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The Honorable Norman Dicks
Chairman
Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
2467 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6301

The Honorable Todd Tiahrt
Ranking Member
Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
2441 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6301

Dear Chairman Dicks and Ranking Member Tiahrt:

On behalf of the Association of American Universities (AAU), an organization of 60 leading U.S. public and private research universities, I appreciate the opportunity to propose a new program at the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for your consideration.

Since September 11, 2001, our nation has become acutely aware of our need to understand the languages, histories, religions, and cultures of other peoples and traditions. The logical federal investment in the post September 11 world should be in these areas, just as it was logical to invest in science and technology in the post-Sputnik world. National security, as well as economic competitiveness, depends on strengthening our cultural competencies, including all these areas and more. Globalization and our increasing cultural diversity at home call for the knowledge and scholarly methods of the humanities. In this new multi-polar world, we have not been investing in the kinds of humanities research necessary to meet today's challenges.

Understanding what it means to be human today and in the past can help us define identity and difference in a multicultural and multilingual society. Our future depends on our ability to engage in acts of cultural translation, to engage with the languages and cultures of others both in the United States and in the world. As concepts of nations and nationalism are changing, these challenges raise crucial questions about citizenship.

We need to prepare ourselves to be citizens in a global society, while also teaching the traditions that define what it is to be American. Understanding our own history, including our American traditions of democratic pluralism and diversity, will allow us to be citizens at home and in the world. Globalization has changed the way that we teach the humanities, especially language, history, literature, and religious studies. The humanities are uniquely positioned to address questions about citizenship and national and cultural identity in a global society. The humanities are more important than ever in preparing our society for the social, cultural, economic, and national security challenges that we face in the 21st century.

As a nation, we need to call on the humanities to expand our capacity to operate effectively in a global society. To do so will require not only expanding areas of scholarship but preparing future generations of scholars by enriching the education of graduate students embarking on their careers.

Currently, the NEH is the only federal agency supporting academic research and scholarship that does not also support graduate education. The National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, Department of Defense, Department of Energy, and the National Aeronautics and Science Administration, among others, have strong programs supporting graduate education that complement the agencies' programs of research support; the NEH does not. We want to build on the successful practices of the university-government partnership that exist at these federal science agencies. NEH has the capacity – and, we would argue, the responsibility – to help meet the nation's global challenges by fostering new forms of collaboration between faculty and graduate students in a manner that helps to supply our nation with the talented and knowledgeable scholars who will contribute to a culturally competent workforce that will ensure our nation's security and success in the new multi-polar world.

For these reasons, the AAU proposes a new program at the NEH that would create an ongoing partnership between the endowment and the nation's research universities. The goals of this project include:

1. Expanding scholarship in key areas of inquiry;
2. Supporting the critical education of graduate students in the conduct of research;
3. Bringing faculty and graduate students together in collaborative arrangements that have a long track record of success in the sciences; and
4. Creating examples of new models for graduate teaching and pedagogy that could be adopted at other universities or within existing humanities centers at universities.

In the sciences, such collaborations foster rich and creative interactions of faculty and graduate students, who define new areas of inquiry in seminars and then pursue them jointly in the laboratory. The ancillary benefits of faculty mentorship, the early and in-depth engagement of graduate students in research, and the enrichment of the scholarly endeavors by the close interaction of faculty and graduate students has been all too lacking in the humanities.

To accomplish the goals outlined above and promote the faculty/graduate students collaborations that have served the sciences so well, we propose a competitive program in which proposals from universities would be judged on the scholarly merits of the inquiry; the social and cultural relevance of the research in a selected field; the degree of originality and expected contribution to the advancement of knowledge; the feasibility of the research; and the plans to communicate the results beyond the campus; among other factors. Universities would first screen applications via internal competitions and select one proposal to submit to the national competition to be conducted by NEH. The institutional proposals might each involve a team of two faculty members and four or five graduate students working on a core research topic, while each participating institution should ultimately have discretion over how the proposal is structured. The expectation is that high quality ideas would circulate on campus, generating greater visibility and community support for humanities scholarship and research.

The program would be open to any graduate student, not just advanced graduate students developing and carrying out their dissertation topics. Student selection should be left up to the faculty members participating in the program. We think that flexible structures are very important, allowing for a multi-tiered project, for example, that would include positions for beginning students and also dissertation stipends attached to it. During the duration of the grant, faculty members and students would meet regularly in informal and formal seminars while pursuing their studies, research, and writing. These seminars would form a core part of the faculty/graduate student collaboration. Each seminar could be assigned one or two graduate students whose task would be to record the discussion, progression, and results of the research program for the participants and the appropriate officials on campus. The record could also provide evidence of the success of the project and be used to model improvements in the future. Ultimately, grant recipients would plan for a dissemination of research results, perhaps through a publication of research results, a website, or digital archive. Indicators of success might include the amount of collaborative work between humanities faculty and students in developing research topics and questions, including scholarly publication; measures of time to degree and completion; job placement of graduate students (inside and outside of academia), and the manner in which the program affects the overall graduate curriculum at participating institutions. In addition, the students might contribute to the university community by giving undergraduate and graduate lectures.

The university community would work with Congress and the NEH to define the scope of this collaborative research and education program, perhaps organizing it around pressing national issues, such as foreign languages and cultural studies, religious histories, the impact of globalization on teaching and scholarship, among many others. Institutions should be allowed to play to their strengths though, avoiding a scenario in which participating graduate students might all be working on the same topics in a given year. We envision that the new program would be located in the NEH Research Division. If the average team project included two faculty members and four or five graduate students, a program funded at \$10 million would support approximately 50 grants averaging \$200,000 each. The grants would provide \$30,000 fellowships (tied to National Science Foundation stipend levels, among other federal agencies) for the graduate students and some funding for program expenses. The faculty costs should be the responsibility of participating institutions. A possible institutional match to include tuition and fees is another program component that we could discuss.

Although funding for such programs is very scarce, a few universities have been able to secure foundation funding to create such programs in the humanities, and report enthusiastically on their success. It is worth noting that the Mellon Foundation, in particular, has shown interest in developing new and innovative models of graduate education.

Many details of course remain to be worked out, but we strongly believe that such a collaborative, interactive faculty/graduate student research and education program at the NEH would enrich humanities scholarship and improve humanities graduate education, essentially gaining two for one in a single program. We believe that giving advanced researchers and the next generation of scholars in the humanities new opportunities to explore pressing national issues will benefit society, as a whole. It is through the humanities that we can better understand and address the social, economic, and political changes associated with technological development and globalization; it is extremely important that we better understand the human dimension of these changes through the humanities.

The AAU greatly appreciates your interest in this proposal for a new faculty-graduate student humanities program. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require additional information. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert M. Berdahl". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Robert M. Berdahl
AAU President