



National Humanities Alliance

July 24, 2014

Margo Anderson
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Room 4W311
Washington, DC 20202-5930

Dear Ms. Anderson,

The National Humanities Alliance (NHA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Secretary of Education's proposed supplemental priorities and definitions for discretionary grant programs. As an organization representing 130 humanities organizations—including scholarly societies, humanities research centers, colleges, universities, and organizations of museums, libraries, historical societies, humanities councils, and higher education institutions—we would like to suggest the inclusion of an additional priority focused on promoting effective humanities learning to complement Proposed Priority Seven focused on STEM learning.

The humanities are comprised of a number of inter-related areas of study, including language, literature, philosophy, culture, ethics, rhetoric, and history. Effective learning in these subjects at all levels is essential to ensuring opportunity for all Americans, robust civic life, innovation and economic development, and productive global engagement. Moreover, effective learning in the humanities complements, rather than competes with, effective in STEM learning.

Opportunity for All Americans

Many Americans lack access to opportunity because they are deficient in a number of critical skills that are sought by employers. In a recent study conducted by the Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management, employers ranked reading and writing as top inadequacies in new hires. More than a third of employers found high school graduates "deficient" in reading comprehension, and "written communications" tops the list of applied skills found lacking in high school and college graduates. The Common Core standards that have been adopted in forty three states call for the humanities to play a central role in correcting these inadequacies by fostering essential skills and habits including reading, writing, critical thinking, and effective communication across primary and secondary school

curricula. These deficiencies not only limit the economic mobility of individuals, they also carry an economic burden for society as annual spending on remedial writing courses is estimated at more than \$3.1 billion for large corporations and \$221 million for state employers.

Robust Civic Life

Traditionally, civic education has introduced students to the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizens, knowledge of civic institutions, and a basic grounding in US history. In the 21st century, civic education must integrate these basics with a global perspective and ability for inter-cultural dialogue. Recognizing the realities and challenges of the current moment, the Department of Education commissioned a report in 2012 on what 21st-century civic learning and democratic engagement should entail at the college level. The resulting report argued for a robust civic education running throughout K-16 and outlined the knowledge and skills civic learning should cultivate. By the end of two or four-year colleges, the report contends, students should have knowledge of key democratic texts and principles, a historical and sociological understanding of democratic movements in the US and abroad, and knowledge of the diverse cultures, histories, values and contestations that have shaped the US and other world societies. So too should they have honed key skills: critical inquiry, analysis and reasoning; gathering and evaluating multiple sources of evidence; deliberating and bridge building across cultures; and communicating in multiple languages. A strong humanities education—that delves deeply into the history, cultures, literature and art of the United States and the world—is essential to achieving these fundamental civic goals both at the K-12 and college levels.

Innovation and Economic Growth

Employers increasingly seek employees who can combine the cultural knowledge and analytical ability fostered by humanities programs with technical knowledge and scientific research fostered by STEM education to create innovation and economic growth. In an effort to serve this demand, the Committee on the Engineer of 2020, a group convened by the National Academy of Engineering, recommends increased interdisciplinary education—including the humanities—in order to train engineers with the broad perspective necessary for 21st century innovation. Similarly, a substantial number of medical schools have integrated humanities coursework into their programs to enhance the cultural knowledge and observational abilities of their graduates with the goal of providing higher quality, more efficient care. Recognizing the role that the humanities play in fostering innovation, countries such as China and India have begun to integrate the humanities into their own education systems.

Productive Global Engagement

As they deal with increasingly complex international relationships, both business and military leaders look to the humanities to provide critical knowledge about communities throughout the world. These leaders argue that our ability to engage productively with the world depends on the deep knowledge of the languages,

cultures, and histories of rapidly changing areas of the world that the humanities cultivate and maintain. Historians, linguists, anthropologists, archaeologists, and literature scholars among others spend years learning about communities and their deep roots, thereby gaining expertise that may inform those who seek to work in these geographic areas.

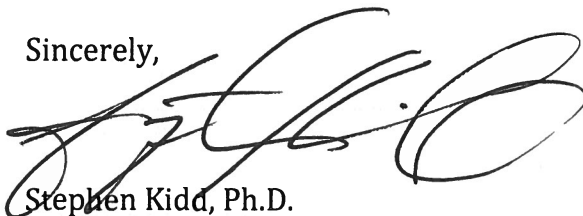
It is given the value of a strong humanities education to both individual and national achievement that the National Humanities Association proposes adding to the Secretary's proposal a Priority Area for promoting humanities education similar to proposed Priority Seven for STEM.

Within this priority, we encourage the Department of Education to support projects that address one or more of the following:

1. Developing humanities projects that target under-served school populations (such as civic learning projects as outlined in the Sandra Day O'Connor Civic Learning Act of 2013 bill);
2. Encouraging school-community partnerships that provide project-based humanities experiences that enhance students' civic knowledge and skills;
3. Increasing the preparation of teachers or other educators in humanities subjects through activities that may include building content knowledge and pedagogic content knowledge in global languages, cultures, and histories
4. Fostering the development of curricula that cultivate essential skills and habits including reading, writing, critical thinking, and effective communication within English, social studies, and foreign language classes
5. Encouraging approaches to post-secondary education that integrate humanities and STEM learning.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed supplemental priorities. The National Humanities Alliance appreciates your commitment to improving the quality and effectiveness of education in our country. Please contact Stephen Kidd (skidd@nhalliance.org) with questions or comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Kidd', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Stephen Kidd, Ph.D.
Executive Director
National Humanities Alliance