

11 August 2023

Gordon Gee  
President  
West Virginia University

Dear President Gee,

As the executive director of the Modern Language Association, the largest disciplinary association in the humanities, with 20,000 members in the US and 100 other countries, I write to express how vital it is for you to support and retain teaching and research in modern languages, English, and other humanities fields at the flagship public higher education institution in West Virginia.

We at the MLA have been receiving messages from people all over the country who are alarmed at the notion that a public land grant university would abandon its commitment to its state, a commitment to provide the education its residents need and deserve. A full liberal arts education includes providing students with the tools that enable them to interact both with their neighbors in West Virginia and with the rest of the world. Science, technology, and business courses and majors are not enough for WVU to offer if it wants to produce fully informed and thinking citizens for West Virginia.

I will leave it to others to make the arguments about the economic impact of arts and sciences and, especially, humanities programs on campus. I understand that both the World Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics department and the English department generate substantial tuition revenue for the university beyond their expenses, so we are left to wonder at the motivation for these cuts.

Because we monitor the status of language and literature departments across the nation and conduct a regular census of language enrollments, I can tell you that no other state flagship university has forsaken language education for its students or made the kinds of cuts to the humanities that WVU is undertaking. Such cuts dramatically narrow educational opportunities not just for humanities students but for STEM and business students as well. All students' job prospects and lives are enriched by language study, writing instruction, and the research and analytical skills taught in beginning and advanced literature and culture courses. Access to these courses is especially important in public higher education, which is often the only route to a degree for many state residents. The humanities should not be reserved for students who can afford private higher education.

In addition, state flagship universities have an obligation to contribute to the production of knowledge in all their disciplines. Research in language and literature needs the support of

universities if we are to move forward in our understanding of the world around us, and that is no less true in the humanities than it is in STEM fields.

The MLA would be happy to share with you any information or resources you might want to help you to understand the impact of language learning on career prospects and the importance of a solid liberal arts background for full civic participation. Please feel free to contact me at [pkrebs@mla.org](mailto:pkrebs@mla.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paula M. Krebs". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paula" being the most prominent.

Paula M. Krebs  
Executive Director