

Professional Integrity and the OAH

During the past two years the executive board of the Organization of American Historians has engaged in an extensive discussion of issues of academic freedom and professional ethics. These discussions have been provoked, for the most part, by highly publicized accusations of professional misconduct. At the annual meeting in Memphis the board voted to appoint an ad hoc Committee on Professional Standards to help formulate guidelines for responding to the issues raised by such cases in the future.

The OAH executive board approved a Statement on Honesty and Integrity in April 2002. It also endorsed the American Historical Association Statement on Plagiarism in April 2002 and the Scholarship and Teaching sections of the AHA Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct in April 2003. The AHA documents can be viewed at <http://www.theaha.org/pubs/standard.htm>.

OAH Statement on Honesty and Integrity

At its spring 2002 board meeting, the executive board adopted the following statement endorsing and amplifying the American Historical Association's Statement on Plagiarism. The board's intent was to address honesty and integrity in the classroom and specifically condemn lying by teachers and professors:

- Honesty and integrity should undergird the work of all historians. Historians seek truth about the past in an effort to better understand historical developments and how they relate to the present and future.

When students encounter historians in the precollegiate, community college, and university classroom, there is an implicit trust on the part of the student that the history teacher or professor

will convey a truthful representation of the past when s/he is discussing historical themes, events, places, or individuals. The OAH categorically condemns lying as well as falsification and deliberate distortion in the teaching of history. Such mendacity is an ethical violation of the principle of truth on which the historical profession is based.

Similarly, plagiarism also undermines the search for truth. Stealing another writer's work and offering it as one's own is not only a violation of law that can result in legal action, but it is an attack on the credibility of the historical profession as a whole. The OAH endorses the American Historical Association Statement on Plagiarism, amended in January 2002, and its conclusion that "All historians share responsibility for maintenance of the highest standards of intellectual integrity. . . . Scholarship flourishes in an atmosphere of openness and candor, which should include the scrutiny and discussion of academic deception."