

## ***Statement on the FY-1992 Appropriation for the National Endowment for the Humanities***

**Before the U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies (Committee on Appropriations), by G. Michael Riley, Dean of Humanities, Ohio State University, Speaking on behalf of the Association of American Universities and the National Humanities Alliance**

**April 18, 1991**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

I am Michael Riley, Professor of History and Dean of the College of Humanities at the Ohio State University, the largest humanities college in this country.

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 seventy scholarly and professional associations, organizations of museums, libraries, historical societies, higher education, and state humanities councils, and others concerned with national humanities policies.

As a historian my specialized work treats the socio-economic and political history of Latin America and, more specifically, Mexico. For nearly two decades, administration of humanities units in two universities, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and now, The Ohio State University, has occupied most of my time. My primary responsibility is the delivery of instruction, research, and public service related to the humanities.

In my work as a scholar and faculty member as well as an academic administrator over the last twenty years, my colleagues and I have benefited enormously from our association with the National Endowment for the Humanities. I personally have enjoyed two major NEH project grants, which yielded research and public service accomplishments for a large number of faculty and students -- graduate and undergraduate. My faculty and student colleagues in The Ohio State University are this year and next year pursuing important aspects of their work with NEH support, three hold NEH Faculty Fellowships, two are directing a special NEH fellowship program for advanced study abroad, two are preparing to advance their research with NEH Summer Faculty Fellowships, and one is directing an exciting NEH Summer Institute for College Teachers of Arabic -- from all over the United States.

The NEH-supported activities I have just described are typical of each of the last fifteen or so years. The National Endowment for the Humanities has been and remains a vital and valued partner in the research and related scholarly activities of the students and faculty I serve.

For these and many other reasons, I am delighted to have this opportunity to express support for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and to address two specific issues in connection with the work and policies of that admirable institution.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is, without question, the largest and most important funder of research, teaching, and public programming in the humanities in this country. William G. Bowen of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation produced a study in 1988 (Reported by William G. Bowen in testimony on behalf of the National Humanities Alliance before the Interior and Related

Agencies Subcommittee at a hearing on 17 March 1988 on the FY-89 appropriation for NEH.) which identified the endowment as the most important single source of funding for the humanities in the U.S. today. "It is not exaggeration to say that the decisions made concerning the budget for NEH (overall size and composition), and subsequent administration of the funds, have an absolutely decisive impact on the health and character of the humanities in America."

Those of us with responsibility for our humanities programs are pleased that the administration's National Endowment for the Humanities budget request for fiscal year 1992 calls for an increase of \$8 million over its current year appropriation. That request builds upon the very promising fiscal year 1990 request which broke a decade-long pattern of consistently proposed reductions in that budgeting. Those of us in the trenches have advanced our programming significantly as you in Congress have evidenced your commitment to us through your investment in the NEH. And surely, Mrs. Cheney is deserving of recognition for her important role in securing growing budget requests.

### **ON THE NEED TO ARREST THE DECLINE IN FELLOWSHIP FUNDS**

Despite recent improvements in the NEH appropriations, funding for research in the humanities has been declining steadily since the early nineteen eighties. There are now fewer dollars available to support the major national fellowship programs upon which we depend. (There are four programs in the humanities that represent the main national competitions that are unrestricted as to subject and encompass all areas of the humanities disciplines: American Council of Learned Societies, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the National Humanities Center, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. There are also a number of other fellowship programs that are either subject-specific or administered by individual campus-based humanities centers and other centers of advanced study. The four programs represent the traditional core of fellowships in the humanities and, as a group, are less restrictive with respect to subjects of research and other aspects of eligibility for funding than the programs of centers. Data for the present testimony is drawn from an ACLS study conducted by Douglas Greenberg that will be published later this spring.) When inflation is taken into account, the decline in constant dollars amounts to more than 35%. The total number of awards has declined by 16.5%.

These fellowship programs, sponsored by the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, The American Council of Learned Societies, the National Humanities Center, and the NEH, are awarding fewer fellowships as a whole, worth less money this year than they did in 1983. In addition, average individual stipends for those who do manage to win awards have not kept pace with inflation, declining by more than 25% when measured in constant dollars. Further, the ratio of applications to awards, a rough measure of the difficulty that scholars face in finding support, has increased alarmingly.

While these changes have been apparent for each of the four programs alluded to above, they have been especially difficult for the American Council of Learned Societies and the National Humanities Center. These two organizations have traditionally depended upon major grant support from the large private foundations and the federal government in order to maintain their fellowship programs, even though they have worked to endow all or part of these programs.

As such external support declines, the fellowship programs suffer accordingly. At ACLS, for example, the number of fellowships has declined by about 20% and the average stipend has not increased since the mid-eighties; the result is a loss of income to fellowship winners of more than 30% measured in constant dollars. Concurrently, however, the demand for such fellowships has increased. The ratio of applications to awards at ACLS increased by more than 50% in the same time period.

These changes occurred despite the fact that the ACLS won a one million dollar Challenge Grant for its endowment from NEH during the same period. In accepting the Challenge Grant, ACLS voluntarily surrendered what was more than \$800,000 of annual regrant support from the endowment for its fellowship programs as a quid pro quo for the one million dollars (producing less than \$50,000 in expendable annual income) of support for its endowed fund. A second Challenge Grant, awarded last year, was funded at the level of only \$250,000. The income on the two Challenge Grants (and the associated matches) will not be sufficient to fund the ACLS program at the dollar level that term grants from NEH and others permitted in 1982, despite the fact that the ACLS raised more than \$4 million from private sources for its endowment and that the return on the endowment investments have surpassed all the major indexes of growth during the same period.

For whatever reasons, the general trend in national fellowship support has been downward. Even in NEH's own fellowship program, the losses have been substantial as inflation has eroded the value of a fellowship budget that has increased, but not enough to keep pace.

The decline in available resources for the non-federal national fellowship programs is costly not only because of the decline in the number of scholars that can be supported, but also because of the lessening of alternative fellowship sources as the NEH managed program becomes numerically more dominant. The decline of the national fellowship competitions also means a loss of the rewards achieved through national peer panels, and to scholars outside the academy.

Therefore, due to the urgent need to maintain a diversity of funding for fellowships for scholarly research, we recommend that the subcommittee increase the budget for NEH's Research Division by \$2 million (annually) -- For grants to national and other qualifying institutions to be regranted in turn to fellowship applicants selected through rigorous peer review.

Finally Mr. Chairman, on this point, we are grateful that with current appropriations, the subcommittee was able to resolve the questions raised about the endowment's authority to make grants that permit regranteeing of funds for fellowships and related activities.

#### **ON DISSERTATION FELLOWSHIPS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS**

Support for future scholars is another area of strong need that we urge the subcommittee to address with this budgetary request. The education of future scholars in the humanities must be carried out simultaneously with the support of current research and scholarship. The intimate relationship between research and graduate education is a defining characteristic of American universities; graduate education is the reproductive system of scholarship. But we have witnessed disturbing trends in graduate education that will affect humanistic research and scholarship. Over the past fifteen years, fewer young persons have been enrolling in humanities graduate programs, and, while there are present signs that this pattern may be changing, those who have enrolled are taking substantially longer to complete their doctorates. The average registered time-to-degree -- the time actually spent in a graduate program -- is now 8.5 years, three years more than the average time of 5.5 years in 1968. The percentage of PhDs earned in the humanities has declined substantially: in 1973, humanities doctorates constituted 16% of total PhDs; by 1989, that percentage had dropped to 10.3%.

A major part of the explanation for both increased time-to-degree and decreased number of humanities PhDs is the lack of financial support for graduate study. Since the demise of the National Defense Education Act in 1973, federal support for graduate study in the humanities has hovered near zero: 1989 humanities doctorate recipients received an average of 2.2% of their

support from the federal government, compared with 22.6% of support in the life sciences, 20.0% of the support in the physical sciences, and 15.8% in engineering.

Inadequacy of financial support for graduate students in the humanities needs to be understood in a broader context: the reduced support for doctoral study in the humanities is only a more extreme case of a national overall decline in doctoral support. Across all fields, federally funded fellowships and traineeships have dropped precipitously, from approximately 60,000 in 1969 to less than 13,000 now. Of these remaining fellowships, roughly 900 -- less than a tenth -- support graduate study in the humanities.

The declining supply of PhDs is on a collision course with increased demand. The combination of faculty retirements with other reasons of departure from the professoriate will produce strong sustained replacement demands over the next 25 years. Beginning in the mid-90s, increased student enrollments will be superimposed on replacement demand to increase sharply the need for new faculty. If current trends continue to hold, there will be only eight candidates for every ten faculty vacancies across all arts and sciences disciplines by the 1997-2002 time period. According to the most reliable recent projections, shortages will be particularly severe in the humanities and social sciences, in which only seven candidates will be available for every ten faculty vacancies. And the nation can not wait to act until these market forces begin to exert their pressures. Since it takes over eight years to earn a PhD in the humanities, the faculty who will be needed by the late 90s should be entering graduate school now.

Although the precise magnitude of the projected divergences of supply and demand may be open to question, few analysts dispute that current trends will certainly lead to a shortage of PhDs that will be substantial and will have its impact on all disciplines and all markets: university, industry, and government. Indeed, the President's Science Advisor, Allan Bromley, has expressed his concern about shortages in the sciences and engineering. Last year, Eric Bloch, then director of the National Science Foundation, called for a doubling of the NSF graduate fellowship program and an exploration of additional initiatives NSF might undertake to address this problem.

Graduate fellowships and traineeships are extremely effective for attracting talented students into doctoral programs, increasing retention rates, and shortening time-to-degree. For the humanities and related disciplines, the Jacob K. Javits Fellows Program in the Department of Education is the sole federal program that has as its express purpose attracting exceptionally talented students into graduate study in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. In its first six years of funding, the Javits program has amply demonstrated its capacity to accomplish that purpose; but even in its strongest year of funding (1988), the Javits program was able to support only 211 new students, about half of whom were enrolling in humanities graduate programs.

Although we may have to rely solely on the department of Education for the only available federal assistance in attracting new graduate students into doctoral programs, there is a special need for humanities graduate students that can and should be addressed by the NEH. For humanities graduate students, the most difficult point in securing financial support occurs at the point at which they are engaged in making their own first significant contributions to research -- the dissertation stage.

The special difficulty faced by humanities doctoral students at this stage becomes clear when we consider funding patterns in other areas of graduate education. Federal support for graduate education is overwhelmingly concentrated in the science and engineering fields, primarily in the form of research assistantships as a component of federally funded research project grants. The chances of science and engineering graduate students being supported as research assistants

improve as they progress through their graduate programs, so that they may have a comparatively high probability of being supported in such a manner while they conduct their dissertation research. In contrast, humanities graduate students support their doctoral study primarily through personal finances and loans, teaching assistantships, university fellowships, and work outside their academic program. None of these forms of support reliably carries them through the dissertation to degree completion. Increasing numbers of graduate students already accumulated substantial loan indebtedness as undergraduates; a further reliance on loans at the graduate level is particularly difficult in humanistic fields where a longer period of time is required to complete the degree. Teaching assistantships and university fellowships are typically available for no more than three or four years. Nonacademic employment takes students out of their programs, resulting in lost time for carrying out dissertation research and completing the doctoral program. Some students are compelled to drop out of school altogether; although these students intend to save sufficient funds to return and complete their dissertations, a substantial percentage of them become locked into circumstances of employment and family that preclude returning to complete their degrees. That is a regrettable -- and preventable -- loss to the students and to society.

We believe strongly that the National Endowment for the Humanities should establish a dissertation fellowship program. The doctoral dissertation represents the first significant research effort of young humanists; as such, it is wholly worthy of support by the single federal agency charged with promoting humanistic research. A program in which support is awarded to exceptional students through annual national competitions could be managed by NEH with little or no alteration in its current administrative structure. NEH now funds research proposals submitted by faculty through merit-reviewed, national competitions. By administering a dissertation program principally as a research grant program and awarding fellowships through judgments of the quality of the proposed research, fellowship awards could be allocated through existing NEH mechanisms.

Even a modestly funded dissertation fellowship program would produce both direct and indirect benefits to the nation. First, it would provide critical support to a portion of the nation's most promising humanities graduate students, enabling them to complete their graduate work without delay. Second, it would send an important message to all humanities students and scholars: that the federal government acknowledges some responsibility for supporting the first research efforts of the next generations of humanities teachers and scholars, just as it acknowledges its role in encouraging the research of the current generation. Third, to provide additional resources for dissertation research will contribute to reducing the time required to complete the PhD and to increasing the number of students who will in fact complete their programs. This will place more scholars into the system more rapidly and to that extent will blunt the impact of the impending PhD shortage.

Two additional points should be made with respect to this recommendation for a dissertation fellowship program. First, additional resources must be provided to support this new activity; to fund such a program at the expense of research funding would defeat the purpose of providing NEH with the programmatic capacity to support both current scholars' research and the first research efforts of the next generation of scholars.

Second, responding to the impending faculty shortages is not the responsibility of the federal government alone. Indeed, the Association of American Universities has argued that the principal share of responsibility lies with the universities. To be sure, universities have steadily increased their own contributions to graduate student support in recent years, as the federal government and private foundations have reduced their commitments. But educational policies within universities need to improve. Accordingly, the AAU charged the graduate deans of its member universities, through the Association of Graduate Schools, to examine institutional policies governing doctoral

programs and identify changes that can increase retention rates, shorten time-to-degree, and so move graduate students more expeditiously into faculty ranks. That work has been carried out, producing a comprehensive set of recommendations concerning graduate student teaching and research faculty mentoring, the graduate curriculum, and evaluation of student performance. The AAU is now working to implement these recommendations within its member universities in ways appropriate to individual institutions.

In 1989, approximately 2,600 humanities PhDs were granted to U.S. citizens. It would cost the federal government approximately \$5 million per year to provide one-tenth of those students one year of dissertation support. That is a cost that would simultaneously assist dedicated students at the most difficult point in their graduate programs and enrich the entire enterprise in future years. It would bring NEH policy into accord with reality by recognizing and supporting the intimate interrelationship between research and the final phases of graduate education.

What we are urging, in short, is collaboration and partnership. If both the government and universities respond in ways within their control and appropriate to their missions, we can together substantially improve the climate for humanities teaching, research, and scholarship and reduce the impact of the PhD shortage that is fast approaching.