E-Newsletter - Spring 2020

We are pleased to invite you to the 2020 Department of History Convocation on Friday, June 12, 2020. The virtual ceremony will start at 2pm.

We hope you will join us as we celebrate our graduates and their achievements! This event will include a welcome from the chair of the Department of History, a keynote speech from a state senator, well wishes from surprise alumni, and a virtual procession of our 2020 graduates!

Spring Message from Professor Glennys Young, Department of History Chair

Dear Friends,

I hope this finds you and everyone you care about doing as well as possible in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

We have concluded what has been such a challenging quarter for so many of us. We have been living with the impact of COVID-19 on our work and in our lives. Simultaneously, police brutality, racial violence, and the appalling racial disparities in health and economic impact of the pandemic are causing deep harm, grief, and anger for many in our community. These events have been, and will continue to be, deeply painful and exhausting for our Black colleagues and students, who are more likely to have suffered the loss of someone in their family. They are, at the same time, experiencing the heightened threat of racism.

The department, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the university are determined to do the urgent work that lies before us in dismantling systemic racism and profound injustice in our world. The College of Arts and Sciences, the Department of History, and I fully support UW's Race and Equity Initiative. I welcome your ideas about how the department can make the most effective and lasting contributions to promoting racial justice.

Away from Smith Hall, the history department has not only carried on but risen to the challenge of offering remote learning in disturbing times. The department has provided excellent instruction to 1568 students. Students completed 49 courses remotely, thanks to instructors who adjusted to a new mode of instruction with little notice.

This spring, one of the department's priorities was providing events that seek to offer perspective on our national and global crises. We moved our events to the world of Zoom. Highlights included the 2020 Stephanie M. H. Camp Lecture by Professor Sharla Fett of Occidental College, and “History behind the Headlines,” hosted by Professor Margaret O'Mara. And on June 2, Professor Nancy Bristow, chair of the history department at the University of Puget Sound, spoke on lessons of the 1918 pandemic for the COVID-19 crisis.

As always, we marked the end of the academic year with convocation. This online event featured remarks from well-known history alumni including Larry Gossett and Rick Steves, addresses from outstanding graduating seniors, and a keynote speech from Senator...
Rebecca Saldaña. I invite you to watch this inspiring ceremony. We look forward to welcoming the class of 2020 back in 2021 for an on-campus ceremony.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank students for their flexibility and commitment to their studies, history staff for their amazing work in helping the department function in challenging times, and our faculty for their creativity and innovation in designing courses to be taught remotely. I am also deeply grateful to our donors for their support of our educational mission.

I am eager to see you in Smith Hall. Until then, I wish you and your families good health and as joyful a summer as possible in these challenging times.

Best wishes,

Glennys Young

“We Can't Not Talk about It”: History Instructors Teach the Virus

Teaching a course on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the middle of another viral pandemic is a daunting prospect, but that is precisely the scenario that confronted Professor Laurie Marhoefer at the start of spring quarter. HSTCMP 248: The AIDS Epidemic: A Global History usually begins with the earliest AIDS patients in the 1980s before moving back in time in order to explain the context within which the epidemic emerged. This year, however, such an... Read more

UW History Professors Investigate Global Histories of Health in New Books

Department of History professors Lynn Thomas and Adam Warren published new books dealing with histories of health this spring. Thomas’s Beneath the Surface: A Transnational History of Skin Lighteners (Duke University Press, 2020) investigates the history of skin lighteners in global popular culture—their use, their sale, and opposition to them from medical professionals, consumer health advocates, and antiracist thinkers and activists... Read more

Husky 100 Recipient Racquel West on Being a History Major and Graduating in a Pandemic
Graduating in the middle of a pandemic is a difficult situation for students. For the history department, this makes celebrating the work and accomplishments of our graduating seniors especially important. One of those students is Racquel West, a double major in history and geography whom the university recognized this week as one of this year’s Husky 100. The Husky 100 program honors the accomplishments of 100 outstanding undergraduate and graduate students from the University of Washington's... Read more

In Memoriam: William Rorabaugh

Professor Emeritus William Rorabaugh passed away the morning of March 19 at Northwest Hospital from complications arising from the treatment of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Born in 1945, William, known to his colleagues as Bill, was a popular teacher and prolific scholar whose legacy in the department will be felt for many years to come. Bill began his career as a historian of the Jacksonian period of U.S. history and published his first book, The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition (Oxford,... Read more

Department of History faculty in the news

Lynn Thomas discusses Amazon’s regulation of skin lightening products and her new book, Beneath the Surface: A Transnational History of Skin Lighteners

Laurie Marhoefer writes about three lessons from the AIDS crisis for The Conversation

Margaret O’Mara talks to Slate about America’s history of mobilizing the private sector during times of crisis

Margaret O’Mara on the Great Depression and how COVID-19 will affect the future of big tech

The Seattle Times quotes Joshua Reid on the Makah Nation’s historical experience of epidemics

Margaret O’Mara on the history of the technology industry’s relationship with working from home