Oral Testimony of

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Before the
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on the Interior and Environment

April 19, 2007

Introduction

Good afternoon Chairman Dicks, Ranking Member Tiahrt, and subcommittee members:

On behalf of the Association of American Universities, an organization of 60 leading U.S. public and private research universities, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on the FY2008 budget of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I would like to use my time to explain the importance of NEH grants to the higher education community, to highlight an AAU effort to identify ways to increase the visibility and public support of the humanities, and to articulate our funding priorities for the NEH in FY2008.

The Endowment is the single most important source of federal support for the humanities. It is through the humanities that we can better understand and address the human encounter with social, economic, and political change. It is through the humanities that we come to understand who we are as a people and our place in the global community. As Robert Kennedy derived the strength to deal with the loss of his brother through his reading of Greek philosophy, the humanities provide us with a framework for understanding the human condition.
AAU universities perform about 60 percent of federally funded university-based scientific and engineering research. But our schools also are leaders in the humanities. For example, faculty at a large number of universities, including the University of Washington and University of Kansas, are engaged in productive NEH-funded grants. Because NEH-funded challenge grants require universities to provide a 4-to-1 match, they leverage significant resources from universities to achieve the goals of the Endowment.

On a personal note, I received a NEH research grant in 1976 that enabled me to conduct research that shaped my entire career as a historian. I am grateful to the Endowment for this opportunity and am personally committed to ensuring that other students, faculty, and researchers have the same opportunities made available to them.

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**AAU’s Efforts**

In 2004 AAU released a report, *Reinvigorating the Humanities: Enhancing Research and Education on Campus and Beyond*, as a follow-up to the report, AAU universities convened roundtable discussions on emerging trends and new ways of presenting the humanities. These campus efforts culminated in a national convocation with the American Council of Learned Societies in 2006, to discuss the appropriate role for the humanities in meeting today’s challenges. AAU more recently assembled a small group of provosts and graduate deans to discuss how academic institutions and the Endowment might better support the current needs of humanities graduate students and faculty. These discussions have helped to shape our funding priorities.
AAU and the broader humanities community believe that now is the time to make a significant investment in the humanities. We ask Congress to fund NEH at the level of $177 million in FY2008, an increase of $37 million, or 26 percent, above FY2007 funding. This request would represent an important step in restoring the Endowment to earlier funding levels. In nominal dollars, NEH was funded at $177.5 million in FY1994. In the following years, the agency sustained some of the most severe reductions of any federal agency. This has substantially eroded the federal government’s role in the support of the humanities.

**Funding Priorities**

AAU suggests two funding priorities for the Endowment.

The first collective funding priority, shared by the National Humanities Alliance, is to provide proportional increases to all NEH grant programs, giving preference to the core divisions that have sustained the deepest cuts since FY1994. When funding for the Endowment was cut in the mid-1990s, 60 percent of the cuts were made to the education and research core programs. The education division funds important programs such as the Summer Seminars and Institutes and Faculty Humanities Workshop, while the research division funds fellowships for scholars (except for graduate students).

The second priority for AAU is a proposed new pilot program that would simultaneously expand scholarship and bring faculty and graduate students together in collaborative arrangements similar to those practiced by the natural sciences. In the sciences, collaborative inquiry fosters rich and creative interactions of faculty and graduate students. Several
universities have created such programs in the humanities and report enthusiastically on their success.

We propose a national competitive program in which proposals from universities would be judged on the scholarly inquiry to be conducted and the manner in which the central organizing research topic would be expanded by faculty-supervised graduate student research. In our proposal, universities would first screen applications and submit one to the national competition to be conducted by NEH.

The NEH does not currently support graduate education in the humanities. While the NIH NSF, Department of Defense, Department of Energy, and the NASA among others, each have a graduate education component that complements university-based research and training, the NEH stands as one of the very few federal agencies that does not support the training of the next generation of scholars. While the Endowment once funded a small dissertation fellowship program, the program was eliminated by cuts in the mid-1990s. We believe this should change.

Many details remain to be worked out, but we strongly believe that a program such as we are suggesting here will enrich humanities scholarship and improve humanities graduate education. We hope that we can further discuss this proposal as you move forward in crafting your Interior Appropriations Bill.
Conclusion

AAU encourages you to take seriously the importance of the humanities in our society today. NEH helps our universities—and other colleges and universities around the country—ensure that the humanities remain central to their missions and to the cultural life of the nation. We believe that the 110th Congress provides a unique opportunity to restore cuts to NEH grant programs and develop a new program that will reinvigorate scholarships and collaboration between students and faculty in the humanities.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I welcome any questions.