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Letter from Professor David Torres-Rouff

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Letter from Professor David Torres-Rouff

Fellow Historians,

I am honored to have spent the Spring 2015 semester working with an energetic group of History Majors who are completing their Capstone Essays. The Capstone Essay serves as the culmination of the History major. Students generate an original, analytical, historical narrative based on substantive primary source research and extensive scholarly reading. Participating in the process—helping students find archival materials, narrow their research questions, and engage in round after round of revision—brings me back to my own senior thesis on race and justice at California’s Folsom Prison during the 1800s, which I wrote to earn my A.B. from UC Berkeley in 1995. Working at the Bancroft Library three afternoons each week, pouring over the enormous, handwritten ledgers that logged every incoming inmate, his crime, sentence, national origins, distinguishing markers (including complete descriptions of every tattoo) convinced me that I wanted to pursue a career in history.

How delightful, therefore, that your enterprising peers through this outstanding journal have decided to include the abstracts for all History Capstone essays from Spring 2015 forward. As the primary means by which scholars communicate with each other, academic journals play a critical role in the development and exchange of ideas, strategies, and foci. Including the abstracts means that your work will be part of this extended intellectual conversation. Beyond building a collective, institutional memory that helps mark our own identity as historians, having the abstracts in the journal offers an easy way for our alumni to access their own memories of research and writing; to preserve their own history as History majors.

With gratitude to all of the students whose energy makes my work possible,

David Torres-Rouff
Merced, CA
May 2015