$275,400  
NEH funding at Vanderbilt in FY 2016

$480,000  
NEH Challenge Grant awarded to Vanderbilt in 1989

$1.9 million  
Leveraged by Vanderbilt's 1989 NEH Challenge Grant

$1.42 million  
NEH funding given to Tennessee in FY 2016

The Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities

In 1989, Vanderbilt’s Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities was awarded a $480,000 Challenge Grant from the NEH to assist in establishing a permanent endowment for the program. The grant had to be matched 4:1 with funds from the private sector, which helped leverage an additional $1.9 million. This award signifies the nationally recognized achievements of the center and helps to ensure its long-term future. The center facilitates interdisciplinary research in the humanities and social sciences by hosting annual faculty fellows, including one visiting faculty member from outside the university. It also has an annual graduate fellowship program. The center often collaborates with partners from across the campus and Nashville to provide opportunities for humanistic excellence.

Supporting a digital archive of slave societies

The Ecclesiastical and Secular Sources for Slave Societies (ESSSS) Digital Archive, directed by Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of History Jane Landers and administered at Vanderbilt, preserves African history in Cuba and Brazil. It was launched in 2002 with the support of an NEH grant. Other grants have funded preservation of records in Cuba, Brazil, Colombia, and Spanish Florida. The archive contains more than 600,000 images from the 16th to 19th centuries that preserve the history of 4 million to 6 million African and Afro-descended individuals, protecting imperiled cultural heritage and enabling research on understudied populations by making materials from remote locales accessible. Scholars draw on ESSSS collections for conferences, doctoral dissertations, journal publications, and monographs.

The original archive infrastructure can no longer support the archive’s data. With new NEH support, the records will be converted into a standardized format and transferred to a system that promotes sharing. ESSSS will host a conference to exchange new findings with scholars and a workshop to share digital preservation expertise with institutions that have limited cyberinfrastructure.

Syriaca.org preserves endangered cultures

NEH funding has allowed David A. Michelson, assistant professor of the history of Christianity, to collect and preserve essential historical information about the Syriac minorities of the Middle East. Syriac is a dialect of Aramaic, which was once a primary language of trade and culture in the Middle East and is still used by minority communities in the region. Historical documents surviving in Syriac are vital for understanding the history of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and other religions. As the general editor of Syriaca.org, Michelson has overseen the publication of the Syriac Gazetteer, an online geographical dictionary to document the memory of Syriac churches, monuments, and other places now threatened by civil war. The Syriac Gazetteer is the first of several NEH-funded reference works published by Syriaca.org. Michelson and colleagues received an NEH Preservation and Access Grant in 2015 that will support three new reference works.

Geospatial tools to map colonial Peru

Steve Wernke, associate professor of anthropology, received an NEH Digital Humanities grant to prototype two resources for collecting and analyzing geospatial data related to the Spanish colonization of Peru. Researchers studying ancient cultural transformation face challenges due to fragmentary and patchy information. In the Andean region, where no written record exists prior to 1532, understanding social transformations is challenging. Spatial tools can aid in reconstructing history. With this grant, Wernke and colleagues will develop two geospatial aids: 1) a crowd-sourced, linked open online gazetteer—a geographical atlas—and 2) a geospatial database and interface for producing thematic and analytical maps. These tools will be used to produce the most comprehensive settlement map of colonial Peru to date and serve as a model for spatially integrating fragmentary historical information.