



YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO 44555

November 15, 1985

Committee Members
Academic Standards and Events
Youngstown State University
Youngstown, Ohio 44555

Dear Colleagues:

On October 23, 1985, Professor William Binning sent a letter to your Committee in which he expressed opposition to the inclusion of a history course in the proposed social studies requirement. The same letter was also circulated at the Arts and Sciences Chairmen's meeting on November 7. The arguments set forth by Dr. Binning are flawed and can not be left unanswered. Therefore, I would like to address myself to some of the issues he raised and present an opposing point of view.

It is surprising and also unfortunate when the inclusion of a history requirement has to be defended against the attacks of colleagues whose enthusiastic support one would have expected. To have an understanding of the historical process, to have students who are aware of the factors which have shaped our cultural, political and socio-economic development, should be welcomed by every member of the University faculty, but most certainly by those who teach in the social sciences and humanities.

Opposition to the inclusion of history as a University requirement seems to be even harder to understand when we examine the general trends in higher education today. In almost every instance where a serious examination of requirements was undertaken and a "core curriculum" was developed, courses in history are required. Dean Rosovsky's Harvard curriculum, for example, requires two semesters of history. As you know, the Harvard core curriculum has already been widely imitated in a variety of institutions, both private and public, large and small. Stanford University has a Western Civilization sequence requirement which every student must pass in order to graduate. Examples by the hundreds could be cited to support the fact that the inclusion of a history requirement is considered sound educational policy.

Committee Members
Page 2
November 15, 1985

In the determination of what is included or excluded in a basic university curriculum, the primary consideration should always be the intellectual development of our students and not an effort to build "academic empires" or to "protect our turf." A requirement that students take at least one history course is an intellectually sound proposal.

It is interesting to note that Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, Stanford and other first rate institutions which draw on the best high school graduates in the country, students who are usually widely traveled and highly literate, still require that their graduates take history courses. Many of our students whose academic preparation is less extensive, who come from a culturally deprived environment, would benefit greatly from exposure to the discipline of History. It would open up new horizons and decrease the provincialism of many of our pupils. A history requirement at Youngstown State University is far more vital to the educational development of our students than the same requirement at an "Ivy League" institution.

The most incomprehensible part of Professor Binning's argument is his insistence that history is the least typical of the social sciences and is not representative of its methodology or its content. First of all, we have to ask the question: On what authority Binning bases his assertion. Just because we say something does not necessarily make it true. While Dr. Binning's statement might have had some validity as a critique of the methodology of history as it was practiced a hundred years ago, it is certainly not true today. History has in fact been influenced by and has adopted much of the methodology of the other social sciences. For example, many historians regularly use the tools of anthropology and geography. Psycho-history is not a passing fad but has become a respected part of the profession. Quantification, population movements, sociological insights into history are all aspects of our discipline. Marxist as well as non-Marxist historians have made giant strides in the study of economic factors in the development of historical trends and events. Historians have learned much from their colleagues in the other social sciences and by incorporating some of this methodology into their own discipline, have strengthened the profession. History is in fact an excellent introduction to what social scientists do. The statement that it is the least typical discipline is obviously fallacious.

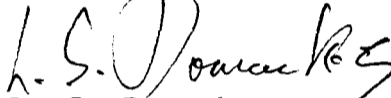
Committee Members

Page 3

November 15, 1985

The members of the Academic Standards Committee should be commended for including a history course in their recommendation. Not only is this in harmony with the general educational trend evident in the United States, but it is an academically and intellectually sound proposal.

Sincerely yours,



L. S. Domonkos
Professor of History
Acting Chairman

LSD/mb

cc Dean B. Yozwiak
Assistant Dean G. Mapley
Chairmen, College of Arts and Sciences