The MIT Graduate Student Council (GSC) represents the 6,800 graduate students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in all matters concerning their welfare, academic and professional development opportunities, and overall health. We strongly support federal funding for the arts and humanities, specifically through continued funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) as part of federal discretionary spending in 2017.

The NEA and NEH were founded by bipartisan legislators and signed into law over half a century ago (Pub.L. 89–209, 1965). These acts acknowledged how a great nation invests in its artistic and humanistic infrastructures, just as it must support its scientific, social, and physical ones.

Through the decades, NEA has helped fund many local cultural initiatives all over this country through matching grants that have stimulated local arts economies, as well as their outright grants that have stimulated the arts in all regions of the country. Art and cultural institutions provided 4.74 million jobs in 2013, according to a 2016 report.¹ The report further states that art and cultural production contributed over $704 billion to the U.S. economy, or 4.2% of the U.S. GDP.

Similarly, NEH has provided funding for scholars in all 50 states at all stages of their careers, immensely enriching our literature, history, and educational offerings. Diminishing or abolishing these agencies would do little to curb government spending (less than 1/10th of one percent of the federal budget). Rather, they would devastate the cause of cultural equity in our country and deprive smaller communities of vital access to the nation’s best art and ideas. Moreover, NEA and NEH grants provide key funding opportunities for important research such as projects in the digital humanities, digital preservation of historical archives, and development of digital media for remote learning. Historically, NEH has funded a number of innovative digital humanities research projects at MIT, such as Hyperstudio Lab’s Annotation Studio² and Visualizing Cultures Online Curriculum.³

We thus ask you to maintain the current level of funding for both the NEA and NEH so that scholars can continue to advance American innovation in education and cultural exchange.

 Prepared by the External Affairs Board on behalf of the MIT Graduate Student Council.

¹ Bureau of Economic Analysis (Commerce) 2016 report Arts and Culture Grows at Faster Pace in 2013, p.4
² For more information about Annotation Studio, see: annotationstudio.org
³ For more information on MIT’s Open Courseware Visualizing Cultures Curriculum, see: https://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/home/vis_menu_03.html