

May 6, 2020

President M. Duane Nellis
Ohio University
3211 Providence Drive
Athens, OH 45701
via email: president@ohio.edu

Dear President Nellis:

Like so many who care deeply about the state of higher education today, we were concerned and saddened to hear about the tremendous challenges Ohio University is facing. We certainly understand that when institutions are facing financial instability, in the best interests of students and the long-term viability of the institution, difficult decisions may have to be made.

However, as the executive directors of the American Anthropological Association and the American Sociological Association, we were troubled to learn that in the span of one year the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Ohio University--which is celebrating its centennial anniversary this year--may have to give up eight faculty lines. Four faculty (all sociologists) have already accepted voluntary early separation agreements. It is our understanding that these lines will not be replaced. If another four lines are eliminated, as has been proposed, the department will have lost approximately 30 percent of its faculty this year alone.

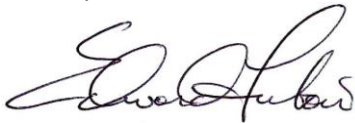
Students taking courses in anthropology and sociology examine some of the most pertinent topics in our world today, including health and health care, culture, families, policing, power and governance, inequality, and globalization. They gain skills in the areas of critical thinking and analytic reasoning; global understanding; complex problem solving and analysis; written and oral communication; and the application of knowledge and skills to real-work settings. These are precisely the skills that surveys conducted by the American Association of Colleges and Universities reveal are the most sought by today's employers.

We understand that the current pandemic has amplified and accelerated financial problems for many institutions of higher education. But the pandemic also amplifies and highlights the need for the social and behavioral sciences. Research findings from sociology and anthropology can help our nation respond to the pandemic and recover from its impact. They can help us develop effective social distancing guidelines, understand the social and cultural dynamics behind contagion, and inform public policy to efficiently provide economic relief. Both fundamental research into the nature of individuals, groups, and cultures, and applied research into the effectiveness of policymaking and the impact of changes to our national security, education, and healthcare systems, are important to understanding how this pandemic has affected, and will continue to affect, the way we live.

Anthropology and sociology are distinctive fields that reflect on the breadth and complexity of the many problems we face in the 21st-century. They also play a key role in developing culturally sensitive strategies in a world that is increasingly animated by cross-cultural contacts. They are involved in improving healthcare and educational systems, working towards environmental sustainability, protecting cultural heritage, reducing global inequalities, and increasing awareness of the many forms of households and families that raise our children and take care of our elderly.

As you and your colleagues grapple with the difficult decisions ahead, we urge you to look again at the value of the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Ohio University, consider its 100 years of service to students and the institution, reflect on the value of the courses that are taught within the department, the research that is produced by its faculty, and the needs of future employers in Ohio. There is strong evidence to suggest that maintaining robust sociology and anthropology departments across the nation will serve our communities well. Thank you for considering our request. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



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