

February 29, 2024

Alexander Conyers, President  
Frederick Evans, Provost  
Douglas Gantt, Chair, Board of Trustees  
South Carolina State University

Dear Col. Conyers, Dr. Evans, and Chair Gantt,

The American Historical Association expresses grave concern about the plan to cut majors in history, African American studies, and social studies teaching at South Carolina State University.

The centrality of history to any serious liberal education gives cause enough to be concerned about such a plan at any higher education institution. But it seems especially egregious at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and downright absurd at an HBCU as steeped in its history as South Carolina State University (SCSU), the site of the infamous “Orangeburg Massacre” of 1968. Remembering and highlighting that history is vital not only to the history of our nation but to your mission. Such memory means little without the context provided in history courses.

According to SCSU’s mission statement, “SC State University . . . prepares highly skilled, competent and socially aware graduates to meet life’s challenges and demands and enables them to work and live productively in a dynamic, global society.” To meet that high standard, students need to situate their own experiences into a complicated past that offers lessons for the present. Essential to being “socially aware graduates” is knowing how hard-fought the right to a full education was at this particular institution. Black history is American history (a tag line of the National Museum of African American History and Culture); it is also your institution’s history.

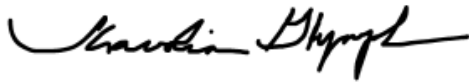
Cutting a core liberal arts degree like African American studies or history is short-sighted. Civic leaders from all corners of the political landscape have lamented the lack of historical knowledge of American citizens.

Surveys by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and others offer overwhelming evidence that employers seek the kind of skills a history or African American studies degree can provide. Cutting social studies education is an especially irresponsible move at a moment when teachers are being prohibited from teaching the truth about slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, or the continuing centrality of racism in American public culture. Because SCSU is immersed in history, indeed a living icon of the Civil Rights Movement, having expert historians who can guide students to see the power of that story is essential. As prizewinning historians of the African American and more broadly the American experience, we are especially surprised that SCSU would downgrade the role of history in its curriculum.

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, as necessary, defending the discipline and its practitioners on university campuses.

The AHA urges the Board of Trustees to consider the educational impact of this myopic plan, which weakens how prepared your students will be to take on leadership as citizens and to create change.

Sincerely,



Thavolia Glymph  
President



James Grossman  
Executive Director