

UNH Vies for NEH Honor to Become \$20M Center for New England Culture

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DURHAM, N.H. -- The University of New Hampshire could become the cultural hub for New England studies if all goes according to plan over the next year.

UNH is one of only 16 colleges and universities across the country to receive a \$50,000 planning grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and one of only two in the Northeast vying to become the "Center for New England Culture." Brown University in Providence, R.I., is the other regional grant recipient.

The grants will support a year's work to lay the foundation for independent regional studies centers across the country. By the end of the summer, NEH expects to have funded 20 such planning grants, covering all 50 states, U.S. territories and Puerto Rico.

NEH ultimately will fund 10 regional centers at \$5 million each and require each selected institution to raise \$15 million in matching funds. Totalling \$20 million, the campus endowments would support regional humanities research, guest speakers, public programs, education and preservation efforts, according to William Ferris, chair of NEH.

"People everywhere define themselves through the places where they live or where they grew up," adds George Farr, acting deputy chair of NEH. "History, folklore, language and landscape -- humanities -- shape us in lasting ways."

UNH project co-directors David Watters and Burt Feintuch say the university is well positioned to become the Center for New England Culture. Campus initiatives include development of the massive Encyclopedia of New England Culture, co-edited by Feintuch and Watters. With support from the UNH Center for Humanities, the encyclopedia is expected to be the lead book published by Yale University Press in the fall of 2003.

"This is the centerpiece of our work in New England studies to date," says Watters. "Creating the encyclopedia has given the Humanities Center access to unparalleled intellectual resources for the study of New England." The book will have approximately 1,300 entries written by almost 900 authors.

The university's academic strengths also include faculty research in diverse regional areas such as ethnic geography, literary studies, maritime history, the New Hampshire primary, the environment and women's history.

Another advantage is, as they say, location, location, location. An hour from Boston, Durham is nearly the geographical center of New England. UNH is within a three-hour drive from the region's six state capitals and borders up-country and urban areas, with easy access to both shorelines and mountains.

Meanwhile, the UNH team has begun meeting with regional stakeholders to determine their level of support. Among the targeted groups are state humanities councils, historical societies, education and tourism officials, teachers, researchers and librarians.

The proposed center already has support from David Hiley, UNH provost and vice president for academic affairs, who sees the center as a "hotbed of intellectual teamwork."

"Faculty-student research, interdisciplinary collaboration -- these are the cornerstones of many of our best programs at UNH," he says. "I see the Center for New England Culture fitting nicely into that model."

"This project is perfectly suited for a public university," adds Feintuch. "It will help New Englanders from all walks of life understand and appreciate a region that has always been considered special. And it will build on the virtues of a land-grant university, combining teaching, research and public service for the region."

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