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UNH Receives NEH Grant to Establish Center for New England Culture

By Erika Mantz
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UNH News Bureau

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DURHAM, N.H. - The National Endowment for the Humanities has awarded the University of New Hampshire $378,900 to establish a Center for New England Culture to promote research, education, public outreach, and preservation projects in the humanities concerning the rich historical and contemporary culture of the six New England states.

This grant, one of nine awarded to establish regional culture centers across the country, will be matched through donations 3-to-1 to establish a permanent endowment. Housed in the existing Center for the Humanities, the Center for New England Culture will be directed by Professor David Watters, the James H. Hayes and Claire Short Hayes Chair in the Humanities.

"As a land grant university, UNH is committed to serving the public," says David Hiley, provost and vice president for academic affairs. "The Center for New England Culture is an opportunity for us to assemble all the great work that is already being done, from climate study and maritime history to education and outreach, and to increase understanding of the significance of New England's past and its importance today."

In its first years, the Center for New England Culture will host national conferences on New England Identities (2002), New England Literatures (2003), and New England Environments (2004). In collaboration with the six state humanities councils, the center also will sponsor a lecture series, "New England's Voices, Places, and Peoples."

"Regional culture is remarkably persistent in New
England, and many Americans associate core
democratic values with its six states," Watters says. "To
increase understanding of the significance of New
England's past and the value of its diverse
contemporary culture, the Center for New England
Culture will be a collaborative hub for educators,
organizations and the general public. With its strong
record of regional scholarship and teaching and its
central location, UNH is an ideal site for the center."

Watters says the center will offer teacher institutes and
conferences designed to strengthen the core content of
the curriculum on regional culture, especially its
historically significant ethnic communities. Marilyn
Hoskin, dean of UNH's College of Liberal Arts, says it
will build on the wide range of strengths the university
has in these areas.

"We plan to expand our work in historical, social and
environmental studies in New England to capture the
rich character of this region for its residents and those
who visit, study, or just want to know about this
important part of the country," she says. "I am delighted
that scholars and students will have new opportunities
to bring their fascinating research to the broader
population through museums, performances and written
work on what makes New England special."

In addition, college and university faculty and
Cooperative Extension Services will work together
through projects on the history of 4-H and on building
social capital in local communities. Additional outreach
projects will include the development of a Web site
with a New England timeline and a regional humanities
curriculum database, publications, and research interest
groups.

"I've always been convinced that place matters," says
Burt Feintuch, director of UNH's Center for the
Humanities. "Regions are one way people ground
themselves, relate to others, and, ideally, develop an
ethic of stewardship for features of life -- social,
cultural and environmental -- that matter to them. The
new Center for New England Culture will be an
incubator for new ways of thinking and new projects of
value to the region. In the spirit of a land-grant
institution, it will also emphasize programming at the
grass roots, working in communities and with
organizations across the six New England states."

For further information, contact David Watters at (603) 862-3983 or dhw@cisunix.unh.edu.

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