In December 2012, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded the Howard Department of Classics a 3-year grant to support its transformation to a Department of Ancient Mediterranean Studies. The project supports a series of workshops and public lectures by visiting scholars who work in two areas: (1) cultural connections in the ancient Mediterranean and (2) the classical tradition with emphasis on Classica Africana. The workshops will provide the intellectual underpinning for our process of transformation into a Department of Ancient Mediterranean Studies [AMS]. Planned to replace the former Classical Civilization degree which will be terminated as of 2015, the new degree program will significantly extend the scope of Classics along both horizontal and vertical axes by introducing courses on interactions between all the ancient Mediterranean cultures as well as courses on classical reception in modernity.

The NEH-funded series of 11 public lectures will introduce the Howard community to the new degree program, while the concurrent series of 11 faculty workshops will train faculty for implementing it. Workshop participants will also draw on the expertise of the invited scholars to develop the full Ancient Mediterranean Studies degree program by creating opportunities for our core team of faculty to study, innovate, and plan together. The first public lecture and workshop by Joy Connolly, Classics Professor and Dean of the Humanities for New York University, on the interface between Roman political thought and the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt will offer a compelling example of the role of classical reception studies in the education of future citizens and leaders in a democracy. For the second NEH lecture/workshop of the 2013 spring semester, Professor Margaret Malamud of New Mexico State University will focus on the reception of classical culture by African Americans. Later in the series, Professor Eve Hawthorne of Howard’s Caribbean Studies Program will lecture and train faculty to incorporate the reception of classical culture in Caribbean literature. These and other visiting consultants will enable our faculty to design and teach reception courses on Classica Africana, a field slated for special attention in the AMS program as particularly pertinent to the “Howard experience.”

The NEH project seeks to maintain the nearly hundred and fifty year tradition of the African American study of Greek and Latin at Howard University by enlarging the scope of the Classics Department to cover the plurality of ancient cultures that bordered on the Mediterranean Sea. The proposed project of study and consultation with a national team of experts on the connections between the ancient Mediterranean cultures and their legacy to today will enable us to create an academically responsible and innovative program in AMS that can serve as a model for other classics departments in similar situations.