Humanities Recruitment Survey

CHALLENGES & AUDIENCES

STUDY THE HUMANITIES

NHA

NATIONAL HUMANITIES ALLIANCE

The National Humanities Alliance (NHA) is a nationwide coalition of organizations advocating for the humanities on campuses, in communities, and on Capitol Hill. Founded in 1981, NHA is supported by over 200 member organizations, including: colleges, universities, libraries, museums, cultural organizations, state humanities councils, and scholarly, professional, and higher education associations. It is the only organization that brings together the U.S. humanities community as a whole.

The NHA is a 501(c)(4) non-profit association and is strictly nonpartisan. The National Humanities Alliance Foundation is the 501(c)(3) supporting foundation of the National Humanities Alliance. It works to research and communicate the value of the humanities to a range of audiences including elected officials and the general public.

National Humanities Alliance

Humanities Recruitment Survey

The Humanities Recruitment Survey (HRS) is a component of the National Humanities Alliance Foundation's *Study the Humanities* initiative, which develops resources to help higher education faculty and administrators make the case for the value of studying the humanities as an undergraduate. It is funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

HRS is an ongoing survey of the higher education community in the United States. Survey data collection began on July 30, 2019 and will continue indefinitely. Data analysis for this report was conducted on responses received prior to January 15, 2020.

This report provides an overview of HRS results. Questions can be directed to Scott Muir, project director for *Study the Humanities*, at smuir@nhalliance.org.

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Faced with declining enrollment in the humanities, many faculty and administrators have been working to reverse this trend on their campuses. However, knowledge of their success often does not extend beyond a particular campus.

With this in mind, we launched a pilot survey of faculty and administrators in 2018 to gain an initial understanding of the humanities recruitment work being conducted on individual campuses. We found that faculty and administrators were eager to learn about practices that have worked on other campuses. However, they lacked a comprehensive resource that catalogs strategies, evaluates their success, and shares best practices for how to shift understanding of the value of studying the humanities in higher education. Based on the 2018 pilot survey, we launched the Humanities Recruitment Survey (HRS) to create a clearinghouse of ways that faculty and administrators have engaged with audiences such as students, parents, employers, and guidance counselors to recruit students to the humanities.

"We are in need of new ideas that will increase the number of students enrolling in our humanities courses."

We received responses from over 395 individuals at almost 300 institutions. In addition to asking respondents about specific recruitment strategies, we also asked about the challenges they face when recruiting students to the humanities and the audiences they engage to address those challenges. The quantitative results are presented in this report, with a particular eye toward challenges and audience engagement.

HRS respondents also shared a wide variety of humanities recruitment strategies they employ on their campuses. Using their responses as a starting point, we have conducted further qualitative research into recruitment strategies at institutions around the country. These results will be published in a number of in-depth resources, each focusing on a different type of strategy. Taken together, the results of HRS and further qualitative research efforts will provide the humanities community with a broader understanding of the recruitment field and access to the work of their peers.

Methodology

HRS was developed based on a 2018 pilot survey, in which 77 faculty and administrators answered open-ended questions about challenges to attracting students to the humanities and the audiences they engaged to address these challenges. The responses to these questions were categorized via inductive coding into the six top challenges and the nine most common audiences, which formed the basis of the HRS instrument (see Appendix A for full survey instrument). Respondents were asked to evaluate on a 10-point scale how influential they perceive each challenge to be at their institution and their level of engagement with each of the nine audiences *(actively, planning to, would like to,* or *N/A).*

Six Top Challenges:
- Admission pipeline skewed away from the humanities
- Discouragement from parents and other influences
- Student concerns about job prospects
- Debt driving students to maximize immediate ROI
- Lack of understanding of humanities disciplines
- Lack of institutional support for humanities

Nine Most Common Audiences:
- Current students
- Admitted students
- High school students
- High school guidance counselors
- Career services
- Upper administrators
- Parents
- Admissions officers
- Employers

HRS was administered via email to 1,436 faculty and administrators at 689 institutions. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands were represented. The sample included NHA member institutions and recipients of specific National Endowment for the Humanities or Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grants, as well as minority-serving institutions, liberal arts colleges, and a range of Carnegie classifications. Within each institution, we reached out to a minimum of two individuals, including presidents, provosts, deans, associate deans, department chairs, and various faculty members, with the goal of at least one person responding to represent their institution. 27.6% (n = 397) of individuals responded, representing 42.7% (n = 294) of the surveyed institutions.

For this report, quantitative data is presented via descriptive statistics and cross-sectional analyses of variables.

Key Findings

The 397 responses to HRS contain a plethora of rich data. Importantly, the responses reinforced the need for the survey itself. Many respondents indicated they were hungry for successful models and eager to learn what other institutions are doing. The data reveals not only the work currently being done, but also the kinds of resources that could help faculty and administrators who are seeking guidance on where to focus future efforts.

Challenges are similar across institution types. Respondents indicated how influential each of the six challenges were at their campuses; the results were largely consistent regardless of institution type. In the 2018 pilot survey, many working in the humanities assumed that challenges were unique to their specific institution or type of institution. However, HRS results tell a different story. The primary challenges to attracting students to the humanities apply across the full range of institutions, from community colleges to R1 universities. This suggests that effective strategies developed at one kind of institution might be fruitfully adapted to a different context.

> "We need help. Desperately. … We need help making compelling public arguments that can drive tangible culture change."

Audience engagement is most likely to occur on campus. When asked which audiences they were trying to engage to address these challenges, the majority of respondents reported actively engaging on campus audiences, such as upper administrators and current and admitted students. Far fewer are actively engaging external audiences, such as employers, parents, high school students, and guidance counselors. Respondents identified these same external audiences as the ones they would most like to engage.

Faculty and administrators want to engage a wider variety of audiences, but are unsure how to do so. The data reflects humanities faculty and administrators' desire for help reaching a broader range of audiences. Respondents indicated they were eager to learn best practices for connecting with new audiences and new strategies for engaging familiar audiences.

Taken together, these results tell us there is significant opportunity for information sharing between those who have developed successful strategies and those looking to expand their recruitment efforts. Through this report and future resources, we aim to facilitate information sharing and support members of the humanities community as they work to recruit students and make the case for the value of studying the humanities on their individual campuses.

Survey Respondents

397 responses came from 294 distinct institutions, located in 46 states and Washington, D.C.

The response rate is 27.5% for surveyed individuals who represent 42.6% of surveyed institutions. The responses analyzed for this report were received between July 30, 2019 and January 15, 2020. The survey remains open in order to continue adding data to the clearinghouse of humanities recruitment strategies.

We asked respondents to self-report their role(s) at their institutions and what type(s) of institution they work for. Respondents were given the following lists of options and selected all that applied.

Respondent roles (n = 397):

260 faculty

174 administrators who oversee multiple areas of study

102 administrators who oversee the humanities specifically

82 involved in a grant-funded initiative

47 other (department chairs, etc.)

Respondent institution types (n = 397):

293 four-year institutions

180 public institutions

148 research universities

125 private institutions

120 liberal arts colleges

110 minority-serving institutions

61 two-year institutions

Figure 1.1. Respondents' perceptions of the prioritization of the humanities on their campuses, with 1 indicating not prioritized.

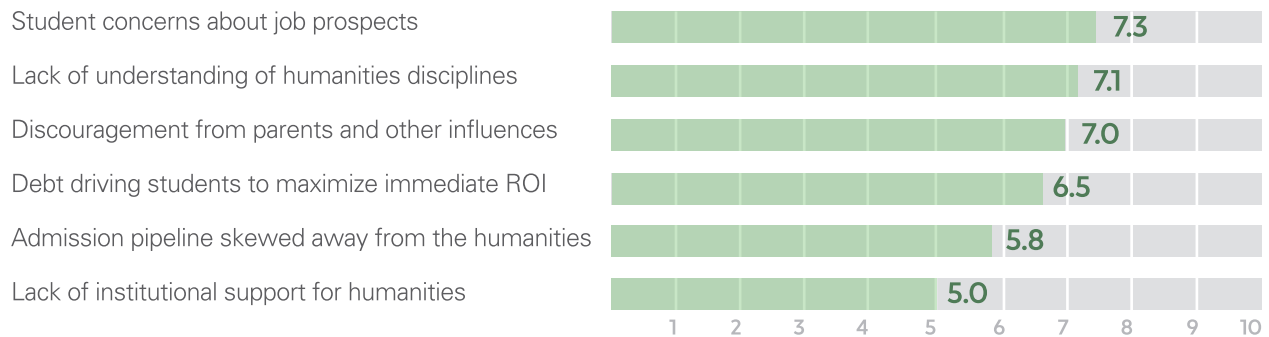| Institution type	Score
All respondents	5.5
Liberal arts college	6.14
Private institution	6.13
Four-year institution	5.57
Minority-serving institution	5.47
Two-year institution	5.32
Research university	4.95
Public institution	4.88
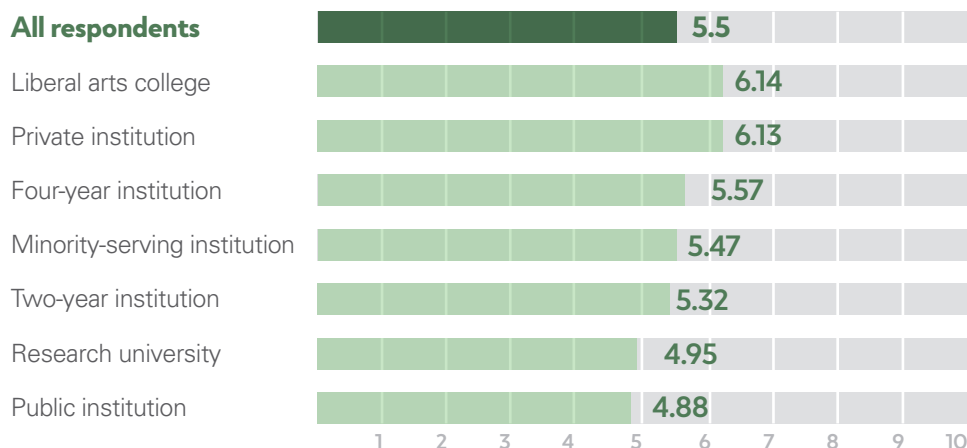
Are the humanities prioritized on your campus?

Challenges

A key goal of HRS is to understand the challenges to recruiting students to the humanities and how they manifest across higher education institutions.

We asked respondents to consider the six specific challenges derived from the pilot survey results and invited them to elaborate on challenges particular to their campuses. *Student concerns about job prospects* was reported as the most influential challenge on campuses, with an average response of 7.3 on the 10-point scale (see Figure 2.1). Alternatively, *Lack of institutional support for humanities* was reported as the least influential, with an average response of 5.0.

Figure 2.1. Overview of the influence of challenges. Respondents were asked how influential each challenge is on their campus, with 10 indicating a major challenge.

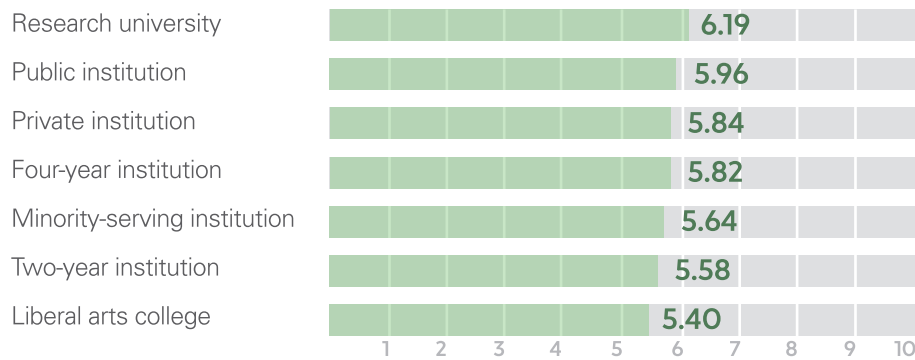| Challenge	Score
Student concerns about job prospects	7.3
Lack of understanding of humanities disciplines	7.1
Discouragement from parents and other influences	7.0
Debt driving students to maximize immediate ROI	6.5
Admission pipeline skewed away from the humanities	5.8
Lack of institutional support for humanities	5.0

Respondents reported the influence of each challenge similarly regardless of the type of institution they represented (see Figures 2.2–2.7). Average responses by institution type were within 1.3 units of each other for all six challenges (on the 10-point scale). These largely consistent results suggest that successful strategies to combat these deterrents can be useful to humanities faculty and administrators at all types of institutions.

"The biggest challenge, as I perceive it, is connecting students from humanities disciplines to concrete, sustainable jobs."

"The misunderstanding of what the humanities are and the purpose of such an education is a problem across the campus. Even the administration believes that a degree in one humanities field should serve to teach in another. The accreditation agency rules are the main thing that helps keep that in check."
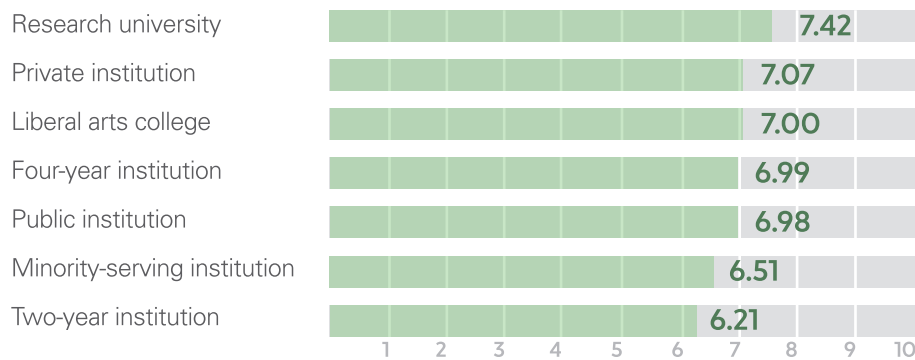
"Our main challenge lies with student perceptions of the humanities. They don't believe it's a viable college choice in today's career market."

Figure 2.2. *Admission pipeline skewed away from the humanities* **by institution type.**

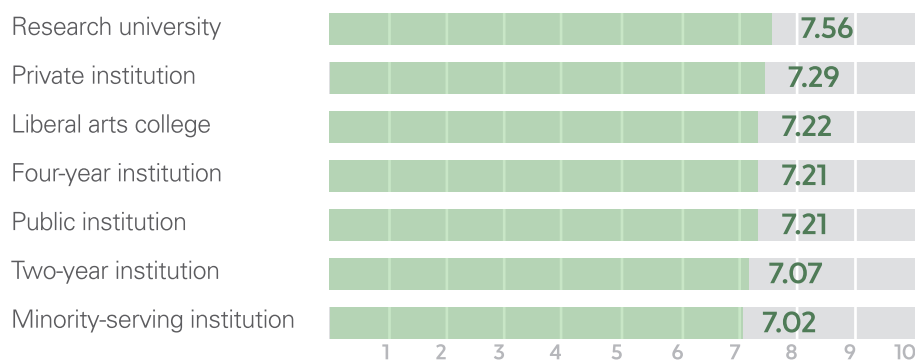|	
Research university	6.19
Public institution	5.96
Private institution	5.84
Four-year institution	5.82
Minority-serving institution	5.64
Two-year institution	5.58
Liberal arts college	5.40

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

"[O]ur Admissions team finds it easier to discuss profession-focused majors when recruiting, since they seemingly have more concrete paths and outcomes."

Figure 2.3. *Discouragement from parents and other influences* **by institution type.**

Research university	7.42
Private institution	7.07
Liberal arts college	7.00
Four-year institution	6.99
Public institution	6.98
Minority-serving institution	6.51
Two-year institution	6.21

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

"Students stay away from humanities majors because they are told by parents (or they think themselves) that they will not be able to get a job."

Figure 2.4. *Student concerns about job prospects* **by institution type.**

Research university	7.56
Private institution	7.29
Liberal arts college	7.22
Four-year institution	7.21
Public institution	7.21
Two-year institution	7.07
Minority-serving institution	7.02

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

"Many of our students … are concerned with clear paths to employment. The uncertainty around professional work for humanities majors can be discouraging to them … Students need more concrete guidance, and we do not have the resources to offer more hands-on career counseling."

Figure 2.5. *Debt driving students to maximize immediate ROI* by institution type.

Research university	6.65
Minority-serving institution	6.52
Public institution	6.49
Private institution	6.45
Four-year institution	6.42
Liberal arts college	6.39
Two-year institution	6.25

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

"[M]any students overlook the humanities at our college, and I suspect that the desire to maximize ROI is a major factor."

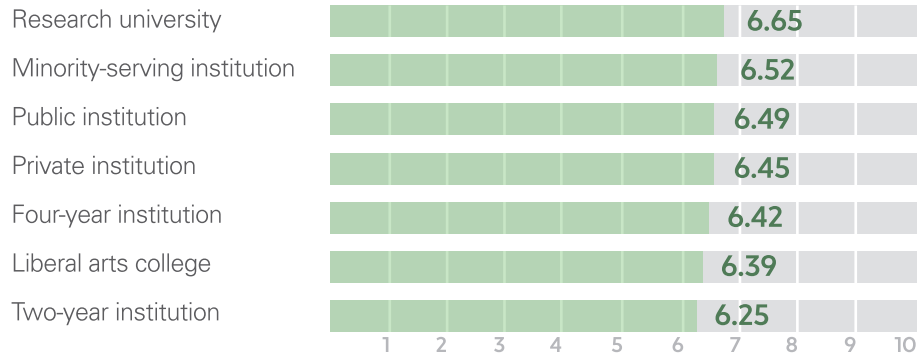**Figure 2.6.** *Lack of understanding of humanities disciplines* by institution type.

Liberal arts college	7.23
Public institution	7.16
Four-year institution	7.15
Minority-serving institution	7.15
Private institution	7.09
Research university	7.06
Two-year institution	6.81

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

"[T]he term liberal arts is often ranked last in a list of importance for matriculated and non-matriculated students; however, they all rate the skills of the liberal arts (communication, critical thinking, cultural competency, etc.) as very important to their higher education choice."
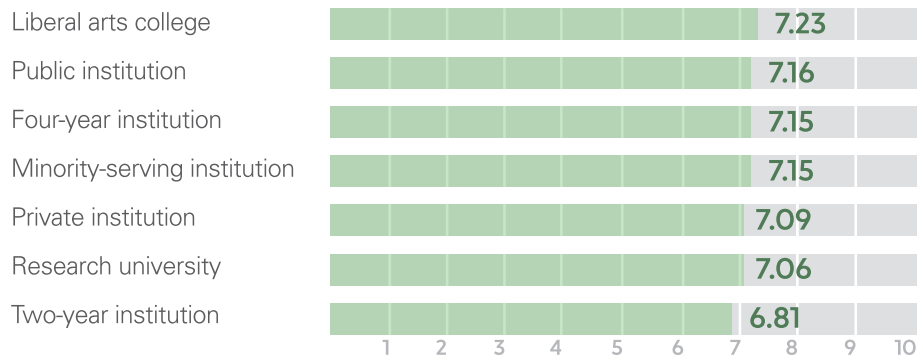
Figure 2.7. *Lack of institutional support for humanities* by institution type.

Research university	5.34
Private institution	5.22
Liberal arts college	5.14
Four-year institution	4.93
Public institution	4.87
Two-year institution	4.49
Minority-serving institution	4.32

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

"The challenges at my institution occur when an emphasis on STEM meets long-term and debilitating lack of funding."

"Administration looks to the liberal arts to pay the bills and to STEM when they spend money."
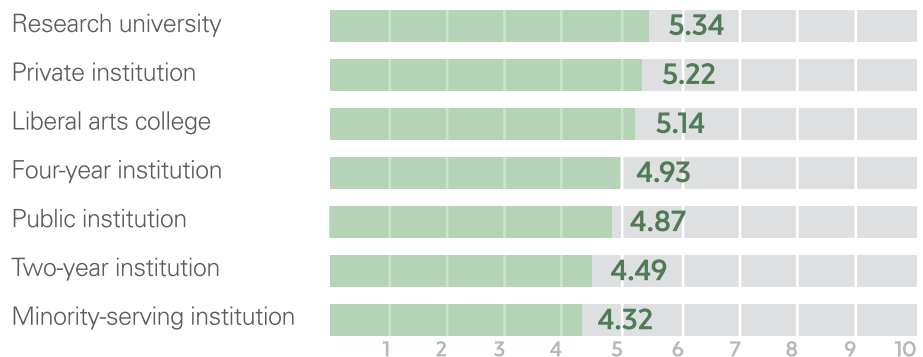
Additional Challenges

We asked respondents if there were additional challenges on their campuses, or if any of the six challenges manifested in particular ways at their institutions. The data reveals two additional challenges to recruiting students to the humanities:

Dual or AP/IB credit in high school

"Many of the dual credit areas knock out humanities courses (Comp I and II, U.S. History, etc.) in high school so that faculty teaching those courses at the university don't even have a chance to recruit students to the major because we never see them."

"Because many students come with lots of AP credit, the university is legally required to exempt them from important liberal arts courses. Students who take AP U.S. history in 10th grade ... are able to avoid history; as a result, many never experience a college-level history course. … [W]e no longer have access to beginning college students—something that once gave us the ability to demonstrate the value of intense Socratic discussion and a focus on writing."

"AP scores move good students out of introductory humanities courses."

Decreasing federal and state funding

"As a public institution, some of our funding depends on the state legislature. We have a legislature that speaks of valuing STEM and not valuing humanities, and this discourse not only affects the budget we get, it affects how officials at the university think they should use the budget—and how parents think universities should operate."

"As a state institution that receives less than 30% of its funding from the state and is suffering from a depleted endowment, humanities constitute the lowest funding priority."

" [T]he ongoing budget crises with the state consistently underfunding the university ... not only creates anxiety, but requires the cutting back of initiatives that would draw students to the humanities."

Audience Engagement

A second key goal of HRS is to understand which audiences respondents are engaging to address the challenges they identified.

We asked respondents to indicate if they are *actively engaging, planning to engage, would like to engage,* or *N/A* for each of the nine types of audiences. If respondents selected *N/A*, we assume they either do not see it as their responsibility or are not interested in engaging that audience in any capacity.

These nine audiences fall into three categories: external, bridging, and internal (see Table 3.1). External audiences are those that exist wholly outside higher education institutions, whereas internal audiences are those that operate within the institution. Bridging audiences are those that function to bridge the gap between internal and external constituents. We have identified these as *admissions officers* (the bridge between higher education and prospective students) and *career services* (a department designed to be the bridge between students and potential employers).
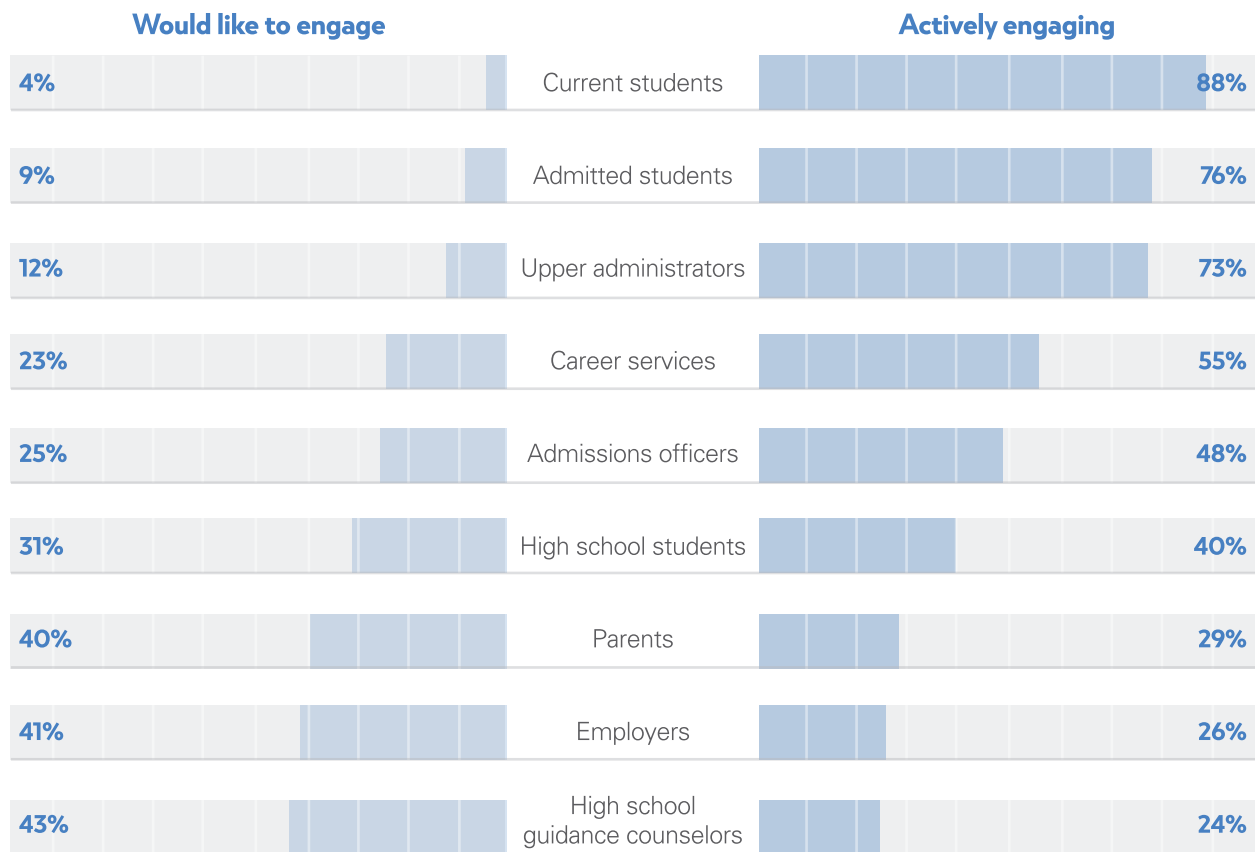
Table 3.1. Overview of audience engagement responses.

	Actively engaging	Planning to engage	Would like to engage	N/A
External audiences				
Employers	26%	17%	38%	18%
Parents	28%	13%	40%	19%
High school guidance counselors	23%	15%	42%	20%
High school students	39%	14%	33%	14%
Bridging audiences				
Admissions officers	47%	17%	38%	18%
Career services	53%	17%	38%	18%
Internal audiences				
Admitted students	73%	11%	10%	5%
Current students	87%	7%	4%	2%
Upper administrators	70%	9%	13%	8%

The majority of respondents are actively engaging internal audiences, while far fewer are actively engaging external audiences. Respondents identified these same external audiences as the ones they would most like to engage (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. The audiences that respondents are not actively engaging are the same ones they reported they would like to engage.

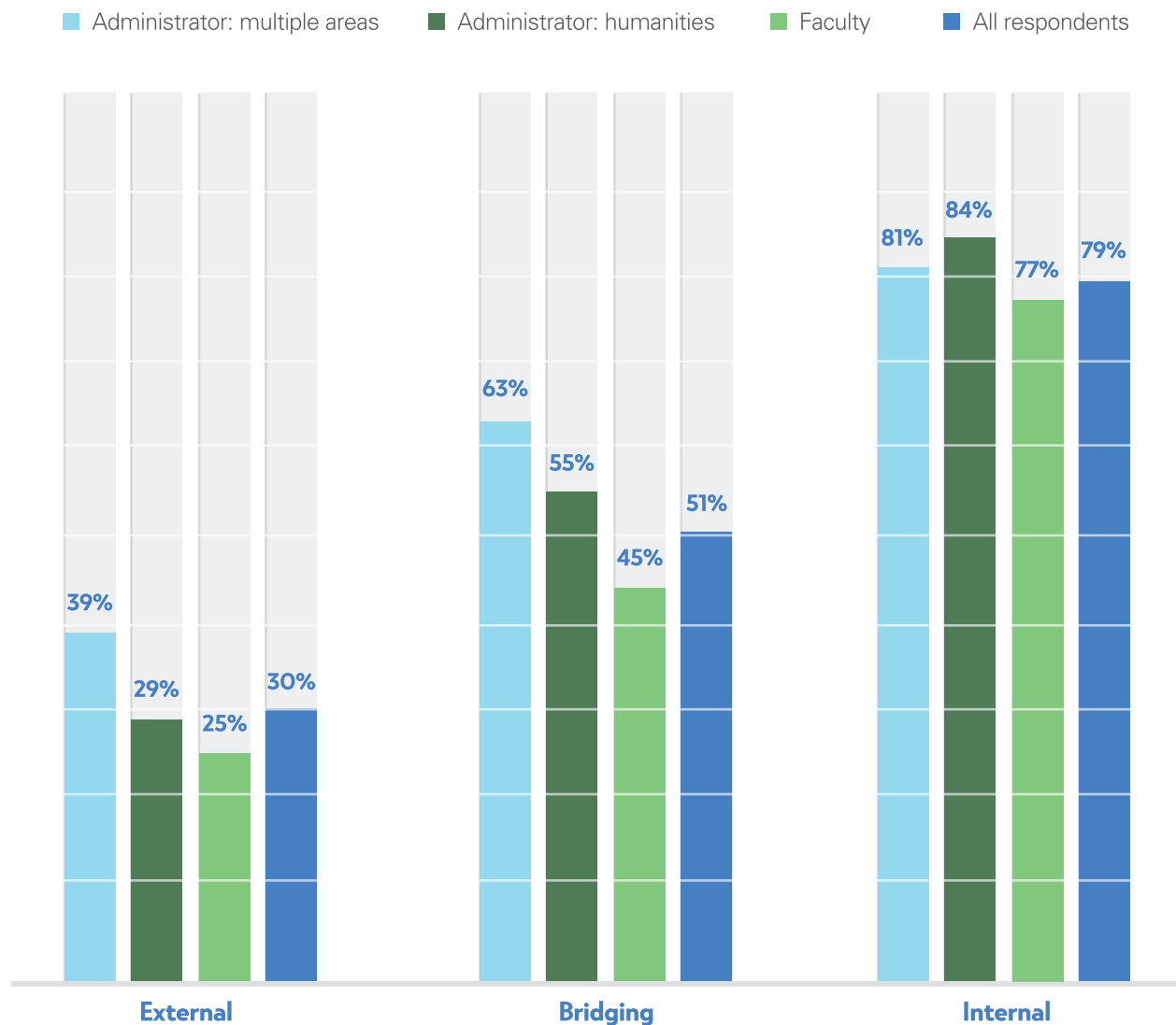| Would like to engage		Actively engaging
4%	Current students	88%
9%	Admitted students	76%
12%	Upper administrators	73%
23%	Career services	55%
25%	Admissions officers	48%
31%	High school students	40%
40%	Parents	29%
41%	Employers	26%
43%	High school guidance counselors	24%

"I think admissions counselors and high school guidance counselors are the key audiences that can affect change."

"Engaging the identified audiences means committing to consistent intentional and intensive outreach to the families of our students in multiple contexts."
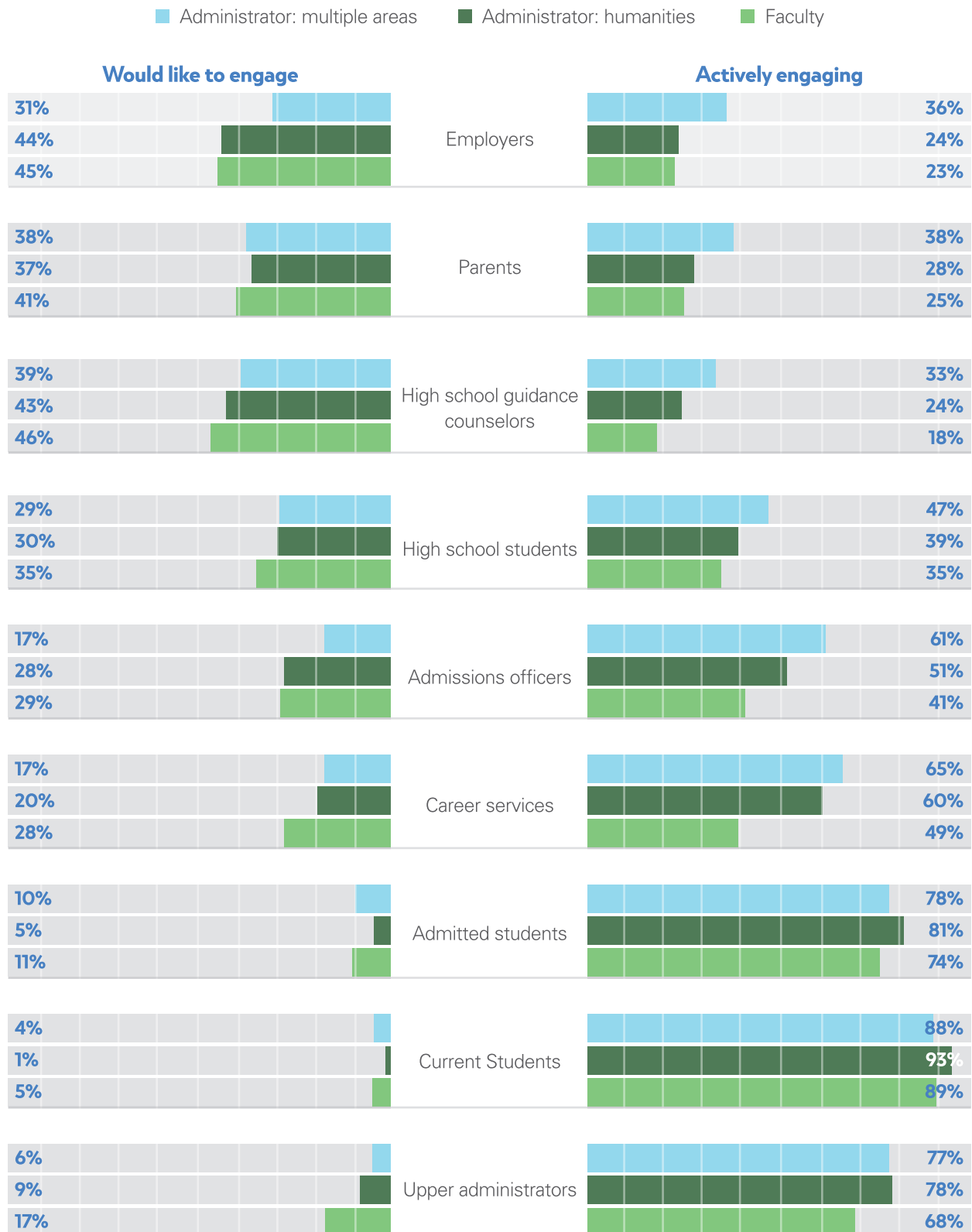
While only 29% of respondents report that they are engaging external audiences, administrators who oversee multiple areas of study are the most likely to do so, with 39% reporting that they actively engage these audiences to address the challenges to recruiting students to the humanities (Figures 3.2–3.3). They were also most likely to report engaging the bridging audiences *(career services* and *admissions officers).*

Figure 3.2. Active engagement of audiences by respondents' positions within the institution.

■ Administrator: multiple areas ■ Administrator: humanities ■ Faculty ■ All respondents

External: 39%, 29%, 25%, 30%

Bridging: 63%, 55%, 45%, 51%

Internal: 81%, 84%, 77%, 79%

Figure 3.3. Audience engagement by respondents' positions within the institution.

Legend: ■ Administrator: multiple areas ■ Administrator: humanities ■ Faculty

Would like to engage / Actively engaging

Employers
- 31% / 36%
- 44% / 24%
- 45% / 23%

Parents
- 38% / 38%
- 37% / 28%
- 41% / 25%

High school guidance counselors
- 39% / 33%
- 43% / 24%
- 46% / 18%

High school students
- 29% / 47%
- 30% / 39%
- 35% / 35%

Admissions officers
- 17% / 61%
- 28% / 51%
- 29% / 41%

Career services
- 17% / 65%
- 20% / 60%
- 28% / 49%

Admitted students
- 10% / 78%
- 5% / 81%
- 11% / 74%

Current Students
- 4% / 88%
- 1% / 93%
- 5% / 89%

Upper administrators
- 6% / 77%
- 9% / 78%
- 17% / 68%

Conclusions

HRS responses illustrate the need for a comprehensive view of humanities recruitment efforts across the country to inform and strengthen efforts on individual campuses.

We learned that challenges to recruiting students to the humanities manifest in similar ways across higher education institutions, which suggests that many successful strategies to address these challenges can be adapted to a variety of contexts. We also learned that while only a modest minority of faculty and administrators are currently engaging external audiences, many more are motivated to take on this work and are eager to learn from those who have discovered effective ways to reach these audiences. The quantitative data presented in this report is the first step in understanding the field of humanities recruitment and provides faculty and administrators with high-level data about the perceptions and work of their peers.

Next Steps

We will next turn to sharing the recruitment strategies that HRS respondents described in their qualitative responses.

Using HRS responses as a starting point, we are outlining distinct categories of strategies and conducting additional qualitative research to identify effective approaches within each category. We will then distribute in-depth resources that provide an overview of types of recruitment strategies, such as career pathway initiatives and curricular innovations, with specific examples that represent the range of approaches within each category. These resources will feature case studies of successful strategies that illuminate how faculty and administrators launched and sustained initiatives that are attracting more undergraduates to the humanities. These future resources, together with the quantitative data in this report, deepen our understanding of humanities recruitment by providing faculty and administrators access to the work of their peers.

Get Involved

Share Your Strategies

Please contribute to this research by completing HRS yourself on our website (studythehumanities.org). Help us continue to learn about best practices for attracting students to the humanities so that we can share them with the National Humanities Alliance community.

Impact Research

We are researching the impact of innovative initiatives on student perceptions and behaviors concerning the humanities. If you would like to partner with us to better understand the impact of your initiative, let us know by emailing our research associate, Younger Oliver, at yoliver@nhalliance.org.

Annual Meeting

At the NHA Annual Meeting and Humanities Advocacy Day each March, the NHA convenes a community of faculty and administrators committed to attracting more students to the humanities. Through presentations and workshops, participants share strategies, develop new approaches, and connect to support one another in this work.

Access reports and learn more about how you can join us in our effort to make the case for studying the humanities at www.studythehumanities.org and www.nhalliance.org.

Humanities Recruitment Survey
Survey Instrument

Study the Humanities: Share Your Institution's Strategies

The National Humanities Alliance is an organization dedicated to promoting the value of the humanities on campuses, in communities, and on Capitol Hill. NHA's *Study the Humanities* initiative is developing a clearinghouse of successful approaches humanities faculty and administrators are employing to recruit students to study the humanities as undergraduates.

Please complete the following survey to help us learn about challenges to recruiting students to study the humanities and any approaches you or others on your campus have used to try to overcome them.

1. Name

2. Email

3. Institution Name

4. Please check all that apply to your institution:
☐ Two-year institution
☐ Four-year institution
☐ Public institution
☐ Private institution
☐ Liberal arts college
☐ Research university
☐ Minority-serving institution

5. In my view, within my institution the humanities are…
Not prioritized ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 Prioritized

6. Check all that apply to your position:
☐ Administrator: I oversee the humanities specifically
☐ Administrator: I oversee multiple areas of study, including the humanities
☐ Faculty
☐ Involved in a grant-funded initiative to promote the humanities
☐ Other

7. *[Displayed if Q6, "involved in a grant-funded initiative" was selected]* What is the funding source for your grant-funded initiative?

       ☐ Mellon Foundation

       ☐ National Endowment for the Humanities

       ☐ Other _____

8. *[Displayed if Q6, "involved in a grant-funded initiative" was selected]* What is the title of your grant-funded initiative?

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. Below, we have listed 6 potential challenges to recruiting students to take humanities courses or major in the humanities on your campus. Please indicate how influential you perceive each potential challenge to be at your institution, 0 indicating "not a factor" and 10 indicating "major challenge."

       ☐ Admission pipeline skewed away from the humanities

       ☐ Discouragement from parents and other influences

       ☐ Student concerns about job prospects

       ☐ Debt driving students to maximize immediate ROI

       ☐ Lack of understanding of humanities disciplines

       ☐ Lack of institutional support for humanities

10. Are there additional challenges at your institution? Or do the challenges listed above manifest in particular ways at your institution? Please describe.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

11. We would like to know more about the audiences you have engaged to address these challenges. For each type of audience, please indicate if you are thinking about ways to engage them but have not yet taken steps to do so ("Would like to engage"), are in the process of developing specific plans to engage them ("Planning to engage"), or are already actively engaging them ("Actively engaging").

	Would like to engage	Planning to engage	Actively engaging	N/A
High school students	☐	☐	☐	☐
High school guidance counselors	☐	☐	☐	☐
Admitted students	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parents	☐	☐	☐	☐
Current students	☐	☐	☐	☐
Admissions officers	☐	☐	☐	☐
Career services	☐	☐	☐	☐
Employers	☐	☐	☐	☐
Upper administrators	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐	☐	☐

12. Please describe strategies that you have adopted to engage the audiences identified or overcome the challenges previously addressed. Please include major initiatives as well as any more modest efforts. The more detailed your examples, the more effectively we can share your strategies with others.

_____

13. Have you observed any outcomes of the strategies employed? Have the audiences you engaged responded to your efforts? Please share any information you feel is relevant.

_____

14. Please share any web links associated with your strategies. Feel free to send attachments to Scott Muir, Project Director for Study the Humanities, at smuir@nhalliance.org.

_____

15. Would you like to explore the possibility of collaborating with us to document the impact of your initiative(s)?
       ☐ Yes   ☐ No

16. Is there anything else you would like us to know?

_____

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National Humanities Alliance Foundation