October 19, 2011

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael K. Simpson  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Appropriations Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James P. Moran  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Appropriations Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Reed and Simpson and Ranking Members Murkowski and Moran:

On behalf of the Association of American Universities (AAU), representing 59 leading public and private research universities in the United States, we thank you for your support for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

As you work to finalize the FY12 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we encourage you to provide $155 million for NEH. This is the same as the FY11 enacted level and the draft Senate FY12 bill, which is $12 million below the FY10 funding level. The House FY12 bill (H.R. 2584) would further cut the NEH budget by $20 million to $135 million. This would reduce funding for NEH to its FY04 funding level and substantially impact the Endowment’s ability to fund its core programs. We believe the NEH should not be reduced further in FY12.

The humanities remain central to the missions of U.S. colleges and universities and the cultural life of the nation. As the largest federal funder of the humanities, NEH is a vital source of funds for humanities research and education. NEH supports summer seminars and institutes for K-12 teachers and faculty, pre-service training for aspiring teachers, and collaborations between institutions of higher education and local school districts. Today’s humanities-related workforce is significant; more than 2.5 million Americans are engaged in a broad range of humanities professions, including K-12 teachers, college and university faculty, museum curators, librarians, translators, and news analysts.

We are especially concerned about the continued erosion of funding for the NEH core programs. These grants to nonprofit institutions and scholars are extremely competitive
and known for their quality and their ability to leverage significant non-federal funding for humanities projects nationwide. Funding for NEH core, competitive programs was cut disproportionately by 10.5 percent last year alone. Further funding erosion would have a significant impact on the Endowment’s ability to support humanities research and education into the future. In addition, there would be consequences not only for our continuing efforts to understand and highlight U.S. history, culture, and civic values, but also for our economic competitiveness, as the impact of NEH investments goes well beyond the scholars and institutions supported. Grants to universities and museums—to protect and preserve important collections and to construct or renovate facilities—impact small businesses across the nation, including local construction companies.

Our nation’s long-term economic success depends on cultivating a broadly educated workforce ready to compete in the knowledge-based, global economy of the 21st century. NEH helps to achieve that goal.

We thank you for your consideration of our views and recommendations. We stand ready to work with you through the remainder of the appropriations process.

Sincerely,

Hunter R. Rawlings III
President
Association of American Universities

cc: Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Daniel K. Inouye
Senate Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Thad Cochran
Members of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee Chairman Harold Rogers
House Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Norman D. Dicks
Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies