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Reauthorization: Hearings and Reports (1990): Correspondence 05

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XX January 1990

The Honorable Claiborne Pell
Chairman
Education, Arts and Humanities Subcommittee
Labor and Human Resources Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Pell:

Over the last fifteen months, the members of the National Humanities Alliance (NHA) have been identifying and studying issues that we believe should be considered during the reauthorization of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The NHA's Policy Planning Committee has been responsible for the review. The landscape for the reauthorization has changed dramatically over the last nine months due to the controversy over two Arts Endowment grants. Legislative innovations in the current reauthorization cycle are much more problematic than they seemed a year ago. Nonetheless, I am writing now to convey a priority that NHA members believe should be emphasized as Congress prepares to take action on the NEH reauthorization.

We place special emphasis on the need for an expanded and strengthened system of data collection and dissemination in the humanities. As you know, this is part of the Congressional mandate to NEH enacted in 1985: section 7 (k) of the NFAH act directs that NEH shall

in consultation with State and local agencies, other relevant organizations, and relevant Federal agencies, develop a practical system of national information and data collection on the humanities, scholars, educational, and cultural groups, and their audiences. Such system shall include cultural and financial trends in the various humanities fields, trends in audience participation, and trends in humanities education on national, regional, and State levels.

The NHA supports the Congressional formulation of the scope and nature of the federal interest in data in these areas, all of which are of great value not only to policy makers but also to scholarly, educational, and other public communities. In our view, the general usefulness of data directly collected by NEH as well as data collected in coordination with other agencies would be strengthened through regular on-going consultation with humanities educators, particularly with representatives of federal and private organizations most centrally concerned with

DRAFT

data collection, analysis, and dissemination in the humanities. NHA members have identified several kinds of information that would be useful to scholars, scholarly organizations, institutions of higher education, and policy makers. While this list is by no means exhaustive, it may suggest directions for our future discussion both with Congress and the NEH.

1. Information that might be collected regularly, and in a manner facilitating comparison over time, from the central administration of colleges and universities.

A. Enrollment data in humanities courses, reported in such a way as to facilitate identification of patterns and trends in and among the various humanities disciplines. Raw data should be made readily available at modest cost in printed or electronic form. (A useful model for such a service can be found in data services now provided by the Department of Education. The Department charges \$150 for a data tape containing institutional enrollment figures; the company that currently collects and analyzes data for NEH estimated that purchase of a tape would cost more than \$5,000.)

B. Numbers of students choosing the various humanities disciplines and interdisciplinary programs involving the humanities as their major field.

C. Data about general education and graduation requirements.

D. Numbers of faculty teaching in the various fields of the humanities, with cross-tabulation by field of study, type of institution, faculty rank, full- or part-time status, and demographic characteristics such as highest degree attained, gender, and ethnicity.

E. Data about institutional support for scholarship, including availability of sabbatical support, travel funds, support for participation in public programs, and support for innovations in curriculum and teaching.

F. Data about the kinds and amount of institutional support provided to graduate students, including stipends, fellowships, teaching assistantships, and travel funds.

2. Information from and about public programs including state humanities councils, museums, historical societies, libraries, and other public and private entities providing public access to scholarship, learning, and cultural artifacts. Perhaps this data should be limited to activities supported by NEH and by the state humanities councils. Categories of information should include statistics on audiences and attendance; kinds, amounts,

DRAFT

and sources of support; disciplinary and institutional distribution; and institutional employment.

3. Information from and about private and public foundations and other agencies that provide support for teaching, research, or other activities in the humanities, including the kinds and amounts of support provided for research, publication, travel, teaching, and curriculum development by individual scholars; for public programs; and for museums, libraries, and historical societies.

4. Information from other sources. Create a grant-making program at NEH to encourage the collection of specialized data and the analysis of existing data collected by NEH, the Department of Education, and other organizations. (Actually a decade ago, NEH supported a number of activities of this sort).

We do not suggest that all these areas need to be addressed immediately, nor that they should be specifically mentioned in the reauthorizing legislation. All the same, these are representative of the areas in which we believe a more comprehensive NEH effort at data-gathering -- directly and coordinated with other agencies -- could be of considerable help to the educational interests of policy makers and the interested public.

As important as the kind of information collected is the need for regular on-going consultation with humanities associations, higher education institutions, and other agencies concerned with data on the humanities. We urge that a structure be put in place requiring frequent consultation with representatives of humanities associations and higher education.

For example, a standing advisory committee to the NEH on humanities statistics could be established. Members of such a committee should be appointed in such a way as to ensure both broad representation of diverse disciplines and institutions and expertise in higher education and in statistical methods. Both private and federal groups concerned with collection and dissemination of data in the humanities should be represented on such a committee. Its responsibility would be to advise the NEH both on kinds of data to be collected and disseminated.

In addition, an advisory committee on humanities statistics could be of considerable assistance to NEH in its coordination and/or collaboration with other data collecting agencies. For example, the large scale educational data systems of the Department of Education and the National Research Council could be modestly expanded or modified to produce more usable information specific to the humanities.

DRAFT

Sen. Claiborne
XX January 1990
Page 4

We have taken up the issues we have raised here in our meeting with Alexander Cray on January 25 and look forward to the opportunity to meet with you to discuss reauthorization. We appreciate your interest in these issues and look forward to your continued interest in the future.

Sincerely yours,

John H. Hammer
Director

For the Policy Planning Committee, National Humanities Alliance:

David A. Hoekema, Chairman (American Philosophical Association and the University of Delaware)
Edward C. Carter II (Independent Research Libraries Association and the American Philosophical Society)
Phyllis Franklin (Modern Language Association)
Roderick S. French (George Washington University and President of National Humanities Alliance)
Douglas Greenberg (American Council of Learned Societies)
Jamil S. Zainaldin (Federation of State Humanities Councils)