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Editorial

For the Readers of the IJNH

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Editor

Some months ago we read with some interest and concern editorial observations made by Hugh Murphy of the venerable *Mariners Mirror*. His editorial began as follows,

It has been your editor's experience since taking responsibility for this journal that standards supervision of submissions, particularly from postgraduates and university lecturers, have seriously slipped. . .

He went on to comment about historical programs, proper student preparation and guidance, the policies of universities, questionable hiring practices, and the habit of taking the study of history less seriously than it deserves. He called upon scholars, teachers, and educational institutions "to raise their game accordingly."

The IJNH feels that Professor Murphy has raised an alarm long overdue. Our professional community needs a regular dialogue on these issues to illuminate circumstances critical to both our discipline and the quality of our work. How do we draw the best and brightest to the study of the naval and maritime experience? How do we train students properly in a university setting that welcomes the study of both maritime and naval history? The United States has very few places where one can specialize in military history, let alone naval or maritime. Many university settings reject the study of military and naval history as characteristic of a violent aspect of our society that somehow promotes the armed forces rather than informs. It seems as if some places devoted to scholarship seek to study a world in which navies do not exist.

This needs to change. Our discipline cannot make a contribution to understanding unless we properly study, effectively teach, and energetically communicate our insights with excellence and clarity to each other and to all who will listen.

To accelerate and sustain this essential dialogue we asked two professors and two graduate students to help this journal make a beginning. We posed some fundamental questions to these volunteers and shall post their complete responses on a Facebook page set up for this journal. We encourage all naval historical professionals to respond to the same questions and suggest insights that will help us address the issues raised by Professor Murphy. In taking these steps we seek to establish a forum to solicit alternatives and discover opportunities for change. These initial responses come from

Professor Andrew Lambert of Kings College London and Professor Howard Fuller of the University of Wolverhampton. Our student responses came from Sebastian Bruns in Germany and Ryan Wadle in the United States.

In two of his responses Professor Lambert provides an excellent beginning for our dialogue, giving special attention to the link between naval history, naval historians, and the naval service. He also expresses well the concern of the IJNH that we dismiss Hugh Murphy's questions and warning at our own peril.

Is naval history as respected and valued as other fields of historical study? Why or why not? Does this effect standards, academic performance, and institutional support?

In short: it is not. The key problem is that naval history operates in two distinct fields. Although developed to educate navies it has adopted and applied the methods of the historical profession. The close link with navies makes it an unwelcome presence on academic departments that equate the study of war with its promotion. In academic terms it belongs in the 'War Studies' area, a problem based collection of academic approaches linked by a concern to understand the problem of war and related violence. The only academic department in Britain with a consistent track record teaching naval history at post graduate level for the past forty years is the Department War Studies at King's College London. It has high levels of institutional support.

Is the future as grim as Murphy implies—a world characterized by a steep decline in writing quality with few books being produced, increasingly rapid content being distributed online, and social networking experts and information management specialists being valued more than PhDs in military history—or are there reasons to be optimistic?

Whether we agree with everything Hugh Murphy has said, or not, we should take heed of his stark warning, and factor it into our decision-making. The biggest threat we face is complacency, because if he is right the very thing we consider the pinnacle of academic achievement, the Ph.D. program, is being devalued. Are we comfortable with the standard of students, academic provision and assessment currently applied? Some of the more forthright attacks on the original editorial have generated more heat than light.

We appeal to naval historical professionals, graduate students, naval officers and petty officers, and friends of the profession to seek out these four first responses to our questions. Respond to them yourself and share the results with us on the IJNH page at www.facebook.com . Let us generate an ongoing conversation that may provide ideas and raw material for changes in both institutional and educational habits.



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