



American Academy of Arts & Sciences

www.HumanitiesIndicators.org

Humanities Indicators

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences' *Humanities Indicators*, a set of statistical data about the humanities in the United States, is now available on-line at www.HumanitiesIndicators.org.

Organized in collaboration with a consortium of national humanities organizations, the *Humanities Indicators* are the first effort to provide scholars, policymakers and the public with a comprehensive picture of the state of the humanities, from primary to higher education to public humanities activities. The collection of empirical data is modeled after the National Science Board's *Science and Engineering Indicators* and creates reliable benchmarks to guide future analysis of the state of the humanities. Without data, it is impossible to assess the effectiveness, impact, and needs of the humanities.

The Academy project collected and analyzed data from existing sources to compile a prototype set of 74 indicators and more than 200 tables and charts, accompanied by interpretive essays covering five broad subject areas. The *Indicators* will be updated as new information becomes available, including data from the Academy's Humanities Departmental Survey administered last year to approximately 1,500 college and university humanities departments. The Academy views the *Indicators* as a prototype for a much-needed national system of humanities data collection.

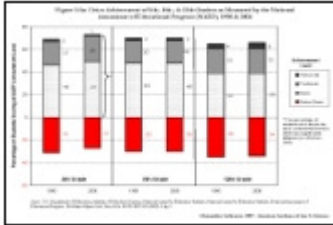
“Until now the nation has lacked a broad-based, quantitative analysis of the status of the humanities in the United States,” said Leslie Berlowitz, chief executive officer of the American Academy and project co-director. “We need more reliable empirical data about what is being taught in the humanities, how they are funded, the size of the workforce, and public attitudes toward the field. The *Humanities Indicators* are an important step in closing that fundamental knowledge gap. They will help researchers and policymakers, universities, foundations, museums, libraries, humanities councils and others answer basic questions about the humanities, track trends, diagnose problems, and formulate appropriate interventions.”

Excerpts from the Humanities Indicators Prototype

I. Primary and Secondary Education

From Indicator I-4, Knowledge of Civics

For a country that prides itself on its democratic traditions—indeed, defines itself, in large measure, in those terms—the fact that over a third of those graduating from its high schools in 2006 lack basic civics knowledge is striking (Figure I-4a).

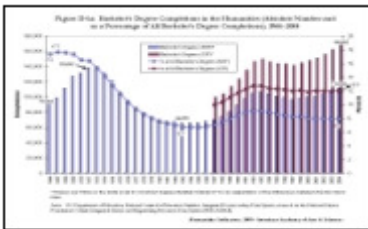


Older students demonstrated lesser mastery than younger. Only 66% of high school seniors performed at a basic level or better compared to 73% of fourth graders and 70% of 8th graders.

II. Undergraduate and Graduate Education in the Humanities

From Indicator II-1, Undergraduate Degrees in the Humanities

“Rollercoaster” is an apt metaphor for the steep rise in humanities graduates in the 1960s, followed by an abrupt plunge in the decade after 1971, and more gentle undulations after that.

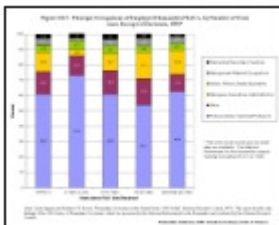


The Indicators show the share of humanities bachelor's degrees stuck at about twelve percent for the last decade, even while enrollments and college graduates grew to all-time highs. Thus, the good news is that the absolute number of humanities graduates has been slowly increasing for nearly a decade, managing to keep pace with the expanding number of college graduates.

III. The Humanities Workforce

From Indicators III-7, Occupations of Humanities PhDs

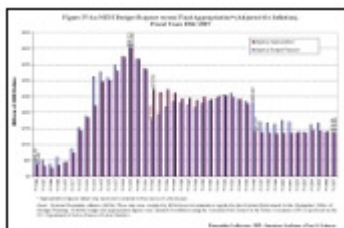
According to data from 1995, the most recent year for which such data are available, humanities PhDs are overwhelmingly employed as postsecondary teachers. Sixty-one percent of all humanities PhDs are working as teachers in colleges and universities, with an even greater percentage of newly credentialed PhDs taking such jobs (73% for those in the first 5 years past their degrees versus a low of 54% for those 16-25 years past their degrees). Those older PhDs who leave teaching are most likely to go into administration.



IV. Humanities Funding and Research

From Indicator IV-1, National Endowment for the Humanities Funding Levels

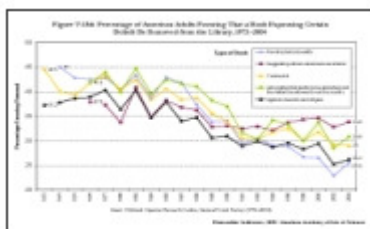
At the request of the Humanities Indicator project, the National Humanities Alliance (NHA) compiled data from publicly available reports and documentation supplied by the NEH's Office of Strategic Planning. These data, which have been adjusted for inflation (all funding figures are given in 2006 dollars), reveal that the period between the late 1960s and 1979 was one of substantial, virtually uninterrupted growth in NEH funding, with appropriations for the agency increasing from approximately \$27 million to over \$400 million. Funding, however, quickly dropped from this historic high, and after three years of marked reductions appropriations were down 32%. Thereafter, funding declined incrementally until 1996, when total appropriations to the agency were cut 38%, from \$228 million to \$141 million. Subsequently, funding remained near this lower level through FY 2007.



V. The Humanities in American Life

From Indicator V-15, Public Attitudes toward Literature

In the last three decades, Americans became less supportive of the suppression of most of the texts that may have been distasteful to them. Since the early 1970s, the number of Americans who would call for a book espousing atheism, extreme militarism, communism, or homosexuality to be removed from a public library decreased by at least 11 percentage points, although still from 26% to 34% of the public would support banning some type of book. In the case of books advocating homosexuality, the decline was a particularly significant 20 percentage points. The exception to this trend concerns books asserting the inferiority of African Americans, toward which there was a fairly consistent level of disapproval over time.



Statement of Support

“The humanities are an invaluable source of enrichment in all our lives. The study of history, philosophy, languages, and literature deepens our understanding of the world as it was, as it is in our own day, and what it may become for future generations. I commend the Academy for its important contribution to the nation in documenting the extent and quality of research and instruction in the humanities available in today’s society. It will encourage schools and colleges in communities across the nation to improve their curricula and enhance the education of all our students, and the nation will reap the benefit in the years to come.”

—Edward M. Kennedy, United States Senate

Background and Acknowledgments

Among the organizations collaborating with the Academy on the effort are the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Academy of Religion, the American Historical Association, the American Political Science Association, Association of American Universities, the College Art Association, the Federation of State Humanities Councils, the Linguistic Society of America, the Modern Language Association and the National Humanities Alliance.

A decade ago, Academy Fellows Steven Marcus, Jonathan Cole, Robert Solow, and Francis Oakley joined Berlowitz in recognizing the need for improved data on the humanities and spear-headed the Academy's efforts to establish a data collection system. The need for and value of the *Humanities Indicators* was described in the Academy's 2002 report, *Making the Humanities Count: The Importance of Data* (go to: <http://www.amacad.org/projects/humanities.aspx>). Norman Bradburn and Patricia Meyer Spacks serve as principal investigators on the Humanities Indicators project. Other leading humanists, including Denis Donoghue, Pauline Yu, Arnita Jones, and Rosemary Feal helped guide the project.

"The humanities community has suffered from a protracted case of data deprivation, especially in comparison with science and engineering," said Oakley, co-chair of the Academy's Initiative for the Humanities and Culture and President Emeritus of both Williams College and the American Council of Learned Societies. "We know that public support of the humanities depends on accurate data. The *Indicators* prototype is the start of an infrastructure that will broadly support policy research in the humanities."

The Academy's Initiative for the Humanities and Culture provides a framework for examining the significance of the humanities in our national culture. It is a necessary backbone for developing adequate resources and informed policies to ensure the continued growth and health of the humanities. The Academy's work in this area has received support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Teagle Foundation, and the Sara Lee Foundation. For more information on the Initiative, see <http://www.amacad.org/projects/humanities.aspx>.

The Academy's Initiative is also committed to advancing humanities scholarship. A recent *Daedalus* issue, "Reflecting on the Humanities," edited by Patricia Spacks and Leslie Berlowitz, presents various professional perspectives on the humanities by authors such as Richard Franke, Michael Wood, Harriet Zuckerman, Ron Ehrenberg, and Gerald Early. A national conference highlighting the work of the Initiative took place in Washington, D.C. in March of 2009. Speakers included Don M. Randel, David Souter, Patty Stonesifer, and Edward Ayers.

Founded in 1780, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences is an independent policy research center that conducts multidisciplinary studies of complex and emerging problems. Beyond its work in humanities and culture, current Academy research focuses on: science and global security; social policy; and education. With headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Academy's work is advanced by its 4,600 elected members, who are leaders in the academic disciplines, the arts, business and public affairs from around the world. (www.amacad.org)