

# OREGON ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS



## Trail Notes, Fall 2019

Dear Colleagues,

Is it possible for the educated public and concerned citizens to bring American higher education back into the mainstream of American society? A phrase that I have often heard in conferences on this topic recently is “the room outside the room.” It refers to the broader audience of people to whom our hopes and concerns for higher education and the quality of debate in American life generally should be addressed, rather than necessarily to students, faculty, and staff. The idea is that change, if it is to come, will be possible only from the outside since it is clear that the obstacles on the inside are mostly insurmountable.

In recent months, yours truly and Dr. Peter Boghossian, my colleague in the Department of Philosophy at Portland State University, have broadcast loud and clear to those “outside the room” that academic freedom and intellectual diversity are under serious threat, not just at our university and at universities in Oregon in general, but in the wider public. PSU’s sanctioning of Dr. Boghossian for his participation in the now-famous grievance studies hoax articles affair (on the grounds that he failed to obtain the consent of the journals that were the subject of the hoax) has been widely broadcast to the “room outside the room” even as PSU has dug in like a terrier to justify its unjustified decision. The university’s ban on my course on conservative political

thought on the grounds that it does not advance the ideological program of group grievance-based diversity has likewise become a touchstone for a broader national debate on the diversity agenda. By taking our arguments to the “room outside the room”, we have done more than any number of on-campus efforts might have yielded. The future of intellectual integrity, diversity, and excellence in our country is no longer in the hands of the faculty, who have shown their ignorance and intolerance for the role they were supposed to play. Instead, we as scholars, and as the Oregon Association of Scholars, need to take our case to the wider public, to the “room outside the room.”



*Mummy tag in Greek and Demotic Egyptian, 3rd century AD*

Of course, the radicals and ideologues who are determined that higher education should never succumb to the dark forces of liberalism and openness are also taking their case to the “room outside the room.” Consider the recent decision by the Oregon legislature to restore \$350,000 in annual funding to the University of Oregon’s Labor

Education and Resource Center. The taxpayer-financed body has been engaged in unapologetic partisan politicking since its founding in 1977, pushing for more unionization and a range of controversial labor laws and practices including Oregon’s job-killing and grossly unfair pay equity law, an attack on charter schools, and attempts to expand public sector unionization. Little more than an advocacy group for free labor-bashing, the LERC has seven full-time faculty members (about \$1 million in annual costs) and very little revenues. The university vowed to half its budget earlier this year as part of a rationalization of spending. The campus unions rallied around LERC, despite its massive annual deficits. LERC then went off-campus and lobbied Salem, calling the proposed cuts “union-busting.” The legislature stepped in with the \$350,000 from Oregon taxpayers without explanation or debate. There was no attempt to ask whether LERC was an effective way of spending a million dollars a year even if one accepts their partisan political agenda. This event, like countless others, shows how resistant universities are to economic and political realities “outside the room” and the extent to which they will carry their campaigns to defend the indefensible. LERC learned to advocate “outside the room.” So should defenders of a return to intellectual honesty and non-partisan institutions at the university.



*Miniature French board game, ca. 1835*

While LERC has been spared the bother of having to show its worth to society, economic realities have a habit of catching up with Marxist assumptions about how an economy works. In October, the University of Oregon announced that it would be hiring 25 fewer graduate teaching assistants in the coming year (out of a total of 1,400). The reason is simple: since graduate teaching and research assistants unionized at the university in 1976, the costs of the positions have skyrocketed. In late October, with the threat of a strike by the “student workers”, the university caved in, restoring full funding for health insurance and promising further wage increases. Before graduates started to think of themselves as the vanguard of the proletariat, they saw themselves as apprentices in the craft of scholarship.



*Soyuz-Apollo joint mission badge, 1975*

Remuneration for opportunities to teach and engage in research were set so that the available monies could be spread widely and so that the students would not become dependent on graduate life. With a union, departments that previously offered assistance to most graduate students, now offer it to less than half. The “insiders” who have positions -- about 40 of 120 graduate students in the School of Planning, Public Policy and Management for instance – are now the classic “elite”– while others work as

baristas. Do the baristas realize the union is to blame for their plight?



Slippers, 18th century India

So much of the challenge of intellectual and scientific life is to remain curious about the complexities and uncertainties of the world. I chose for this fall's newsletter some items from the University of Cambridge's aptly-named Curious Objects exhibition from 2017 that included an old boot, a boomerang, a beard hair sent to Charles Darwin, and the world's first slide-rule, as well as the objects shown here. Lest we forget, pre-formed categories for thought – whether Marxist or identity politics – are precisely the enemy of a free society and of scientific advance. The National Association of Scholars this fall engaged in a full-press rebuttal of the attempt by the *New York Times* to recast American history as nothing but the sorry tale of white racism and black victimization through its 1619 project. The contributions and interviews of the NAS 1620 project make for more stimulating reading, in part because they all make very different points, not all of them in unison. I concluded my own modest contribution – “Was It Good Fortune to be Enslaved by the British Empire?” – this this assertion: “One wonders why the projects surrounding 1619 – an

invitation to history – have become such a boorish rejection of history. Instead of insight and empowerment, 1619 has become an exercise in Soviet-style historiography. It is fake history, propaganda, and utter nonsense. I suspect those involved in it – like Soviet historiographers – know it.”

**DEBUNKING HOWARD ZINN**  
Exposing the Fake History That Turned a Generation Against America  
Mary Grabar

**EVENT DETAILS**

- Book talk by Dr. Mary Grabar
- Introduction by Dr. Bruce Gilley, Professor of Political Science at Portland State University and President of the Oregon Association of Scholars
- “Save the Children From Howard Zinn” donation drive: buy a copy of Dr. Grabar’s book to donate to your local public library or school

**OREGON ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS PRESENTS:**

**Dr. Mary Grabar**  
Resident Fellow,  
Alexander Hamilton  
Institute for the Study of  
Western Civilization

Speaking on her new book *Debunking Howard Zinn* and on the distorted American history plaguing K-12 and college classrooms.

**Wed., January 22  
6:00-8:00 p.m.**

Browsing Lounge  
Smith Memorial Union  
Portland State  
University

**NAS**  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS

Questions?  
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Speaking of libraries, a recent acquisition by the Portland State University library is Dr. Mary Grabar’s book *Debunking Howard Zinn: Exposing the Fake History that Turned a Generation Against America*. We should be cautious in using the term “fake” to describe interpretations or political claims with which we disagree. There is a wide scope for American histories from across the political spectrum. But Zinn, whose books are assigned in many Oregon classrooms, is beyond the pale, as Grabar shows, because his book is full of plain errors and lies. The OAS is bringing Dr. Grabar to Portland to speak on January 22 and before that is raising funds for a “Save the Children From Howard Zinn” drive. Please join both.

Thanks for all you do!  
Bruce Gilley  
OAS President  
[www.oregonscholars.org](http://www.oregonscholars.org)