



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

July 23, 2021

Professor Amanda Davies
Head of School of Social Sciences
University of Western Australia
VIA EMAIL: <socialsciencesproposal@uwa.edu.au>

Dear Professor Davies,

It is the understanding of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) that the leadership of the School of Social Sciences at the University of Western Australia has proposed to eliminate Anthropology and Sociology, and reduce faculty research strength in Archaeology and Forensic Anthropology. Speaking particularly from the perspective of Archaeology, the SAA strongly urges you to reconsider this proposal.

The SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With nearly 7,000 members, SAA represents professional and avocational archaeologists, archaeology students in colleges and universities, and archaeologists working at Tribal agencies, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. While focused on the Americas, its members include archaeologists who live, work, and carry out research all over the world, including Australia.

Archaeology as a social science discipline is not just about the past. It creates knowledge of the human past so as to contribute to better understandings of the present and wiser decisions about a future that must grapple with social injustice and inequality, environmental pollution, climate change and a host of other problems. This is a global and comparative endeavor, and the University of Western Australia has an outstanding reputation as a contributor to it, partly but by no means exclusively because of the "flagship" program in Australian archaeology identified in the Proposal for Change. The entire endeavor is damaged wherever archaeological research and student training are weakened. Archaeology receives vital intellectual nourishment from its close relationships with other social science disciplines, especially Anthropology. The SAA appreciates that difficult budgetary decisions must be made in any institution, and the idea of focusing on areas of strength is appealing. But reducing Archaeology's faculty strength, and eliminating Anthropology and Sociology altogether, risk irreparable damage to the very flagship program in which the School of Social Sciences places hope. Its strength and global reputation cannot be maintained as an isolated entity, disconnected from its most important disciplinary siblings.

It is especially ironic that just a year ago, the SAA joined a worldwide chorus of dismay over the wanton destruction of the Juukan Gorge sites. In concert with our Australian colleagues, we lamented their loss, and urged Western Australia to strengthen protection of such sites of major scientific and cultural importance and inestimable heritage value. We did not expect to be further saddened by news that the University of Western Australia proposed to reduce Archaeology and discontinue Anthropology and Sociology, disciplines vital to understanding such places and to realizing their potential in relation to the diversity of interests, values, and concerns of real communities finding their niche in the modern era.

Thank you for your time and for your reconsideration of these elements of the Proposal for Change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deborah L. Nichols". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a light-colored background.

Deborah L. Nichols, Ph.D. RPA
President

cc.: Professor Amit Chakma, Vice-Chancellor <vice-chancellor@uwa.edu.au>
Associate Professor Katie Glaskin (Anthropology & Sociology) <katie.glaskin@uwa.edu.au>