



March 15, 2018

Bernie Patterson, UWSP Chancellor
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
213 Old Main, 2100 Main Street
UW-Stevens Point
Stevens Point, WI 54481-3897

Greg Summers, Provost
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, Academic Affairs
Room 202 Old Main, 2100 Main Street
Stevens Point, WI 54481-3897

Ray Cross, President
University of Wisconsin System
1720 Van Hise Hall, 1220 Linden Dr.
Madison, WI 53706

Dear Chancellor Patters, Provost Summers, and President Cross:

The Organization of American Historians (OAH) is deeply troubled by the recent announcement that the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point plans to eliminate thirteen humanities and social science majors, including history. This comes on the heels of similar action directed at the same constellation of disciplines announced for the University of Wisconsin-Superior last fall. Certainly there is widespread recognition that budget cuts have forced university leaders to explore new options and make difficult choices about educational priorities. However, the simultaneous announcement that sixteen programs will be expanded or added at UWSP, all in fields that require large start-up and operating expenses, raises serious concerns that more is at issue here than tight budgets.

Chancellor Patterson's acknowledgement of the critical importance of the liberal arts should be taken to heart. In Chancellor Patterson's own words, it is "critical [that] students learn to communicate well, solve problems, think critically and creatively, be analytical and innovative, and work well in teams. This is the value of earning a bachelor's degree." We couldn't agree more. These critical life skills are at the core of historical study. This is one reason that history is a core discipline in comprehensive colleges and universities across the country. Historical study teaches students how to ask meaningful questions, to locate and assess relevant evidence in answer to those questions, to distinguish fact from fancy, to value and weigh differing perspectives, to be attentive to both the obvious and subtle and the immediate and long-term, to arrive at and support conclusions with valid evidence, and to communicate coherently orally and in writing.

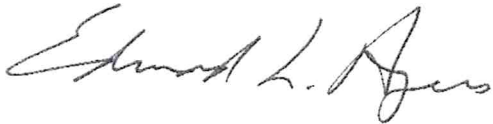
As taught and learned through historical study, these are not generic skills. They are inextricably linked to concrete knowledge that is essential to citizens in a democratic society and to individual achievement in a rapidly changing world. George Santayana's warning that "[t]hose who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" is as relevant today as it was when he wrote it. History is the discipline dedicated to studying the past. Historical study affords a usable past essential to navigating rapid economic

transformation, international crises, epidemic disease, political gridlock and myriad other modern challenges.

Elimination of the history program means the elimination of a university's capacity to teach, and for its students to develop, critical life skills. Denying students the opportunity to pursue a history major conveys a fallacy that understanding the past is an unaffordable luxury rather than a welcome necessity in a democratic society. Eliminating the history major along with a full slate of humanities and social science majors fundamentally distorts the mission of higher education and denies students the right to understand and participate fully in their society.

We urge you to reconsider this decision. With more than 7,000 members, the OAH is the largest professional society dedicated to the teaching and study of American history. Our core mission is to promote excellence in the scholarship, teaching, and presentation of American history. We would welcome the opportunity to assist in strategic planning to ensure the viability and relevance of the history major and related humanities and social sciences.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Edmund L. Rogers". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name of the signatory.

OAH President

CC: UW Chancellors at other Campuses and UW Board of Regents