

January 25, 2024

President Milo Rivero  
Acting Provost Rani Roy  
Chair of the Board of Trustees Stephen Squeri  
Manhattan College  
Riverdale, NY 10471

Dear President Rivero, Acting Provost Roy, and Chair Squeri,

The American Historical Association expresses grave concern about the termination of two members of the history faculty at Manhattan College. The dismissal of a tenured professor is especially egregious, although we also are concerned that a faculty member on the tenure track would be let go in this manner. Dismissal of a tenured faculty member on short notice is outside of the college's standard procedures as outlined in the faculty handbook.

The termination of 19 tenured professors across various disciplines on January 12, 2024, following the mass nonrenewal of tenure-track faculty in September 2023, obviously signals deep financial stress at the college, and we recognize the need to take appropriate emergency measures in a crisis. The issue in such situations, however, is the nature of the crisis and whether such drastic measures are necessary and appropriate. The history department will be cut in half from six to three through these and other faculty eliminations.

We have also been advised of plans for the realignment of academic departments and programs, including the uncertain future for the history program itself. Our experience with comparable institutions is that these kinds of consolidations usually sacrifice academic quality to financial efficiencies, especially at institutions with the high standards that characterize the reputation of Manhattan College (which I know well, having grown up 13 miles to the north).

As a Lasallian institution with a strong tradition of liberal arts education, Manhattan College has a particularly impressive record of high-quality history education provided by an accomplished faculty committed to undergraduate education. The AHA urges the administration to consider how its actions are undermining this commitment to the liberal arts and the training of teachers, and the importance of the liberal arts to the lifelong learning essential to occupational and professional success.

The college's failure to adhere to its own contractual faculty handbook, not to mention generally accepted ethical guidelines, is an especially striking embarrassment for an institution committed to Lasallian values. By waiting until January for the largest round of terminations, the college also made it impossible for affected faculty to seek new positions for the fall, in violation of the handbook's September 1 notification deadline. One would think that whatever reason the college might have for

making these extensive cuts, there would be more concern for the future career path possibilities for affected faculty.

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, government, 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 providing resources to history 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. Manhattan's history chair has participated in 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.

Cutting a core liberal arts faculty is short-sighted. There is overwhelming evidence that 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 lack of 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.

As experienced administrators we certainly understand the pressure of budgets and do not underestimate the financial constraints you confront at this moment. These terminations and the methods and timing by which they were enacted, however, will have serious and deleterious consequences for the practice of historical work and hence the quality of undergraduate education at Manhattan College. Once programs are eliminated or truncated, they are often exceedingly difficult and expensive to reconstitute. We urge you to reconsider these terminations, or at the very least to honor your contractual obligations to these teacher-scholars as delineated in the faculty handbook.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Grossman", written in a cursive style.

James Grossman  
Executive Director