

March 27, 2020

Dr. Tristan Denley

Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer

University System of Georgia

Chairman of the General Education Redesign Implementation Committee

270 Washington Street, S.W.

Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Dr. Denley:

The American Historical Association (AHA) has learned that the University System of Georgia (USG) is considering redesigning its general education curriculum in a way that would diminish instruction in United States and Georgia history. This would be not only unwise, but also likely a violation of state law, which mandates for each and every student “instruction in the history of the United States and the history of Georgia and in the essentials of the United States Constitution and the Constitution of Georgia.”

The American Historical Association 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. The Association does not claim expertise in the intricacies of state law. But we do know what constitutes proper “instruction in history,” and the requirements for delivering such instruction in a way that is professional, effective, and necessary to the learning outcomes implied in Georgia law. Currently, most USG institutions require students to take both American Government and a United States History survey. That approach seems intellectually and pedagogically wise, and well-suited to meet the requirements of Georgia law. Some USG institutions, however, currently permit students to fulfill both aspects of the requirement by taking a single course, either an American Government course or a United States History Survey. The redesign envisions expanding that approach across the USG. Hence at best students are learning history from a political scientist and vice versa. This is unwise from an educational perspective and contrary to the spirit if not the letter of the law.

Our role as an advocate for the study of history in all aspects of American intellectual life does not 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 is not the absence of disciplines,

however, but rather their interaction. The logic is straightforward, and does not imply that either discipline lacks respect for the work of their colleagues. Would you hire a first-rate plumber to rewire your home? A radiologist to do heart surgery? No. Nor should your students learn political science from a historian or history from a political scientist.

The American Historical Association opposes a redesigned general education curriculum that would purport to fulfill an American history requirement in a government course. History and political science are distinct disciplines pursuing differing approaches and aiming to achieve differing learning outcomes. History courses should be taught by historians trained in the historical discipline. The mandate in Georgia law requiring students to take United States and Georgia history should be met in history courses taught by trained historians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Grossman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

James Grossman
Executive Director

cc: Dr. Carla Gerona, Chair, Regents Academic Advisory Committee on History