted plan and reorganization, which will serve 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.

This ill-considered plan not only diminishes the quality of a Canisius degree; it also identifies the college with employment practices that have no place in American higher education. The college will terminate three tenured members of the faculty without adhering to its own contractual Faculty Handbook, not to mention generally accepted ethical guidelines—an especially striking embarrassment for an institution committed to Jesuit values.

The AHA has seen this approach to prioritization and restructuring before, and the results have not been impressive. Cutting a core liberal arts degree like history is short-sighted. There is overwhelming evidence that shows employers seek the kind of skills a history degree can provide. This is an especially odd move at a time when civic leaders from all corners of the political landscape have lamented the historical knowledge of American citizens. The elimination of these faculty positions will seriously compromise essential geographic and chronological coverage necessary to foster basic historical literacy in liberally educated citizens.

The AHA is America's largest and most prominent organization of professional historians, with over 11,500 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

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. Canisius'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 at this particular moment. This reorganization, however, may have serious and deleterious consequences for the practice of historical work and hence the quality of undergraduate education at Canisius College. 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. I urge you to reconsider.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Grossman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

James Grossman
Executive Director