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## Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct

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*Debbi Ann Doyle*  
*Sharon K. Stone*  
*Stone@theaha.org*  
*Assistant Director,*  
*Administration & Convention*  
*Director*

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## Introduction to the 1999 Edition

Under its 1889 charter from the U.S. Congress, which specifically authorizes the American Historical Association to act "in the interest of American history, and of history in America," the AHA bears a special obligation to address principles of conduct and practice among historians. Thus, in 1974 the Association established the Professional Division, the profession's only elected body specifically charged with responsibility for ethical concerns. As such, the division has developed the following statement and addenda, which supersedes the 1974 report of the AHA's Ad Hoc Committee on the Rights of Historians. Although enforcement of these standards is part of its work, the division hopes that policing activities will diminish as historians become more cognizant of their professional responsibilities. Toward that end, the Professional Division urges you to share this document with your students and colleagues, whether by ordering additional copies or photocopying this publication.

Readers should also take note of more specialized guidelines developed and adopted by other professional organizations. These include statements by four of the AHA's affiliated societies: the American Association for State and Local History's *Statement of Professional Ethics*, the National Council on Public History's *Ethical Guidelines for the Historian*, the Oral History Association's *Principles and Standards* and *Oral History Evaluation*

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*Guidelines*, and the Society for History in the Federal Government's *Principles and Standards for Federal Historical Programs*. Copies of these publications are available through the headquarters of the respective organizations. (4)

This edition of the *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct* incorporates revisions to Section 4 of the Statement. The AHA Council adopted the modifications in January and May 1999.

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## Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct

*(Adopted May 1987; amended May 1990, May 1995, June 1996, and January and May 1999)*

The historical profession is diverse, consisting of people who work in a variety of institutional settings and also as independent professionals. But all historians should be guided by the same principles of conduct.

### 1. Scholarship

Scholarship, the uncovering and exchange of new information and the shaping of interpretations, is basic to the activities of the historical profession. The profession communicates with students in textbooks and classrooms; to other scholars and the general public in books, articles, exhibits, films, and historic sites and structures; and to decision makers in memoranda and testimony.

Scholars must be not only competent in research and analysis but also cognizant of issues of professional conduct. **Integrity** is one of these issues. It requires an awareness of one's own bias and a readiness to follow sound method and analysis wherever they may lead. It demands disclosure of all significant qualifications of one's arguments. Historians should carefully document their findings and thereafter be prepared to make available to others their sources, evidence, and data, including the documentation they develop through interviews. Historians must not misrepresent evidence or the sources of evidence, must be free of the offense of plagiarism, and must not be indifferent to error or efforts to ignore or conceal it. They should acknowledge the receipt of any financial support, sponsorship, or unique privileges (including privileged access to research material) related to their research, and they should strive to bring the requests and demands of their employers and clients into harmony with the principles of the historical profession. They should also acknowledge assistance received from colleagues, students, and others.

Because historians must have **access to sources**--archival and other--to produce reliable history, they have a professional obligation to preserve sources and advocate free, open, equal, and nondiscriminatory access to them, and to avoid actions that might prejudice future access. Historians recognize the appropriateness of some national security and corporate and personal privacy claims but must challenge unnecessary restrictions. They must protect research collections and other historic resources and make those under their control available to other scholars as soon as possible.

Certain kinds of research and conditions attached to employment or to use of records impose obligations to maintain confidentiality, and oral historians often must make promises to interviewees as conditions for interviews. Scholars should honor any pledges made. At the same time, historians should seek definitions of conditions of confidentiality before work begins, press for redefinitions when experience demonstrates the unsatisfactory character of established regulations, and advise their readers of the conditions and rules that govern their work. They also have the obligation to decline to make their services available when policies are unnecessarily restrictive.

As **intellectual diversity** enhances the historical imagination and contributes to the development and vitality of the study of the past, historians should welcome rather than deplore it. When applied with integrity, the political, social, and religious beliefs of historians may inform their historical practice. When historians make interpretations and judgments, they should be careful not to present them in a way that forecloses discussion of alternative interpretations. Historians should be free from institutional and professional penalties for their beliefs and activities, provided they do not misrepresent themselves as speaking for their institutions or their professional organizations.

The bond that grows out of lives committed to the study of history should be evident in the **standards of civility** that govern the conduct of historians in their relations with one another. The preeminent value of all intellectual communities is reasoned discourse--the continuous colloquy among historians of diverse points of view. A commitment to such discourse makes possible the fruitful exchange of views, opinions, and knowledge.

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## 2. Teaching

Communication skills are essential to historians' efforts to disseminate their scholarship beyond the profession. Those skills are not limited to writing books and articles but also involve teaching, which takes place in many locales--museums and historic sites as well as classrooms--and involves the use of visual materials and artifacts as well as words.

Quality in teaching involves **integrity** as well as competence. Integrity requires the presentation of differing interpretations with intellectual honesty; it also requires fairness and promptness in judging students' work on merit alone and a readiness to discuss their views with an open mind.

When so applied, the **political, social, and religious beliefs** of historians may inform their teaching. The right of the teacher to hold such convictions and to express them in teaching, however, does not justify the persistent intrusion of material unrelated to the subject of the course or the intentional use of falsification, misrepresentation, or concealment.

**Freedom of expression** is essential to the task of communicating historical thought and learning. To this end, historians should have substantial latitude in realizing their objectives, although they are obligated to see that their courses or other presentations reasonably correspond in coverage and emphasis to published descriptions.

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## 3. Public Service

Historical knowledge provides a vital perspective in the analysis of contemporary social problems and political issues and at times may impose obligations on historians to enter policy arenas in which difficulties abound. Often the work of historians may be used by others in ways that historians find objectionable. Some may seek to make partisans out of professionals or to discredit them by charging that they are not qualified to speak on an issue or are biased.

Historians entering public arenas as political advisers, expert witnesses, consultants, legislative witnesses, journalists, commentators, or staff may face a **choice of priorities** between professionalism and partisanship. They may want to prepare themselves by seeking advice from other experienced professionals. As historians, they must be sensitive to the complexities of history, the diversity among historians, and the limits as well as the strengths of their own points of view and experiences and of the discipline itself and its specialties. In such situations, historians must use sources, including the work of other scholars, with great care and should be prepared to explain the methods and assumptions in their research and the relations between evidence and interpretation and should be ready also to discuss alternative interpretations of the subjects being addressed.

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## 4. Employment

Although some historians are self-employed, most work for academic institutions, corporations, government agencies, law firms, archives, historical societies, museums, parks, historic preservation programs, or in communications. In such institutions, they are usually in a position to influence employment policies, and thus they at least **share responsibility** for any unfair policies. To the extent that they can influence policies in their employing institutions, the AHA encourages historians to do all they possibly can to persuade their employers to accept and enforce such rules as will best ensure **fairness in all decisions** about the appointment of historians and in all personnel decisions affecting the welfare of employed historians. If they are in an academic institution, they should urge the institution to accept the 1966 "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities," jointly formulated by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. If in a nonacademic institution, they should urge the institution to adopt comparable standards.

Fairness begins with **recruitment**. Historians have an obligation to do all possible to ensure that employment opportunities in the field are widely publicized and that all professionally qualified persons have an equal opportunity to compete for any openly advertised position. This means not only the placement of job notices in appropriate publications (for example, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, AHA's *Perspectives*, or other more specialized professional placement newsletters) but also the inclusion in such notices of a completely accurate description of the position and of any contingencies, budgetary or otherwise, that might affect the continued availability of the position. An institution should not deceive possible candidates by omitting qualifications or characteristics that favor certain candidates over others (for example, a preference for unspecified minor fields). If an employer decides to alter a job description or selection criteria, the institution should readvertise.

Fairness also involves equal treatment of all qualified applicants and procedures that are considerate to all

applicants. For example, an employing institution should promptly acknowledge all applications and, as soon as practicable, inform applicants who do not meet the selection criteria. Likewise, it should keep competitive applicants informed of the progress of the search and promptly notify those who are no longer under consideration. It should do everything possible to accommodate finalists in arranging interviews, including the payment of expenses, where appropriate. Finally, it should ensure that those who conduct interviews adhere to professional standards by respecting the dignity of candidates, focusing their questions on the qualifications needed for the position, and avoiding questions that violate federal antidiscrimination laws.

Employment decisions always involve judgments. But, except in those cases in which federal law allows a specific preference, institutions should base hiring decisions as well as all decisions relating to reappointment, promotion, tenure, apprenticeship, graduate student assistantships, awards, and fellowships solely on **professional qualifications** without regard to sex, race, color, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, political affiliation, veteran status, age, certain physical handicaps, or marital status. A written contract should follow a verbal offer in a timely manner. Once signed, a contract should be honored by all parties as both a legal and ethical obligation.

Once employed, any person deserves the **professional respect and support** necessary for professional growth and advancement. Such respect precludes unequal treatment based on any nonprofessional criteria. In particular, it precludes any harassment or discrimination, which is unethical, unprofessional, and threatening to intellectual freedom. Harassment includes all behavior that prevents or impairs an individual's full enjoyment of educational or workplace rights, benefits, environment, or opportunities, such as generalized pejorative remarks or behavior or the use of professional authority to emphasize inappropriately the personal identity of a student or colleague. Sexual harassment, which includes inappropriate requests for sexual favors, unwanted sexual advances, and sexual assaults, is illegal and violates professional standards.

Historians should receive promotions and merit salary increases exclusively on the basis of professional qualifications and achievements. The best way to ensure that such criteria are used is to establish **clear standards and procedures** known to all members of the institution. For example, academic historians need to know the relative weight given to scholarship, teaching, and service, and how they relate to decisions about tenure or promotion. An institution should have an established review process, should offer candidates for promotion or merit raises opportunities to substantiate their achievements, should provide early and specific notification of adverse tenure or promotion or salary decisions, and should provide an appeal mechanism.

Of particularly grave concern to historians are those institutional decisions that lead to disciplinary action--most important, questions of suspension and dismissal, because they may involve issues of academic freedom. All institutions employing historians should have clearly written policies governing both the grounds for disciplinary action and the procedures to be followed. Those procedures should embody the principles of due process, including adequate mechanisms for fact-finding and avenues for appeal. Academic institutions should adhere to the AAUP's 1940 "Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure." Other institutions that employ professional historians should provide a comparable standard of due process.

Historians who work **part-time or as adjunct or temporary faculty** should receive compensation in proportion to the share of a full-time work load they carry, including a proportionate share of fringe benefits available to their full-time colleagues; they also should have access to institutional facilities and support systems, including research support, and should be eligible to apply for relevant tenure opportunities. Employers should offer multiyear contracts to those likely to remain part-time for extended periods, and those individuals should have the attendant obligations of participation in governance and administrative tasks and access to the same procedural protections as full-time employees. Nontenure-track employees also should be represented on the appropriate advisory and governing bodies, such as faculty senates.

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## 5. Credentials

Historians are obligated to present their credentials **accurately and honestly** in all contexts. For example, care must be taken not to misrepresent one's qualifications in c.v.'s and in grant applications.

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## 6. Implementation

Historians have a professional obligation to encourage the establishment of and to support guidelines and procedures concerning professionals in their employing institutions. Historians also have the responsibility to take appropriate action when confronted with violations of the profession's standards of conduct.

Initially, historians should use their employing institutions' grievance mechanism. When this is not possible, feasible, or appropriate, alleged violations may be referred to the Professional Division of the AHA for consideration and possible resolution. The division is not an investigatory body, although it may solicit and receive documents on cases.

The division may refer cases to other organizations for formal arbitration or resolution; it may make statements on cases or advise parties to the controversies to do so; and it may provide opportunities for persons to bring their views before the profession.

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## Addendum on Policies and Procedures

(Adopted December 1987, amended December 1989, May 1995, and January 1997)

The Professional Division, elected by the AHA membership, has primary responsibility for interpretation of the AHA *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct* (including any addenda), for the evaluation of complaints brought under it, and for recommendations to Council pertinent to such complaints. The Professional Division will review those cases for which it is the most appropriate forum, if it considers the matter important to the profession, and if it deems the AHA's resources to be adequate to yield a fair judgment. The division will not accept complaints it deems frivolous or principally vindictive, and, except in unusual circumstances, it will not pursue a case while the dispute is pending in another forum. Review of a case by the Professional Division should not be regarded as a substitute for legal action.

All complaints of violation(s) of the AHA *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct* should be directed in writing to the executive director, who shall acknowledge receipt of the complaint and send a copy of the *Statement*, these procedures, and a standardized complaint form, asking for a description of the complaint, the name of the person or institution against which it is directed, the section of the AHA *Statement on Standards* allegedly violated, and a brief description of the kind of evidence or documentation to be presented in support of the complaint.

The executive director shall circulate the completed form to the members of the Professional Division, who may vote to either accept the complaint for full review, decline to consider the complaint, or delay a decision pending further discussion. The Professional Division will base its decision on its judgment of the division's capacity to handle the matter in light of its resources and competence; the seriousness of the complaint; the degree to which the complaint alleges specific violations of the AHA *Statement on Standards*; the likelihood that the AHA will be able to make a positive contribution to resolving the problem; and the availability of a more suitable forum, such as a university grievance procedure or the AAUP. Except in extraordinary circumstances, the division will not pursue cases that require independent investigation but will confine its review to written materials submitted by the parties involved.

If the Professional Division decides to hear a case, the executive director shall ask the complainant to submit full documentation for all charges. A complainant has 90 days in which to submit documentation after being notified that a complaint has been accepted. If this period expires without the submission of supporting documents, the complainant must refile the complaint for consideration. The executive director shall forward the complaint, with documentation, to the accused party or parties, along with a copy of the *Statement on Standards* and these procedures (by registered mail with return receipt requested). The party against whom a complaint is made shall have 90 days in which to respond, unless the division extends the response time for good cause.

If the accused party responds to the charges, the executive director shall forward copies of the response to the party filing the complaint. The complainant then has 30 days in which to reply. If the complainant sends a reply, the executive director shall forward a copy to the accused party, who will have 30 days to respond. That will mark the end of the cycle. When all the communications from the complainant and accused parties have been received, or when the allotted time for all complaints and responses has elapsed, the executive director shall ensure that the complainant, the accused party, and all members of the Professional Division have copies of all the documents in the case. While a case is being considered, all material shall be marked "Confidential," and each member of the division, as well as the complainant and the accused party, shall treat all aspects of the case with confidentiality.

After reviewing materials submitted by the parties involved, the division shall decide by majority vote whether it

- Needs additional expert opinion to clarify issues in the case (for example, expertise in foreign languages).
- Judges the complaint without merit.
- Wishes to issue an advisory opinion.
- Deems that a specific AHA standard was violated.

If the division

- Decides it needs expert consultation, the executive director will secure such assistance and the division will resume consideration of the case when the additional information has been provided. In such case, the division shall inform all parties that additional expertise is being sought.
- Decides that the complaint is without merit, the vice president for the Professional Division shall communicate this decision and the reasons therefore to the executive director, who shall notify all parties.
- Decides that an individual case is indicative of a larger problem, it may issue an advisory opinion or guideline, which shall be published in *Perspectives* and become an addendum to the *Statement on Standards*.
- Decides a violation has occurred, it shall convey its findings to the executive director, who shall communicate them to all parties involved in the complaint. The division may in certain instances decide that additional action is necessary. For example, it may decide that fuller disclosure of misconduct is necessary to deter recurrence of behavior judged in violation of AHA standards or, in cases of plagiarism, to prevent proliferation of misattributed work. In such situations, the Professional Division must, through its vice president, seek approval from Council. The executive director shall notify all parties of the division's request, and they shall have 30 days to submit to Council in writing any comments on the proposed action. The Council shall then make a final determination of the case on behalf of the Association. The executive director shall notify all parties of Council's action.

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## Appeal

Any party or parties whom the Professional Division has found in violation of AHA's standards but who believe that determination to be in error may appeal to Council. Council may decide whether a hearing is appropriate or whether the appeal should be decided on the basis of the written record submitted to it by the Professional Division. If the division has recommended public disclosure of its finding(s), the accused party or parties have an absolute right to a hearing to contest either the factual conclusions reached by the division or the severity of the proposed sanction.

An Appeals Committee composed of three members of Council appointed by the Executive Committee will conduct any hearing, at which the appellant may appear personally. An appellant may also be represented by an attorney or other advocate. The Appeals Committee will make a final recommendation to the whole Council, and the executive director will inform all parties of Council's action.

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## Statement on Plagiarism and Related Misuses of the Work of Other Authors

(Adopted May 1986; amended May 1990, May 1993, and May 1995\*)

### 1. Identifying Plagiarism and Other Misuses

The word *plagiarism* derives from Latin roots: *plagiarius*, an abductor, and *plagiare*, to steal. The expropriation of another author's text, and the presentation of it as one's own, constitutes plagiarism and is a serious violation of the ethics of scholarship. It undermines the credibility of historical inquiry.

In addition to the harm that plagiarism does to the pursuit of truth, it is also an offense against the literary rights of the original author and the property rights of the copyright owner. Detection can therefore result not only in academic sanctions (such as dismissal from a graduate program, termination of a faculty contract, or denial of promotion or tenure) but also in civil or criminal prosecution. As a practical matter, plagiarism between scholars rarely goes to court. Publishers are eager to avoid adverse publicity, and an injured scholar is unlikely to seek material compensation for misappropriation of what he or she gave gladly to the world. The real penalty for plagiarism is the abhorrence of the community of scholars.

The *misuse* of the writings of another author, even when one does not borrow the exact wording, can be as unfair, as unethical, and as unprofessional as plagiarism. Such misuse includes the limited borrowing, without attribution, of another historian's distinctive and significant research findings, hypotheses, theories, rhetorical strategies, or interpretations, or an extended borrowing even with attribution. Of course, historical knowledge is cumulative, and thus in some contexts—such as textbooks, encyclopedia articles, or broad syntheses, the form of attribution,

and the permissible extent of dependence on prior scholarship--will be different than in more limited monographs. As knowledge is disseminated to a wide public, it loses some of its personal reference. What belongs to whom becomes less distinct. But even in textbooks a historian should acknowledge the sources of recent or distinctive findings and interpretations, those not yet a part of the common understanding of the profession, and should never simply borrow and rephrase the findings of other scholars.

Both plagiarism and the misuse of the findings and interpretations of other scholars take many forms. The clearest abuse is the use of another's language without quotation marks and citation. More subtle abuses include the appropriation of concepts, data, or notes all disguised in newly crafted sentences, or reference to a borrowed work in an early note and then extensive further use without attribution. All such tactics reflect an unworthy disregard for the contributions of others.

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## 2. Resisting Plagiarism and Misuse

All who participate in the community of inquiry, as amateurs or as professionals, as students or as established historians, have an obligation to oppose deception. This obligation bears with special weight on the directors of graduate seminars. They are critical in shaping a young historian's perception of the ethics of scholarship. It is therefore incumbent on graduate teachers to seek opportunities for making the seminar also a workshop in scholarly integrity. After leaving graduate school, every historian will have to depend primarily on vigilant self-criticism. Throughout our lives none of us can cease to question the claims our work makes and the sort of credit it grants to others.

But just as important as the self-criticism that guards us from self-deception is the formation of work habits that protect a scholar from plagiarism or misuse. The plagiarist's standard defense--that he or she was misled by hastily taken and imperfect notes--is plausible only in the context of a wider tolerance of shoddy work. A basic rule of good notetaking requires every researcher to distinguish scrupulously between exact quotation and paraphrase. A basic rule of good writing warns us against following our own paraphrased notes slavishly. When a historian simply links one paraphrase to the next, even if the sources are cited, a kind of structural misuse takes place; the writer is implicitly claiming a shaping intelligence that actually belonged to the sources. Faced with charges of failing to acknowledge dependence on certain sources, a historian usually pleads that the lapse was inadvertent. This excuse will be easily disposed of if scholars take seriously the injunction to check their manuscripts against the underlying texts prior to publication. Historians have a right to expect of one another a standard of workmanship that deprives plagiarism or misuses of their usual extenuations.

The second line of defense against plagiarism or misuse is organized and punitive. Every institution that includes or represents a body of scholars has an obligation to establish procedures designed to clarify and uphold their ethical standards. Every institution that employs historians bears an especially critical responsibility to maintain the integrity and reputation of its staff. This applies to government agencies, corporations, publishing firms, and public service organizations such as museums and archives, as surely as it does to educational facilities. Usually, it is the employing institution that is expected to investigate charges of plagiarism or misuse promptly and impartially and to invoke appropriate sanctions when the charges are sustained. Penalties for scholarly misconduct should vary according to the seriousness of the offense, and the protections of due process should always apply. A persistent pattern of deception may justify public disclosure or even termination of an academic career; some scattered misappropriations may warrant only a formal reprimand.

All historians share responsibility for maintenance of the highest standards of intellectual integrity. When appraising manuscripts for publication, reviewing books, or evaluating peers for placement, promotion, and tenure, scholars must evaluate the honesty and reliability with which the historian uses primary and secondary source materials. Scholarship flourishes in an atmosphere of openness and candor, which should include the scrutiny and discussion of academic deception.

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## Advisory Opinion Regarding the Harassment of Job Candidates

*(Adopted May 1989)*

Several disturbing instances of "academic mugging" have come to the attention of the AHA Professional Division. By this term, the division means the practice of individuals attempting to influence the appointment process by, for example, refusing to cooperate with a candidate if he or she is appointed, circulating rumors or other unsubstantiated derogatory information, and pressuring a candidate by phone or mail. The division finds such actions inappropriate and counter to professional standards of conduct that should at all times govern historians in their relations with one another.

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## Statement on Interviewing for Historical Documentation

*(Adopted May 1989; amended January 1998)*

Interviewing has become commonplace in historical research focusing on the 20th century, but unfortunately it is often done and used without proper attention to professional obligations. When they conduct interviews, individual historians too often fail to adhere to the standards now well established in more formal oral history programs and projects. Historians should recognize that in interviewing they are creating historical documents and that entails special responsibilities to ensure future access for both verification and research by others. The AHA's *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct* (adopted 1987) establishes basic obligations for historians who engage in interviewing, which are detailed on pages 1-2 under the heading "Scholarship."

Recognizing the need for more specific guidelines, the AHA's Professional Division consulted with representatives of the Oral History Association, the Organization of American Historians, and the Society of American Archivists. The following guidelines resulted from that discussion and are drawn from statements adopted by the Oral History Association and the Society for History in the Federal Government:

1. Interviews should be recorded on tape but only after the person to be interviewed has been informed of the mutual rights and responsibilities involved in oral history, such as editing, confidentiality, disposition, and dissemination of all forms of the record. Interviewers should obtain legal releases and document any agreements with interviewees.
2. The interviewer should strive to prompt informative dialogue through challenging and perceptive inquiry, should be grounded in the background and experiences of the person being interviewed, and, if possible, should review the sources relating to the interviewee before conducting the interview.
3. To the extent practicable, interviewers should extend the inquiry beyond their immediate needs to make each interview as complete as possible for the benefit of others.
4. The interviewer should guard against possible social injury to or exploitation of interviewees and should conduct interviews with respect for human dignity.
5. Interviewers should be responsible for proper citation of oral history sources in creative works, including permanent location.
6. Interviewers should arrange to deposit their interviews in an archival repository that is capable of both preserving the interviews and making them available for general research. Additionally, the interviewer should work with the repository in determining the necessary legal arrangements.
7. As teachers, historians are obligated to inform students of their responsibilities in regard to interviewing and to encourage adherence to the guidelines set forth here.

Certain interview research may be governed by the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects (codified at 45 CFR 46). Such research may require prospective review by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as written informed consent of the interviewee. Additionally, institutions engaged in biomedical or behavioral research are likely to have internal policies that also pertain to interview research. Historians should be cognizant of and comply with all laws, regulations, and institutional policies applicable to their research activities. Before beginning any research that may include oral history interviewing, historians should contact their IRB for policies and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects. They will also find it useful to read and follow the *Principles and Standards of the Oral History Association and Evaluation Guidelines of the Oral History Association*. See also *Oral History and the Law* by John Neuenchwander (Oral History Association Pamphlet No. 1, 2nd ed., 1993), which provides sample release forms.

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## Statement on Discrimination and Harassment in Academia

*(Adopted May 1991)*



The American Historical Association encourages educational activities to counter incidents of racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, and homophobic behavior (including speech) on school campuses, and also encourages school administrators to speak out vigorously against such incidents. At the same time, the Association disapproves of efforts to limit or punish speech on university campuses. We condemn the violation of academic freedom and First Amendment rights to free speech as well as the harassment and vilification to which some faculty and students have been subjected.

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## **Advisory Opinion Regarding Conflict of Interest**

*(Adopted May 1991)*

A conflict of interest arises when an individual's personal interest or bias threatens or appears to threaten to compromise his or her ability to act in accordance with professional or public obligations. Historians frequently encounter such situations as participants in some form of peer review--for example, reviewing grant applications, vetting manuscripts for publication, evaluating annual meeting program proposals, or selecting prize or award recipients. Historians should identify and, where appropriate, recuse themselves from any decisions or other actions in which a conflict of interest or the appearance thereof arises; they should avoid situations in which they may benefit or appear to benefit financially at the expense of their professional obligations. An individual should normally refuse to participate in the formal review of work by anyone for whom he or she feels a sense of personal obligation, competition, or enmity.

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## **Statement on Diversity in History Teaching**

*(Adopted May 1991)*

Course offerings and textbooks in history, whether for K-12, undergraduate, or graduate classes, should address the diversity of human experience, recognizing that historical accuracy requires attention both to individual and cultural similarities and differences and to the larger global and historical context within which societies have evolved.

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## **Advisory Opinion Regarding Age Discrimination**

*(Adopted June 1996)*

The AHA's Professional Division has found troubling evidence of age discrimination within the history profession. The division is particularly concerned about discrimination against older applicants both in position announcements and in the hiring process. More specifically, the division is concerned about departments trying to narrow the applicant pool through the use of age-restrictive criteria in job descriptions or arbitrarily eliminating otherwise qualified candidates because of age. No one should be denied the opportunity to pursue a career in history because of his or her age.

When a department or institution decides to confine its search to younger applicants, it discriminates against two groups. One is made up of older individuals who earned their doctorates during the job shortages of the 1970s and 1980s, have since held a variety of temporary and part-time positions, and are interested in entry-level positions that offer the possibility of tenured status. Although their teaching experience and often impressive publications might be expected to give them an advantage in the search process, they sometimes find themselves dismissed without interviews as "overqualified." The other group that suffers age discrimination is made up of those who have earned their degrees later in life and thus are recent Ph.D.'s but no longer young. Such candidates have received the same training as their younger colleagues and have benefited from more extensive life experience; yet search committees sometime tend to be biased against those whose lives do not fit traditional patterns. By eliminating well-qualified candidates simply because of age, search committees lose valuable opportunities to enrich their departments and institutions.

The Professional Division opposes the use of hiring criteria that discriminate against qualified candidates on the basis of age. The use of such criteria at any stage in the search and hiring process is unprofessional and may constitute age discrimination, which is illegal.

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