

Expanding Access to Undergraduate Humanities Education: Models and Strategies



National Humanities Alliance

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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 250 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.

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Introduction

This report aims to support faculty and administrators in expanding access to undergraduate humanities education through detailed case studies drawn from a wide range of institutions. These case studies showcase how faculty and administrators built initiatives that succeeded in attracting students from a wide variety of backgrounds and supported them in achieving strong outcomes. We encourage you to take inspiration from these case studies as you seek to make your own humanities courses and programs more attractive to students from a variety of backgrounds.

This publication—and the research it is grounded in—were made possible by a grant from the Mellon Foundation, which has generously supported the National Humanities Alliance’s (NHA) research on undergraduate humanities recruitment since 2019. It builds on our 2021 report, *Strategies for Recruiting Students to the Humanities: A Comprehensive Resource*, which highlighted initiatives that had succeeded in engaging students in the humanities and revitalizing humanities programs. It was less clear from our research for that report, however, how effective those approaches had been in attracting students from historically underrepresented groups—including historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, first-generation college students, community college transfers, Pell grant recipients, and recent immigrants—to the humanities. To learn more about this, we launched a survey that sought to learn about a) faculty and administrators’ perceptions of the barriers that students from historically underrepresented groups face in studying the humanities, b) the steps taken to address those barriers, and c) the efforts that had proven most successful in attracting a diverse group of students to the humanities.

On a national scale, we have limited information on how successful humanities departments have been in attracting students from historically underrepresented groups. In 2017, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences’ Humanities Indicators issued a report that looked at the percentage of bachelor’s degrees awarded to African American (non-Hispanic), Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native students in a variety of fields from 1995 to 2015. From 1995 to 2013, humanities fields awarded a slightly lower percentage of bachelor’s degrees to members of these racial and ethnic groups than the average across all fields. This changed from 2013 to 2015, when the share of humanities degrees awarded to students of color grew faster than in all fields of study, increasing 10% in the humanities as compared to 5% among all fields. As a result, in 2015 the percentage of humanities graduates who were students of color was slightly higher than the average across all fields of study (22.0% compared to 21.4%). At that point, the humanities lagged behind social sciences and business, but were significantly ahead of natural sciences, engineering, education, and fine and performing arts.

While this data points to a trend between 2013–2015, we lack national level data beyond that point. In addition, this report focuses on additional groups that have been historically underrepresented, including first-generation college students, community college transfers, Pell Grant recipients, and recent immigrants. Lacking strong and current data that covers trends in all of these groups, we rely on our survey respondents to identify the student groups that have faced barriers to studying the humanities on their campuses and the strategies they have used to address those barriers. With that said, perhaps maintaining the share of students from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups represents a success amid the headwinds that the humanities have faced particularly after the Great Recession in 2008. Further, the change that the Humanities Indicators data points to between 2013 and 2015 may mark the growth of initiatives like those profiled in this report, which work to make humanities education more inclusive, equitable, and accessible while also attracting more students to the humanities.

In the context of the national racial reckoning precipitated by George Floyd’s murder in 2020, many public colleges and universities increased their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) budgets, and many private institutions ramped up their investments as well. Scholarly societies have also ramped up their efforts to expand access to their disciplines in a variety of ways, as we highlighted in our 2022 report, *Strategies for Recruiting Students to the Humanities: Leveraging Scholarly Society Resources* (which also features scholarly societies representing social science disciplines). For example, the American Historical Association’s History Gateways initiative is helping to reform introductory history courses to better serve students from historically underrepresented groups on a national level. Since that time, scholarly societies have undertaken additional significant projects that promote diversity and inclusion in their disciplines, such as the Modern Language Association’s new faculty grant program, Pathways: Recruitment, Retention, and Career Readiness.

At the same time, state legislatures in conservative states have passed educational gag orders that undermine, divest from, and/or prohibit public institutions from creating DEI structures and trainings. Then, in June 2023, the Supreme Court upended decades of affirmative action policy, a decision with far-reaching implications for admissions but that appears to be less of a threat to the kinds of inclusive recruitment strategies featured in this report. Many in the higher ed community and the humanities community remain committed to implementing more inclusive and equitable approaches as they navigate these evolving constraints. As the representation of first-generation students, Pell Grant recipients, and students from racial and ethnic groups that have been traditionally underrepresented continues to increase in terms of their share of the overall undergraduate student population, the examples presented in this report show how humanities programs can speak directly to the interests and financial realities of students from underrepresented groups.

Research Methodology

We framed our survey as both a general inquiry into recruitment trends and initiatives and a more targeted reflection on the barriers students from historically underrepresented groups face in studying the humanities. We asked specifically about the interventions that had proven successful in addressing those barriers and attracting a diverse population of students. For the latter portion of the survey, we chose not to define “students from historically underrepresented groups” so that respondents might apply this term freely from their unique contexts. Respondents were asked if they saw students from historically underrepresented groups as facing specific barriers to studying the humanities at their institution and to elaborate on those. They were then asked to describe what steps had been taken to address these specific barriers and the outcomes of those efforts. Finally, they were asked, “what do you think has most contributed to attracting students from historically underrepresented groups to the humanities at your institution?”

The survey was distributed to more than 1,000 two- and four-year institutions in Fall 2021 and Spring 2022, with a special emphasis on reaching public institutions in all 50 U.S. states, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the vast majority of minority-serving institutions (MSIs). We sent the survey to deans and associate deans who represent the humanities and asked them to share the survey with their colleagues. As a result, in addition to responses from deans and associate deans, we received many responses from faculty, department chairs, and humanities center directors. Overall, the survey garnered more than 300 responses.

Respondents focused on different groups of students they identified as historically underrepresented in the humanities on their campuses, including first-generation students; Black, Latinx, Pacific Islander, or Native American students; underserved K–12 students; and community college transfers. By featuring the perspectives of the survey respondents, this report takes both local and national patterns of underrepresentation into consideration. For example, while students of Asian descent have not been underrepresented in the national student population for quite some time, we nonetheless feature efforts to engage such students in contexts where they are underrepresented in an institution’s overall undergraduate student population, underrepresented in humanities programs specifically, or both.

After analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data collected through the survey, we reached out to individual respondents to learn more about promising initiatives. We interviewed faculty and administrators about the strategies and initiatives they had developed to address barriers to access and foster diversity and belonging in their undergraduate humanities courses and programs. In each case, we looked for concrete evidence that these efforts

were indeed helping to expand access. For example, we sought data that might demonstrate how the number of students from historically underrepresented groups grew when specific courses, majors/minors, marketing strategies, community-building efforts, and/or programming were implemented. In certain cases, we collected testimonials or conducted additional survey research to better understand the impact of these interventions on students and how the initiatives succeeded in making humanistic study more accessible.

The case studies that follow reflect the diversity of approaches to expanding access to the humanities captured through this broad approach. They employ respondents' preferred terminology to describe the underrepresented groups engaged rather than impose categories and terms chosen by the researchers. For example, while we listed "Native American or Alaska Native" among the response options to a question about race/ethnicity included in our student surveys, in our case study on a multifaceted effort to engage such students at the University of Washington, we defer to their terminology, which includes the singular application of "Native" as well as "American Indian."

Addressing Barriers

The survey sample reflected a wide range of institutions, varying in size, geography, and student population. Survey respondents were from predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and minority-serving institutions (MSIs) as well as 2- and 4-year institutions. Across this variety of campus contexts and historically underrepresented student populations, we noted four overarching trends in the barriers to studying the humanities that respondents observed and the strategies they had undertaken to address them.¹

Revamping curricula to resonate with students

Respondents noted that portions of traditional curricula appear out of touch with the needs and interests of a highly diverse student population. Related to this is the issue of inadequate representation of specific racial and ethnic communities in course materials. As one respondent wrote, "our humanities program is very antiquated in its understanding of the discipline. We still tend to teach from a historical, primarily Westernized perspective. Our campus is quite diverse, which only seems to amplify how out of touch our curricular model is."

Respondents pointed to several ways they are updating and diversifying their curricula that have helped them to attract a more diverse population of students. Many pointed to the creation of traditional ethnic and gender studies programs at institutions that had not yet introduced such offerings. Such programs are among the few categories of humanities majors that have remained stable during the past decade of decline.² Others highlighted new programs framed more broadly in terms of social justice and identity (e.g., "racial justice, equity, and inclusion," "gender, race, and identity," "race and ethnicity in history," "human rights," etc.). Many respondents emphasized the broader appeal of applied humanities and interdisciplinary programs, including medical humanities, environmental humanities, and public humanities/history.

1. While our initial Humanities Recruitment Survey was not focused specifically on historically underrepresented student groups, it is worth noting that the barriers to studying the humanities that emerged from that data (collected in 2019) highlighted similar challenges.
2. Bachelor's Degrees in the Humanities, *Humanities Indicators*, accessed May 9th, 2024, <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/higher-education/bachelors-degrees-humanities>

Alleviating students' concerns about job prospects

Many respondents emphasized that concerns about job prospects and return on investment were a particularly powerful deterrent for students from historically underrepresented groups. Respondents also pointed to the way that high school counselors, parents, and others who influence students' choices steer them toward STEM. While this trend impacts all students, it may be particularly acute among communities that have been historically underrepresented in higher ed in light of career concerns, public policies, and efforts to attract a more diverse range of students to STEM programs. Spending on initiatives to expand access to STEM has increased rapidly, underwriting extensive outreach to and support for students of color interested in studying these fields and dwarfing such investments in the humanities.³

Respondents explicitly identified a variety of efforts to articulate career pathways that were helping to foster diversity and belonging in their programs. Many of the strategies included in this report have been highlighted previously in the chapter on “Articulating Career Pathways” in *Strategies for Recruiting Students to the Humanities: A Comprehensive Resource*, including: partnering with career services, incorporating career exploration into gateway courses, engaging employers, and sharing data and stories highlighting alums' career outcomes. In this survey, some respondents also shared collaborative efforts among humanities departments to reach out to local employers and articulate specific employment pathways in the surrounding area, as well as instances where humanities faculty and administrators participated in state-level conversations on workforce development to educate policymakers. These efforts to address students' concerns about job prospects and support post-graduate outcomes for all students make it easier for students from historically underrepresented groups to pursue their interest in the humanities with confidence. In this way, humanities career pathways work is equity work.

Addressing faculty diversity and combating cultural isolation

Many respondents cited issues of faculty diversity. All too often, humanities departments' faculty do not adequately represent their students' diverse backgrounds. And several respondents pointed to a persistent culture of discrimination on their campuses that makes it difficult to attract and/or retain faculty of color when hiring opportunities arise. Others testified to genuine collective will to address these issues that is undermined by administrators' reluctance to approve proposals to hire new faculty or even replace those who retire or depart. Furthermore, small student populations in many humanities programs make it easy for students from historically underrepresented groups to feel culturally isolated. In this context, many respondents pointed to the importance of programs designed to foster community among these students.

For example, we describe how an expansive set of initiatives for Native students and faculty at the University of Washington have fostered a sense of belonging that has helped to retain Native faculty and students and facilitate engagement with American Indian studies. Respondents also highlighted how students from historically underrepresented groups are frequently attracted to offerings that forefront opportunities for creative self-expression, particularly when those opportunities center questions of identity. In the case studies below, we highlight examples, including an exceptionally diverse creative writing program at the University of Pittsburgh (see pages 33–35) and a new major in Writing for Diversity and Equity in Theater and Media at Pace University (see pages 18–19).

3. Broadening Participation in STEM, *U.S. National Science Foundation*, accessed January 18, 2024, <https://new.nsf.gov/funding/initiatives/broadening-participation/investments>

Making the humanities more legible to students

Respondents noted that many students, particularly those from historically underrepresented groups, enter the university without a basic understanding of humanities disciplines that either were not introduced in their K–12 curricula or were sapped of their vitality through standardization. Respondents emphasized the importance of taking advantage of general education (gen ed) courses and first-year experiences as opportunities to pitch the value of continued study in the humanities. They also pointed to efforts to make curricula more approachable, such as revising all course descriptions “so that they address students and are geared for them,” as one respondent wrote. And they highlighted efforts to engage admissions, recruitment, and marketing staff to help them hone their pitch for humanities programs. For example, one respondent shared how humanities faculty had presented to university-wide recruiters to “debunk old-fashioned ideas about who we are.” Others described developing detailed marketing plans that confidently convey the benefits of studying the humanities in more accessible terms. For example, one respondent shared efforts to reframe “soft skills” as “power skills” that “prepar[e] students for every future.”

Using This Report

The fifteen case studies that follow relate how faculty and administrators built initiatives that have succeeded in overcoming the barriers cited above (among others) and expanding access to the humanities among the student populations that they noted to be underrepresented in humanities classrooms or on campus in general. These initiatives are organized into two broad categories.

(1) Initiatives that proactively engage and support students from historically underrepresented groups in the humanities in a highly intentional manner:

- The Center for American Indian Studies at the University of Washington has created robust pathways for Native students through an expansive set of initiatives that foster a more inclusive environment on campus and encourage these students to participate in humanities courses and research projects.
- The Kickstart Program—a summer bridge designed by English and writing faculty at Eastern Oregon University to support students from historically underrepresented groups, particularly Pacific Islanders—uses the tools of the humanities to support students’ successful transition to the campus and immerse them in the history and culture of the region.
- A new B.A. program in Writing for Diversity and Equity in Theater and Media (WDETM) at Pace University integrates intensive writing instruction, in-depth humanistic exploration of social justice issues, and hands-on training for a variety of careers in theater and media.
- The Institute for Arts and Humanities at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts supported arts and humanities programming, DEI work, and community engagement to empower students from historically represented groups to make their voices heard.
- The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) has developed strategies that welcome all students to the humanities, support first-generation students, and train faculty and graduate students in inclusive pedagogies.

- A grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) helped faculty at Vanguard University create a summer bridge program that illustrated the practical and personal value of the humanities for a majority-Latinx student population.
- (2) Interventions pitched to the broader student population that have demonstrated success in increasing representation of one or more historically underrepresented student groups:
- The history department at James Madison University has increased its majors and minors through curricular reforms, advocacy concerning career pathways, and marketing efforts, all of which have made studying history more attractive to first-generation students.
 - The English department at the University of Pittsburgh reversed a 50% decline in majors and attracted a more diverse student population by creating a range of innovative programs that prepare students for careers in media and communications.
 - The University of South Carolina-Union (USC-Union) has attracted more Black and Latinx students to the institution and increased enrollments in the humanities by expanding dual enrollment offerings for high school students and offering humanities courses for students pursuing nursing degrees.
 - Aurora University's English department sustained a healthy pipeline of majors as the university's student population diversified by proactively articulating career pathways and reforming its curriculum to better represent students' identities and experiences.
 - Through outreach to underserved students, concrete support, and innovative curricula emphasizing civic engagement, Cuyahoga Community College is cultivating an inclusive humanities pipeline that prepares students for leadership.
 - The High Impact Humanities Initiative at the University of Massachusetts, Boston has generated 24 timely humanities gen ed courses that are shifting perceptions of the value of the humanities among a highly diverse student population.
 - The College of Humanities at the University of Arizona has achieved steady growth and attracted a diverse student population by investing in inclusive recruitment strategies and innovative curricula.
 - The Engaged Humanities Initiative at the University of Illinois-Chicago empowers students to pursue their personal, professional, and civic goals through community engagement and mentored research projects.

Collectively, these two types of case studies offer important lessons about how to expand access to undergraduate humanities education by highlighting strategies that make the humanities more accessible and inclusive to students from a wide range of backgrounds as well as foster a more welcoming and supportive learning environment for members of specific historically underrepresented groups. In addition, we provide a review of recruitment challenges and strategies at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). This review, which is located between the two sections, highlights efforts to articulate career pathways, market opportunities to students, develop innovative curricula, and foster humanities identity and community despite resource disparities.

Throughout this report, we use tags to categorize case studies in other ways (see below for list). First, we note the type of institution each case study is drawn from. Case studies were selected to represent a variety of contexts, from community colleges to elite R1s. We also made a point of including case studies from distinct types of MSIs as well as efforts at PWIs. Second, we identify the broad strategies the initiatives embody: articulating career pathways, curricular innovations, investments in marketing and recruitment, and fostering humanities identity and community. These categories were outlined in our previous report, *Strategies for Recruiting Students to the Humanities: A Comprehensive Resource*.

We include these tags so readers can find models that can be readily implemented within their particular context. But we hasten to add that many of the models presented can also be scaled up or down, adapted across different types of institutions and disciplines, and modified to fit within a shoestring budget. We've included efforts of varying scale, from campus-wide initiatives to department-level strategies. And we highlight a variety of cross-campus partners engaged through these initiatives, including multicultural centers, offices of diversity and inclusion, student success centers, professional schools, career services offices, employers, and community organizations. We hope that faculty and administrators will draw on the full range of case studies as they think creatively about how to expand access to undergraduate humanities education on their campuses.

Profile Tags

Institution Type:

Public	Two-year	Liberal Arts College	Minority-Serving Institution (MSI)
Private	Four-year	Regional Comprehensive University	Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI)
		Research University	Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI)
			Historically Black College or University (HBCU)

Type of Intervention:

Articulating Career Pathways	Cultivating a Marketing Mindset
Curricular Innovations	Fostering Humanities Identity & Community

Section 1: Engaging and Supporting Students From Historically Underrepresented Backgrounds

Initiatives in this section proactively engage and support students from historically underrepresented groups in the humanities in a highly intentional manner. Since these are the most targeted approaches, they are often aimed at a relatively small population of students. All of the initiatives featured in this section have benefited from external support—whether in the form of Mellon grants, NEH grants, private donations, or funds obtained through government programs—making it possible to offer concentrated resources to modest-sized cohorts of students. It is often hoped that these substantial investments will have a broader effect beyond participating students, but such intangible impacts on campus climate can be difficult to measure. However, many of the strategies developed through these well-supported projects can also be implemented on a shoestring budget. Readers should consider not only how they might create similar humanities programs for students on their campuses, but also how they can incorporate these strategies for engaging and supporting students from historically underrepresented groups into existing programs.

Supporting Native Students, Faculty, and Staff Through Indigenous Studies

University of Washington

Institution Type:

Public Four-year Research University

Type of Intervention:

Curricular Innovations Fostering Humanities Identity & Community

With a grant from the Mellon Foundation, the Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies at the University of Washington (UW) has launched a set of initiatives that support Native students (undergraduate and graduate), faculty, and staff in a comprehensive fashion. These include: a program that supports Native students' transition to UW (NUW Scholars); an organization to bring together Indigenous graduate students; an initiative to strengthen community college pathways (Native Pathways Program); community-based projects grounded in Indigenous knowledge (Knowledge Families); summer institutes on Indigenous humanities for graduate and undergraduate students; a monthly workshop in which faculty and graduate student fellows take turns presenting works in progress; a Knowledge-in-Residence Program that enables Native elders to share their expertise with the campus community; a flexible grant program to support faculty, staff, and students pursuing Indigenous research projects (Qacag^{wac} Awards); and funding to bring guest speakers and Native knowledge to campus. Collectively, these initiatives are attracting Native students to UW and encouraging more of these students to study the humanities while fostering an inclusive environment for Native students and supporting more equitable outcomes.

The Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies (CAIIS) was established in 2018. Chadwick Allen, a scholar of Native literature in the English department who serves as Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement, proposed the center in part to help recruit and retain Native faculty at UW after several left for positions at other universities. He worked with Chair of American Indian Studies Christopher Teuton to secure support for the new center from 11 different units on campus, particularly the provost's office. Allen served as an initial co-director along with American Indian studies faculty member Jean Dennison; UW Tacoma English professor Danica Miller now serves alongside Dennison as co-director. "We spent the first year really just talking to people, first and foremost with Native faculty, about what they wanted to see in a center," said Dennison, "and they said that what it means for me to be retained here is that we create a community for Native faculty, staff, and students here on the UW campus." From there, CAIIS began outlining the programmatic components to realize that vision in an ultimately successful grant proposal to the Mellon Foundation.

The innovative initiatives funded through the Mellon grant provide powerful examples for others wishing to encourage Native students to pursue the humanities. First, the NUW Scholars program immerses incoming Native undergraduates in a community-building cohort program that helps them to feel at home on campus from the outset. Before their first quarter begins, NUW Scholars participate in a week-long orientation program, which includes field trips, workshops, and presentations from guest speakers. From there, students meet weekly throughout their time in the program and support one another as peer mentors. "We had pitched it as academic preparedness, but we quickly learned that what these students actually needed was sheer community," Dennison

recalled. “They needed a place where they could gain confidence in their voice, where they could feel at home at the university. And that is 100% what this space has done.” NUW Scholar cohorts have grown steadily, from 10 students in the first year (2021–2022) to 20 in the second year to 30 in the third year (2023–2024).

Although the program is open to students in any area of study, it seems to be motivating more incoming Native students to pursue humanities offerings, particularly within American Indian studies. “In the past, Native students who have come to UW have overwhelmingly focused on STEM,” said Dennison. “But this year, in part because of this program, I’ve seen a real switch where they’re also wanting to get a major in American Indian Studies. I didn’t expect it to work so quickly or so effectively.” Two thirds of the NUW Scholars enrolled in Dennison’s Introduction to American Indian Studies course, where Scholars made up about two thirds of the overall enrollment in the course. “They really want to be situated in the humanities in this way because they’re seeing that we have a stronger Native community here in the humanities and social sciences,” observed Dennison. “It’s just absolutely amazing, the sense of support, the sense of caring. You can see them gaining their voice and their feet and seeing the importance of Indigenous humanities perspectives.”

Second, the Native Pathways Program builds partnerships with Washington community colleges to expand their offerings in American Indian studies (AIS), increase Native student enrollments, and facilitate smoother transitions to UW. Through the program, community college faculty have been invited to the UW campus for summer workshops with AIS faculty. They work together to create syllabi for Native studies courses that will transfer from the two-year campus to UW. CAIIS has also hosted several American Indian and Indigenous Studies Higher Education Pedagogy Summits, through which faculty around the country share successful efforts to integrate Native knowledge into undergraduate curricula. And through a partnership with Seattle Community College (SCC), a fellowship was created with program funds to support the teaching of a transferable American Indian studies course and additional efforts to cultivate community among Native studies at SCC. These expansive initiatives have encouraged others in UW’s orbit to make their own investments in Native pathways. For example, the state two-year college system was inspired to create a new position to facilitate the implementation of Native knowledge across the system. Meanwhile, Cascadia College, a nearby public two-year institution, created a new position for a half-time American Indian studies instructor and half-time tribal liaison.

Third, CAIIS has expanded co-curricular opportunities for undergraduates to explore Native knowledge systems as they move toward earning their degrees. The Knowledge Family Experience brings together a year-long cohort of undergraduates who work closely with faculty, staff, graduate students, and/or leaders from local tribes to pursue community-based projects that center around distinct forms of Indigenous knowledge. For example, students have learned traditional basket-making practices and how to cultivate, harvest, and distribute medicinal plants from local Native knowledge experts. Many of these projects have been featured at the Burke Museum on the UW campus, sharing this knowledge with visitors.

Finally, through the Summer Institute in Indigenous Humanities (SIIH), undergraduates undertake stipend-supported research projects in collaboration with community partners. They receive training in archival and ethnographic research methods from the teaching team and work with them to design and develop an independent research project. Students then have the opportunity to present their projects at a research symposium later in the year. These experiences are not only encouraging Native students to see graduate-level humanities programs as a good option for their future, but giving them the tools to get into and succeed in these programs.

This work has continued to be supported by a growing number of units across the University of Washington's three campuses, as well as a second grant from the Mellon Foundation. In addition to continuing this existing programming, this funding is supporting the expansion of several of these initiatives to the University of Washington's Tacoma campus. Danica Miller, an associate professor of Culture, Arts and Communication at UW Tacoma, has joined Dennison as a CAIIS co-director to lead this expansion.

Collectively, these initiatives have greatly strengthened the community of Native students, faculty, and staff at UW. They have created a robust series of pathways for Native students that welcome them to the campus, immerse them in a supportive community, and often result in students taking American Indian studies courses. These pathways lead to additional opportunities to participate in robust Indigenous research projects that range from collaborative explorations of Native knowledge systems to more traditional self-directed academic projects. Efforts to strengthen community college pathways and engage graduate students further extend these pathways in multiple directions. "And what's fun is that you see them walking our pathway—a lot of last year's NUW scholars then did the Summer Institute, and are now part of knowledge families," observed Dennison. More broadly, the center is transforming the climate at UW for Native students, faculty, and staff. Dennison explained:

It's a game changer for students. Many Native students are leaving higher education because the knowledge that they've been given throughout their life is not valued. So much of what we're doing is showing that there's ways to respectfully engage with Indigenous knowledge in higher education. It really shifts what the university feels like; students feel like they have a place here because their knowledge systems are being valued.

Through these various initiatives, the Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies is demonstrating the crucial role the humanities can play in healing the wounds of the past and empowering a new generation of Native students.

Easing Students' Transition to a Rural Campus Eastern Oregon University

Institution Type:

Public Four-year Regional Comprehensive University

Type of Intervention:

Curricular Innovations Fostering Humanities Identity & Community

Primarily white institutions, particularly regional comprehensive universities located in rural areas, traditionally have struggled to create an environment in which students from historically underrepresented groups feel they belong and will be successful. To help address these challenges, English and writing faculty at Eastern Oregon University (EOU) have worked with the campus Multicultural Center to develop the Kickstart Program. This summer bridge program helps students, particularly a sizable population of students from the Pacific Islands,

transition successfully to the campus. Students receive writing instruction and social support that can help them overcome language and other cultural barriers to succeed as EOU students. At the same time, the program orients students from historically underrepresented groups to the region through exploration of its history and culture.

Beginning in the 1970s, Eastern Oregon University leveraged a federal funding stream to attract students from Micronesia, the Mariana Islands, the Marshall Islands, and other Pacific islands. For half a century, EOU has sustained a steady flow of students from this region, but these students continue to face substantial barriers in their transition to the campus. Because English is a second language for many of these students, they must first demonstrate sufficient language proficiency to succeed in college. Cost, distance, and infrequent testing dates can make it difficult for students to take the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). In response to this, the university initially instituted a phone-based conversational English evaluation and contracted for a computer-mediated English language boot camp. Neither solution provided meaningful assessment of or practice in academic reading and writing in English. “It was a real problem,” explains Summer Bridge Director and Professor of English/Writing Cori Brewster. “We were encouraging these students to come without a clear sense of whether they were ready to succeed.” This left students vulnerable to investing their savings in an ill-fated journey to a university thousands of miles from home.

To support these students’ successful transitions to college in a more comprehensive fashion, English faculty designed a curriculum that integrates intensive writing instruction with an in-depth exploration of the history and culture of Eastern Oregon. Students earn two credits for completing Invitation to Rural Oregon, a course that incorporates class visits to local organizations and historic sites such as the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation; the Maxville Heritage Center, which preserves the history of a local African American logging community; and the Pendleton Roundup, a local rodeo that serves as a beloved community cultural event. Students learn about the histories of the various communities that comprise the region, including local Native tribes and a growing Latinx population, and reflect on different ways of belonging in Eastern Oregon. “Kickstart provides a space for students to tell their own stories about who they are and why they are here,” says Brewster. “They have an opportunity to co-create the student culture, as opposed to simply entering something that exists, so they can see the university culture as something they are empowered to help make their own.”

To create and sustain the program, faculty and staff have had to be resourceful in piecing together limited funding sources. They began by getting administrators to repurpose the \$200 per student the university had allocated for the unsuccessful computer-based language instruction program toward more robust instruction. “From there, we shoestrung little chunks of money, a \$500 grant here and there,” explained Brewster. “We had to donate a lot of labor to this—only the instructor of record was paid—and even then we still had to impose a \$100 student fee. But we saw it was something the students really needed.” While the program continued to serve EOU’s substantial population of Pacific Islanders, Brewster noted that the invitation to participate was extended to “any student who was unfamiliar with U.S. and/or academic culture.”

After running Kickstart on a shoestring budget for years, new funding streams emerged in the context of the pandemic that are enabling faculty to expand the program and offer it to more students. In response to a perceived gap in writing and math skills among students who completed high school under the constraints imposed during the pandemic, the Oregon Commission of Higher Education created a funding stream called Strong Start to support the kind of preparatory writing and math instruction that Kickstart was already offering. These funds have enabled faculty to offer the program free of charge, including two and a half-weeks of room and board, to up to 50 students—a substantial portion of an incoming class of 300 students. The expanded program is now open to all newcomers, but faculty continue to work closely with the Multicultural Center to promote the opportunity to students from the Pacific Islands and other historically underrepresented groups.

Preparing Students to Make Change in the Entertainment Industry

Pace University

Institution Type:

Private Four-year Research University

Type of Intervention:

Articulating Career Pathways Curricular Innovations

Pace University has created a new B.A. program in Writing for Diversity and Equity in Theater and Media (WDETM) that centers questions of inclusivity and representation in both content and practice. Its curriculum integrates intensive writing instruction, in-depth humanistic exploration of social justice issues, and training for a variety of careers in theater and media—inside and outside the classroom.

WDETM was created with support from the Edmond de Rothschild Foundation in 2021 and Assistant Dean for Equity in the Arts S. Brian Jones was brought in to lead the new major. While the program is still in its infancy, steady growth over the course of its first two years and the enthusiastic response of its initial cohort of students suggest it as a promising model for others to consider. In order to build out the new program around a strong sense of community, Jones decided to begin with a small, tight-knit cohort of students. He aimed to enroll three students in the first year but far outpaced that goal, enrolling 12 majors from a variety of backgrounds, including three African Americans, three Asian Americans, two Latinx students, and two non-binary students. Now entering its third year, WDETM has grown to 25 majors and now has more students interested in enrolling than the emerging program is currently designed to accommodate.

Student testimonials illustrate how the program has succeeded in attracting a highly diverse group of students by appealing to their personal and professional aspirations. “Even before high school, I knew I wanted to do something in theater or film, something especially centering on identity, specifically Latin American identity and all of its intersectionality,” one first-generation Mexican-American WDETM major wrote. Reflecting on the experience of seeing authentic representations of Latin Americans in theater and film, the student continued, “To have the ability to give that experience to more kids, it just warms my heart and keeps me going.”

In contrast to other programs geared toward careers in media, WDETM leverages the humanities to empower students to pursue these aspirations. When Jones was hired to launch the new program, he shifted the curriculum from its original design in order to center the humanities. “The first thing I did was I added humanities classes,” Jones recalled. “I wanted them to have the opportunity, not only to develop their voice, but to understand the world around them and the stories that they are telling. So that is at the center of the program.” The promotional material for the program highlights opportunities to “embrace the complexity of underlying social and historical issues.”

Students are required to take a mix of several theory courses offered by the departments of American studies, women and gender studies, disability studies, peace and justice studies, and film and screen studies, as well as five writing-intensive courses offered by the English department. Students also must complete a minor as part of the

program and are encouraged to consider taking a deeper dive into one of the areas of studies they engage through the WDETМ curriculum. Jones elaborated on the appeal of this curriculum:

They already have an interest in the humanities. I think what excites them is it allows them to be creative, but it's a mix of these two passions together. They're becoming authentic storytellers who say that I'm going to sit down and write a story about this community and do that research, that understanding, that discovery. I'm not just creating art to make art. I'm creating art to make change, and the humanities are the pathway to change.

Meanwhile, students take courses in the theater department that provide them with additional practical skills to help them actualize their vision for change. Crucially, they also engage directly with working professionals in the field on a regular basis through master classes and field trips to performances and cultural organizations in New York City. These engagements help prepare students for internships with affiliated nonprofit organizations, which are promoted as a major feature of the program. Through these professional development opportunities, students have ample opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills gained in their humanities courses in real time. A'isha Muhammad, a WDETМ major, wrote in a testimonial on the program website: "You're going to learn so many skills and get in contact with so many people and have access to cool opportunities that a lot of other majors don't necessarily have access to."

The students meet with Jones to discuss their interests and goals prior to joining, and they hold weekly cohort meetings. "Students' voices need to be at the center of this type of work," Jones said. "I tell them that these are your meetings, I'm just here to facilitate. They are really bought into having a really rigorous, vibrant discussion."

As the program grows, peer mentoring propels it forward. Muhammad wrote about this aspect of the WDETМ experience:

I'm most excited to see the cohorts under us come up because we were in the pilot program. Now we have a full table of people [and] it's really exciting to see freshmen who are able to start out in the major. I hope we're setting a good example for them and getting new and younger voices into the room to contribute.

The program is already drawing Pace students into deeper engagement with the humanities. Muhammad wrote about switching to WDETМ due to its emphases on writing, equity, and inclusion after being initially drawn to Pace to study performance as a Film and Screen Studies major:

If you value DEI in media ... then this is the major for you. As someone who writes, it's really important to me to have diversity and equity at the forefront of my work. For me, my writing has [helped me to] realiz[e] that, like all my peers, we all have unique voices, and we all have different stories that we want to tell. We are here to create space, and that's one of the many beautiful parts of this major.

The program is also beginning to attract students to Pace. WDETМ major Dreana Henry described how the program motivated her to apply to Pace in the first place. "I've never actually seen a major that was super focused on diversity and equity all around, so I thought it was really interesting that there was a program where I could learn not only how to screen write, but to write novels too. I had never seen something that was so diverse in that way."

Promoting Equity, Inclusion, and Public Engagement Through the Arts and Humanities

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

Institution Type:

Public Four-year Liberal Arts College

Type of Intervention:

Fostering Humanities Identity & Community

With a grant from the Mellon Foundation, the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) established an Institute for Arts and Humanities (IAH) with three primary aims: (1) supporting faculty and students in innovating engaging programming across the arts and humanities; (2) establishing and strengthening connections with the vibrant local ecosystem of humanities organizations in Berkshire County; and (3) leveraging these interventions to make MCLA a more equitable and inclusive learning environment for all members of its highly diverse student body. Located in a semi-rural county that is 85% white, MCLA enrolls a large proportion of first-generation students and Pell Grant recipients (40% each), and there is a growing population of students of color (23% identify as African American, Latin American, Asian American, or Native American). The IAH supported a number of interventions that have not only helped students of all backgrounds feel more at home on the campus and in the region, but also created opportunities for them to make their voices heard through the arts and humanities.

To achieve these goals, MCLA leveraged grant funds to foster community engagement in arts and humanities courses. IAH offered mini grants for students to develop programs, as well as internships that immersed students in a variety of professionalizing projects on and off campus. Faculty fellowships brought arts and humanities faculty together to identify ways they could make their teaching, programming, and research more reflective of the college's diversity while availing themselves of the community's rich resources. A Student Advisory Board (SAB) was established to ensure that all IAH activities were guided by student input. This approach ensured that students benefited directly from the infusion of funds while gaining access to new platforms for making their voices heard. One member of the SAB reflected on their "very rewarding" experience: "The SAB has provided an opportunity to create real change while having my thoughts and opinions valued and heard." Another reflected on how the experience instilled "a desire to work for anything regarding arts and the humanities."

The student empowerment theme was even represented in the staffing of the program. Institute Director Lisa Donovan hired recent MCLA graduate Erica Barreto to serve as IAH Coordinator after first hiring her to work on the initial Mellon planning grant as a student research associate. As an Afro-Latin woman, Barreto was particularly well positioned to encourage students from historically underrepresented groups to take advantage of IAH offerings.

IAH has supported a number of student-led interventions that helped to foster a more inclusive and equitable environment on campus. For example, a trans student used a mini-grant to create a series of zines to facilitate discussion about expanding access to gender neutral bathrooms on campus. IAH also responded to student feedback by revitalizing a space designed to make the campus more welcoming to students of color. While MCLA created the Empowerment Lounge in 2018 as a space for students of color on the predominantly white campus, the space was underutilized and students complained that it was uninviting and difficult to find. An IAH intern

who also served as president of the Black Student Union led a collaborative effort that leveraged grant funds to revitalize the space. Students reorganized the space, painted it in bright colors, and equipped it with appliances and a food pantry in response to discussions about food insecurity on campus. “Cultivating this sense of belonging for students in a white rural town far away from home through a safe sense of space/place was crucial to the success of our student-centered work,” said Barreto. “They asked us to do something about the lounge and we listened.” To raise the visibility of the lounge, IAH hosted a re-launch event and created and posted window decals announcing the lounge’s location. IAH brought the arts and humanities into the space by decorating it with student art and hosting a number of events in the lounge. It continues to be used for both affinity group and humanities events, such as poetry nights. As one student reflected, “giving [students] the opportunity to be seen and heard can change, in my case, a student’s life forever.”

One example that illustrates how IAH leveraged the tools of the humanities to foster inclusion was the Mariposa Project, a multifaceted, year-long initiative that delved into experiences of unauthorized migration. IAH student interns played a crucial role in the project, which engaged large numbers of students and community members and drew praise from both. It featured poetry readings, a musical performance, a “Know Your Rights” seminar, and a gallery exhibition that depicted migrant boys’ bedrooms covered with butterflies. Reflecting on how powerful it was to be part of the project, one student intern noted:

[High school] students [were] wandering around the campus saying that the exhibit was amazing because our youth saw themselves. How cool is that? They see themselves reflected as they walk onto campus! I just feel like that kind of intergenerational piece is powerful ... especially with students at the center.

Across all of these components of IAH, a key takeaway was how the student-centered process through which these efforts were undertaken promoted more equitable outcomes for students. A report on the project concluded that:

Actively involving students in the planning, execution, and evaluation of community engagements and events inevitably contributes to the overall success of those initiatives ... The intentional and collaborative process of helping students optimize their educational experiences and achieve their dreams, goals, and potential can have a profound impact on student retention and success rates ... creat[ing] pathways of discovery and success for students who may be hesitant to identify and activate their dreams.

In sum, IAH leveraged the arts and humanities to achieve inclusive culture change on the MCLA campus. In this way, IAH demonstrates how the arts and humanities empower students, particularly those from historically underrepresented groups, to make change.

Promoting Belonging Through Programming and Pedagogy University of California, Los Angeles

Institution Type:

Public Four-year Research University

Type of Intervention:

Articulating Career Pathways Fostering Humanities Identity & Community

As a large, diverse public research university, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) has adopted strategies that invite a broad population of students to identify with the humanities and foster an inclusive and supportive environment for these students. This effort begins with UCLA's Humanities Welcome event, which has framed the existential and professional aims of humanities education for incoming students since 2011.

Students receive an invitation to the event two weeks before they arrive on campus and approximately 400 students attend in a given year. They hear punchy presentations from four distinct perspectives: an inspiring professor provides an accessible presentation on the importance of their research; a recent graduate tells a compelling story about applying their humanities skills in the workforce; a dynamic senior recaps the highlights of their undergraduate humanities education thus far; and the dean offers a high-level overview of the professional and existential value of the humanities.

Former Dean of Humanities David Schaberg crafted a two-part pitch combining evidence of the efficacy of humanities knowledge and skills in a wide variety of career fields with a values-driven appeal designed to connect with incoming students' ideals and hopes for their college experience. The values-driven pitch emphasizes empowerment, highlighting the personal growth fostered by the culture of free inquiry within the humanities. The event concludes with a reception where incoming students peruse tables staffed by faculty representatives of humanities departments and student club leaders highlighting their offerings. "Senior Survey data indicates that humanities majors have remembered and prized the framing of humanities values that goes on in the Humanities Welcome," said Schaberg.

Humanities faculty reinforce the themes introduced in the Humanities Welcome through pitches they integrate into their courses. Co-curricular programming also reinforces these themes. An annual cycle of 8–10 Humanities Career Panel events gives students regular opportunities to explore career options and hone their skills (and network) for the job market. And there are recurring events that highlight the intrinsic value of humanities education itself, such as World Languages Day.

In addition to this concerted effort to communicate the value of humanities education in a clear, comprehensive, and compelling fashion, the Division of Humanities has also demonstrated a commitment to fostering an inclusive environment that equitably supports the success of all members of its highly diverse student population.

With support from the Mellon Foundation, UCLA's Excellence in Pedagogy and Innovative Classrooms (EPIC) initiative has worked to redress exclusionary teaching practices and incorporate pedagogical approaches that make humanities classrooms more inclusive and equitable. For example, the EPIC program has hosted two 10-week seminars for graduate students and faculty at UCLA and associated community colleges that offered a comprehensive approach to fostering an inclusive learning environment, as well as additional seminars on specific pedagogical practices designed to better serve the educational needs of historically underrepresented student groups and make course material as accessible as possible. Schaberg explained:

EPIC is a call for cultural change across the humanities disciplines at UCLA [which asks] how can we make the real diversity of every one of our classes a source of excellence and an opportunity for learning of the kind that changes lives? It promotes a distinctive culture of teaching in the humanities [that is] inclusive in the sense of recognizing the unique needs and backgrounds of our individual students and focused on advancing each person's prospects as skillfully as possible. We expect that this culture, as it continues to take hold, will help us attract and retain students in humanities majors.

These EPIC seminars reflect a broader emphasis on fostering an inclusive environment for students from historically underrepresented groups, including those who are the first in their families to go to college—nearly half of the students in the Division of Humanities. For example, the Division of Humanities and the EPIC program co-hosted a symposium called Ready, Set, Teach! Nearly 90 humanities faculty attended the event, where they heard a panel of first-generation students provide feedback on how to make courses more inclusive. The Division of Humanities has also worked more broadly to create a supportive environment for first-generation students. More than 30 humanities faculty have identified themselves to students as being first-generation, offering themselves up as a resource to help students navigate the challenges involved. Every year, the First Gen Advisory Board stages First Gen Day to raise awareness about those challenges and celebrate these students with “first to go” swag and community-building events that highlight educational and professional resources.

By fostering a learning environment that is inclusive and supportive for all students and framing humanities education in a way that connects with students' goals for their personal and professional development from the moment they step foot on campus, the Division of Humanities at UCLA has been able to maintain overall steady enrollment amidst steep declines at other large public universities.

Note: This case study was previously published in *Strategies for Recruiting Students to the Humanities: A Comprehensive Resource* (2021).

Immersing Latinx Students in the Humanities Through a Summer Bridge Vanguard University

Institution Type:

Public Four-year Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI)

Type of Intervention:

Articulating Career Pathways Curricular Innovations

Fostering Humanities Identity & Community

Humanities faculty at Vanguard University have hustled to amass and leverage resources to generate interest in the humanities through an NEH-funded summer bridge program at a private hispanic-serving institution (HSI) that has not prioritized the humanities. Located in Orange County, California, Vanguard is a Christian university that draws large proportions of Latinx students (47%) and Pell grant recipients (43%). Many Vanguard students have limited knowledge and resources concerning their academic and professional options. Through the summer bridge program and a broader implementation of the program's dual emphases on articulating humanities career pathways and highlighting stories that resonate with students' lived experiences, the department of history and political science achieved a 60% increase in enrollments and a 40% increase in the number of majors in just four years.

When former history professor Kristen Lashua (who later became chair of the department and has since resigned) arrived at Vanguard in 2015, she noticed many ways in which STEM and pre-professional programs were privileged at the institution, which graduates a large number of nurses. These included a summer bridge program that framed the Vanguard experience for incoming freshmen in a thoroughly STEM-oriented fashion. When administrators balked at the idea of offering a similar experience for students interested in the humanities, Lashua sought and obtained funding through the NEH's Humanities Initiatives at Hispanic-Serving Institutions grant line in 2018–2019. The result was an inviting, accessible gateway experience entitled *American Stories: A Humanities Summer Bridge Program*.

The summer bridge program is a five-week intensive residential academic enrichment and leadership program. Students attend daily classes and workshops, receive personalized writing instruction, and become oriented to the campus and various offices and resources they can draw upon for support. They complete up to four course units that fulfill history and English gen ed requirements. They visit local museums, art galleries, and historical sites and explore a variety of career pathways through these excursions. And they learn about opportunities to conduct original humanities research in conjunction with the university's summer undergraduate research program and journals that publish undergraduate research in English, history, and political science.

Lashua partnered with NHA to document how the summer bridge program is encouraging more students to study the humanities at Vanguard. From 2019–2022, NHA surveyed 46 students across four cohorts before and after they participated in the program. Seventy-three percent of students surveyed identified as Hispanic or Latinx. Findings illustrate how the bridge program (1) helped prepare students for the rigor of college work; (2) fostered a

sense of community among students; (3) connected students to resources that would help them succeed; and (4) promoted understanding of the humanities and career trajectories.

A major goal of the bridge program was to ease the transition to college for at-risk students. Students clearly appreciated how the knowledge and skills imparted through the program enhanced their college readiness. Ninety-seven percent of survey respondents agreed that they have a more thorough understanding of what their college journey will look like after participating in the program, compared to just 45% before the program. And 94% agreed they felt prepared for their educational and/or career goals as a result of the summer bridge, compared to 64% before. As one student elaborated, “I feel so much better because honestly I do not know what college life is like and this gave me more confidence and a better understanding of how it is going to be.” Another student reflected, “After this experience, I feel like I can definitely continue my college journey and succeed. I feel prepared and motivated.”

The community building facilitated by the program was crucial for cultivating this confidence and sense of belonging. Ninety-seven percent of students agreed that they felt like part of a community as a result of participating in the program and 94% plan to keep in touch with people they met through it. “I value this opportunity so much,” shared one student. “The amount of kindness and helpfulness given from the people that are part of the bridge program really helped me and my family get an idea of what my college years were going to be like.”

The program also oriented students to critical resources. Prior to the program, 27% of respondents agreed that they know where to go to find resources on campus that will help them succeed. Following the program, 100% of respondents agreed that they know where to go to find resources on campus that will help them succeed and felt confident reaching out to their professors for assistance/questions/advice when needed. And 97% said they felt comfortable going to their professors’ office hours. “I feel like I have the confidence now more than before to use the resources provided for me and to reach out when I need help,” elaborated one student. Cultivating this sense of community and belonging and empowering students to take advantage of available resources has been shown to increase an at-risk student’s chances of earning their degree.

At the same time, the program helped students, many of whom had very limited awareness of the opportunities available to them through the humanities, to better appreciate how studying the humanities supports their personal and professional goals. Prior to the summer program, only 45% of respondents were aware of the types of jobs available to humanities majors, while 65% were aware of how skills in the humanities are useful in jobs, compared to 80% and 90% after the program, respectively. Immediately following the program, students gave more nuanced descriptions of the humanities by listing specific majors offered in the humanities and describing the humanities as understanding how “past events shaped the reality today” and a way to “understand how society actually works.”

Another important way the program made the humanities come alive for students was by empowering them to learn more about the history and cultures of their surrounding community. Ninety-four percent agreed that they learned more about Orange County’s local culture and history and that participating in this program enhanced their sense of connection to the Orange County community.

The success of the program inspired Lashua and her colleagues to incorporate the dual emphases on professional applications of humanities knowledge and skills and accessible, relatable content across the entire humanities curriculum. “We’ve worked to make the intro classes and upper division courses as exciting as possible and to ensure that we are representing students’ stories, families, and cultures in our curriculum,”

said Lashua. At the same time, there is consistent messaging about the broad applicability of the skills cultivated through these courses, as well as internships and exposure to alums' career experiences to help students develop as emerging professionals and explore concrete pathways. "We unfortunately do not get support from admissions or administration, so we have had to push for these changes and raise money for marketing materials," said Lashua.

This feeling of being unsupported by an administration focused on boosting STEM and pre-professional programs is shared by many humanities faculty. This case study illustrates how seeking external support can help redress this resource gap and boost the humanities in such contexts. And it demonstrates how forefronting content that resonates with students' lived experiences and educating students about the possibilities for applying humanities knowledge and skills in the workforce helps to expand access to the humanities for Latinx students.

Spotlight

Recruiting Students to the Humanities at HBCUs: Challenges, Trends, and Strategies

Advancing the humanities at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) is crucial to maintaining and expanding access to the humanities, particularly for Black students. Here, to provide perspective on the unique opportunities and challenges undergraduate humanities programs at HBCUs face, we summarize recruitment trends, strategies, and perspectives collected from a number of HBCUs through our 2021 Humanities Recruitment Survey. These data are presented to offer insights and strategies both to those working to attract students to the humanities at HBCUs and those at other institutions looking for ways to make their programs more inclusive and equitable.

In distributing our survey, we made a concerted effort to reach out to a wide range of HBCUs around the country. We contacted administrators at 41 HBCUs and received responses from 11 institutions in 10 different states.

Challenges

Respondents pointed to challenges that are common to many types of institutions as well as those particular to HBCUs. Many reported that their institution's humanities departments and programs were in a precarious state. While 22% indicated that humanities enrollments were stable or growing, 56% said either that enrollments were low/declining or that students were increasingly leaning toward pre-professional degrees and STEM fields. When asked about budget cuts and program discontinuation/reduction, 30% indicated that humanities departments had suffered such cuts in the past 3–5 years, with another 40% indicating they were unsure. While there is a great deal of institutional diversity within the HBCU category in terms of size, location, areas of focus, and public/private status, all but a small handful of the most elite and well-endowed HBCUs must navigate considerable resource disparities rooted in a long history of underfunding compared to predominantly white institutions.⁴

In contrast to the responses we received from other types of institutions, responses from HBCUs framed these cuts as broader institutional budgetary challenges rather than institutional skepticism regarding the value of the humanities. Some respondents who referenced cuts emphasized that these were not driven by enrollment concerns so much as challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. And others expressed confidence that the humanities had the support of upper administrators and other key stakeholders. “The humanities remain central to the university’s mission by appealing to our students’ aspirations, instrumental and otherwise,” reflected Carlton Wilson, dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at North Carolina Central University (NCCU).

Nonetheless, from a student demand perspective, the humanities recruitment environment has become more challenging at HBCUs just as it has at other institutions. When asked about the barriers that deter students from studying the humanities, respondents pointed to barriers commonly observed at other institutions while suggesting that these may be experienced more acutely by HBCU students. They highlighted family and individual career concerns, contemporary biases toward business and STEM, a student population in which a disproportionate number come from underserved K–12 educational contexts, and the need for paid summer internships for humanities students that can compete with other employment opportunities in light of financial demands on students. Retention is also a major challenge: survey respondents noted that a disproportionate number of students at HBCUs are forced to take nontraditional pathways to a degree, stopping and restarting their education repeatedly to deal with financial and family demands.

Cultivating a Marketing Mindset

Respondents from HBCUs reported a range of ways they prioritize recruitment. Several pointed to redoubled outreach efforts and, importantly, the creation of incentives to encourage faculty to get involved. “All of our humanities departments have detailed recruitment plans that target students who may be interested in specific programs that prepare them for a variety of career opportunities,” Wilson shared. “There is funding to support these efforts.” NCCU hosts a fall preview day for around 1,400 high school students in the region and requires every department to be there to meet prospective students. They also visit several area high schools that tend to send students to NCCU. Several departments have ramped up their social media outreach, and the college advertises humanities events and programs on the university’s renowned radio station.

5. ACE Brief Illustrates HBCU Funding Inequities, *American Council on Education*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.acenet.edu/News-Room/Pages/ACE-Brief-Illustrates-HBCU-Funding-Inequities.aspx>

Articulating Career Pathways

Respondents described a range of strategies they have developed to address students' concerns about job prospects, leveraging their particular strengths to address student needs in spite of limited resources. These strategies include concrete forms of support, such as offering child care on campus and proactively reaching out to students about internships, scholarships, career fairs, and other career development opportunities. Compared to those from other types of institutions, responses from HBCUs indicated a greater willingness among faculty and administrators to forefront students' economic realities and draw clear connections between the humanities and a wide range of careers. "We constantly advise and inform students of the benefits of having a degree in the humanities," Wilson shared. "We provide them with examples of persons in a variety of careers who have earned undergraduate degrees in the humanities. In addition, we have convinced our Career Services office of the need to consider humanities students when recruiters who represent the 'traditional' employment areas visit the campus." Kathryn Silva, assistant professor of history and chair of the department of humanities at Claffin University, observed that "Claffin has trained faculty in the humanities to be explicit with students on how this will help them in their future careers, [particularly] in our general education program."

Curricular Innovation

In light of budget constraints, HBCU faculty and administrators often have to be particularly resourceful in leveraging existing strengths to create new curricula that illustrate how the humanities prepare students for alluring careers. In recent years, the humanities department at Claffin University has struggled to attract majors while criminal justice has thrived as the second most popular major on campus. "We find that many students major in criminal justice without realizing that this is not the best major to lead them into law school," Silva observed. The School of Humanities and Social Sciences built a new interdisciplinary pre-law program rich in humanities courses to better serve such students. At the same time, Silva's department has created a new track in public history to illustrate a clear professional path that aligns with student aspirations.

Fostering Humanities Identity and Community

Other respondents pointed to concerted efforts to foster humanities identity and community in ways that carry forward HBCUs' tradition of exceptional mentorship. For example, in addition to referencing the aforementioned kinds of outreach efforts, Silva emphasized:

Our strategy is to figure out what students want in their life and mentor, not just advise, our students. The humanities department holds the Ghanaian idea of *Nea Onnim*—if I don't know, I can learn. We even have t-shirts with the Adinkra symbol and translation. We expect excellence, and students are excited by the challenge because the rewards are often tangible within a year or two of their studying in our department.

In this context, peer mentors play a particularly powerful role. Silva emphasized how the department's four Mellon Mays scholars serve as influential student leaders who embody this standard of excellence and encourage their peers. As another respondent put it more simply, "our students are our best ambassadors."

Responses also highlighted the outsized role that alums can play in recruitment at HBCUs. "Our most vocal boosters are the alum[s], who are often the siblings or parents of our students," said Silva. "Many of our students attend Claffin because someone in their family attended Claffin." Devissi Muhamad, assistant dean

of social sciences and humanities at Wiley College, shared, “The alum[s] are highly valued. . . . Their success is a demonstration that the major is consequential and pays dividends on many levels.” North Carolina A&T Distinguished Professor of History Jelani Favors describes this robust culture of mentorship as a “second curriculum” in his book on HBCUs’ distinctive legacies, *Shelter in a Time of Storm*.

Seeking Grants

In all these ways, humanities faculty and administrators at HBCUs model a strong commitment to meeting students where they are as they work to attract students to the humanities, frequently on a shoestring budget and with heavy teaching loads. Historically, in addition to being underfunded by public sources, HBCUs have also been at a disadvantage in seeking grants from private funders that traditionally focused on a small group of wealthy, elite universities. However, there are encouraging signs of a potential increase in the availability of grant funding for innovative initiatives at HBCUs. Since 2020, there has been growing acknowledgement of this historic pattern of neglect and some efforts on the part of funders to invite HBCUs to apply for grants and assist with capacity building.

Dean Wilson of NCCU noted that he was pleased to observe a general increase in grant applications among his faculty that had resulted in some big wins, including a \$500,000 Mellon Foundation grant and an NEH fellowship. In 2021, NCCU hosted an NEH workshop to assist faculty with the application process and encourage them to apply. Wilson sees the potential for such grants to reinvigorate the undergraduate humanities curriculum based on his experience as a partner on a digital humanities project at Duke University funded by a previous Mellon Foundation grant. With support from this grant, a group of NCCU faculty had created a digital humanities lab that recently led to the approval of a new minor in digital humanities.

Conclusion

Faculty and administrators at HBCUs have developed strategies to attract students to the humanities that play to the particular strengths of the humanities. Fostering a culture of mentorship among faculty, students, and alums is a high-impact practice that promotes diversity, equity, and belonging. The very nature of humanistic learning places humanities faculty in a uniquely strong position to cultivate this culture of mentorship. At the same time, humanities faculty and administrators at HBCUs set an example for others in the unequivocal, forthright way they address students’ career concerns with confidence and work to support career success for their students. Tackling this challenge is crucial to expanding access to the humanities. Finally, HBCU faculty and staff model resourcefulness in the face of considerable challenges, including heavier teaching loads, smaller support staff, and the need to support a disproportionately underserved student population.

Section 2:

Interventions That Have Increased the Representation of Historically Underrepresented Groups

The case studies in this section document initiatives that, while pitched to the broader student population, have increased representation of one or more of a wide range of historically underrepresented student groups. These initiatives are situated within different institutional contexts: some have promoted diversity and inclusion at PWIs while others help address underrepresentation within humanities programs that exist on more diverse campuses. Each case study describes the steps humanities faculty and administrators took to address barriers to studying the humanities and presents evidence of their success in expanding access by looking at enrollment figures over time. They also distill key takeaways and strategies that readers might draw upon in adapting these models to expand access to the humanities at their own institutions.

Attracting First-Generation Students to History Through Curricular Reforms, Marketing, and Advocacy

James Madison University

Institution Type:

Public Four-year Regional Comprehensive University

Type of Intervention:

Articulating Career Pathways Curricular Innovations
Cultivating a Marketing Mindset

From 2019 to 2022, the history department at James Madison University increased its number of majors by 21% (to 286 majors total) while more than doubling its number of minors to 62. Much of this overall recruitment success can be attributed to the department's ability to attract more first-generation college students. The number of first-generation history majors more than doubled over this three-year period, accounting for 60% of the overall growth in majors. Curricular reforms and redoubled marketing and advocacy efforts all appear to have been crucial to making the history major and minor more attractive to students overall and more inclusive of first-generation students in particular.

First, the department overhauled its traditional curriculum for majors to offer courses of clearer relevance to a wider range of students. Former department chair Maura Hametz, who oversaw this effort, explained:

We did away with the geographic requirements. We looked at history as a method, as information literacy rather than as a body of content knowledge. We highlighted its contemporary relevance by emphasizing skills and knowledge acquisition—that was the guiding principle for the development of our curriculum.

The department introduced new requirements that are framed as “connected” courses and “applied” courses at the 300 level and funded faculty teams to develop them. These curricular innovations have helped to attract first-generation students who may not recognize the value of traditional approaches in history and the humanities.

The department's new connected course designation signals that these courses have a transnational and/or comparative component to them. They are often organized thematically; for example, one such course is titled *Our Better Angels?: The History of Violence*. And the applied course designation highlights how these courses teach students specific research skills, particularly digital skills, that they apply to produce public-facing research products. For example, students write profiles for the public history app *Clio*, record podcast episodes, interface with GIS tools, participate in *Reacting to the Past* role-playing games, study material culture, and contribute to larger public history projects like *Histories along the Blue Ridge*. These applied courses enable the department to take advantage of its newly renovated building's high-tech facilities, known as the History Lab and History Studio, which house a recording studio, 3-D printer, GIS lab, and virtual reality equipment. Meanwhile, student projects in a required methods class and in 400-level seminars now take a variety of forms far beyond the traditional research paper. “There are few empty seats in upper division courses,” said Hametz.

At the same time, the department has redoubled efforts to promote these courses and recruit students. The building the department occupies is adorned with digital signage that displays a series of slides advertising upcoming courses on a continuous loop. This slide presentation is also posted to the department website and distributed via email. This enables faculty to present their vision for their courses in a more complete and engaging manner. These advertisements are especially crucial for those offered as topics courses, which are described only in vague, generic terms in the university course catalog. These slides seem to have had a great impact on enrollment, as the only course not to exceed 50% of its capacity is the one for which a slide was not submitted on time. The department has also adopted more intentional scheduling policies; each faculty member schedules at least one course within one of the most popular time slots and at least one course outside prime hours. Faculty are encouraged to schedule their courses strategically to maximize enrollment; for example, scheduling a large course that doesn't always fill during peak hours while filling their off-peak slot with a popular upper division course with limited capacity.

Meanwhile, the department has expanded its recruitment efforts and gotten students and younger faculty members involved. The department designed t-shirts for students who volunteer to provide tours to prospective students and support recruitment events. And they purchased swag to distribute at these events that pair a picture of the department's iconic building with the tagline "Make History." The department also introduced History Huddles, meetings once a semester where students and faculty share a pizza lunch and talk casually about classes, advising, careers, and opportunities for research, study abroad, and internships. Collectively, these interventions make for a more inviting atmosphere.

Efforts to connect history to careers have been integral to this broader recruitment push and the department's success in attracting more first-generation students. The department created a required course that supports students' professionalization and preparation for their post-graduation job search. History alums (not necessarily from JMU) with exciting jobs visit the class via Zoom to talk about what their history major has meant to them and what they look for when hiring. For example, students in the course recently heard reflections from the leader of the U.S. component of the UN World Food Programme, which was awarded the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize. The department also created a "Historians as (specific type of professional)" event series to highlight career paths for history majors. Information on careers also scrolls on digital signage throughout the building. These efforts clearly signal that the history major is a viable path to career success for students of all backgrounds.

All of these efforts have been strengthened by mutually supportive relationships with upper administrators. When the university hired a new dean and provost who prioritized inclusion, the history department came through with ambitious plans that aligned with the university vision. As a result, the department was able to obtain course development funds to support its curriculum overhaul, while individual faculty received stipends for developing new courses that promote diversity and belonging. When a new dean of admissions was hired and charged with emphasizing recruitment of underserved students, the department developed plans that aligned with this vision. They initiated programming to support first-generation scholarship students and organized events to help first-generation students acclimate to the community and to spur their interest in history. "The institution is very generous in supporting these efforts if you give them a really reasonable plan and ask for things that aren't simply self-serving," said Hametz. In turn, the department has communicated its gratitude for institutional support and demonstrated how it is making good on these investments. For example, Hametz sent a particularly impressive podcast created in one of the applied courses to the university president with a hearty "thank you" for the studio in which it was produced.

This strong relationship with upper administration, combined with growth in majors, minors, and enrollments, has helped the department secure approval to replace departing and retiring tenure-track faculty on a relatively fast

timeline. Hametz observed that “the key has been to make the case for what we want to add and why, rather than complain about what we’ve lost.” The department has used these open tenure lines to rapidly diversify its faculty and course offerings at a time when this predominantly white institution is working to attract more students of color. And the curricular and recruitment reforms described above help these new faculty members to quickly establish their place in the curriculum. “I know it is working,” said Hametz. “Not only are our majors up, but our links to interdisciplinary programs have strengthened and when new faculty come in, at first their classes are small, but they quickly gain popularity.” Taken together, all of these interventions have helped make the JMU history department a more vibrant and inviting place, particularly for first-generation students.

Attracting a Broader Range of Students to English Through Applied Majors

University of Pittsburgh

Institution Type:

Public Four-year Research University

Type of Intervention:

Articulating Career Pathways Curricular Innovations

The University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) English department has attracted a more diverse population of students by creating innovative programs and courses that draw clearer connections to appealing career fields. These innovative career-oriented programs and courses have helped the department fully recover from a 50% decline in majors in the wake of the Great Recession to restabilize at around 650–690 total majors per year. In addition to more traditional majors in Literature and Writing, the department has created majors and new tracks in Film and Media Studies, Public and Professional Writing (PPW), and most recently, Digital Narrative and Interactive Design (DNID). These curricular innovations have helped the department buck national trends of decline in the English major despite an overall decline in humanities enrollments at Pitt. They have also helped ensure that students from historically underrepresented groups are better represented within the English department than in the university student body as a whole.

The department partnered with the School of Computing and Information to create a Digital Narrative and Interactive Design major that integrates English and computer science. The major has grown rapidly and drawn students from a wide range of backgrounds. The DNID major attracted 24 majors within a year of its Fall 2019 launch. Since then, it has grown steadily each year. By Spring 2023, there were 160 DNID majors.

More broadly, the department has worked to introduce new courses that forefront career applications. For example, Literature and Public and Professional Writing majors can now take courses in Critical Making, Media Ecology, Composing Digital Media, and Professional Uses of Social Media.

One of the keys to these successful innovations has been the department's ability to build bridges to other schools and departments through initiatives like DNID. Crucially, the department has been aggressive in seeking gen ed certification for intro-level courses offered across its full range of programs. These gen ed courses serve as gateways to the majors, exposing students to the program when they are still early in their undergraduate careers. Moreover, these courses' forefronting of professional skills and issues surrounding technology make them an easier sell to students who are skeptical of the professional value of taking humanities courses.

In Fall 2022, we surveyed 63 students enrolled in a selection of gen ed DNID courses—Composing Digital Media, Intro to Game Studies, Integrating Writing and Design, Narrative and Technology, Digital Humanity, Intro to New Media, and Visual Literacy—to examine how they helped to shift students' perception of the value of the humanities. Their responses testify to how these gateway courses help expand access to the humanities. Sixty-nine percent of respondents reported that the primary reason they took the course was to fulfill a gen ed requirement (referred to henceforth as “gen ed students”). A majority of these students had declared STEM or business majors; most of the remainder were either already DNID majors (16%), computer science majors (12%), English majors (6%), or seeking a digital media certificate. More than 80% of these gen ed students indicated that the course they took helped them understand how knowledge and skills gained through liberal arts courses can help them in their careers, and more than 75% indicated it made them want to take more liberal arts courses.

By appealing to a broader range of students, DNID courses are helping to attract students from backgrounds that have historically been underrepresented in traditional English programs. More than a quarter of students surveyed were of Asian descent, compared to 17% of the general Pitt student population. While demographic figures are not available for all English majors, faculty note that Asian representation within DNID appears to be much higher than other English majors.

Students of Asian descent elaborated on how the program helped shift their perceptions of the value of studying English in their responses to open-ended questions. “I believe it helped me further refine my writing skills by focusing on topics that interested me,” stated a male data science major of Asian descent. Another Asian male, a computer engineering major, shared, “I enjoy computer science more, so applying computer science to English has made me appreciate English more. I think I've diversified my skill set; rather than only computer science skills, I now have some [general] skills that will appeal to employers.” A female DNID major of Asian descent observed that the course “made me appreciate the importance of having both ... with the emphasis on STEM, it is easy to forget how humanities hold so much value in our everyday lives. Neglecting [the humanities'] impact is only harmful to society.”

The integration of computer science and English also helps to address gender imbalances in both programs. Computer science enrolls a disproportionate number of male students and English attracts a disproportionate number of female and gender nonconforming students, but the population of DNID is much more evenly mixed. In this way, DNID brings more male students into English courses and more female students into computer science courses. Just as the male computer science students quoted above expressed appreciation for the writing skills they gained through these courses, a female student expressed appreciation for how the course enabled her to “learn skills in a predominantly male field that will help me in future job endeavors.” It also seems that the neutralization of gender associations through the integration of these fields may foster an environment that feels more inclusive to non-binary students. While data on the proportion of University of Pittsburgh students who identify as non-binary is not available, the 6% of our DNID sample who identified as non-binary is likely above average compared to the overall undergraduate population at Pitt.

At the same time, the department has worked to promote diversity and belonging across its full range of majors, including more traditional offerings. For example, it introduced a Black Rhetorics track into its Public and Professional Writing program and an African American literature cluster in its Literature major. The department also just launched a new online Disability Studies Certificate, which attracted 15 students in its first year. Finally, the department's popular (creative) Writing major, one of the university's most diverse undergraduate majors overall, illustrates a broader trend reported by a number of respondents to our second Humanities Recruitment Survey: students from historically underrepresented groups are frequently attracted to offerings that forefront opportunities for creative self-expression, particularly when those opportunities center questions of identity. Through the Writing major and these new tracks, the department highlights a range of opportunities for students from historically underrepresented groups to make their voices heard.

When we step back and look at overall trends in the English department's enrollments and majors, it is clear that the creation of applied offerings like the DNID major has helped it to attract students from groups it has struggled to recruit to some of its more traditional offerings. This growth has helped shore up support for more traditional offerings, enabling them to adapt to better serve students from historically underrepresented groups through new courses and tracks. Collectively, these efforts have helped the department to (a) continue to grow while many other English departments experience steep declines and (b) attract a diverse population of majors overall.

Engaging a Diversifying Student Body in the Humanities

University of South Carolina-Union

Institution Type:

Public Two-year

Type of Intervention:

Curricular Innovations

The University of South Carolina-Union (USC-Union), a small two-year institution that is part of the broader University of South Carolina system, has increased enrollments in the humanities by expanding dual enrollment offerings for high school students and offering humanities courses for students pursuing nursing degrees. These new programs have attracted more students from historically underrepresented groups to the institution, and increased enrollments have led to more resources for the humanities. The institution's growing humanities faculty has leveraged these resources to introduce new courses and co-curricular programming examining the experiences of historically underrepresented communities to foster a more supportive and inclusive environment for its diversifying student body.

USC-Union's dual enrollment program has played a crucial role in attracting students from historically underrepresented groups to the campus and the humanities. Historically, students of color have been underrepresented at USC-Union compared to the overall student population in the USC system, but the gap is now closing. USC-Union faculty established partnerships with 12 regional high schools to offer dual enrollment

courses taught by USC-Union faculty at both the high schools and the USC-Union campus. From Fall 2019 to Fall 2021, USC-Union's Black student population grew by 56.5% following a decline in the preceding years. Most of this growth came through the dual enrollment program—which nearly tripled its Black enrollees during this period. And USC-Union has seen a similar, though less pronounced, pattern among Latinx students, with growth again being disproportionately fueled by the dual enrollment program. In this way, the partnerships with high schools are helping to attract more students from historically underrepresented groups and facilitating their transition to higher education.

Faculty at four-year institutions have raised questions about how such offerings impact subsequent humanities course-taking. Such concerns are especially warranted when dual enrollment programs offer courses that are taught by high school instructors. However, the case of USC-Union illustrates how dual enrollment programs can provide valuable opportunities for community college faculty to turn students on to humanities disciplines not previously taught in these high schools, such as religious studies. For example, through the dual enrollment program and a course designed for nursing students described below, religious studies course enrollments at USC-Union have more than doubled since 2019.

USC-Union's Associates of Science in Nursing degree, introduced in 2014, has also played a key role in the growth of humanities enrollments. Since then, overall enrollment has more than doubled after a long period of incremental growth. Through a partnership with USC-Aiken and Palmetto College, the program prepares USC-Union students to be competitive in applying to a bachelor's of science of nursing program. Importantly, USC-Union has incorporated robust humanities courses that help these nursing students appreciate the value of humanities knowledge and skills.

These courses fulfill humanities course requirements and forefront content and themes of clear relevance for nursing students. These include a new Latin American studies course that explores films from the region to deepen students' cultural frame of reference for understanding an important patient population and a section of a comparative religion course that examines how patients from different religious traditions relate to medical treatment. Associate Dean of Academic Affairs Majdouline Aziz reported that these courses have boosted humanities enrollments while helping nursing students appreciate the value of the humanities for preparing them to provide culturally competent care to patients from diverse backgrounds.

Through their participation in the dual enrollment and pre-nursing programs, humanities faculty have played a key role in driving overall enrollment growth at USC-Union, and this has positioned them well to further expand their offerings. The gains achieved in terms of humanities enrollments, overall enrollment, and representation of Black students encouraged upper administrators to hire a tenure-track African American studies instructor to introduce new courses on African American history and culture. Meanwhile, humanities faculty have played a crucial role in programmatic efforts to foster a more inclusive environment for the growing number of students from historically underrepresented groups drawn by these expanded programs. When USC-Union established a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee to support these efforts, the committee highlighted opportunities to strengthen the humanities curriculum and co-curriculum. The institution responded with funding for events exploring identity issues through the humanities led by speakers from inside and outside the campus community. These included an exhibition of works by local Black artists, a poetry reading, multiple events involving survivors of the Holocaust, and an event promoting women's empowerment with a focus on the experiences of Black women.

This case study illustrates how humanities faculty can benefit from proactive collaboration with cross-campus partners. By lending their support to key institutional initiatives, humanities units at USC-Union have gained

more resources, enabling them to expand. At the same time, humanities faculty are partnering with the Student Academic Success Center, advisors, and admissions and marketing staff to raise awareness about the new courses and increase enrollments in them as quickly as possible. “The great strength of our small campus is that everyone works really well together to support the students and one another’s efforts,” said Aziz. “These partners have been critical in informing students which courses are available in the humanities and how they not only help them meet degree requirements, but also the benefits that these courses offer our students academically, personally, and professionally.” In turn, USC-Union administrators and staff appreciate the important role that faculty in the humanities and humanistic social sciences play in making the campus as welcoming as possible for students from historically underrepresented groups. Looking ahead, campus leaders hope to continue to expand access to humanities courses at USC-Union while fostering equity and inclusion through the humanities curriculum and co-curriculum.

Articulating Career Pathways to Shore Up the English Major Aurora University

Institution Type:

Private Four-year Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI)

Type of Intervention:

Articulating Career Pathways

In hindsight, it seems clear that Aurora University’s English department’s efforts to articulate career pathways helped it to avoid the significant declines in majors, minors, and enrollments experienced by many English departments since the Great Recession in 2008. The department sustained a healthy pipeline of majors throughout the 2010s, consistently attracting about 60 majors per year, a respectable figure for an undergraduate population of 4,000. The department held steady by making a compelling case for the professional value of the English major while expanding its curriculum to better represent growing populations of students from historically underrepresented groups.

Over the course of the last decade, the undergraduate population at Aurora University diversified rapidly. In 2012–2013, it was 70% white; by 2022–2023, a clear majority were students of color. Aurora University earned federal designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institution in 2016 and its undergraduate population is now 39% Latinx. About three quarters of Aurora undergraduates now receive need-based scholarships or grants, up from two thirds in 2012–2013.

The English department launched an internship program in 2011 before many had begun to grasp how dramatically the Great Recession had shifted students’ decision-making about what to study in college. In hindsight, this was a crucial strategic decision that helped the department make the case for the value of the English major to a diversifying student population. Professor Bridgitte Barclay, then a new hire, created the program to fill a perceived gap in her own experience. “I had done a lot of professional writing and copyediting

and public relations work before and during graduate school,” reflected Barclay, “which turned out not to be a great fit for me. I could have learned that much earlier if I had access to this kind of internship program when I was an English major. So as I met people in Aurora who were doing neat work, I’d ask, ‘would you like free labor?’ And I would ask the students what they were interested in and try to find something that fit. It really wasn’t too arduous.” Over the years, student interns have been placed with a wide range of local businesses and cultural organizations, including libraries, theater companies, and independent artists.

As the internship program grew, it became a formal requirement of the English major. The department has worked to foster job-shadowing opportunities as an intermediate step for students who were not immediately prepared for an internship. The department also introduced a one-credit faculty mentoring course for juniors to help students prepare for and make the most of the internship and post-graduate opportunities. Students read literature on career development to prompt reflection on their ongoing internship experiences. They also work on their resumes and identify future internship and job opportunities to apply for. The course culminates in a term paper through which students reflect on their internship experience and future goals, drawing on the discussions and readings.

Meanwhile, the department kept careful track of where alums went on to work. Faculty touted these career outcomes in their recruitment efforts and hosted events where they reflected on how their degree had helped them build successful careers. They also partnered with university communications staff to publish articles such as “Why Become an English Major” and “Jobs for English Majors.” All of these efforts have helped the department maintain a strong position at the institution and diversify its student body.

Importantly, the department also revised its curriculum to be more inclusive and engaging, particularly for students from historically underrepresented groups. They scaled back major requirements in American and British literature to create more space in the curriculum for students to explore literature from other parts of the world. And they introduced new courses that also contribute to affiliated programs in Latinx studies, Black studies, gender studies, and environmental studies, such as Gender and Literature, The Harlem Renaissance, and Environmental Research and Writing: Popular Science and Advocacy. The result was a curriculum that better represented the full range of identities and experiences of students and more clearly signaled opportunities for students to explore issues they care about through literature.

Barclay observed that the department was able to come together to support these curricular and co-curricular innovations. She and one of her colleagues stepped up to take on most of the work involved in running the internship program, which has grown over time as the process has become more formalized. Other faculty are less involved, but they have been supportive nonetheless. Select faculty members’ expertise and interests position them to introduce new courses affiliated with area studies programs, while faculty focusing on British and American literature have supported the reforming of the curriculum to incorporate a wider range of voices, contexts, and experiences. This is a story of a department working proactively in a united way to meet the needs and interests of a diversifying student body. As a result, they were able to avoid the declines experienced by many English departments after the Great Recession, attracting a steady and increasingly diverse population of majors to buck national trends. “There’s always new challenges,” said Barclay. “But there’s been no panic and no huge push. It’s been a gradual process that fortunately everyone has been receptive to.”

A look back at the English department in the context of the rapid diversification of the university and national declines in English majors and enrollments illustrates how (a) concerted efforts to connect students to career pathways and (b) the expansion of the curriculum to better represent students’ identities and experiences have

been critical to its sustained success. In these ways, the department has expanded access to the humanities as larger populations of students from historically underrepresented groups, particularly Latinx students, have gained access to the university.

Cultivating a Pipeline for Underserved Students Cuyahoga Community College

Institution Type:

Public Two-year

Type of Intervention:

Curricular Innovations Cultivating a Marketing Mindset
Fostering Humanities Identity & Community

Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) leveraged a grant from the Mandel Foundation to create and endow the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Humanities Center, which supports multiple initiatives designed to attract at-risk students to the college and the humanities. The Mandel Scholars Academy, which was launched in 2016, is the cornerstone. It offers comprehensive support to students as they pursue a distinct curriculum focused on the humanities, leadership, and civic engagement and participate in a wide range of co-curricular humanities activities. In addition, the Mandel Youth Humanities Academy was created in 2022 to provide an immersive humanities summer experience for 30 high school students from the surrounding area.

Through both programs, the center has been intentional about extending these opportunities to the students who need them most. “We primarily target underserved populations,” Tri-C Dean of Humanities Matt Jordan, who leads the center, explained. “Our goal is to identify students who have the potential to flourish as humanities students but don’t realize it yet. This shapes our marketing efforts: there are many very good schools in our area with very good students to whom we have not reached out. Instead, we target high schools that typically send maybe 40-60% of their students on to college after graduation.”

The center provides funding for up to 200 Mandel Scholars (100 per class year), which includes full tuition and covers expenses such as books and co-curricular activities. Its mission is to “cultivate civic-minded leaders who have thought broadly and deeply about the human experience.” To achieve this, students take a required three-course sequence: a fairly traditional survey course called *The Individual in Society*, a course that explores the history of Cleveland, and a project-based capstone *Community Engagement Through the Humanities*. Mandel Scholars are not required to be humanities majors, and they have a wide range of academic and professional interests. These courses help the humanities come alive for students by focusing on issues they care about in both local and global contexts and applying humanities knowledge and skills to hands-on projects that benefit their community.

Each section of the capstone works collaboratively with a local cultural and/or civic organization to complete a project that serves the organization’s needs and goals. Examples of community partners include Literary Cleveland,

the Museum of Contemporary Art–Cleveland, and the local YWCA. “Our partner gives us some kind of question that they’re trying to answer, a project that they want to complete, or a problem they’re trying to solve, that, in most cases, they do not have the human resources to address right now,” said Jordan. “We try to keep sections of the class quite small, usually capping them at eight students each, because the central focus is getting the students to work together as a team to solve a problem.” Meanwhile, the professor crafts a course that runs parallel to the project. For example, a section that worked with sustainable agriculture nonprofit City Fresh helped revise their HR policies while reading Wendell Berry’s work on agricultural ethics. Many of these projects are then featured on the Mandel Center’s podcast, *More Human*, as part of its broader programming on humanities projects in Northeast Ohio.

As they complete the three-course sequence, students are also required to participate each semester in three humanities-based co-curricular activities of their choosing. “We put together a big menu of options; here’s 80 different activities, pick three and enjoy,” said Jordan. Examples range from trips to the local art museum to events hosted by the philosophy club involving guest speakers. “We try to keep these activities small, because we want the students to be able to connect with each other and have a real conversation.” Each activity is chaperoned by humanities faculty or Mandel Center staff, who frame the activity in relation to the humanities and civic leadership and facilitate a 30–60 minute discussion afterwards. The Mandel Center endowment also provides funding for more involved excursions. For example, the center has supported day-long field trips to the Detroit Institute of Art and a study abroad experience in literature and philosophy in Oxford, England. For the past five years, the Mandel Center has sponsored a five-day Civil Rights tour of Alabama that brings approximately 25 students to historical sites and museums related to the Civil Rights Movement.

The Mandel Scholars Academy has encouraged students to persist toward a four-year degree after they earn their associate’s degree and continue to study the humanities once there. Many take advantage of a streamlined transfer pathway to Cleveland State University. “The Mandel Scholars generally go on for more education,” said Jordan. “For example, one student who’s now at Cleveland State came here planning to be a dental hygienist. Now he’s planning to become an immigration lawyer, and it’s because of his experience in our program. New horizons—both in terms of what kinds of options are out there, and what’s possible *for him*—were opened to him through the Mandel Scholars Academy.”

Through the Mandel Center’s other major program for students, the Mandel Youth Humanities Academy, Tri-C is opening horizons in the humanities for students from underserved high schools in the hopes that they will persist on to college. “The way that we have framed this program, the ideal student is somebody who’s not totally sure college is for them, right?” said Jordan. “We intentionally didn’t buy any advertising, because we didn’t want a bunch of applications from our elite high schools and from students who, frankly, don’t really need our help. And we try to be fairly clear, with the schools we work with that we’re looking for that student who is not so sure whether college is for them.”

Participating students complete a nine-week seminar at the Mandel Center that includes visits to humanities sites around town. It is organized around themes such as the examined life, beauty, and morality. They receive stipends to offset the opportunity cost of foregoing a summer job. Outreach seeks to show, rather than tell, students what this experience can do for them. Program Director David Busch meets with prospective students, virtually or in-person, and walks them through an interactive, mini-lesson exploring Plato’s allegory of the cave. In this way, students are introduced to philosophy and other humanities disciplines with which they may be unfamiliar in an inviting, engaging way.

Through these two engaging programs and highly intentional outreach, the Mandel Center is able to expand access to the humanities among underserved students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Underserved really is the operative word here, since attending an under-resourced high school is a primary recruitment criterion, whether that school be urban or rural. “I’m very much in the classical liberal mode as an educator and believe really strongly in helping students to encounter ideas and see different perspectives,” said Jordan. “But I think there’s also a political and a strategic argument on behalf of that sort of approach. We are a large multi-campus institution. Our four campuses are in very different communities and serve populations that are diverse in every sense of the word. I believe that part of the success that we’ve had stems from the fact that we just can’t be described as ideological or beholden to one political party or the other. I think that helps.” In this context, the Mandel Center has built an exacting equity approach into its work that serves the full range of underserved students in Northeast Ohio by inviting those whose access to the humanities is most limited to immerse themselves in the humanities in highly accessible ways. “We are open enrollment and, frankly, most of our students have not been well prepared by their K–12 educational experience to study the humanities, regardless of demographic considerations,” Jordan noted. The Mandel Center has leveraged the resources provided by the Mandel Foundation to build programs that are succeeding in attracting underserved students to study in the humanities as preparation for civic leadership.

Creating Engaging and Inclusive Gen Ed Courses

UMass Boston

Institution Type:

Public Four-year Research University
Asian American and Native American
Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI)

Type of Intervention:

Curricular Innovations

The High-Impact Humanities Initiative (HIH) at the University of Massachusetts, Boston has revitalized the university’s humanities gen ed curriculum in ways that make the curriculum more inclusive, accessible, and inviting to a highly diverse student population. In *Strategies for Recruiting Students to the Humanities: A Comprehensive Resource*, we outlined the initiative, describing how funds from a Mellon Foundation grant were redistributed to faculty in the form of \$5,000 course development stipends to incentivize them to create 24 exciting new gen ed courses as part of mutually supportive cohorts of faculty grantees. Grant funds were also made available to support the infusion of career readiness content, guest speakers, and field trips into existing courses. In these ways, the initiative empowered instructors to connect course content to important and relevant work in the city of Boston. As a result, students were able to see opportunities for applying the knowledge and skills imparted through the courses to enrich their communities.

Here, we take an in-depth look at survey responses from 242 students enrolled in HIH courses between Fall 2020 and Spring 2022 to examine how these innovative courses are shifting students' perceptions of the humanities, particularly for students from historically underrepresented groups. The diversity of our sample generally exceeded that of the broader University of Massachusetts, Boston student population: 27% of respondents identified as Black (compared to 16% overall), 21% as Asian (15% overall), 16% as Latinx (17% overall), and 68% as first-generation (59% overall). More than 70% of respondents indicated that the primary reason they took their course was to fulfill a gen ed requirement. And 70% reported that they had declared a major outside the humanities, with another 5% having not yet declared a major. In sum, this is a highly diverse, majority first-generation population of students that seems to have been more motivated by gen ed requirements than pre-existing interest in the humanities.

While students may have entered these HIH courses with little interest in the humanities, post-course surveys abound with examples of how the courses' themes and content resonated with students' experiences, interests, values, and aspirations, engendering appreciation for the relevance of the humanities to their lives. Many course titles announced their exploration of issues of identity and social justice through a wide variety of media and cultural contexts: Asian American Cinema; The History of Hip Hop and Hip Hop as History; Literature and the Arts of the Islamic World; Meditation Traditions of Asia; Enlivening Cultural and Gender Identities Through Dress; and Building Language Justice: Translation, Migration, and Linguistic Human Rights. More than 90% of survey respondents agreed that their course enabled them to pursue questions of personal interest to them.

Moreover, students came away from these courses with a greatly enhanced understanding of how the humanities can be applied in the "real world." Nearly 95% agreed that the experience helped them more clearly perceive how humanities knowledge and skills can be applied outside the university; 87% indicated it helped them perceive how they would help them in their careers. And 82% indicated that it made them want to take more classes in the humanities. A first-year multiracial student who indicated that she strongly agrees with all of the previous statements reflected on her experience taking three HIH courses: "All of my humanities courses in general were outstanding. My conception of the humanities has changed as a result in that there is a lot to learn about life and career choices while also learning how to be a better human being." Her experience of the Building Language Justice course in particular led her to consider adding a minor. Similarly, a first-generation Latina psychology major in the Meditation Traditions of Asia course reported, "I felt like I got a deeper understanding of meditation traditions and their history. It helped me see how humanities can be applied in everyday life and my future career. I am [now] interested in learning more about meditation and how it can be used in therapy."

Students also expressed appreciation for opportunities to explore issues of personal identity through course themes. For example, a first-generation Black Latina student described her experience in the Building Language Justice course as an "eye-opener." "This class helped me feel good about where I come from and my identity," she wrote. "[It] has taught me the importance of the humanities in everyday life and [I'm taking that] experience into consideration on how to include my cultural identity into my career goals." Another Black Latina student majoring in biology indicated the course made her want to add a minor. "I feel more engaged with world issues surrounding language justice and other social issues and am more mindful of the work that can be done in our own community and on campus especially," she wrote.

Turning to the hip hop history course, many students expressed appreciation for the way it demonstrated the power of the humanities for uncovering hidden layers of meaning surrounding a familiar cultural form. "I feel like this class made me learn so much more about hip hop that I never even thought about," a first-generation Latino criminology major wrote. "It changed my conception of humanities because it made me realize that there are a lot of topics that are connected with humanities, [which] change the way I see things in life." Another student, a

Black male IT major, emphasized the depth of intellectual engagement experienced in the course: “I would recommend this course because it is engaging. The unit assignments all required critical thought and the ability to form arguments with supporting evidence. It’s a great course.”

Students from varying backgrounds enrolled in different courses expressed appreciation for the opportunity to explore unfamiliar cultures in great depth. “I learned a lot through Islamic art and literature,” wrote a first-generation Asian female biology major. “I would recommend this course to students who would like to dive into a different type of literature from typical English literature. Great course overall!” And a first-generation Latina student in the course *Exploring Identity and Dress* reflected: “I didn’t think Humanities were interesting to me, mainly because I never really looked into it. But after taking this class, I learned a lot about human geography and other cultures and I think everyone should take this class.”

Students also noted with appreciation how these courses filled critical gaps in their education, providing more complete and accurate narratives that resonated with their experiences. A first-generation male of Asian descent enrolled in *Asian American Cinema* applauded how the course “provides a safe haven for many of us to study about the less popular side of U.S. history regarding the Asian population.” He noted how the course helped him appreciate how the humanities help him “to understand more about why something is the way it is and that there’s more beneath that than what I casually see.” Similarly, a Black female student in *Building Language Justice* celebrated how the class “made me think about discrimination and racism more in depth” and how they are “embedded in our language and how we consume it.”

Across the board, these data illustrate how HIH has succeeded in achieving positive shifts in perceptions of the humanities among students from historically underrepresented groups. By incentivizing and supporting the development of exciting new courses and mandating that they be steered through the gen ed certification process, the initiative generated dozens of new opportunities for students to explore the humanities through topics that resonated with their interests while fulfilling degree requirements. And the emphasis on imbuing these courses with high-impact practices that clearly illustrate opportunities for applying humanities knowledge and skills in the real world helped overcome student skepticism regarding the practical value of such courses. These interventions helped make these courses accessible and relevant for a broad range of students. Crucially, students from historically underrepresented groups also clearly appreciated the way the courses helped them explore a diverse range of cultures and marginalized identities, facilitate reflection on inequality and discrimination, and identify opportunities for promoting social justice. Through these data, we see how both the individual courses and the broader HIH curriculum development model offer promising approaches for expanding access to the humanities.

Investing in Recruitment and Innovative Curricula University of Arizona

Institution Type:

Public Four-year Research University
Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI)

Type of Intervention:

Articulating Career Pathways Curricular Innovations
Cultivating a Marketing Mindset

In a decade when many humanities divisions have experienced decline, the College of Humanities (COH) at the University of Arizona has grown at an impressive rate. In Fall 2010 (prior to the implementation of a new financial model on campus—see below), the college had 1,089 majors. As of Fall 2021, the college had 1,972 majors—an 81% increase, compared to an increase of approximately 15% for the undergraduate population as a whole. Moreover, the college has consistently maintained a faculty and student body that are more diverse than the university’s as a whole. Recent data showed that 53% of COH students identified as Asian, Black, Latinx, Native American, or Pacific Islander compared to 50% of the broader university student population. More strikingly, 54% of the COH faculty are faculty of color compared to 25% of the university faculty as a whole. Adapting to meet the needs and aspirations of students from historically underrepresented groups, including large populations of Latinx and first-generation students, has been crucial to the college’s remarkable success.

There are many examples of how the College of Humanities has adapted to meet a diverse student body where they are. In *Strategies for Recruiting Students to the Humanities: A Comprehensive Resource*, we highlighted the rapid growth of the Department of Public and Applied Humanities. The department, which COH established in 2017, has created eleven distinct tracks (as of Fall 2024) through partnerships with other colleges and schools across the university—including the Colleges of Management; Public Health; Agriculture and Life Sciences; Architecture, Planning, & Landscape Architecture; Engineering; Medicine; Social & Behavioral Science; and Applied Science & Technology; as well as the Schools of Information and Human Ecology. In the chapter on “Cultivating a Marketing Mindset,” we noted how the college has tackled misconceptions about humanities majors’ job prospects more broadly through compelling, high-quality promotional media and programming, through which alums testify to the value of their humanities background for their work in a wide variety of careers.

In this case study, we describe the broader strategic vision that led the college to make such substantial investments in curricular innovation and marketing and to build recruitment into its management structure, which has helped it to attract a large number of students from historically underrepresented groups. COH Associate Dean of Research & Program Innovation Ken McAllister reflected on the synergy achieved through COH’s efforts to promote innovation, outreach, and inclusion: “From the creation of exciting new degrees and research centers to taking out billboards on major highways promoting the idea that ‘Humanities = Jobs,’ we all work constantly not only to grow the number of humanities majors, but also to ensure that the diversity of our college—its faculty, students, and program offerings—continues to expand.”

COH began investing in recruitment, marketing, and curricular initiatives when the university switched to a RCM budget model that gave the college full control of its budget for the first time. While the university as a whole recently suffered a significant budget crisis and is moving to a new budget model, the growth achieved by COH under RCM nonetheless illustrates how investments in recruitment and curricular collaborations with other colleges can increase humanities enrollments, particularly among students from historically underrepresented groups.

The budgetary autonomy extended to all colleges at the university through RCM made it easier for COH to form the mutually beneficial partnerships upon which the public and applied humanities curriculum is founded. COH has established transparent agreements with each of the ten participating partner colleges, in which each unit keeps the revenue from every course it contributes to the program, while COH and the Department of Public and Applied Humanities receive additional revenue for administering the degree. “It’s opened up new opportunities for meaningful collaboration,” McAllister said. “The humanities will survive—and thrive—by adapting, and doing so at UArizona has given us numerous opportunities to experiment and fund initiatives that we think signal the future of the humanities.”

At the same time, COH has leveraged its budgetary autonomy to make greater investments in the everyday work of marketing and recruitment. “From day one, COH Dean Alain-Philippe Durand has been forward-thinking about recruitment because he appreciates that attracting students is fundamentally a marketing challenge,” said McAllister. “You have to help the faculty and staff see the importance of connecting the humanities to the careers students want to pursue. But there is often a worry that . . . faculty and department heads will suddenly have to become marketing and sales experts instead of teachers and researchers.” Upon his hire, Durand immediately began building up the college’s marketing team, then created a full-time undergraduate recruitment position. This recruitment specialist regularly visits area high schools and works with the dean, departments, advisors, and communications staff to brainstorm and implement recruitment projects and events. COH now has a robust calendar of more than six events per semester and a Humanities Ambassadors Program, which mobilizes majors in the college to make the case for the humanities to prospective students.

Meanwhile, the college has sent a clear message to faculty that their own recruitment efforts are important, valued, and recognized. For example, a college-wide grant program was created to provide multiple \$5,000 awards each year for outreach initiatives, which complement a roughly equal number of grants for teaching innovation and research. Every department now has at least one faculty member or staffer assigned to recruitment tasks, and beginning in Fall 2022, the college implemented a new program designed to train interested faculty and staff in the work of student recruitment. Recruitment training will also become standard for all graduate teaching assistants, which the college hopes will not only help generate new humanities majors at UArizona, but will also prepare students who are looking toward careers in the professoriate to provide leadership in humanities recruitment for other colleges and universities down the line.

The college’s Faculty Development Institute (FDI), which serves to educate faculty about the inner workings of the university and elevate new leaders, played an important role in securing buy-in from the faculty for this new vision. In one FDI workshop, the Assistant Dean for Business & Finance and COH leadership teach humanities faculty how to glean salient information from the publicly available yet notoriously complex university budget so that the ways that funds flow through the institution become less mysterious, more transparent, and ultimately a source of innovation. The institute has also consistently offered workshops that delve into the particular roles and functions of staff and administrators. As a result, “faculty learn to appreciate the jobs others are doing and why those positions are necessary for the health of their departments, the college, and the campus,” said McAllister.

“We rarely hear top-heavy critiques anymore. It was much easier for faculty to understand the importance of good marketing once they understood details like these, help[ing] them see how these investments could lead directly to more—not fewer—resources for them.”

As a result of this education campaign, most faculty now see clearly how effective collaboration with advisors, the recruitment specialist, and marketing and communications staff can help yield more students and thus more room in departmental budgets to fund priorities. “Our staff colleagues are among the most valuable partners we have because they see the widest diversity of students and can most easily and personally share our mission and vision with them,” explained McAllister. “We’re all in this together.”

Empowering Students Through Community Engagement University of Illinois Chicago

Institution Type:

Public Four-year Research University Asian American and Native American Pacific
Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI)
Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI)

Type of Intervention:

Curricular Innovations Cultivating a Marketing Mindset
Fostering Humanities Identity & Community

The Engaged Humanities Initiative (EHI) at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), both a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI), has enticed a diverse population of students to take a sequence of humanities courses rich in experiential learning and pursue their own publicly engaged research projects.

Funded by the Mellon Foundation, the initiative advertises opportunities for students to connect with a community of faculty mentors and peers and use the tools of the humanities to make their voices heard. Identity, community, civic engagement, and research are key selling points for the EHI. The website emphasizes how its “small seminar-style courses allow for faculty-student mentorship and peer interaction,” helping students “learn more about how to conduct research in the humanities and connect the course material to [their lives]” and “make a positive difference in the UIC and broader communities.”

Importantly, students are welcomed into EHI through seminars that fulfill gen ed requirements. HUM 120 courses, which fulfill a first-year writing assignment, engage timely topics of student interests. Course titles include: Social Justice and the Politics of Information; Police Culture: Mass Entertainment and the Production of

Law; and Pandemics + Climate Change + Hate: What in the World is Going on? These feed into HUM 201 courses that similarly fulfill additional requirements while exploring issues such as Narratives of Displacement and Belonging, Collaborative Digital Storytelling and the Ethics of Representation, and Refuge, Race, and Resistance. Students in these EHI seminars visit cultural and community organizations throughout Chicago and have access to funding for additional self-directed experiential learning.

NHA partnered with EHI to survey 55 students in these HUM courses from Fall 2021 to Spring 2023 to learn how timely, ripped-from-the-headlines courses enriched by experiential learning with community partners helped to shift their perceptions of the humanities. The sample of survey respondents reflected a diverse student population—39% identified as first-generation college students, 37% identified as Hispanic or Latinx, 32% identified as Asian, and 11% identified as Black or African American. These courses also attracted students with a wide range of academic interests. Only 18% of respondents had declared humanities majors; 68% indicated they had declared majors outside the humanities, with 13% undeclared. Seventy-three percent indicated that the primary reason they took the course was to fulfill a gen ed requirement rather than a pre-existing interest in humanities content.

EHI gateway seminars succeeded in persuading students to pursue additional courses in the humanities. Four out of five respondents who took a HUM 120 seminar indicated that they wanted to continue on to HUM 201. More broadly, 88% of students surveyed in either course said that the experience made them want to take more classes in the humanities. “I didn’t really understand what the humanities were before,” reflected one student, “but I am extremely interested now.” Another student shared, “It has opened up some thought about engaging in different subjects that I have not previously found interesting.”

The courses’ experiential learning components and engagement with community partners helped shift students’ perceptions about the applicability of humanities knowledge and skills. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the experience helped them understand how humanities knowledge and skills can be applied outside the university (90%), understand how the humanities can help them in their careers (93%), and see how knowledge and skills gained through the humanities help them to better serve their communities (90%). A female student of Asian descent described how learning from community organizations about “the projects they’ve been working on [and] their reasons for engaging in these projects ... got me thinking [and] increased my curiosity on the subject.” A Black female student described how she had begun working with social justice organizations she had discovered through the course. “[It] showed me a lot of organizations that I did not know existed in Chicago,” she reflected. “Now I feel I am more well-connected and can advocate better for Chicago’s needs.”

Students appreciated how the courses encouraged them to become more active citizens and to make their voices heard. Respondents were asked whether their experience in the course had directly affected their likelihood of engaging in a variety of civic behaviors. Sixty-nine percent indicated that the experience made them more likely to vote in local elections with the remaining 31% indicating “no change,” likely because they had already planned to do so. Fifty-nine percent indicated that the experience made them more likely to recruit others to participate in a community or civic activity, with the rest indicating no change. And 80% indicated that they were more likely to volunteer with a local organization. “I have become a lot more curious and involved with my environment and community thanks to this course as it allowed me to become more aware of issues and events going on around me,” elaborated one first-generation Latina student.

These shifts in perspective are further reinforced by opportunities for students to conduct their own publicly engaged research, both within EHI seminars and through the fellowship opportunities afforded to those who complete them. Students are coached on research skills and encouraged to experiment with alternatives to

traditional research papers. And funding is made available to enable them to attend museums, performances, and events on campus that inform their projects. When asked whether this funding was beneficial, respondents described how it propelled them forward. “The funding encouraged me to prioritize campus life instead of taking the first bus home,” shared one first-generation multiracial student. “It encouraged me to be invested in the things occurring on campus and enjoy them at a greater level.” Overall, 90% of respondents indicated that their EHI seminar experience made them interested in conducting research on issues that affect their communities.

After completing HUM 201, students are invited to apply for EHI fellowships that enable them to engage in more robust research projects. They work with the program director and coordinator to develop a detailed plan for a summer research project, identify a faculty mentor to supervise it, and eventually present their completed project to the campus community. For example, one student developed a course module for K–12 students that compared the Haymarket Riot of 1886 to Black Lives Matter protests in Chicago.

As seniors, these EHI fellows become mentors for subsequent EHI cohorts, helping to build momentum for the program. “They’re by far our best ambassadors,” said program director Ellen McClure. As one student testified, “Seeing others passionate about this certain thing, made me want to make a difference and take part in enacting change.”

In all these ways, EHI appeals to a diverse student population by demonstrating how the humanities offer tools for advancing understanding of issues impacting their communities and making their voices heard. Ninety percent of respondents agreed that their EHI class helped them think about themselves and the communities they are part of in new ways. Respondents elaborated on this point from a variety of perspectives. “As a minority, it really encouraged me to learn more about my history and roots . . . I have used a lot of the things I have learned in this class and have applied it to my own life,” reflected one Latina student. “I feel like my EHI classes were affirming to my interest in research topics that involve the Black community,” noted one African American female student. Another student reflected, “I was able to contribute my perspective of each topic from the mindset of a Muslim, Hijabi, female.” A Latino student shared that their EHI course “has shown me that there is a space for me in [the humanities] and that I can be a person who makes an actual impact, instead of being the static and impotent person I had always thought myself to be.” Clearly, many students felt empowered by EHI’s invitation to participate in self-directed, publicly engaged research. Through the experience, they came to see the humanities as valuable for pursuing their personal, professional, and civic goals.



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