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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 28, 2007

Sweet Briar professor promotes humanities on Capitol Hill

WASHINGTON – Lynn Rainville, an assistant professor in anthropology and archaeology at Sweet Briar College, joined advocates from around the country this week to urge Congress to support increased funding for the humanities as part of Humanities Advocacy Day.

Rainville represented the American Anthropological Association (AAA), one of more than 30 national organizations co-sponsoring the annual event, which is coordinated by the National Humanities Alliance (NHA).

Advocates, comprised of about 120 educators and scholars, met with their senators and representatives to promote the value of the humanities and the need for federal support for scholarly research, education and public programs.

Rainville, who studies the Ancient Near East, the Assyrian Empire, African-American culture, slave cemeteries and the history of Virginia, has been awarded grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) several times, most recently in 2005 to support research into African-American mortuary traditions in the Virginia Piedmont from the 18th to the mid-20th centuries. NEH is a key source of grant funding for anthropological and archaeological research. She met with the offices of seven members of Virginia's congressional delegation – House Reps. Eric Cantor (R), Tom Davis (R), Randy Forbes (R), Virgil Goode (R), and Jim Moran (D), and Sens. Jim Webb (D) and John Warner (R) – to make the case in support of sustained and increased funding for the NEH and other key federal humanities programs, such as the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

This year, the NHA and AAA are urging Congress to support a fiscal year 2008 budget of \$177 million for the NEH, an increase of \$36 million above the FY 2007 appropriation and presidential requests. This additional funding would strengthen NEH's ability to support high-quality humanities projects throughout the United States. Further, such an increase would mark a significant step toward restoring NEH funding to historic levels. For the third year in a row, the Bush administration has requested flat funding for the NEH.

NHA and its advocacy partners also are asking Congress to provide a \$12 million appropriation to the NHPRC, a program within the National Archives and Records Administration that has been zeroed out in the president's FY 2008 budget proposal. The NHPRC is considered by humanities advocates to be a vital mechanism for preserving the documentary record of American history.

More information and background material on these budget issues is available on NHA's Web site at www.nhalliance.org/conference/2007/sourcebook.

This is the eighth year for the two-day Humanities Advocacy Day program, which draws participation from various disciplines and institutions including colleges, universities, scholarly societies, state humanities councils, museums, libraries and historical societies. The American Anthropological Association is among the scholarly societies participating.

Founded in 1902, the American Anthropological Association is the world's largest professional organization of anthropologists and others interested in anthropology, with an average annual membership of more than 10,000. The Arlington, Va.-based association represents all specialties within anthropology – cultural anthropology, biological (or physical) anthropology, archaeology, linguistics and applied anthropology.