

Testimony of Tiffany López, Ph.D.
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on

Fiscal Year 2016 Appropriations for the National Endowment for the Arts and
the National Endowment for the Humanities

Submitted to the
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

March 18, 2015

On behalf of the University of California, Riverside (UCR), I respectfully submit this testimony for the record in support of funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). **UCR requests funding for NEA and NEH each at \$155 million for fiscal year 2016.** UCR especially requests robust funding at NEH for the “Humanities Initiatives at Hispanic-Serving Institutions” program and the “Awards for Faculty at Hispanic-Serving Institutions” program. NEA and NEH faculty support grants are important, not only to increasing diversity of presence, but also of thought. These funds are vital to encouraging the development of our students to dream about what is possible in their education.

NEH is the lead federal agency focused on the development and support of scholarship in the humanities. It is a vital source of funds for scholars and researchers whose work helps citizens and policy-makers alike better understand and address the social, economic, political, and cultural challenges facing our nation and our world today. Similarly, NEA is the main federal agency that funds local cultural programming and arts education, which provide jobs and attract tourism revenue. But, beyond all of that, the arts and humanities programs funded by NEA and NEH have the power to change lives.

I would like to share my own story to demonstrate how an education in the arts and humanities can truly be life changing. I left an abusive home at 15 and, while working full time in fast food, began taking classes at a community college with the goal of becoming a fast food franchisee owner. I struggled to overcome various challenges as a first-generation college student; in fact, when I was advised to transfer to a Cal State to get my bachelor’s degree, I thought only doctors and scientists had such advanced education. I didn’t know I could continue my studies majoring in the humanities and arts. I credit literature, theater and visual art for saving my life by showing me that the abusive and toxic story of my childhood was just one story in my life and that there were other stories I could make for myself and share with others as my mentors had with me.

As much of the conversation in higher education emphasizes the science-technology-engineering-mathematics (STEM) disciplines, the humanities and arts are facing significant pressure and, consequently, are being undervalued. However, devaluing the arts and humanities

does not benefit American society. Although STEM fields are critical, our society must stay committed to educating the whole person, which only the arts and humanities can help students achieve. A liberal arts education gives students the tools to be creative thinkers and better communicators—traits that are in high demand from employers. A 2009 report by the Conference Board, entitled *The Ill-Prepared U.S. Workforce* states, “Particularly disturbing are the substantial gaps in training for critical thinking and creativity skills that are crucial to companies’ ability to compete in the global marketplace.” Reading comprehension and writing skills were also reported to be lacking.

One of the NEH grants at UCR that I would like to highlight is for \$100,000 to establish a health humanities program to complement the training of health professionals at UCR’s new School of Medicine. The idea is to improve doctor-patient interactions by developing an engaged conversation between faculty of the humanities and medicine around the cultural, economic, historical, and philosophical complexities of health and medical encounters. This focus will allow doctors and patients to better understand one another.

Although UCR recognizes Congress must make difficult financial decisions and that sequestration will only further squeeze non-defense discretionary federal agencies, such as NEA and NEH, I strongly urge you to support increased funding to \$155 million for NEA and NEH. Again, NEA and NEH provide valuable resources to our communities in Inland Southern California that promote productive global engagement, strong communities, and our cultural heritage. Additionally, given our close proximity to Los Angeles and the film and arts industries there, supporting the arts and humanities provides an economic boon to our region as well.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any assistance in the future.

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