

## ***Testimony on the FY-1994 Appropriation for the National Endowment for the Humanities***

**Presented to the U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies (Committee on Appropriations), by Douglas Greenberg, Vice President, American Council of Learned Societies and Visiting Professor of History, Rutgers University, on behalf of the Association of American Universities and the National Humanities Alliance**

**May 12, 1993**

Mr. Chairman and the Members of the Subcommittee:

I am Douglas Greenberg, Vice President of the American Council of Learned Societies and Visiting Professor of History at Rutgers University.

It is a pleasure to testify before you today and to represent the Association of American Universities (AAU), an organization of 58 research universities with preeminent programs of research and graduate and professional education, and the National Humanities Alliance (NHA) and its membership of 76 scholarly and professional associations, organizations of museums, libraries, historical societies, institutions of higher education, state humanities councils, university based and independent humanities centers, and others concerned with national humanities policies.

In my testimony today, I focus on NEH'S fellowship programs which, along with the endowment's research programs, are the engine that drives the entire humanities enterprise. As you know, fellowships support the work of individual scholars while research programs tend to support large-scale collaborative research. These two sorts of efforts have different emphases, but together they provide the foundation upon which all humanities programs, whether originating in educational institutions or in the state humanities councils and other public agencies, depend.

Fellowships for individual scholars were among the first programs put into place when NEH was created more than a quarter century ago. The first leaders of NEH, both in the Congress and on the Council and among the staff, understood that the Endowment would do many things, but that most of them would not be possible if the new agency did not provide consistent and ongoing support to the difficult and demanding work of individual philosophers, historians, literary critics, and other humanities scholars. As a result, a roster of NEH fellowship recipients over the last 28 years is a veritable Who's Who of leaders in every field of the humanities, including many distinguished university presidents, as well as leaders of museums and other cultural institutions. For many of these individuals, the NEH award was literally the difference between completing a pathbreaking book and postponing its completion indefinitely. Indeed, in the humanities community, the winning of an NEH fellowship is a certain sign of scholar quality, a certification of the significance of the scholarly endeavor, and a harbinger of later contributions to scholarship. Awards to individual scholars for research and study return their value in a multitude of ways to students and public audiences.

Two years ago, I completed a study of virtually all the private and public fellowship competitions supporting humanities scholarship in the United States. The study had a variety of conclusions, and I will make copies of it available to the members of the Committee. Today, however, I want to highlight my main findings with respect to the NEH fellowship program and its relative standing with respect to other humanities fellowship programs sponsored by private agencies, including the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the National Humanities Center, and the American Council of

Learned Societies. The NEH program has always been by far the largest program, and I will have some things to say about its particular character in a moment.

For now, I want to discuss the context in which the NEH awards are made and the more general situation of support for individual scholars in the humanities by highlighting some of the more salient findings of my study. The first is the inescapable conclusion that humanities fellowships, regardless of who awards them, have become more difficult to win over the last decade and, when inflation is taken into account, they also provide less financial assistance than they once did. This rather discouraging conclusion may be explained by two factors in particular:

First, the number of persons seeking fellowships from the national competitions has risen steadily while the number of fellowships offered has actually declined. The result is that the ratio of applications to awards, the best measure of the difficulty of acquiring support, has increased substantially.

Second, over the same period, the value of fellowship stipends has not kept pace with inflation. Measured in constant dollars, the average stipend of the major national program has lost more than 35% of its value since 1983.

In other words, more and more people are competing for less and less money with each passing year, although panelists and others charged with evaluating applications both at NEH and elsewhere express astonishment at the very high quality of the applications they must judge.

In this general national picture, NEH looms as by far the most significant funder. More than 60% of all the humanities fellowships offered in national competitions are offered by NEH. Almost 60% of all the dollars awarded come from the NEH program, and NEH also receives significantly more applications and makes more awards than any of the other national funders. Furthermore, the stipends that attach to NEH fellowships are among the most generous of any national program, although they too have been badly eroded by the inflation with which they have failed to keep pace over the last decade.

All of this leads to a simple, if somewhat worrisome conclusion: the fellowships of the National Endowment for the Humanities are the single most important source of support for individual scholarship in the humanities. They have failed to keep pace with demand as measured by the number of applications they generate and by the quality of individual work that those applications represent. They have also failed to provide the same level of support for those who receive the awards today that they provided for those who received them a decade ago since inflation has badly eroded the purchasing power of the average stipend. Another way to say this is simply to remark that, in spite of some modest increases in budget allocations for the Fellowship Division, the National Endowment for the Humanities is today supporting fewer individual scholars less generously than at almost any time in its history. This is in spite of a great and diverse increase in the quality of humanities scholarship at every level.

Let me note parenthetically here that the programs of the private national funders of fellowships, the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Humanities Center, and ACLS, have also suffered and suffered grievously in the last decade and have been forced to reduce the number of awards in order to maintain or slightly increase stipend levels, although at a rate not near inflation. The importance of the NEH program is, in fact, underscored by the difficulties that the private funders have faced. Its centrality has been highlighted very dramatically by the fact that despite the problems that I have described, the NEH program has done better than any of the private funders both at maintaining the number of awards and at keeping pace, however inadequately, with

inflation. (It should be noted by this that the number of NEH awards has declined but less than other programs, e.g., the College Teacher and Independent Scholars Program made 132 awards in 1988 but only 104 awards in 1992.)

At all events, the NEH fellowship programs have faced and will continue to face a number of problems that arise from: (1) the slower than inflation growth in both the overall fellowships budget and the size of individual stipends over the last decade, (2) the effects of low priority assigned to the fellowship programs of the Endowment by the previous administration, and (3) the funding of new programs in the Fellowships Division by transferring funds from old programs.

Allow me to concentrate for a moment especially on the last of these issues. This committee put into place a program of dissertation fellowships in FY-92. Arguments for the need for such a program were presented by witnesses for the AAU and the NHA during the 1990 reauthorization of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities of 1965. The Senate Arts, Humanities, and Museum Amendments of 1990 (Senate Report 101-472, pages 17-18) said this of the need to support humanities students at the dissertation stage: "In science and engineering fields advanced students are frequently supported during their dissertation work as research assistants through federally-funded research project grants. Several witnesses testified that such a mechanism is lacking in the humanities. The principle means of supporting graduate study in the humanities - teaching, assistantships, personal earnings and university fellowships -- typically expire or are depleted by the dissertation stage. As a consequence, many humanities graduate students must work part-time while trying to complete their dissertation, or drop out of their programs altogether to work full-time, hoping to return to complete their dissertation...young humanities scholars often commit several years of their lives to doctoral study, only to be forced to extend further their time to gain their degrees or even fail to attain their degrees because support for dissertation research is not available. Such outcomes are a heavy burden to the students affected, and a considerable loss to the nation." This conclusion was amply supported by data presented to the Committee by William G. Bowen, President of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and former President of Princeton University, in a book co-authored with his former colleague at Mellon and at Princeton, the current President of Harvard University, Neil L. Rudenstine.

Mr. Chairman, we are especially grateful that you and the Committee responded so helpfully to this testimony and decided in the FY-92 budget to provide funds to begin a dissertation fellowship program at NEH. Although the former Chairman of NEH, Mrs. Cheney, fought against the establishment of the programs -- and probably few knew her feelings on the issues better than you, Mr. Chairman -the NEH performed superbly in developing guidelines, promoting the new program, and generally doing a first-class job in the implementation. The planning of the program, securing the necessary sign-offs on guidelines, and so on made it necessary to delay the first competition until FY93, and funds were carried over for that purpose.

The response to the first competition has sharply underscored the need -- Marjorie Berlincourt, Director of NEH's Division of Fellowships and Seminars, reports that there were 1,475 full applications from 150 institutions for the 50 grants of \$17,500 that will be awarded later this month, an appalling ratio of almost 30 applications for each available award.

The establishment of this critically important and obviously necessary program has some unfortunate side effects that could not have been anticipated when the program was created. Because the Dissertation Grant program was funded in FY-93 entirely with carryover funds from FY-92 and because the FY-94 budget request for the entire Endowment has not been increased over FY-93, money to fund the new program had to be found in the budgets of older (and still

important) programs administered by the Fellowships Division. In addition, the new program itself had to be seriously cut at a time when all the evidence suggested that it needed to be expanded.

Thus, the very significant Travel to Collections program has been entirely eliminated and the budget for the dissertation program has been reduced to \$350,000 (plus administration). This greatly reduced budget will provide 25 grants of \$14,000 (down from 50 grants of \$17,500). The \$350,000 to fund this woefully inadequate program was pulled together by extracting small chunks from the FY-93 levels of all the other fellowship programs.

We recognize that the NEH and its fellowship program must contribute to the effort underway to bring greater control to federal spending, reduce the federal deficit, and restructure the economy. We also believe, however, that through the compromise budgets over much of the last decade in which the committee managed to provide stable funding for NEH in the face of low administration requests, the NEH has already contributed substantially to the new restraints. We urge the committee to add a total of \$950,000 to the fellowship appropriation in order to (1) permit the Dissertation Grant program to offer 50 awards at \$15,000 (2) reinstitute the Travel to Collections program at \$200,000, and (3) continue the NEH's other important fellowship programs at FY-93 levels.

I cannot resist observing, moreover, that this is really a very modest request in light of the need, the previous funding levels of the program in question (this is still less than the original FY-92 appropriation), and the relative insignificance of cuts in the NEH budget for reductions in the deficit. I appreciate having had the opportunity to testify before you today, and I urge you and the committee to restore the all-too-modest dollar amount we have requested to the budget of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Thank you.