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## Reauthorization: Hearings and Reports (1990): Correspondence 07

John H. D'Arms

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May 1, 1990

Senator Claiborne Pell, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Education, Arts and Humanities  
Committee on Labor and Human Resources  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510-6300

Dear Senator Pell:

Many thanks for your letter of April 9, in which you pose three questions arising from my testimony at the hearing on April 5 regarding the reauthorization of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I especially appreciate the opportunity to respond and thus to amplify my written testimony, already submitted to the Subcommittee on Education, Arts and Humanities.

1. As preamble to responding to the question of how it is possible that today's tight job market for Humanities Ph.D's may change in only a few years and become instead a buyer's market, a brief summary of the pertinent recent history of U.S. higher education may prove helpful. As you know, between the mid 1950's and the early 1970's the entire higher educational enterprise expanded greatly: undergraduate student numbers grew exponentially, significantly increased numbers of new Ph.D's (many supported by federal and foundation fellowships) were trained and joined faculty ranks in both colleges and universities; most of these new faculty were later (in the early to mid-1960s) promoted to permanent, or tenured, positions. This period of growth came to an end beginning in the early 1970's, when the expanding numbers of undergraduates attending universities began to taper off, and when the higher educational system as a whole ceased to grow at anything like the rate that had characterized the previous 15-20 years. In addition, tenured faculty came to dominate the professoriate, and correspondingly fewer positions for young faculty were available. We subsequently witnessed a

corresponding rapid decline in the numbers of students in the Humanities who sought the Ph.D (and a virtual disappearance of federal and foundation financial support for those who have). This has been the situation throughout the 1970s and most of the 1980s. But as the current group of tenured faculty begins to reach retirement age in the mid to late-1990's, undergraduate enrollments will sustain themselves and indeed are likely to grow. At that point, a strong demand for faculty replacements will begin to make itself felt, a demand for which the chief and historic source of supply--newly trained Ph.D.'s--will be simply insufficient. Far too few students have been recently trained--or are now actually enrolled--in the graduate schools to fill the places of those faculty who will be retiring between about 1997 and 2010.

Recognizing these impending demographic changes, how should academic leaders and others respond responsibly? The first step is to attempt to understand more fully and accurately the actual dimensions of the problem, since none us wishes to repeat the mistakes of the 1960's, and to overreact by training many more Ph.D's than the actual anticipated faculty openings justify. A series of careful studies and analyses have now appeared (I enclose a brief article which I recently wrote, referring to some of the available data). I and administrators at many other universities, after reviewing these studies critically, draw the following three major conclusions.

- a. We are convinced that there will be increased and sustained demand for more Humanities (and other) Ph.D's beginning in the mid 1990's. This is not wholly a matter of prediction, based on assumptions which reasonable persons might question, but a simple matter of arithmetic. If we subtract the number of Humanities Ph.D's that are now actually being produced each year (a known number) from the number of faculty who will be leaving the work force each year beginning in 1997 (a known number) we are left with a sizeable gap of faculty positions to be filled.
- b. Second, even if some of these positions could be assumed by part-time faculty, or by rehired retirees, or by Ph.D.'s who are currently employed outside the academic sector, we are convinced that the number of such available replacements is simply not going to be sufficient to meet the demand. Moreover, even if those numbers sufficed, it is doubtful whether such a large cohort could fully serve the complex needs of colleges and universities, or of their students. Part-time individuals can make extremely valuable

contributions to colleges, but it is also important to maintain a careful balance here. The management of the higher education enterprise requires ongoing, sustained commitment by faculty to teaching, research and administrative service over time; and universities must rely mainly upon a stable core of full-time faculty if they are to fulfill their obligations to students.

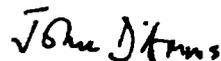
- c. Third, we in universities are not treating these studies as hypothetical, but have already begun to act upon them, taking concrete steps to buffer anticipated faculty shortages. At Michigan, we are now committing resources to Departments which are making fresh efforts to move Ph.D. candidates through their degree programs more quickly; Yale is significantly increasing fellowship support for students in the last phases of their doctoral programs; other universities are similarly deploying resources and revising institutional policies to prepare fresh Ph.D.s more quickly for the professoriate. Universities would simply not be prepared to revise institutional priorities (and re-allocate very scarce resources) in such fundamental ways unless they believed that the nation will require more Humanities Ph.D.'s in the near future, and that the universities themselves must do all that they can to prepare for this future. In this effort, we are not relying only upon the evidence provided by outside studies. We have ample internal evidence--in terms of our own knowledge of current Ph.D "production" and predictable retirements in the humanities--to depend upon. Our hope is that the federal government will share part of this responsibility with us (as it has in the past), and that the NEH will participate in the effort which we have already begun.
2. The short answer to your second question, about number of students to be supported by NEH dissertation fellowships, is approximately 600, or roughly 16% of Humanities students who presently receive the Ph.D. each year. But numbers and percentages need to be viewed in the context of the wholly different purposes which Javits Fellowships and anticipated NEH dissertation fellowship are intended to achieve. The two programs focus on opposite ends of the doctoral process. Javits Fellowships are designed to attract new students into humanities doctoral programs, whereas the NEH dissertation fellowships would support the final efforts of doctoral students who have progressed nearly to completion of their programs, are near the point of entry into faculty careers, and are engaged in precisely the kinds of research projects which the NEH already supports for established faculty. A NEH dissertation fellowship program, in short, would simply extend the NEH support of humanistic research to the point at which, in reality, it seriously begins: the dissertation stage.

As for the academic community's own efforts to retain the Javits program, I can assure you that we are currently mounting the same vigorous efforts which we have been making since the program first began. The University of Michigan and Princeton University have already made contacts with Michigan and New Jersey Congressman who occupy key positions on the House Labor/HHS/Ed Appropriations Subcommittee. The University of Iowa has spoken about the Javits program with Senator Harkin, Chairman of the Senate Labor/HHS/Ed Appropriations Subcommittee. A number of other universities will make similar contacts; and the AAU and other organizations will work diligently throughout the appropriations process. We would be delighted if you could assist us in that effort by contacting Senator Harkin and any other colleagues whom you deem appropriate on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee, so as to encourage funding for the Javits program. The AAU would be delighted to work cooperatively with your staff in such an effort.

3. Finally, you ask about the controversy over restrictive language, and the extent to which it may be creating any kind of 'chilling effect' in the humanities' communities. As a Board member of the American Council of Learned Societies, of the American Academy in Rome, and of the National Humanities Center, I've observed the considerable tensions caused by the new NEH restrictions on Reqrants. The Institute for Advanced Study, as you know, refused NEH support over this issue. Whatever one may think about the wisdom of this, Chairman Cheney, as you also know, now herself believes that detailed NEH oversight of these selection processes--particularly the question of sitting in on actual selection meetings--is proving to be difficult and intrusive, and she would not recommend continuing them. But I think the real test of a 'chilling effect' lies less in what does happen than in what does not. My own major fears about the restrictive language are that it will prevent scholars from submitting applications for certain scholarly projects, and may even 'discourage them from undertaking them at all: it is worrying to contemplate such a future for the Humanistic research efforts in our country.

Many thanks again for encouraging me so courteously to amplify my testimony in this way. May I take this opportunity to say that although Dr. Cheney and I are not in full agreement as to what a reauthorized NEH might be, I have the highest respect for her integrity, for her administrative skills, and for her steadfast efforts to forward the cause of the Humanities in America.

With best regards,



John H. D'Arms  
Vice Provost for Academic  
Affairs and Dean;  
President, Association of  
Graduate Schools in the  
Association of American  
Universities