

**Testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on
the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
on FY13 funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities**

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Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the Association of American Universities (AAU), an organization of 59 leading U.S. public and private research universities, I thank you for the opportunity to express the association's strong support for the federal role in the humanities through the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The humanities are critical to our nation's understanding of history and the civil discourse needed in our republican form of democracy. At a time when our nation faces substantial challenges, the federal commitment to the humanities should be sustained.

To this end, AAU urges Congress to fund the NEH at a level of \$154.3 million in FY13. In particular, AAU strongly supports restoring funding to the competitive grant programs, beginning with a modest increase of \$2.6 million in FY13, as outlined in the agency's FY13 budget request.

AAU believes that Congress must take steps to reduce federal spending and address the nation's growing debt. We need to do this in a smart and balanced way that allocates money in a manner that gives us the best chance of improving our future. Unfortunately, deficit-reduction efforts have thus far focused almost exclusively on domestic discretionary spending – which is approximately one-sixth of the budget, yet includes most of the federal government's priority spending for long-term economic growth and prosperity. Reducing the federal deficit in FY13 and beyond cannot, and should not, fall solely on non-security, domestic discretionary spending. Serious deficit reduction efforts must put the entire federal budget on the table, including entitlements and defense spending, and additional revenues generated through tax reform and measures to improve economic growth. Efforts to reduce the federal deficit in FY13 should not preclude prudent federal spending on agencies, such as the NEH, which will pay dividends into the future.

We believe that there is an important and legitimate federal role in supporting the humanities as a strategic national priority. Federal support of the humanities complements federal investments in the sciences and engineering. Our nation's long-term economic success depends on cultivating a broadly educated workforce ready to compete in a knowledge-based, global economy. The humanities programs funded by the Endowment represent the core fields of knowledge and capacities that enrich individuals, provide a foundation for success in a wide range of careers, undergird our civic institutions, support strategic national interests, and help advance sound public policymaking in addressing the challenges of the 21st century. The high-quality projects supported by the NEH reach millions of Americans each year.

With the federal government's current focus on jobs, it is worth noting that a robust humanities education is seen as a benefit by the vast majority of employers. A national survey by the Association of American Colleges and Universities showed an overall rejection of the trend towards narrow technical training at the college level: 73 percent of employers want colleges to place more emphasis on critical thinking and analytic reasoning. Degrees in the humanities do not limit job opportunities, they expand them. There are countless examples of individuals who used their humanities degrees to propel them into a career not necessarily associated with those degrees. For example U.S. Army General Jack Keane received his undergraduate degree in philosophy.

The NEH is the only federal agency tasked with advancing the entire range of academic fields in the humanities. At its peak in 1979, NEH was funded at \$403.3 million in 2006 inflation-adjusted dollars. Support has steadily declined over time, including cuts in FY11 and FY12, and Congress must begin to re-invest in the agency.

AAU supports \$154.3 million in FY13 funding for the NEH. This is an \$8 million increase above the FY12 funding level and the same level proposed in the NEH FY13 budget request. In particular, AAU is committed to restoring funding to the Endowment's highly competitive, peer-reviewed grants to \$71.4 million in FY13, a modest increase of \$2.6 million. The NEH's core grants programs – including Research, Education, Preservation and Access, Challenge Grants, Public Programs, and Digital Humanities – have been disproportionately cut over the past decade, yet they remain at the center of the agency's mission to create, preserve, and disseminate knowledge in the humanities. These highly competitive grants are renowned for their quality and have led to demonstrable economic, educational, social, policy, and national security benefits. For example, NEH grants fund research projects involving individual scholars and teams of interdisciplinary researchers and education seminars bringing faculty and teachers of all grade levels together to develop classroom resources that directly benefit students. As previously noted, these NEH grants are highly competitive. In FY11, the agency was able to fund only 16 percent of the competitive proposals it received.

Continued funding erosion for core competitive grant funds would have a significant impact on the Endowment's ability to support humanities research and education into the future. Over time, the combined impact of budget cuts and inflation has reduced the number, diversity, and buying power of NEH grants, directly affecting faculty, researchers, students, and the broader public. Moreover, continued funding erosion has consequences not only for continuing efforts to understand and highlight our history, culture, and civic values but also for our economic competitiveness and national security, as our most pressing and complex problems worldwide will not be solved by science alone. In fact, many scientists and engineers appreciate the role of the humanities in their higher education, because their liberal-arts coursework has amplified their effectiveness as a scientist or engineer.

Competitive Funding for Graduate Students

AAU continues to support efforts to better engage humanities graduate students. While the NEH does not currently provide direct support for graduate students, we support the continuation of current policy allowing graduate students to participate in select NEH programs. This provides opportunities for collaboration among students and faculty similar to what takes place in the sciences, and helps to sustain the pipeline of young humanities researchers and scholars. We look forward to working with the Administration and Congress over the long term to develop direct program support for graduate students. We believe that NEH is uniquely positioned to promote a higher level of collaboration between faculty and graduate students in a manner that helps to provide our nation with talented and knowledgeable individuals who will contribute to a culturally-competent workforce.

Bridging Cultures

AAU also supports the agency's FY13 budget request of \$9 million for Chairman Leach's Bridging Cultures initiative, which is designed to renew and reinforce the bridges between the different cultures and viewpoints that are part of the fabric of American life. This represents an increase of \$5.5 million above the FY12 funding level. In the current stage of this initiative, NEH participants are collaborating with educators and state humanities councils to produce materials such as books, films, exhibitions, and other public programming for local, regional, and national audiences. With the funding requested for FY13, the Endowment would invite proposals for a new set of programs focused on such Bridging Cultures themes as "Becoming American" and "Connecting Local to Global: History of Trade, Migration, and the Movement of Ideas." AAU applauds the attention Chairman Leach is paying to the need for improved civil discourse, and we believe that colleges and universities can play a role in facilitating this in the coming years. In fact, dozens of AAU campuses participated in Chairman Leach's state civility tour, which was an important launching pad for the Bridging Cultures Initiative.

Related to the Bridging Cultures initiative, it is important that the nation recognize the link between the humanities and national security issues, as we strive to improve our armed services' understanding of the social, cultural, behavioral, and political forces that shape the views of regions of the world of strategic importance to the U.S. Indeed, analysts in the major national intelligence and security agencies are to a great extent humanists and social scientists.

Humanities Data

AAU also supports a small but important partnership noted in the Endowment's FY13 budget request. As described in the FY13, as well as the FY12 budget request, NEH is committed to a multi-year partnership with the American Academy of Arts and Sciences to sustain the *Humanities Indicators Project* – a system for collecting national data on the humanities. The system has provided policymakers and university

administrators with a valuable statistical tool for informing decision-making in all areas of the humanities, including employment of humanities graduates and public understanding of the humanities.

Conclusion

AAU encourages the Subcommittee to consider the importance of the humanities in our society and NEH's vital role in supporting the humanities. NEH helps colleges and universities around the country ensure that the humanities remain central to their missions and to the cultural life of the nation. NEH, as the largest federal supporter of the humanities, broadens public awareness of and participation in the humanities through teaching, scholarship, and research. Along with the larger humanities advocacy community, AAU encourages Congress to fund the NEH at \$154.3 million in FY13 to maintain our nation's capacity to address complex challenges by advancing an educated and competitive workforce.