



National Humanities Alliance

January 29, 2010

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
United States Senate
Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Durbin:

As the Senate finalizes work on legislation to create and retain jobs, we urge you to consider the attached proposal to provide \$60 million in funding to stimulate teaching positions at colleges and universities around the country.

As the impact of the economic recession continues to deepen at two- and four-year colleges and universities around the country, new humanities PhDs are facing a dramatic, 25% annual projected shortfall in humanities job openings at postsecondary institutions. Significant, immediate intervention is needed to:

- address a growing shortage of undergraduate teaching faculty in fields vital to continuing America's global leadership in higher education
- send an important signal of renewed federal investment in liberal arts education
- preserve our investment in talented young scholars as teachers and researchers in their areas of expertise

The National Humanities Alliance is a coalition of more than 100 organizations and institutions committed to the advancement of humanities education and research. Thank you for your attention to our request for the Senate jobs bill.

Sincerely,

Jessica Jones Irons
Executive Director
National Humanities Alliance



The Crisis in Humanities Employment A Proposal to Stimulate Jobs for New PhDs

ACTION NEEDED: We call on Congress to provide \$60 million to stimulate new faculty jobs in the humanities. Emergency funding would be provided to the National Endowment for the Humanities to support a fellowship program for *recent doctoral degree recipients* entering the academic workforce.

As the impact of the economic recession continues to deepen at two- and four-year colleges and universities around the country, new humanities PhDs are facing a devastating, 25% *annual* projected shortfall in academic job openings. Significant, immediate intervention is needed to:

- address a growing shortage of undergraduate teaching faculty in fields vital to America's continued global leadership in higher education
- send an important signal of *renewed federal investment in liberal arts education*
- preserve our investment in talented young scholars as teachers and researchers in their areas of expertise

IMPACT OF PROPOSAL

At the level of funding proposed, at least 200, two-year fellowships could be awarded per year (beginning 2010), generating **400 temporary, two-year faculty positions over a three-year period** (800 FTEs), *and continuing* access to high-quality teaching, learning and research opportunities for **thousands of students at colleges and universities across the country**. These numbers could increase depending on final structures adopted for determining stipends and cost-sharing.

YOUNG WORKERS

The severity of the present crisis threatens to deprive the nation of the demonstrated talents of what many worry will become a "lost generation" of scholars and educators. While it takes a relatively long time to earn a PhD in the humanities, a sudden economic change can permanently close the short window during which young scholars can gain a foothold in the profession they have worked hard to join. The funding requested is substantial, however a significantly larger public and private investment has *already* been made to support the achievements of these students—from K-12 to graduate school—and is now at risk. The proposed program would serve as a bridge to permanent employment for recent doctoral degree recipients, and encourage retention of higher faculty levels at the host institution for the long run, with lasting benefits to the students and local communities served by these workers.

LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION AT RISK

Our nation's long tradition of fostering broad access to liberal arts education is increasingly looked to by nations around the world as a unique driver of U.S. economic leadership and innovation in the last century. Nevertheless, recent federal policy has placed almost exclusive emphasis on fostering scientific, technological, engineering and math (STEM) fields. While STEM support is critical, *parallel federal and institutional investment in the humanities is desperately needed* to ensure continued opportunities to study basic subjects—such as history, literature, writing, foreign languages, philosophy, religion—at all levels of learning. The current crisis threatens to diminish such access beyond the immediate economic contraction, particularly if realignment of educational resources becomes permanent. The humanities represent core fields of knowledge and capacities that enrich individuals, undergird our civic institutions, and aid society in addressing complex challenges. Our long-term economic success depends on cultivating a *broadly educated workforce* ready to compete in the knowledge-based, global economy of the 21st century. *It is a strategic mistake to turn away from a historic strength of the U.S. educational system at the very moment other nations around the world are moving in the opposite direction.*

JOB ESTIMATES

We estimate that there will be a shortage of roughly 1000 jobs per year for new humanities PhDs entering the academic workforce over the next 2-3 years. *If current economic trends hold or worsen, a third of our nation's most talented, highly-trained scholars could be lost as practitioners in their fields of expertise.*

ADMINISTRATION

The National Endowment for the Humanities has a decades-long record of overseeing fellowships for humanities scholars through its Research and Education divisions. The *New Faculty Fellows Program*, an emergency effort launched by the American Council of Learned Societies in 2009, provides a possible model for addressing this crisis. *Federal funding through NEH could be used to administer an expanded version of this program that would reach a broad range of institutions across the country.*