

November 4, 2010

Dr. Sidney Ribeau, President  
Howard University  
AB Johnson Building  
2400 Sixth Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20059

Dear Dr. Ribeau,

As president of the Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists (WAPA), I am writing on behalf of our board and membership about the proposal to drop the anthropology major at Howard. Our organization is greatly concerned about the long-term consequences this change would have on the profession and would like to ask that the program be retained.

Howard's legacy in the liberal arts goes back to its founding in 1867. The liberal arts and medicine were the twin pillars upon which Howard's reputation of academic excellence was based. Since that time, the university has built a strong legacy in our field, especially through its bioarchaeological work.

The anthropology program has been a leader in exposing young African Americans to our discipline, particularly because the department teaches all four sub-disciplines (social-cultural, physical, archaeology and linguistics) unlike other historically black colleges, few of which offer a major in anthropology. Without an introduction as undergraduates (whether or not they major in it), these students will never consider anthropology as a career.

WAPA has served professional anthropologists in the DC area for over 30 years and we can see in our membership the under-representation of African Americans. This indicates that they are also under-represented in the career paths of our members – social scientists in government, NGO and non-profit organizations, for-profit consulting or contracting firms and self-employment.

This under-representation is particularly unfortunate because these are the professionals working in the US and overseas on areas crucial to the well-being of many minorities, including public health, issues related to poverty, attitude and behavior change, economic development and human rights.

The anthropology program's reputation and strengths have taken many people a long time to build, and if the program were abolished, it would probably never be re-established. Anthropology is a foundational social science, critical to the development and understanding of human rights, civil rights, multiculturalism and fostering a greater understanding among diverse cultures.

WAPA urges you to retain the anthropology program as a crucial channel for introducing the next generation of students to our field and its work in our society.

Sincerely,

Ruth Sando, Ph.D.  
President, Washington Association of Anthropologists