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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

April 12, 1989

MEMORANDUM TO: Rex Arney
General Counsel

FROM: Kenneth Kolson, Acting Director
Division of Education Programs

SUBJECT: Standing Panel Experiment

In the spring of 1988 the Division of Education Programs initiated a three-year experiment with standing panels. The program for Elementary and Secondary Education in the Humanities and the program for Higher Education in the Humanities are conducting the experiment, but it has not been applied to the Teacher-Scholar Program for Elementary and Secondary School Teachers, which is itself experimental.

We are trying to test the hypothesis that standing review panels might provide more thorough and consistent evaluations of grant proposals than panels newly constituted for each application cycle. The purpose of the Division's funding is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the humanities at the elementary and secondary levels as well as in higher education. Panelists are asked to review proposals for their significance to the humanities, intellectual quality, and likelihood of success.

Panelists for the Division's Higher Education in the Humanities Program and for its Elementary and Secondary Education in the Humanities Program are drawn from key disciplines of the humanities and from the ranks of teachers and administrators at a wide variety of educational institutions across the country. Like all of our panelists, standing panelists represent in the review process the breadth of the education community: they are selected on the basis of their expertise in the humanities and their disciplinary, regional, cultural, and institutional diversity.

The standing panels do not, therefore, represent a change in the composition of our panels. The experiment has to do with the length of time for which individuals are appointed. One third of the panelists were asked to serve for three years, one third for two years, and one third for one year. This system was intended to provide both continuity and an orderly system of rotation so that new panelists could be invited each year.

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Our standing panels were formed in May of 1988 with the naming of 25 Higher Education panelists and 15 Elementary and Secondary panelists. The first year of our standing panel system is now complete, which means that our standing panels have met twice. We are currently replacing one-third of the membership. For example, eight of our Higher Education standing panelists were recently replaced with new members who will sit for two-year terms.

The individuals who accepted these appointments have invested a great deal of time and expertise in the important work of identifying the highest quality projects in the humanities and recommending them for federal funding. The Endowment is grateful to these outstanding educators for their commitment to strengthening the teaching of the humanities on a national scale and for the public service that they are performing.

We continue to monitor the performance of our standing panels. Please don't hesitate to ask if you have any questions about our experiment.