

Strategies for Recruiting Students to the Humanities:

A COMPREHENSIVE RESOURCE

STUDY THE
HUMANITIES



Strategies for Recruiting Students to the Humanities

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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 200 member organizations, including: colleges, universities, libraries, museums, cultural organizations, state humanities councils, and scholarly, professional, and higher education associations. It is the only organization that brings together the U.S. humanities community as a whole.

The NHA is a 501(c)(4) non-profit association and is strictly nonpartisan. The National Humanities Alliance Foundation is the 501(c)(3) supporting foundation of the National Humanities Alliance. It works to research and communicate the value of the humanities to a range of audiences including elected officials and the general public. This resource is a product of the National Humanities Alliance Foundation's *Study the Humanities* initiative, which is funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Introduction

This resource presents a range of strategies gathered from campuses around the country to support faculty and administrators in recruiting undergraduates to study the humanities. After a decade of widespread decline in humanities majors and enrollments and in the face of formidable new pressures precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for effective humanities recruitment strategies has never been clearer. Fortunately, in this moment of dramatic cultural upheaval and an era defined by seismic economic, social, institutional, and intellectual shifts, there are countless opportunities to demonstrate the enduring value of the humanities anew.

Indeed, humanists around the country have been busy developing strategies to attract more students to the humanities. However, knowledge of these efforts rarely extends beyond their originating campus. This resource aims to document and disseminate these strategies to the wider humanities community to strengthen recruitment efforts and ensure that future generations of students have access to the humanities. We encourage you to take inspiration from the strategies and models presented to imagine what might be possible on your campus.

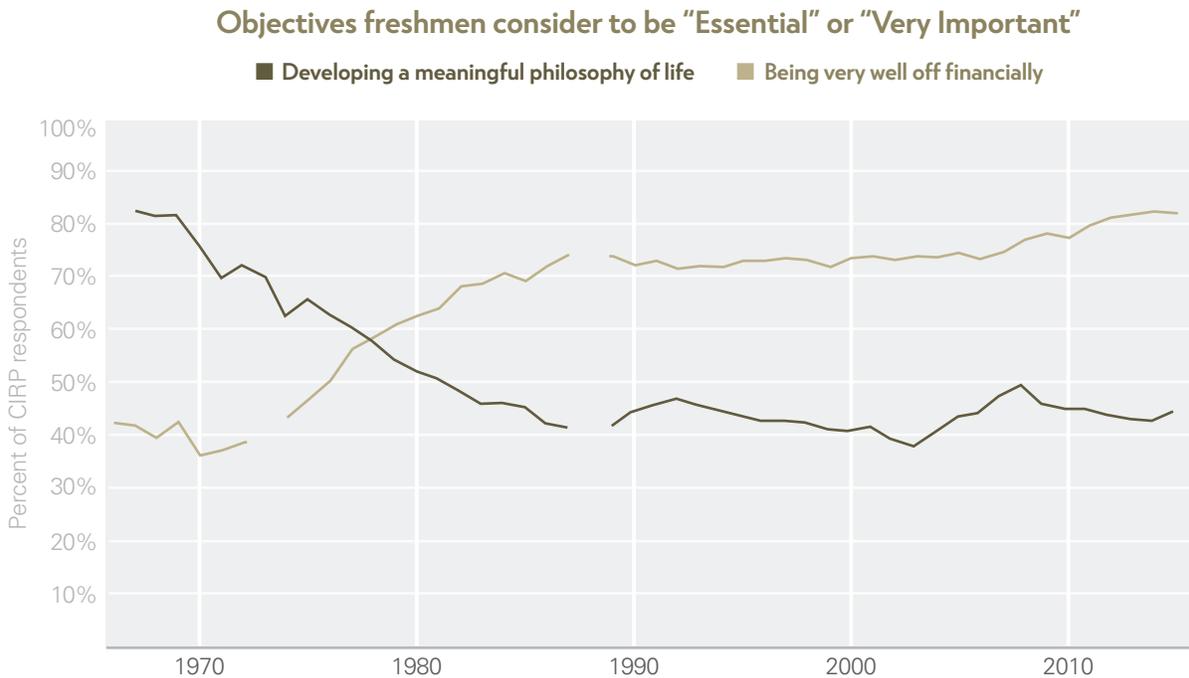
The Context

It is well-documented that the recent decline in humanities majors and enrollments was precipitated by the financial crisis of 2008. Unemployment skyrocketed and hit young adults hardest. Anxieties about securing a job post-graduation rose to a fever pitch that hardly abated despite a decade of steady improvement in employment figures prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

But the roots of this vocational shift in higher education are both deeper and broader: student priorities have been shifting from intrinsic educational aims toward extrinsic financial goals since 1970 (see Figure 1.1); meanwhile, rising costs, declining public and private funding, and plateauing student enrollment have increased institutional dependence on tuition, placing an ever-growing debt burden on students. For example, the student share of revenue at public institutions rose from 35.7% in 2008 to 46% in 2019.¹ Many students had no choice but to carefully weigh the return on this increasingly costly investment. In this context, students interested in the humanities have been dissuaded from choosing a humanities major by misleading tropes about humanities job prospects.

¹ <https://shef.sheeo.org/report/>

Figure 1.1.
Responses from American freshmen to the CIRP survey, 1970-2015.



Source: Eagan, M. K., Stolzenberg, E. B., Ramirez, J. J., Aragon, M. C., Suchard, M. R., & Rios-Aguilar, C. (2016). *The American freshman: Fifty-Year trends, 1966–2015*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

In light of these trends, we began surveying faculty and administrators to better understand the challenges they faced in attracting students to the humanities and the strategies they had adopted to address these challenges. In 2018, we distributed a pilot survey that garnered 72 responses. We found that faculty and administrators were hungry for strategies for shifting student perceptions and eager to learn about approaches that have worked on other campuses. To fill this need, we distributed a revised and expanded Humanities Recruitment Survey (HRS) in 2019, which, to date, has yielded more than 400 responses from over 300 institutions.

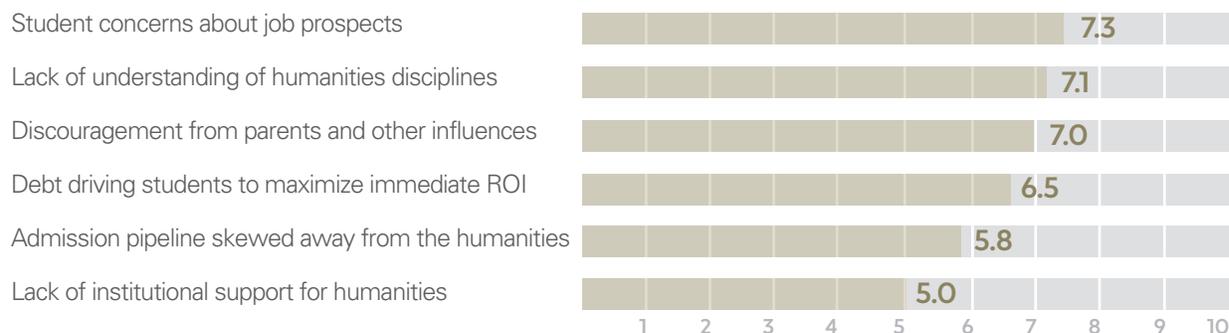
Research and Methodology

Responses to both the HRS and the pilot survey confirmed the need for a comprehensive view of the field of undergraduate humanities recruitment. Respondents indicated that they were redoubling their recruitment efforts in the face of considerable challenges. Some reported experimenting with new approaches without a clear understanding of which were most effective. As one respondent stated, “[it] feels like throwing a million things at a wall, with no sense of where efforts would best pay off.” Others were just getting started, eager for models they might adapt to their campuses. We also received enthusiastic responses from those who had discovered effective strategies and were excited to share them to benefit others. For example, one respondent wrote, “we are at a point in our efforts that demands a wider perspective and more communication and planning with other campuses and larger national efforts.”

The quantitative data presented in the [2020 Humanities Recruitment Survey](#) report further demonstrates the need to share recruitment strategies. We asked faculty and administrators about the challenges they face in attracting students to the humanities (see Figure 1.2). As highlighted in the 2020 HRS report, we found it striking that respondents' evaluations of the challenges hardly varied across different types of institutions. These results suggest that successful strategies could be fruitfully adapted to different kinds of institutions.

Figure 1.2.

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



After asking respondents about challenges, we asked them to describe the strategies they had implemented to address those challenges. Of the responses we received to the HRS and our pilot survey, respondents from 267 distinct institutions shared substantive descriptions of strategies. As Table 1.1 illustrates, the resulting sample includes a diverse range of institutions.

Table 1.1.

The 267 institutions in our qualitative data set by institution type. Respondents who were surveyed through the HRS self-reported their institution type (n=209). Some respondents may not have selected all of the types pertaining to their institution. The remaining 58 institutions represent those who responded to our pilot survey and were not asked to report institution type. We retroactively categorized their institution using the Carnegie Classification of Institutions.

Institution Type	Count
Four-year institution	217
Two-year institution	31
Public institution	124
Private institution	107
Minority-serving institution	60

We analyzed the qualitative data using an iterative, inductive coding process and identified four primary categories of recruitment strategies (see Table 1.2). Efforts to articulate career pathways (44%), curricular innovations (36%), and marketing initiatives (30%) were by far the most commonly reported recruitment strategies. Respondents also presented distinct and compelling cases for fostering humanities identity and community (12%).

Table 1.2.

Qualitative coding results. HRS and pilot survey responses from 267 institutions were analyzed; some strategies fit multiple categories.

	Count	% Reporting
Articulating Career Pathways	117	44%
Curricular Innovations	96	36%
Cultivating a Marketing Mindset	79	30%
Fostering Humanities Identity & Community	31	12%

Beyond analyzing our survey responses, we have conducted additional research. We have interviewed project directors to learn more about how they have built and sustained successful programs. For a select group of initiatives emblematic of trends in the field, we have partnered with project directors to survey and interview students to better understand the impact of their initiatives on students' course-taking and perceptions of the humanities. Selected results from several of these partnerships appear throughout this resource as Impact Research Spotlights, highlighting quantitative and qualitative data to provide insights into the impact of innovative humanities initiatives.

While a major goal of the project is to identify effective strategies in attracting more students to the humanities, we acknowledge that evaluating recruitment success is not an exact science. In this resource, we report hard measures of recruitment success like enrollment figures when available, while

recognizing that humanities recruitment success looks different depending on the contextual factors for individual institutions, such as enrollment trends or changing student populations. Consequently, we also rely on the observations of survey respondents about what appears to be working on their campus. In some cases, we report on initiatives that seem to be generating enthusiasm and momentum, but are too new to have measurable outcomes.

It should also be noted that our foundational data set for the project was collected before the COVID-19 pandemic. We present initiatives in the forms in which they appeared before social distancing measures were imposed with the assumption that they will return to a similar format once social distancing measures are lifted. While some projects may need to adapt to post-pandemic realities, the examples of the initiatives explored in this resource are likely to continue to be useful as models.

Using this Resource

In the chapters that follow, we highlight models that illuminate the range of approaches within the four primary categories of strategies. We outline these sub-categories of strategies through *Project Snapshots*—brief descriptions of distinct initiatives at different institutions—and *Voices from the Field*—quotes drawn from the HRS on the value of the strategy at hand. *Impact Research Spotlights* illustrate key student outcomes through quantitative and qualitative data gathered through our impact research partnerships. Each chapter concludes with in-depth *Case Studies* of particularly robust initiatives that offer models for integrating strategies, engaging students, and building partnerships to make initiatives sustainable.

In a final section on “Next Steps,” we lay out a research agenda for supporting the humanities community in proactively engaging students from historically underrepresented groups and removing barriers in recruitment efforts and throughout their college careers. In each of the following chapters, we see individual examples of curricula, programming, and marketing initiatives that are intentional about communicating that individuals from all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds belong in the humanities community. More broadly, many of these strategies seek to remove barriers to studying the humanities—such as concerns about career prospects, return on investment, and the applicability of humanities knowledge and skills—that we might assume have disproportionately impacted historically underrepresented groups of students. But there is far more work to be done in understanding which approaches resonate with underrepresented students, including racial and ethnic minorities, first-generation college students, community college transfers, and recent immigrants. In the next phase of our research, we will investigate this question.

Throughout the chapters that follow, we point to initiatives of varying scale from a wide variety of contexts to ensure that readers—regardless of their position, institutional context, and access to resources—will find models that can be readily implemented within their particular context. Many of the models presented can also be scaled up or down, adapted across different types of institutions, and modified to fit within a shoestring budget. We hope that this resource will inspire faculty and administrators to think creatively about how to best implement these strategies on their campuses to attract more students to the humanities.

Articulating Career Pathways

Respondents to our Humanities Recruitment Survey (HRS) rated “student concerns about job prospects” the most influential challenge to recruiting students to take humanities courses or major in the humanities. This primary challenge is also arguably humanities advocates’ greatest opportunity. As the data featured in our *Study the Humanities* toolkit demonstrate, humanities majors’ career outcomes remain strong. And futurists predict that demand for humanities skills will increase considerably. The problem, then, is perception more than reality; as one HRS respondent stated, “there is not a clear narrative about how a humanities major or minor translates into a career.” Additionally, there is the related challenge of persuading students unlikely to major or minor in the humanities that additional humanities courses will enhance their job prospects.

We are of course familiar with arguments that efforts to articulate the vocational utility of the humanities compromise the intrinsic aims of humanities education. But through our collaborative research with faculty and administrators across the country, we have found that helping humanities students discern how they can apply the skills they’ve gained enhances humanities education in its own right.

In this chapter, we provide an overview of the range of strategies faculty and administrators are employing to *articulate* humanities career pathways—in both senses of the word. Some approaches seek to change perceptions, disabusing students and their parents of inaccurate beliefs about humanities students’ career prospects and replacing them with a richer and more precise picture of the wide variety of viable career pathways and widely transferable skills. Others focus on improving outcomes by better preparing humanities majors for the job market and connecting them to employment opportunities.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“Our main challenge lies with student perceptions of the humanities. Many students don’t believe it’s a viable college choice in today’s career market.”

— Eve Zimmerman, Director, The Suzy Newhouse Center for the Humanities, Wellesley College

“Students stay away from humanities majors because they are told by parents (or they think themselves) that they will not be able to get a job. We have to convince them that humanities degrees can yield sustainable jobs in a variety of fields and that the skills they will learn (critical reading/writing/research) are highly valued.”

— Bonnie Miller, Professor of American Studies, University of Massachusetts, Boston

We have organized the career pathways initiatives presented in this chapter into several subcategories:

PRESENTING CAREER PLACEMENT DATA AND SUCCESS STORIES TO DEBUNK MISCONCEPTIONS	9
CAREER READINESS PROGRAMMING	11
INTEGRATING CAREER PREPARATION AND HUMANITIES INSTRUCTION	13
INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS	15
ENGAGING EMPLOYERS AND ALUMS TO FACILITATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS	17

These characteristic strategies are interrelated and are certainly not mutually exclusive; they often overlap through the kind of boundary-spanning initiatives described in the case studies at the end of the chapter. We use the categories to differentiate them in terms of the settings in which they frequently occur (e.g., inside or outside the classroom) and the stage in their educational journey at which students frequently engage them (e.g., as entering first-year students or seniors preparing for the job market). Within categories, we often distinguish between department-level efforts and larger-scale initiatives, but many strategies can also be scaled up or down.

Presenting Career Placement Data and Success Stories to Debunk Misconceptions

The first approach focuses on confronting misleading stereotypes about humanities majors' job prospects. A number of HRS respondents mentioned presenting career placement data to parents and prospective students, typically relying on national data sets. While these respondents generally considered this approach to be effective, there was a consensus that data and debunking alone are not enough; negative stereotypes must be replaced with positive models of humanities career pathways. Some have collected local data about their own graduates' career outcomes to share. Others highlight compelling stories about alums, recent graduates, and current students' unfolding journeys from college to career on their websites, whether through text-based narratives or videos.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- University of Mississippi Associate Dean Holly Reynolds affirmed the effectiveness of presenting data in her talks with students, parents, and guidance counselors. She highlights two sources that have proved particularly persuasive: the 2019 National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) survey documenting the top ten skills desired of job applicants and the 2019 Association of American

Colleges and Universities survey about the kinds of experiences employers value most in job candidates. “You better believe that students and parents light up when I provide facts about what employers are looking for AND connect those with our majors in the humanities,” says Reynolds. “I spend time drawing the connections, which is what they need.”

- Dean of Humanities at the University of California, Los Angeles David Schaberg emphasized the importance of simultaneously promoting the intrinsic and extrinsic value of studying the humanities. He presents career outcome data from the *Study the Humanities* toolkit and the American Academy of Arts & Sciences’ Humanities Indicators as part of a Humanities Welcome event that draws about 400 students annually. You can read more about this event in the case study on [page 74](#) in the “Fostering Humanities Identity & Community” chapter.
- At Brandeis University, the Hiatt Career Center presents career outcome data by major on its website. These data illustrate how Brandeis humanities majors find gainful employment in a wide variety of fields within six months of graduating. Dean of Arts and Sciences Dorothy Hodgson reported that “the tremendous placement success overcomes parental and student anxieties.”
- The English department at Lebanon Valley College researched its graduates’ career outcomes. It found that alums had found success in a wide variety of career fields and many had risen to leadership roles. The department created postcards and posters advertising these outcomes, as well as a brief video that presents alums’ actual job titles. Dean Laura Eldred credits these efforts with helping the department maintain a healthy population of majors and sustain enrollments in a time when others are struggling.
- Northeastern University’s College of Social Sciences and Humanities maintains a library of Student Paths, profiles of current students and alums that are featured on its website. “We encourage prospective students to view these profiles so that they can imagine themselves pursuing the humanities at Northeastern,” says Associate Dean Laura Green.
- At Stockton University, the School of Arts and Humanities’ website forefronts alum profiles that illustrate how various majors prepare diverse individuals for success in a wide range of professions. The school collaborated with the university’s in-house production team to develop video testimonials that are displayed on a loop at regular open house events and orientation days.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“Prospective parents and students often don’t know how to think about the humanities. I’ve found, and my colleagues have found, if one is able to re-script this ... everyone is relieved. It’s about providing context, articulating fears, and providing reassurance that study in the humanities is a good choice and why. There is all sorts of substantiation for this, from alum success stories to quantitative data.”

— Karen Fish, Associate Professor of Writing, Loyola University Maryland

“Once people hear what our humanities alum[s] have done in careers, they are highly impressed.”

— Michele Dillon, Dean, College of Liberal Arts, University of New Hampshire

“Parents and students need to see results, not only data, but also testimonies from successful humanities graduates.”

— Uriel Quesada, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Loyola University New Orleans

Career Readiness Programming

Many institutions are working to better prepare humanities students for the job market through special events programming. At the department level, alum career panels are common; they serve the same purpose as the web-based career stories mentioned above, while providing additional opportunities for students to network with alums and ask questions. Some departments have gone further, offering a broader overview of career possibilities and concrete guidance on how to translate discipline-specific skills to employers.

Larger-scale career readiness programs are frequently grounded in partnerships with career services offices. Several respondents shared that their institutions’s career services staff had not prioritized the humanities historically because they lacked the understanding and vocabulary necessary to make a strong case for the value of studying the humanities. However, once humanities faculty and administrators reached out, they found career services staff were eager to partner to better serve humanities students. Respondents reported that taking the time to invest in sharing expertise paid great dividends, helping both parties better articulate how humanities coursework equips students for career success.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

DEPARTMENT-BASED INITIATIVES

- To combat misleading stereotypes concerning career prospects, West Chester University’s English department sponsors an annual event (and accompanying poster series) called What Can You Do with an English Major? Students learn

about career pathways from alums who studied English on their way to successful careers in a wide variety of fields. The department has recorded video footage of these events for more than a decade, enabling it to build a library of career stories that it can share year-round. “It helps first-year and undeclared students see the opportunities,” says professor Eleanor Shevlin. Additionally, The department created a series of six workshops that help majors translate academic accomplishments for job application materials.

CAREER SERVICES INITIATIVES

- The Humanities Center at Miami University (Ohio) formed a partnership with career services staff called HumanitiesWorks, which tripled humanities student participation in career fairs and evidence-based career counseling and enhanced advising in humanities departments. Participating faculty received a stipend to work with career services staff to develop digital and print materials that highlight the value of their disciplines for a variety of career fields.
- Drew University’s *Launch* initiative helps students identify transferable skills, develop a career action plan, and establish a network of mentors through online affinity groups and career communities that bring together students, alums, and faculty around ten broad career areas.
- The University of Illinois established the Humanities Professional Resource Center (HPRC) to better serve humanities students' particular career guidance needs. This specific focus has enabled HPRC Director Kirstin Wilcox to develop instructive strategies for engaging both faculty and students that can be applied to institutions where the precise model may not be practicable. For example, she highlights the importance of providing reluctant humanities students’ with career guidance that addresses their anxieties head-on and illustrates how their perceived weaknesses can be approached as strengths. Wilcox has gained buy-in from faculty by emphasizing that the aim is not to instrumentalize humanities education but to enhance students’ sense of their own agency.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“Academic Affairs has partnered with the Career Center (which is in Student Affairs) to explain the value of the humanities for careers and to develop programming. ... Our belief is that if we are going to maintain a traditional liberal arts curriculum with a strong focus on the humanities, which we want to do, we must surround it with outstanding career preparation programming in order to attract and recruit students.”

— Patrice DiQuinzio, Former Provost and Dean, Washington College

Integrating Career Preparation and Humanities Instruction

Respondents also shared strategies for working career readiness into humanities courses in order to more fully integrate humanities education and career preparation and ensure student participation through course assignments. Department-level initiatives have focused on incorporating in-depth career preparation into upper-level courses for majors. College-wide initiatives take a broader approach to reach as many students taking humanities courses as possible, frequently targeting undecided first-year students fulfilling gen ed requirements. Faculty and administrators who have taken it upon themselves to help students discern how they can apply humanities skills and knowledge overwhelmingly report that these efforts not only empowered students, but strengthened learning outcomes.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

CAREER DEVELOPMENT COURSES

- Helene Meyers, professor of English at Southwestern University, pioneered Novel English Majors, a course that combines literary criticism and career coaching. Students read novels depicting the professional lives of “literary types” and analyze career guidance books, critically engaging with the career advice they offer. Students also shadow or interview English alums. “Students learn what they are capable of,” said Meyers. “And they learn how to articulate that more effectively to themselves, their parents, and future employers.”
- The College of Liberal Arts at the University of Michigan created Applied Liberal Arts courses—including Positioning Yourself for a Successful Internship and Putting Your Education to Work—where students learn how to leverage their academic skills to make the most of their professional opportunities while earning course credit.

INTEGRATING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

- At the University of Missouri, Dean Pat Okker created a faculty fellows position to help faculty across the College of Arts and Sciences incorporate career readiness modules into all lower-level general education courses to help persuade undecided students that a liberal arts degree will help them achieve long-term success.
- Humanities departments at Ball State University are working with career center staff to identify workforce transferable skills identified by the National Association of Counselors and Educators on each course syllabus and evaluate student progress in these areas.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“Our classes, at multiple levels, emphasize the acquisition of digital and research skills and the transferability of these skills. ... [In our] freshman survey course (required for every student), faculty increasingly emphasize digital skills such as digital data analysis and visualization on Tableau and explicitly teach students about the transferability of the writing, critical thinking, research, and communication skills they learn through studying history.”

— Michelle Brattain, Associate Professor of History, Georgia State University

IMPACT RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

“From Capstone to Springboard,” Hendrix College

In 2019, we worked with John Sanders, professor of religious studies at Hendrix College, to document the impacts of integrating advanced disciplinary instruction with career preparation content tailored to the major. With support from the Wabash Center, Sanders transformed the religious studies department’s capstone course, crafting assignments to help students articulate transferable skills gained through previous courses and their capstone projects. Meanwhile, students worked with career center staff to hone their resumes and interview skills. The experimental course’s success persuaded Hendrix College faculty to vote to expand it in fall 2020 into a liberal studies capstone that students from any associated majors can take.

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

“I can identify specific competencies that employers want.”

PRE-CAPSTONE:

50%
Agree

POST-CAPSTONE:

100%
Agree

“I can provide an employer specific examples from course assignments that illustrate my competencies.”

PRE-CAPSTONE:

0%
Agree

POST-CAPSTONE:

100%
Agree

STUDENT VOICES

“While I already had a solid idea of what I was interested in and wanted to do, now I know how I want to do it and how to articulate why I want to do it and what makes me qualified.”

“[M]y focus has broadened and my awareness of my options has grown. ... There is room to explore new options and opportunities.”

Internship Programs

Many institutions have had success articulating career pathways through internship programs, often in partnership with career services departments. Internship placements range from roles with local cultural organizations and private enterprises in the community to positions supporting campus programs or research projects. Once placed, many humanities departments help their students reflect upon their internship experiences in the context of their educational journeys through special internship courses.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- The School of Liberal Arts at St. Mary's College of California established the Liberal Arts Bridge (LAB) program in 2018 to facilitate opportunities for students to explore career fields throughout all four years on campus. LAB connects students to internships in fields like health care, community development, and local government and provides scholarships to fund internships with non-profit and public sector organizations. The program also sponsors professional development workshops and networking events with alums for students. "We know our students do well in the long run, but we have to help them land more quickly and need to be able to show that we do so," explained Dean of Liberal Arts Sheila Hassell Hughes. "Audiences have responded incredibly positively: alum[s] tell me they wish they'd had something like LAB; parents love it (one said, 'I'm a VP for a major international tech firm and I want to hire 200 liberal arts majors this year'); and prospective students feel relieved."
- The College of Liberal Arts at the University of Nevada, Reno hired a coordinator of student engagement and experiential learning to connect students with internship opportunities at local and national organizations from their first semester on campus through graduation. Participating students are provided with stipends through internship endowments funded by donors.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"We have a robust internship program for undergraduates and we focus on outside the box placements. A history student in a local museum or an English major at a local literary magazine are expected, but if we can get those same students internships at banks or engineering firms then the student, the employers, and upper administrators better understand the full range of options available to our humanities students."

— John Herron, Former Interim Dean of Arts and Sciences, University of Missouri-Kansas City

"We have a strong internship office within the department that connects students with employers who see the value of what our students know. Our internship opportunities ... help students get and keep jobs. Employers who hire our students as interns come back again and again because they recognize the value our students bring to their organizations."

— Cara Finnegan, Associate Head, Department of Communication, University of Illinois

IMPACT RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

The Humanities Edge, Florida International University

The Humanities Edge at Florida International University (FIU) is an academic and career development program for humanities majors that have transferred from Miami Dade College, a two-year institution. Funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the program includes a humanities internship, in which students are placed with local cultural organizations and mentored by FIU faculty for a semester. In spring 2020, we worked with Humanities Edge staff to survey students to learn how their internships prepared them to leverage their humanities skills toward future employment.

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

"I developed skills in this internship that could help me get a job."

100%
of surveyed
students agreed

"I feel confident articulating the specific skills gained by studying the humanities to employers."

100%
of surveyed
students agreed

"I am aware of the types of jobs available to humanities majors."

100%
of surveyed
students agreed

STUDENT VOICES

"Before my internship began, I only vaguely knew how to send professional emails, and struggled with talking in a 'business' setting. I learnt how to do this by observing those around me, and talking with [my supervisor]."

"[This internship] made my passion for journalism even stronger. Being able to see newspapers that are older than I am in person ... made me see how important documentation is. If I am able to have something that I write published in a newspaper to be preserved for 40-60+ years, and have someone value it as much as I have, I have achieved something that will last (practically) forever."

Engaging Employers and Alums to Facilitate Opportunities for Students

Results from our survey revealed that many faculty and administrators are motivated to engage employers, but relatively few have established these connections. However, those who have made a concerted effort have often found employers eager to learn more about the humanities and willing to provide feedback about how to better translate humanities skills into workplace competencies.

Respondents reported that once they established such connections, employers were excited about the skills humanities majors could contribute to their organizations.

Many humanities departments report that they have found their alums to be enthusiastic about giving back by helping current students and recent graduates clarify potential career pathways. Alums serve as mentors who assure students that their humanities skills are valued across a range of career fields and connect them to specific opportunities through networks these alums have built. Research conducted by the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of South Carolina found that students who had the chance to network with an alum fared better in their job searches. Several departments reported successfully fostering these connections using a “speed networking” format that facilitates substantive conversations among students and alums in a short time frame.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- At the University of Massachusetts, Boston, administrators invited employers to evaluate the current liberal arts curriculum as part of a project funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. They provided useful feedback about how to make the valuable skills students acquired more clearly apparent to employers.
- At California State University, San Marcos, the American Indian Studies Department worked with tribal governments to secure internships and jobs related to cultural preservation and education for their students. “Our alum[s] have proven to be some of the most desirable students in the workforce,” said department chair Joely Proudfit. “They are well rounded and bring excellent critical thinking skills.”
- Case Western Reserve University’s Baker-Nord Humanities Center and College of Arts and Sciences partnered with the university’s career center, office of corporate relations, and office of government and community relations to create Humanities@Work. The program connects humanities students with potential employers from the corporate, government, and nonprofit sectors through community discussions, networking events, and job opportunities.
- For the past decade, Duke University has hosted a special weekend for arts and humanities majors interested in working in a wide variety of media-related fields and alums who have found success there. The combination of sessions examining trends in the industry and opportunities to network has proven popular with alums and facilitated job opportunities for students.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"I've met with dozens of local employers, recruiters, and CEOs ... each group offered a strong defense of the humanities, but none of them used our language. They spoke instead of curiosity, adaptability, persistence, learning from mistakes, and valuing the perspectives of others."

— David Trowbridge, Associate Professor of History and Director of African-American Studies, Marshall University

"We do a lot of work with the employment opportunities offered by our own humanities alum[s]—especially in internships."

— James Swindal, Professor of Philosophy, Duquesne University

"Employers are excited about humanities majors and see their value because of the communication and critical thinking skills."

— Neva Specht, Dean of Arts and Sciences, Appalachian State University

Case Studies

Far from being mutually exclusive, the menu of approaches presented above can be combined in many ways. Survey respondents frequently described how employing multiple strategies to both change perceptions and improve outcomes achieved synergistic effects. For example, Janice Hawes, Chair of the Department of English and Communications at South Carolina State University, reports that this approach has helped her department achieve an increase in majors:

“We have provided workshops that highlight the skills taught in humanities courses. We have also had successful graduates return and give talks to current students about their successes in the job market. In addition, we are producing flyers, etc. that highlight the ‘uses’ of humanities majors in the workplace, both in terms of specific skills (teaching, editing, etc.), but also in terms of skills that transfer to most careers: reading and analytical skills, writing, interpersonal skills, etc.”

The following case studies describe two particularly robust, multi-faceted approaches to articulating career pathways. They offer insight into how their leaders have been able to launch and sustain such ambitious initiatives.

CASE STUDY ONE

The University of North Carolina, Greensboro’s Liberal Arts Advantage: Campus to Career

Since 2017, faculty at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro (UNCG) have partnered with their campus career services center to articulate the professional value of the arts and humanities to students through an initiative called The Liberal Arts Advantage: Campus to Career (LAA). As the name indicates, the initiative aims to communicate to humanities students that they approach the 21st century job market from a place of strength. Through LAA, part of UNCG’s Transforming the Humanities project funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, faculty and career services professionals are working together to change perceptions of humanities majors’ career prospects through a combination of curricular and programmatic interventions.

Faculty and career services worked together to develop online career readiness modules that humanities faculty can readily integrate into their courses. Career services staff also provide course-embedded workshops upon request. These modules and workshops help students recognize and communicate the versatile skill set acquired through studying the humanities. Faculty have been encouraged to integrate the modules into senior capstone courses to provide confidence and resources for humanities majors preparing to enter the workforce, but also in first-year colloquia and general education classes to shift perceptions among a broader population of students. There is evidence of success in achieving these goals. For example, 39% of exploratory (undeclared) students surveyed after engaging the models said they were extremely or very likely to explore majors in the humanities.

Close collaboration between career services staff and faculty across the humanities—including philosophy, English, history, geography, anthropology, foreign languages, and religious studies—is a hallmark of the program. They work together to stage several events throughout the year, including workshops on practical, hands-on topics like Articulating Your Liberal Arts Story: Skills and Strengths,

Networking 101, and Interviewing 101. In each of these workshops, students interact with a career coach facilitator who is joined by a faculty member and an employer. Students find this combination of career experts in one room, all speaking with them about the professional value of what they are studying, both informative and confidence-boosting.

LAA's flagship event is a biannual, half-day professionalizing conference that draws upwards of 200 students. It features employer panelists representing diverse industries, including consulting, technology, automotive, visual arts, and financial services. "We have an incredible network of employers who appreciate the rich diversity of skills our humanities students have to offer," said Nicole Hall, director of UNCG's Career & Professional Development office and co-director of LAA since its start in 2017.

LAA is linked to UNCG's Humanities Network and Consortium, which has helped promote the initiative to faculty and students. The consortium focuses on connecting UNCG humanities scholars to one another and the surrounding community, as well as helping students identify how humanities coursework translates into personal and professional success. The consortium recently launched a social media campaign focused on raising student awareness about LAA.

To date, more than 900 students have participated in LAA workshops, classroom presentations, biannual professional development events, and online course modules. UNCG's Liberal Arts Advantage exemplifies how mutually beneficial partnerships between faculty and career development professionals can transform perceptions of the applicability of humanities education among students and their potential employers.

PERSPECTIVES FROM PROJECT LEADERS:

"One of the main goals of this initiative is to help students learn to connect the dots between the skills and knowledge they are practicing in their arts and humanities courses, and the real world value of those skills. This value is conveyed both in terms of students' continued personal growth after they graduate, but also in terms of the edge these core critical thinking and communication skills give students once they're on the job market."

— Frances Bottenberg, Faculty Co-Director of the Liberal Arts Advantage, University of North Carolina Greensboro

TAKEAWAYS FROM STUDENTS WHO ENGAGED AN LAA ONLINE MODULE IN GEN ED CLASS:

"The college courses which promote students to engage in self-reflection and to think critically ... are actually tools they can use in a career."

"I felt almost relieved when he brought up the true skills that employers look for. This video made me want to try and branch out and take some humanities classes."

"[It] helped me realize how important a lot of my gen ed and prerequisite classes are ... I've noticed that a lot of things from these classes can be applied to my major classes."

The University of Minnesota’s Career Readiness Initiative

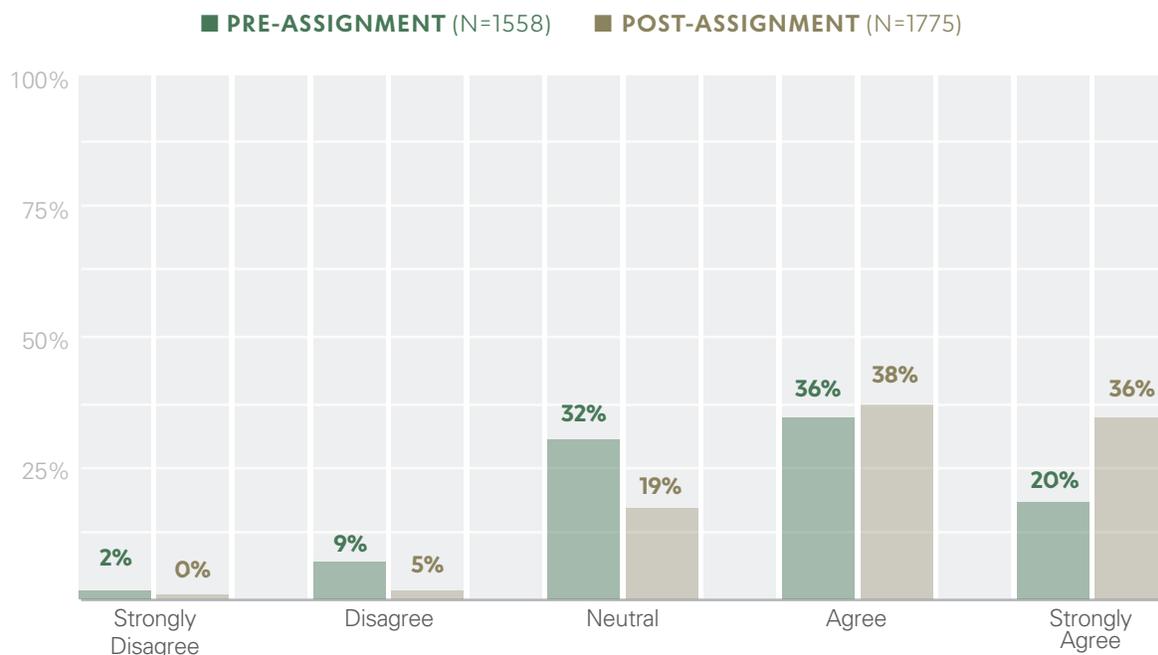
At the University of Minnesota, the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) has launched a multi-faceted Career Readiness Initiative (CRI) to shift student perceptions concerning the applicability of their studies across the college and improve learning outcomes.

The initiative involves a partnership with career services to create collaborative courses on career exploration, career development, internships, and preparation for law school. But the heart of CRI is a college-wide curricular intervention. CLA worked with alumni and employers to adopt a pedagogical framework to help students recognize how their liberal arts courses help them develop 10 core career competencies, including digital literacy, engaging diversity, ethical reasoning, and applied problem solving. To connect these competencies to course assignments, they developed an online tool known by the acronym RATE. It challenges students to *reflect* upon and *articulate* the skills related to one or more core competencies developed through the assignment, *translate* those skills to nonacademic contexts, and *evaluate* their progress in honing the skills identified.

To gain buy-in from faculty, CLA created a faculty fellows program where faculty work to implement the new framework together. Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education Ascan Koerner recalls how the college’s initial strategy, the introduction of additional skills-oriented courses, seemed destined to fail due to anti-vocational attitudes and competition among the R1 institution’s faculty. “We learned three key lessons,” said Koerner. “First, if this was going to work, we needed to put faculty in charge. Second, we had to create an incentive structure. Third, we had to create one-to-one persuasion opportunities to convert the skeptical.”

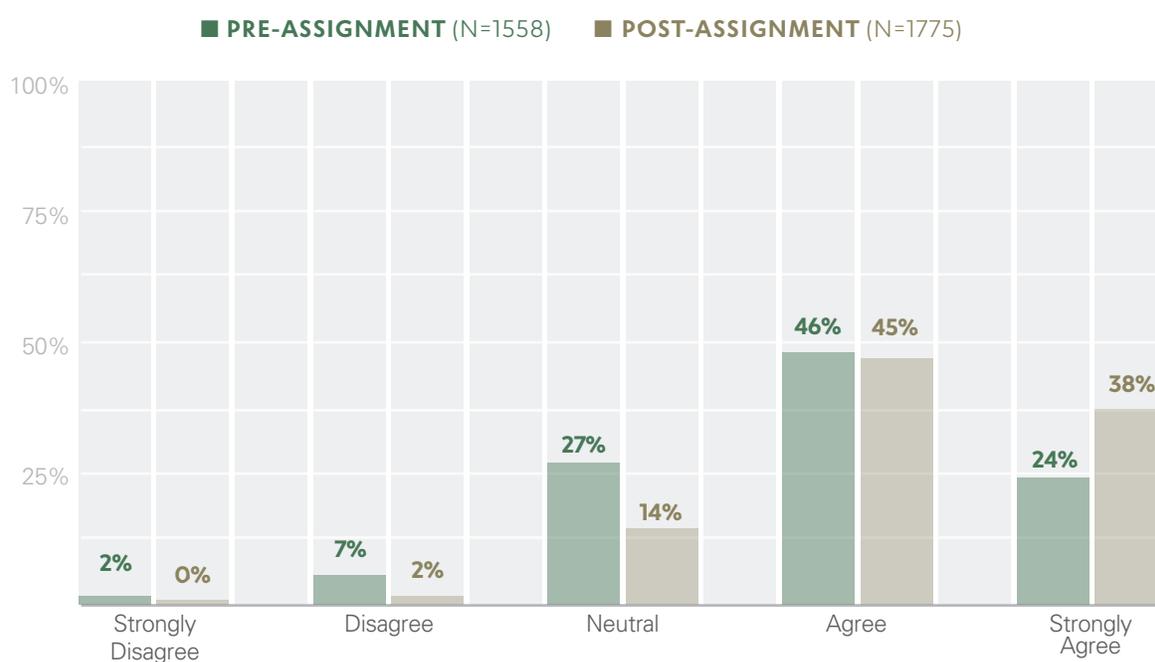
Figure 2.1.

“A liberal arts degree gives me a competitive edge as a job candidate.”



Through the fellowship program and other incentives the College of Liberal Arts has succeeded in getting a large number of faculty to integrate the RATE tool into their courses. In spring 2020, 12,628 individual students completed 23,256 RATE assignments. Pre- and post-test surveys demonstrate how this intervention changed students' perceptions. Initially, students' views of the professional utility of a liberal arts education were somewhat mixed. But after completing the RATE assignment, they overwhelmingly agreed that a liberal arts degree gives them a competitive edge as a job candidate (see Figure 2.1) and that they are prepared to articulate the value of their liberal arts education to potential employers (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2.
 "I am prepared to explain the value of a liberal arts education to a potential employer."



Faculty perceptions and behaviors shifted too. For example, there has been a marked increase in faculty's willingness to identify the core career competencies on their course syllabi. "When the faculty saw that it works, they embraced it," said Koerner. "Some of our biggest opponents became our champions."

Curricular Innovations

In addition to students' and parents' concerns about job prospects, their lack of awareness of the many ways that studying the humanities can prepare students to make significant contributions to our society's well-being has contributed to declines in humanities majors and enrollments. Respondents to the Humanities Recruitment Survey (HRS) rated "lack of understanding of humanities disciplines" as the second most influential challenge to attracting undergraduates to the humanities. Many emphasized that students, parents, and others frequently fail to appreciate the applicability of humanistic study to their lives and the world.

As with concerns about job prospects, this challenge also presents a major opportunity. At various types of institutions across the country, faculty and administrators are demonstrating the professional, personal, and collective value of the humanities through innovative undergraduate curricula. These programs expand the reach of the humanities by appealing to students who might not otherwise engage them. Many highlight concrete, practical applications of humanistic knowledge and skills to specific fields, frequently in collaboration with faculty from other areas of study.

Our emphasis on "applied" humanities curricular innovations is in no way meant to minimize the value of traditional disciplinary approaches. Subsequent chapters on "Fostering Humanities Identity and Community" and "Marketing Initiatives" offer strategies for conveying to students how rewarding traditional humanistic study can be—personally, socially, and intellectually. Here, we feature both department-based programs and interdisciplinary initiatives that offer innovative curricula to shift perceptions about the humanities.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"We have encouraged innovative courses, particularly initiatives that get students out of the classroom and into hands-on experiences, focus[ing] on our interdisciplinary strengths. We're getting very positive responses to our efforts. So far, we've stopped losing students; we're working now to rebuild from a healthy position. We've also managed to get a lot of attention from upper administration, so we are seen as an innovative department, which helps us get resources when we need them."

— John Ernest, Chair, Department of English, University of Delaware

"We are revising curricula in humanities departments with declining enrollments to better attract students and reflect their interests. We're developing experiential learning humanities courses and a range of 'purpose' minors (pre-professional) to both complement 'passion' (humanities) majors and to increase college enrollments. While I strongly believe in the intrinsic value of the humanities and the liberal arts, the arguments that seem to have been the most persuasive emphasize utility."

— Cynthia Davis, Associate Dean for Arts, Humanities and Communications, University of South Carolina

We have organized the curricular innovations presented in this chapter into several subcategories:

PROBLEM-BASED APPROACHES	24
PRE-PROFESSIONAL HUMANITIES PROGRAMS	27
SKILL-BASED PROGRAMS	32
ENGAGING LOCAL CULTURES, HISTORIES, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS	34
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING	35
NEW APPROACHES TO GENERAL EDUCATION	38

These approaches are interrelated and are certainly not mutually exclusive. For example, pre-professional humanities programs frequently identify particular skills gained through the humanities that are useful for solving important problems within a specific profession. By breaking curricular innovations down by recruitment rationale, we hope to inspire humanists to synthesize strategies, e.g. launch an initiative to create new gen ed courses that facilitate experiential learning about local histories and cultures through community partnerships.

Problem-Based Approaches

Several institutions have increased humanities enrollments and majors by demonstrating their value for understanding and solving complex problems. Some have done this by looking for opportunities to integrate problem-based learning across the existing humanities curriculum. Others have created problem-based programs, including **environmental humanities** programs, that integrate multiple disciplines, including those from other areas of study, to address complex problems. Humanities departments have also moved to credential problem-solving capacities acquired through their disciplines.

Our survey data also illustrated a broader related trend: success increasing humanities enrollments by replacing courses organized by traditional conventions (e.g., historic time periods) with topics-based courses that pitch a content area based on themes of more immediate interest. This approach helps humanities departments more clearly signal to students the insights into complex problems they can gain through their discipline.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- Complex Problems, American University's flagship program for first-year students, "teaches students how to [apply] critical humanities methodologies such as cultivating diverse perspectives; reading critically; communicating effectively; reflecting on one's own thinking ... to a single complex problem or enduring question for the entire semester," shared participating faculty member Sarah

Marsh. “[We] emphasize the transfer of intellectual skills students develop in these classes into their other academic and professional work.” Examples of Complex Problems seminars created by humanities faculty include Coming to Terms with Past Violence, Empathy in a Digital Age, Information Overload, and the Problem of Poverty in America.

- The religious studies department at California State University, Chico designed a certificate in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations to more clearly communicate the practical value of knowledge of diverse religious traditions for fostering more harmonious relations among members of distinct traditions. The certificate program appeals especially to pre-professional majors, but the department’s emphasis on professional applications has also helped achieve modest but steady growth in religious studies majors.
- Northeastern University’s departments of philosophy, economics, and political science joined together to offer a Politics, Philosophy, and Economics (PPE) major. The program has succeeded in attracting more students to these fields on the strength of a pitch that it offers an interdisciplinary skill set that is “essential in addressing the kinds of complex global problems future leaders will need to tackle.”
- Gustavus Adolphus College is in the process of developing Interfaith Leadership to add to its roster of interdisciplinary minors and has revamped a Peace Studies minor as a Peace, Justice, and Conflict Studies major. The new Challenge General Education Curriculum at Gustavus also requires students to complete an interdisciplinary capstone focused on contemporary challenges. Both provide faculty opportunities to demonstrate how the humanities help students understand and tackle pressing social issues. “These interdisciplinary programs have attracted students and built partnerships,” said Dean of Arts and Humanities Elizabeth Kubek. “Focusing cross-departmental projects on institutional values, mission, and identity works very well.”

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“The old first-year humanities course (western civ, great books) was moribund. Over the last three years it has been resurrected as a new course organized around a theme: revolution or the body. Our numbers have grown from 18 students (2016) to 99 students (2020).”

— Scott Denham, Wall Distinguished Teaching Professor in the Humanities, Davidson College

“Upper-level students are more likely to take topics courses in the humanities that are issues-based than an intro-level humanities class (Politics of Display vs. Intro to Art History).”

— Anne Harris, President, Grinnell College

The success of **environmental humanities** programs is a prime example of the appeal of programs that demonstrate the value of the humanities by applying humanistic resources to contemporary problems. Survey respondents from a wide variety of institutions pointed to environmental humanities initiatives that had succeeded in attracting more students to the humanities.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- With a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Colby College has launched an environmental humanities initiative that aligns with an institutional strength in environmental studies. Through new courses, students reflect upon consumerism, ethical development, foodways, and varying conceptions of nature through literature, art, film, history, and philosophy. Students also have opportunities to acquire digital skills, pursue original research projects, and share them with the campus community. The initiative “allows us to address some of the most pressing challenges of the modern age,” said Director of the Center for Arts and Humanities Kerill O’Neill. “It is drawing more students to the humanities, and making them see the true value of humanistic study.”
- The Environmental Humanities Initiative (EHI) at the University of California, Santa Barbara serves as a broad umbrella for more than 200 distinct undergraduate courses across 23 departments that address issues in environmental humanities. It also serves as a platform for elevating featured courses, which are typically cross-listed with environmental studies and a humanities department. Examples include Race & Environmental Justice, Environmental Ethics, Religion & Ecology in the Americas, History of the Oceans, Writing About Sustainability, and Introduction to Literature and the Environment. EHI also raises awareness about environmental humanities through an annual theme, conference, and website full of related resources.
- At the department level, the English department at Stony Brook University has developed courses that connect diverse literary fields to urgent environmental concerns, including Non-Western Environmental Feminisms: Land, Bodies, and Climate (In)Justice; Victorian Climates: Literary Histories of Energy and the Environment; and Migrant Literature and Environmental Justice. By drawing connections from environmental justice to social justice through literature, these courses highlight the humanities’ essential contributions to the interdisciplinary field of environmental studies.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"We developed new curricular initiatives that aim to attract students to humanities courses who may not otherwise take courses in humanities ... fields that bridge STEM and humanities, such as environmental humanities and medical humanities. Students are very interested in these interdisciplinary arenas. Course enrollments are showing growth as [are the number of] minors."

— Kathleen Canning, Dean of Humanities, Rice University

Pre-Professional Humanities Programs

Another approach that has helped attract more students to the humanities is illustrating the value of the humanities for particular professions. Some illuminate traditional humanities career fields, combining relevant humanities content with field-specific training. Prominent examples include minors in public history, museum studies, and history and law.

Here, we feature programs that connect the humanities to particular career fields through collaboration with faculty from other areas of study. We also point to efforts to offer robust humanities experiences to pre-professional students, from **medical humanities** programs to courses embedded in new programs that train students for emerging tech fields.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- With support from a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant, philosophers at Le Moyne College worked with faculty from various professional programs to develop courses that delve into ethical issues encountered within those particular professions, including law, medicine, and business. They established a minor in Ethics, Values, and Professional Life that combines these field-specific courses with courses exploring ethical dimensions of religion, communications, technology, and vocation in the context of a meaningful life.
- Courses in linguistics and ethics are integral to a new major in artificial intelligence being developed in the engineering school at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. "For our health sciences departments, business school, computer science departments, and STEM fields, we are always looking for ways to integrate humanities courses and training into those programs," said former Interim Dean of Arts and Sciences John Herron.
- A Bachelor's degree in Applied Humanities at the University of Arizona has contributed to the overall growth in the College of Humanities, which doubled the number of first-year students entering with humanities majors in fall of 2019.

Each track combines professional training with what the program describes as “cognitive, creative, international, interpersonal, and intercultural intelligences taught in the humanities, intelligences that offer a vital edge in these and other rapidly changing professions.” The college has partnered with six other colleges at the university to offer six distinct emphases: business administration, fashion studies, game studies, public health, rural leadership and renewal, and spatial organization and design thinking. The program’s core includes an internship, capstone, and courses like Applied Humanities Practice, Intercultural Competence, and Innovation and the Human Condition.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“Being open to building programs that cross boundaries (e.g., Literature and Media, Social Work, Urban Ecology/Public Health, Writing) has led to institutional support, resources, and in a couple of cases, new hires.”

— Bradley Herling, Chair of History, Philosophy, and Religious Studies Department, Marymount Manhattan College

*“From a professor’s perspective, it is exciting to have students from different disciplinary orientations in these classes. A popular course in health studies, for example, is *Sickness, Health, and Medicine in Early America*, a history course about health in the 17th and 18th century Atlantic world. Students of history, political science, and biology study together in the course, each bringing a different perspective.”*

— Beatrice McKenzie, Professor of History, Beloit College

Several of the most prominent and successful pre-professional humanities programs fall under the broad umbrella of **medical humanities**. These programs appeal to a large student population of aspiring medical professionals, and their value is underscored by emerging data indicating that humanities majors perform better on the MCAT and in medical school. Doctors who studied the humanities are less likely to experience burnout.¹ And they demonstrate greater understanding of the structural sources of health disparities and possess interpersonal skills that make them better practitioners.² The foci of medical humanities programs vary from expansive approaches to more focused minors and certificates in related subfields like bioethics. The range of effective models demonstrates the considerable leeway that humanities faculty have in leveraging their expertise to examine the practice of medicine critically and constructively.

¹ Mangione, S., Chakraborti, C., Staltari, G. et al. Medical Students’ Exposure to the Humanities Correlates with Positive Personal Qualities and Reduced Burnout: A Multi-Institutional U.S. Survey. *J GEN INTERN MED* 33, 628–634 (2018).

² Lamb, Erin Gentry, Sarah Berry, and Therese Jones. *Health Humanities Baccalaureate Programs in the United States*. Hiram, OH: Center for Literature and Medicine, Hiram College. March 2019.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS

- At Western Michigan University, a successful graduate program in Spirituality, Culture, and Health has given rise to popular undergraduate courses, including Death and Dying, Religion and Health, and Meditation Traditions, which have all filled to capacity.
- An NEH grant helped the University of Texas at Austin establish a popular Patients, Practitioners and Cultures of Care certificate program anchored by a large medical humanities lecture course, titled The Healer-Patient Relationship. “Every fall there are approximately 2,000 students on campus who will eventually go on to medical school. I estimate that at least half these 2,000 students will have contact with the program, taking at least one course,” said Professor of Psychiatry, Population Health, and Medical Education Stephen Sonnenberg, M.D. “And I predict that close to 100 graduating students each year will earn the certificate.”

DEPARTMENT-BASED PROGRAMS

- Humanities departments have also fashioned discipline-specific offerings, such as the Science and Medicine in Society minor housed in the history department at Creighton University. Given the high level of interest in health professions in our student population, we hired faculty to begin [the] minor,” said Tracy Leavelle, director of the Kingfisher Institute for the Liberal Arts and Professions. “It has been relatively popular. The individual courses fill quickly. As a result, more students [are] exposed to the humanities beyond the requirements of the core curriculum.”

SINGLE-COURSE MODELS

- A History of Medical Ethics course at Rutgers University in spring 2020 drew nearly 60 students and garnered significant attention when Professor Johanna Schoen pivoted to place the emerging COVID-19 pandemic in historical context, offering students humanistic tools to make sense of their experiences. “Journaling during these uncertain times while making connections to similar historical events definitely helped me process the pandemic,” said aspiring medical student Ahri Han.³

³ Chadwick, John. “Rutgers Historians Launched Medical Ethics Class Just as Pandemic Struck.” <https://sas.rutgers.edu/news-events/news/newsroom/faculty/3269-rutgers-historian-launched-medical-ethics-class-just-as-pandemic-struck>

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“The philosophy and religious and theological studies departments started an interdisciplinary bioethics minor. It has been very successful so far, in part because it has provided STEM and other students with information about available offerings in, for instance, history of science or health communications (as well as ethics) that they find appealing but didn’t know existed.”

— Lisa L. Fuller, Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Bioethics, Merrimack College

“The Medical Humanities Pathway helps better prepare our students to: understand and navigate health care systems; understand how culture, race, and socio-economic status mediate health care outcomes; more fully develop interpersonal skills of close listening, compassion, and empathy; and treat those who suffer from illness or disease in accordance with the individual’s intrinsic human dignity. ... Students who are planning to pursue careers in medicine or allied health see the integrated pathway as an ideal supplement to a major in the natural sciences.”

— Vince Punzo, Professor of Psychology, Earlham College

IMPACT RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Applied Ethics in Criminal Justice, Medaille College

With support from an NEH Connections grant, philosophers at Medaille College partnered with criminal justice faculty to create an Applied Ethics in Criminal Justice pathway. We worked with participating faculty to survey students in a learning community that combined a philosophy course on Ethics with Criminal Justice Applications and a criminal justice course on law enforcement. Students—the majority of whom were criminal justice majors with limited exposure to the humanities—learned a variety of ethical theories and applied them to real-life criminal justice scenarios with the help of visiting criminal justice professionals. These data demonstrate the impact of equipping pre-professional students with philosophical tools to reflect upon ethical challenges facing members of their profession, a model that could be adapted to other fields.

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

“I am better equipped to understand different ethical perspectives on criminal justice issues.”

100%
of surveyed students agreed

“This learning community helped me make sense of some of the more challenging problems in our criminal justice system.”

88%
of surveyed students agreed

“This learning community helped me to more clearly perceive how ethics and philosophy can be applied outside the college.”

89%
of surveyed students agreed

After participating in the learning community, surveyed students reported:

56%
want to take more courses in the humanities

78%
want to engage ethical philosophy more

STUDENT VOICES

“[L]earning that people have different perspectives made me look at the other side more open-minded. I see why some people think what they think, and sometimes I change my mind about the topic after hearing their side.”

“Different ethical perspectives have changed the way I look at the criminal justice system.”

Skill-based Programs

Skill-based programs demonstrate the practical value of the humanities by emphasizing widely applicable skills acquired through humanistic study, including **digital humanities**. As the quotes below illustrate, many are finding ways to emphasize practical skills gained through traditional disciplinary curricula. Others are creating new skills-based programs; many highlight crucial communication skills honed through studying the humanities, while others highlight intercultural competencies and/or ethical leadership.

Some schools have had success with new minors in professional writing, creative writing, and writing and rhetoric. Survey responses suggested that these programs' more straightforward signaling of skills valued on the job market may appeal to a broader range of students than traditional English or communication minors.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- At the University of California, Santa Barbara, humanities faculty from several departments—including communication, English, feminist studies, French and Italian, history, Spanish and Portuguese, theater, and writing—have joined together to magnify their contributions through the Public Speaking Initiative (PSI). Participating faculty meet regularly to share effective pedagogical practices. Program Director Jody Enders worked with university staff to create a website to advertise the initiative's overarching mission, courses, and events and showcase student testimonials that illustrate their impact. Popular PSI courses have helped provide a much-needed enrollment boost in foreign language departments and increased appreciation on campus and in the community of the value of the humanities for building communication capacities—all at minimal cost.
- The University of Texas, El Paso developed a humanities-based Bilingual Professional Writing Certificate for undergraduates with support from an NEH Connections grant. The program provides robust training in bilingual writing, combining instruction in writing and rhetoric in Spanish and English with a focus on translation theory and ethics.
- With an NEH grant, Montgomery College, a two-year institution, created an Introduction to Global Humanities course that illustrates how history, literature, art, linguistics, philosophy, and religious studies equip students with intercultural competencies critical to success in the global economy. The grant also established a Global Humanities Institute to sponsor related events and help faculty across the college bring humanities content into their courses to facilitate student reflection on cultural similarities and differences.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"Extensive research shows that humanities majors exhibit the transferable skills sought after by employers, and that the acquisition of digital skills makes these students successful in many careers. We are exploring ways to 'credential'

undergraduate students in the development of key humanities skills, including digital research tools.”

— Ryan Hinrichs, Dean of Arts and Sciences, Drew University

“Courses emphasizing writing and speaking are in high demand in our department because students learn quickly that these are skills employers want.”

— Cara Finnegan, Associate Head, Department of Communication, University of Illinois

“It’s important to stress in the humanities that the students may not find a career that is directly linked to their major but that the transferable skills they develop can lead to careers across the spectrum. For example, history majors are recruited heavily by insurance companies. A recruiter for AFLAC told me that was because history majors especially could break down complex ideas into concepts that were understandable by the general public.”

— Eric Tenbus, Dean of Arts and Sciences, Georgia College & State University

Digital humanities programs have multiplied over the past several years and have proven to be an effective way to signal the acquisition of valued practical skills through study of the humanities. These programs take many forms, from full-fledged majors to concentrations within particular humanities departments. Their focus can vary from broad efforts to incorporate digital technologies across the humanities curriculum to programs focused on equipping students with a specific skill set combining humanities skills and technological capabilities (e.g. GIS mapping).

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- Through conversations with alums about the skills they had found to be in greatest demand in their various fields, the College of Arts and Science at the University of Missouri developed a major in Digital Storytelling. The program combines instruction in writing, critical theory, and aesthetics with training in video production, animation, and emerging media. It has been “very well received,” said Dean Pat Okker, resulting in a “dramatic increase in number of majors.”
- The Rochester Institute of Technology has developed a Bachelor of Science in Digital Humanities and Social Sciences that has succeeded in attracting more students to the humanities at the historically STEM-focused institution. Many of the program’s project courses, including Digital History and Digital Literature, are offered as general education courses, helping to bring more students into the program. “We have had some success linking creativity in the humanities to innovation in STEM,” said Lisa Hermsen, Caroline Werner Gannett Chair in the Humanities.
- Drew University’s Digital Humanities initiative, funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, has supported the incorporation of digital research tools and methods across the existing humanities curriculum. The initiative also enables students to pursue summer research projects and develop digital portfolios through its Domains of One’s Own project. “The digital humanities initiative has resulted in

hundreds of Drew students designing their own web spaces,” said Dean of the College of Liberal Arts Ryan Hinrichs. “These digital portfolios ... have already resulted in internships and job offers.”

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“We are developing a curriculum that prepares students for a 21st century workforce. Our alum[s] have proven to be some of the most desirable students in the workforce. They are well rounded and have excellent critical thinking skills. I also require my students to use digital media and tech tools to better prepare them for the workforce. I meld the two areas [in courses] and this has proven to be a successful high-impact practice.”

— Joely Proudfit, Chair, American Indian Studies Department, California State University, San Marcos

Engaging Local Cultures, Histories, and Community Partners

Respondents also shared models for showcasing the value of the humanities in community life by offering students opportunities to engage with local histories and cultures. These approaches vary from delving deeply into specific local cultures to studying the history of the immediate community (or even the institution itself) in all its diversity. These models often serve to illuminate the experiences of groups that have been historically underrepresented. Many of these initiatives leverage partnerships with local cultural organizations to achieve these goals and familiarize students with the humanities ecosystems that serve and enrich communities across the country.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- At Lincoln University, incoming students engage with rich humanities content through a unit in their required First-Year Experience course called The Lincoln Legacy. The unit draws on archival material compiled by undergraduate researchers, including a booklet documenting the experiences of Lincoln alums in Old West Baltimore, to immerse first-year students in the history of the first degree-granting historically black institution in the country. Students emerge with a deeper appreciation of the legacy they carry forward as Lincoln students.
- Texas Lutheran University’s *¡Sí, Más!* initiative, funded by an NEH grant, engaged local Latinx high school students through a summer bridge program that immersed them in the history of the local community of Seguin and the field of Mexican-American studies. Undergraduate peer mentors guided the summer bridge students through readings and discussions that provided insight into experiences of marginalization and skills to negotiate challenging situations. Students shared digital testimonies with their parents and the school board, demonstrating the impact of the program on their personal and educational trajectories.

- Berea College’s Engaging Appalachia Across the Curriculum, an NEH-funded project, facilitated the development of four courses that offer students, who primarily hail from low-income families in the region, the opportunity to gain a more substantive and positive understanding of the history and culture of Appalachia through an archival project with the local Pine Mountain School. The project offers computer science students opportunities to engage humanities content and reflect critically on the limits of technology, while exposing humanities students to digital tools.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“Developing curricula that engage diversity in meaningful, locally resonant ways strengthens our students’ understanding of the multiracial, multiethnic world within which we live.”

— Soniya Munshi, Associate Professor, CUNY Borough of Manhattan Community College

“[We] are finding new ways—including experiential education, project and discussion-based learning and teaching approaches which encourage service learning and ‘doing’ the humanities—to use the Central Valley itself as a subject of academic study in an effort to teach inclusively. ... We have seen improved success and retention rates and the reduction of equity gaps, but we continue to aim to do more.”

— Chad Redwing, Professor of Humanities, Modesto Junior College

Experiential Learning

Respondents pointed to efforts to infuse the undergraduate humanities curriculum with opportunities to experience the humanities outside the classroom to demonstrate the value of the humanities “in the real world.” Experiential learning frequently overlaps with other curricular innovation strategies. For example, it may involve partnering with local community organizations, grappling with complex problems, illustrating how the humanities foster valuable skills, and equipping students for specific professions. Here, we highlight initiatives that emphasize facilitating impactful experiences that leave students longing for more opportunities to engage the humanities.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- The history department at Barnard College established partnerships to offer students service-learning experiences in Mississippi and Texas enriched by deep historical context. In Mississippi, students work with the Low-Income Child Care Initiative while learning about the history of injustice that explains contemporary inequities. At the U.S.-Mexico border, students learn about the history of immigration policy while working with the Dilley Pro Bono Project, which provides legal services to mothers and children at the country’s largest detention center for migrant families. Meanwhile, the department expanded opportunities and resources for students to conduct and record oral history interviews for their

capstone projects and independent studies. These deeply immersive learning experiences have helped draw more students to the major. Like so many others, Barnard's history department experienced a sharp downturn in majors from 2008 to 2017 following the Great Recession. In just a few years, it has more than reversed that decline, achieving a more than 10% increase in majors compared to a 2007 benchmark. In 2020, Barnard was awarded a six-year grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to build upon this success and introduce additional immersive learning opportunities.

- Through a Mellon-funded partnership with Johns Hopkins University (JHU), the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) has incorporated experiential learning opportunities into its humanities curriculum, including study abroad programs, service learning activities, and field trips to museums, historical societies, arts festivals, and other cultural sites. CCBC also offers additional immersive learning experiences through its honors program and Mellon Scholars program, such as deep reading exercises with JHU graduate students, biannual symposia, and a summer research experience. CCBC faculty report that the program has created enthusiasm for the humanities on campus and helped students continue on to advanced study in the humanities at four-year institutions.
- Grinnell College's The Humanities in Action project, funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, connects students with the local community to deepen their appreciation for the humanities. Grant funds support the creation of new courses that facilitate community engagement and incorporate site visits and contributions from community members. For example, in an English course called Black Girl Magic, students learned how to create developmentally-appropriate children's books that illustrated course themes and shared them with local elementary school classes.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"As our organizational philosophy and educational model, we have developed the 'Experiential Liberal Arts,' which encourages students to engage in transformative and integrative learning across all the contexts in which they learn—classroom, independent research, global experiences, and local involvement. ... Co-operative education, our signature program, is a draw for many. In the [College of Social Sciences and Humanities], 91% of majors do at least one co-op placement. ... Admissions officers too are interested in the language of the Experiential Liberal Arts and in showcasing some of our innovative classes."

— Laura Green, Associate Dean of Teaching, Learning, and Experiential Education, Northeastern University

"We are working to create more classes that have a practical requirement. My experience suggests that students in the humanities want to connect their work to the 'real' world—they want to know that the question of reading well actually matters to the way people live their lives and experience the world."

— Rishi Goyal, Director of Medical Humanities, Columbia University

IMPACT RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Norwich Humanities Initiative, Norwich University

The Norwich Humanities Initiative (NHI) at Norwich University supports the development of team-taught interdisciplinary courses that invite students to put the humanities into practice through embedded research and community engagement opportunities. Funded via the NEH, the initiative elevates the role of the humanities at this senior military college and helps students connect the humanities to other areas of study. We worked with NHI project directors to survey students to learn how NHI courses influenced their perceptions of the humanities.

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

81% of surveyed students agreed that their NHI course helped them more clearly perceive how humanities knowledge and skills can be applied outside the university.

74% of surveyed students agreed that their course helped them understand others who are different from themselves.

55% of surveyed students agreed that their course made them want to take more classes in the humanities.

STUDENT VOICES

"It was nice to have two professors that have different backgrounds teaching the class because they could bounce ideas and examples off of each other. This allowed for the examples to cover a vast array of topics that can be connected back to the class. One was more mathematical and scientific, while the other was more philosophical. These characteristics seemed to really complement each other and make the class more enjoyable."

"Talking about problems in a multi-discipline context can allow for potential solutions to entrenched problems to be explored."

New Approaches to General Education

Many respondents emphasized the importance of maintaining a strong humanities presence in the general education curriculum—through both positive examples of increasing the gen ed humanities footprint and negative examples of the consequences of losing an existing foothold. Here, we point to a few promising curricular innovations that have succeeded in demonstrating the value of the humanities to a broad population through the core curriculum and faculty and administrators who have leveraged gen ed courses as key opportunities to attract more students (see “Cultivating a Marketing Mindset” on [page 45](#) for more on this).

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- Without completely overhauling the gen ed curriculum, Purdue University’s Cornerstone Integrated Liberal Arts certificate program has succeeded in dramatically increasing the number of STEM students who benefit from robust exposure to the humanities. The five-course sequence functions as a humanities “core within the core” designed for non-humanities students. Students take two popular Transformative Texts courses and choose three additional courses that highlight the value of the humanities in five areas—healthcare, the environment, science and technology, management and organization, and justice and conflict resolution. Program Director Melinda Zook reports that the program has helped boost enrollments, energize faculty, increase appreciation for the humanities, and establish fruitful partnerships. For example, Cornerstone encouraged the Dean of Purdue Polytechnic Institute (PPI, a college within Purdue University) to make the integration of the humanities a selling point of the school; as a result, 65% of PPI programs now require courses in humanities/social sciences in every year of study. Nationally, Cornerstone has inspired a grant program funded by the NEH and the Teagle Foundation to support similar efforts to reinvigorate the role of the humanities in general education.
- The University of North Carolina Asheville (UNCA) has maintained a strong humanities presence in the gen ed curriculum through its Core Humanities Program, a required, linear sequence of three surveys: The Ancient World; Communities and Selves, 300-1700; and The Modern World. Each course combines a common lecture with small sections that facilitate discussions, writing, and project-based activities, building upon the foundations of the previous course in the sequence. Faculty recently worked with an upper-level sociology course to survey more than 400 students to improve the program and make the most of this crucial opportunity to expose all students to a wide variety of humanities disciplines and subject areas. There are also opportunities for students to continue this course of study: two optional capstone courses for seniors—The Individual in the Contemporary World and Cultivating Citizenship in a Global World—as well as a humanities minor that encourages students to pursue a specific area of interest across disciplines.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“Working to make sure we maintain a healthy role in the General Studies program is crucial. Most students never think to major in the humanities until they have had a course as a part of their gen ed program and realize that what we teach is relevant and—as important—personally meaningful.”

— Stephen Covell, Chair of Department of Comparative Religion, Western Michigan University

“We have expanded our footprint in the gen ed system. First- and second-year courses can be great recruiting tools. We have put some of our best instructional faculty in entry-level courses as a way to introduce current students to these subjects. We also encourage these faculty to stress minors and certificates. They are not supposed to change every engineering major to a creative writing major, but they can stress the importance of communication and encourage those students to pick up a minor.”

— John Herron, Former Interim Dean of Arts and Sciences, University of Missouri-Kansas City

Case Studies

Many recognize the need for curricular innovation and the advantages of the approaches above but struggle with how to create visible curricular initiatives without new tenure lines to hire experts in these areas.

The following case studies present two models—a broad, flexible initiative and a precisely focused one—for fostering highly visible curricular innovations to elevate the profile of the humanities on campus. These case studies include analysis of the structures and strategies project co-directors leveraged to stimulate innovation, build support for new courses, and advertise them effectively to students.

CASE STUDY ONE

The High-Impact Humanities initiative, University of Massachusetts, Boston

The High-Impact Humanities initiative (HIH) at the University of Massachusetts, Boston offers a successful model for cultivating curricular innovations across all humanities departments on campus. Supported by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the initiative has led to the creation of 24 new general education courses and the infusion of experiential learning opportunities and career readiness content into both new and existing courses.

HIH illustrates how modest financial incentives can spur curricular innovations that reinvigorate humanities education and increase appreciation of its value among a diverse student population. Using a competitive award process that yielded a wealth of compelling proposals to select from, co-directors Bonnie Miller and Betsy Klimasmith efficiently leveraged resources to incentivize innovation. “The underlying theory of the grant is that faculty will do their best when given resources and freedom to create,” said Klimasmith. They awarded \$5,000 to each faculty member to develop a new course that offered rich learning experiences and appealed to a variety of student interests. Examples include a comparative ethnographic tour of diverse religious communities of Boston; an analysis of pandemic narratives involving the nation’s first public health museum; a poetry and creative writing course engaging patients at Boston’s hospitals; a deep dive into the arts of the Islamic world through collaboration with local religious and cultural centers and museums; and literature courses immersing students in rich local archives and the former homes of authors Malcolm X and Pauline Hopkins. “The project resulted in a number of courses that were very much of-the-moment and really brought our curriculum up to date,” said Miller.

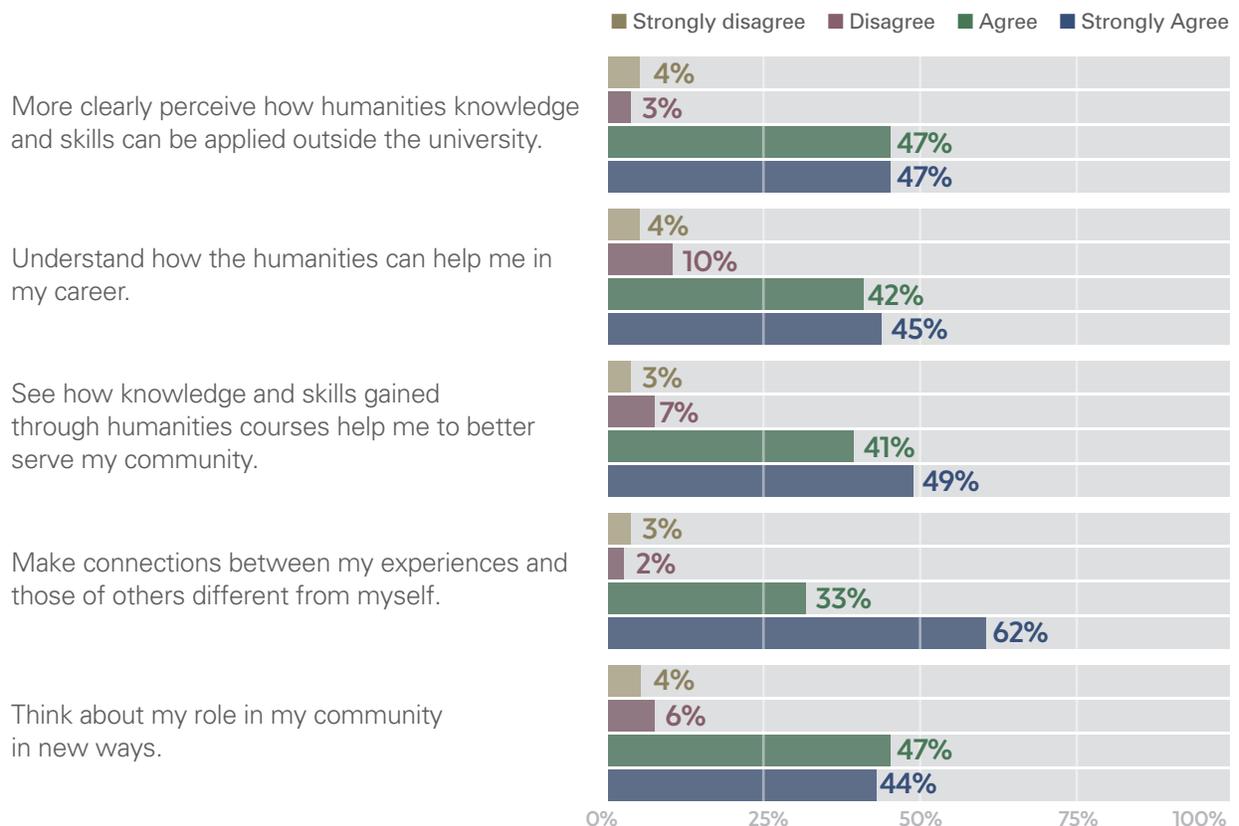
Meanwhile, Klimasmith and Miller implemented a collaborative model to help faculty work together to realize the full potential of the courses they conceived. The 24 faculty who received awards to create new courses were divided into three cohorts of eight. They read one another’s initial proposals and shared feedback, learned high-impact pedagogical approaches from a panel of faculty who had received awards for teaching excellence, and worked together to hone course syllabi. These cohorts built a community centered around supporting innovative pedagogy, which project directors emphasized as a major contribution to an urban, commuter campus with fewer opportunities for community-building than a residential campus. They intentionally formed cohorts of faculty at all stages of their careers, including non-tenure-track faculty, to maximize this impact.

Miller and Klimasmith point to valuable lessons learned through this experimental model. They invited faculty to apply for smaller grants to enhance existing courses, offering up to \$250 for field trips or

honoraria for guest speakers and \$500 to fund a new high-impact experiential exercise. They discovered that these modest sums were not enough to motivate innovative enhancements of existing courses. So they repurposed these funds, offering six \$1,000 grants to connect humanities disciplines to specific career fields by inviting community members working in those professions to participate in existing courses. This allowed for the formation of a fourth career-oriented cohort that succeeded in facilitating impactful curricular innovation. All of these resources helped energize humanities faculty, communicating to them that their commitment to providing exceptional educational opportunities for students is recognized and valued.

NHA and HIH partnered to create student surveys to document impacts of the courses created through these models. Survey responses from students who participated in affiliated courses offered in the spring semester of 2020 illustrate how the initiative is increasing appreciation for the humanities among a diverse student population. 48% of the 61 students we surveyed across eight HIH classes identified as non-white, and 59% were first-generation college students. Some were transfer students, others freshmen, and some were getting ready to graduate. While their backgrounds were varied, the surveyed students overwhelmingly agreed that their HIH course helped them better recognize the applicability of humanities knowledge and skills outside the university, in their careers, and in their communities (see Figure 3.1). Ninety-two percent agreed that their experience in their HIH course made them want to take more classes in the humanities, while 60% reported that their class made them consider new career paths.

Figure 3.1.
[Selected class] helped me:



From a humanities recruitment perspective, one of the most important features of the HHH initiative is its emphasis on making the most of gen ed opportunities to attract more students to the humanities. Our research showed that it is succeeding in this endeavor: 38% of the surveyed students indicated that the primary reason they took their HHH course was to fulfill a general education requirement. Of those students, 71% were non-humanities majors, and 80% agreed that their HHH course made them want to take more classes in the humanities. To ensure that the courses gain approval to fulfill related gen ed requirements, participating faculty work with the project directors to steer each course through the process. Ultimately, the initiative will result in the addition of 24 highly engaging courses to the gen ed curriculum that are specifically designed to demonstrate the professional, social, and civic value of the humanities through experiential learning.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE:

"This class embodies the importance of a liberal arts education ... it spark[ed] important conversations around concepts that range from gender expression to cultural appropriation. It challenges students to think about these topics with an open mind and inspires thoughtful questions ... I'm [now] considering a women and gender studies minor. This class really opened my eyes to the possibility of studying different identities in an academic way and I'm definitely interested in exploring that."

Water in Central Eurasia, The University of Pittsburgh

The Water in Central Eurasia project forges connections with the schools of business and engineering at the University of Pittsburgh to study problems concerning water sustainability and equitable access in Eurasia in the past, present, and future. The heart of the project is a chronological series of three courses housed in different departments: Water Past: Climate Change in the Pre-industrial Era (history); Water Present: Engineering in the Industrial Post-Empire (political science); and Water Future: Encounters in the Anthropocene (business). Through these courses, linked experiential learning opportunities, and co-curricular programming, the project demonstrates how deep understanding of regional history and culture is essential to solving complex problems. Furthermore, it offers a model for multi-level outreach to attract a broad range of students and establish partnerships to promote project success and sustainability.

The project grew out of a collaboration between two Title VI National Resource Centers at the University of Pittsburgh, the Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies (REEES) and the Asian Studies Center (ASC). “The centers’ leadership identified the NEH Connections grant as an opportunity to build curriculum that is embedded in an area studies mission while drawing in students from throughout the university,” said Ruth Mostern, director of the World History Center and an advisor on the project. “We began brainstorming about what we could do that was interdisciplinary that could build on emerging connections with the business and engineering programs; water emerged as a natural direction [in light of available expertise].” Project leaders also perceived how the project would demonstrate how the humanities “help students to think in a global way, to find imagination and empathy to reach far beyond themselves.”

Grant funds enabled leaders to augment and raise awareness about the project with student-facing events, project-based and experiential learning activities, and opportunities for students to conduct and present research under faculty mentorship. They also created two domestic study away programs that connect students with water equity work on the (Lakota) Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota and governmental, non-profit, and educational organizations working on water sustainability in Washington, D.C.

From the earliest stages, project leaders worked to establish partnerships that would elevate the program and help make it sustainable beyond the grant cycle. They presented the initiative to senior university leadership in the Office of the Provost, the Office of Student Affairs, the three participating schools (arts and sciences, business, and engineering), and the Honors College, securing broad buy-in for the project.

These partnerships enabled the creation of flexible and diverse curricular pathways through the program. Project leaders worked with partners to gain approval for the courses to fulfill general requirements in all three participating schools. And they reached out to academic and career advisors to solicit their help in encouraging student participation. Meanwhile, project leaders engaged in robust outreach to promote the course cycle to students. They collaborated with student unions, clubs, and living-learning communities to organize events on water sustainability and environmental activism. They also hired an undergraduate student ambassador to advertise it to students through visits to courses offered by participating schools, tabling at student orientation and engagement events, and peer-to-peer mentoring.

As a result of this multipronged outreach effort, more than 80 students enrolled in the pilot sequence of *Water in Central Eurasia* courses—reaching 85% of the aggregate maximum course capacity—from spring 2019 through spring 2020. Project leaders surveyed participating students to measure their progress concerning key pedagogical objectives. They reported: “Responses to our entry and exit surveys showed that curricular integration with the humanities has the potential to yield positive educational outcomes overall. Many students self-reported increased proficiency in knowledge in global and regional studies, understanding of interdisciplinary connections, communication, and collaboration skills.” For example, students emerged from the course much more confident in their ability to engage in discussion and debates about issues related to Central Eurasia; 91% indicated they possessed this ability in exit surveys (compared to 61% in entry surveys), and only 1% disagreed (compared to 21% prior to the course).

The success of the pilot has reinforced project leaders’ sense of the importance of investing in interdisciplinary projects to provide impactful humanities experiences to students who face barriers in accessing them. “While students are often interested in exploring integrated curricula to enhance their potential for personal, academic, and professional growth, rigid degree requirements [frequently interfere],” they wrote. “The institutionalization of interdisciplinary curricular pathways promises unique opportunities for demonstrating the value of studying the humanities to a broader audience of students, parents, faculty, and staff.” In this case, it “encourages students to explore a pivotal area of the world, while addressing an issue we know to be of global urgency—the need for clean, sustainable water sources—with humanistic habits of mind.”⁴

PERSPECTIVES FROM PROJECT LEADERS:

“In contrast to the traditional model of a liberal arts curriculum that uses general education requirements to ensure students take varied, yet often unconnected, courses from areas outside their majors, this initiative offers the model of a holistic education for the twenty-first century through a humanities-focused interdisciplinary investigation of a real-world issue.”

— Nancy Condee, Director, Center for Russian, East European & Eurasian Studies, University of Pittsburgh

“Humanistic thinking is most vibrant and transformative when it is placed in dialogue with other modes of inquiry. This initiative has demonstrated how eager students are to enrich all their courses with insights about history, culture, and the arts.”

— Ruth Mostern, Director, World History Center, University of Pittsburgh

⁴ Nancy Condee, Zsuzsánna Magdó, and Ruth Mostern. “Humanities-Centered Curricular Innovations: Lessons on Integrated Learning from the University of Pittsburgh’s Initiative Water in Central Eurasia.” August 2020.

Cultivating a Marketing Mindset

Another factor contributing to the decline in humanities majors and enrollments is what one might call a “PR problem.” The second and third most influential challenges identified by Humanities Recruitment Survey (HRS) respondents were “lack of understanding of humanities disciplines” and “discouragement from parents and other influences,” suggesting that humanists could do a better job conveying the value of a humanities education to students and those who influence them. We noted similar trends in our 2018 pilot survey, in which many elaborated on this theme when outlining key recruitment challenges. For example, one respondent pointed to “inadequate marketing of programs, inadequate promotion of successful career paths of our graduates, and insufficient recruitment spokespersons.”

In this chapter, we focus on strategies—in terms of messaging, vehicles, and outreach—for delivering persuasive arguments for studying the humanities to key audiences. These marketing strategies are critical to the success of many of the other strategies presented in this resource: articulating career pathways, curricular innovations, and fostering humanities identity and community. Marketing efforts also offer opportunities to cast the value of traditional humanities courses and majors in a new light. We see significant opportunity to ramp up marketing efforts to counter misperceptions and demonstrate urgent needs for humanities knowledge and skills in civic, social, and economic life.

We believe the wide range of approaches gathered under this heading to be of crucial importance and substance. Working to persuade students of the value of humanistic education helps faculty become better teachers. It helps realize the potential of the humanities to strengthen key civic institutions and promote social justice. And it is a crucial aspect of fostering a learning environment where everyone can feel they belong. There are opportunities to adapt this kind of marketing mindset across all levels of humanities education. Here, we point to ways faculty are incorporating it into their teaching and mentoring; departments are promoting the value of their disciplines, programs, and courses; and colleges are advertising the importance of the humanities through media and events. All of these examples highlight ways to reach broader audiences, grab their attention, and address their aspirations and concerns.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“The [marketing] strategies [we have] employed have proven effective. The annual Reclaiming the Humanities conference is one of our key events and it engages students, faculty, staff, and community members. The peer mentee program includes an outreach component where students outreach to their community college peers as a professional development activity. [And we’ve] develop[ed] social media pages that feature informational videos, announcements, and program information pertinent to students, faculty, and other key collaborators. Outreach to students has increased exponentially. ... In 2016-2017, roughly 100 students were engaged. In 2018-2019, nearly 2,100 students received education on the PATH program and the benefits of a humanities degree. More importantly, these efforts have resulted in an increase in student interest and enrollment.”

— Krystal Henderson, PATH Program Activity Manager, San Diego Community College District

We have organized the marketing efforts presented in this chapter into several subcategories:

OUTREACH TO PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS (AND THEIR PARENTS)	46
BRANDING AND MESSAGING	49
CRAFTING ENGAGING PROMOTIONAL MEDIA	51
MOBILIZING STUDENT AMBASSADORS	53
INTEGRATING A MARKETING MINDSET INTO EVERYDAY PRACTICES	55

These approaches are interrelated and are certainly not mutually exclusive. For example, branding and messaging, engaging promotional media, and student ambassadors can all strengthen outreach to admitted and prospective students. By breaking marketing strategies down this way, we hope to equip faculty and administrators to strengthen their marketing efforts in a holistic manner, enhancing their pitches for humanities education and expanding their reach.

Outreach to Prospective Students (and Their Parents)

Prospective students (including non-traditional and transfer students) and their parents are crucial target audiences for marketing humanities majors and courses. While there are distinct challenges to accessing and addressing this group, particularly compared to students who have already arrived on campus, our research shows that early engagement can help increase recruitment yield. Prospective students and their parents may be uninformed about the humanities (and potentially biased against them), but their excitement and openness concerning educational possibilities create opportunities for challenging misperceptions and increasing their interest in humanistic education. The examples below offer models for reaching students and parents early and often through in-person events and distance communications with messaging tailored to the particular student population.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- At Dartmouth College, campus partnerships that engage prospective and admitted students have proved crucial in reversing a steep decline in humanities majors following the Great Recession. These partnerships have worked on three fronts: expanding the pool of humanities-oriented applicants, increasing their acceptance rates, and enticing admitted students with attractive first-year offerings. Former Associate Dean of Arts and Humanities Barbara Will worked closely with Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid Lee Coffin when he was hired

to help the admissions team understand the nature of humanities scholarship and how to spot promising humanities students among applicants. Will and her colleagues also worked with admissions to create and promote an Arts and Humanities Day designed to attract more humanities students to the college. Prospective students and parents heard accessible and captivating presentations from leading faculty and toured arts and humanities spaces on campus; 100% of participants applied. Finally, Will and her colleagues partnered with the president and communications office to produce and distribute a high-quality brochure advertising a humanities core sequence to all admitted students. “The numbers for these core courses have been steadily climbing,” said Will. Indeed, the program has become so popular that acceptance is now very competitive.

- The College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Montclair State University has created a robust calendar of events designed to engage students and parents at each stage of the journey from high school to matriculation. It historically hosts a Humanities Day, inviting students from area high schools to campus to hear faculty lectures on humanities topics of interest. In conjunction with University Admissions, the college also hosts a series of targeted orientations for every stage of the admission process—open house events for high school applicants and accepted students and orientations for deposited students and incoming freshmen—as well as orientations for parents at different stages. “Foremost, the various orientations have made inroads with some of the students,” said Associate Dean Leslie Wilson. The college has also put extra effort into making incoming students feel welcome, offering college ambassadors to talk to prospective students, and providing a peer mentoring initiative available to all first year students.
- The University of California, Irvine (UCI) designed an interactive event for prospective students and their parents called UCI Humanities in Action. Students and parents were invited to explore 10 stations in a large room. They could play a computer game created by a UCI historian, peruse books written by university faculty and alums, explore a mini art exhibition curated by an English professor, play a trivia game, or watch videos about faculty and student projects.
- Humanities faculty at the New Jersey Institute of Technology have ramped up their efforts to engage prospective and admitted students to attract more majors from a STEM-oriented population. They hold on-campus workshops for high school students three times a year, including a STEM+ seminar to raise awareness of the benefits of double majoring in a humanities field. Humanities faculty also make a point of delivering this message at all university-wide open houses. And they are reaching out to community colleges in the area to attract more transfer students to humanities programs.
- The College of Fine Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at the University of Massachusetts Lowell centers its two on-campus welcome days for admitted students around TED-talk-style presentations by current students on their coursework and co-curricular experiential learning activities. Four to five students work with the director of student success to hone an engaging five to seven minute

presentation. Following the presentation, prospective students and families meet with faculty and student representatives from their prospective majors. “Prospective students and their families have responded well to the student presentations, [which are] always quite amazing,” said Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies Sue Kim. “History and English have done well recruiting students [afterwards]. It’s very demanding on faculty, but the results have been good.”

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“Students want lucrative careers, but they don’t realize that the skills they need for those careers—namely, writing and oral communication skills, critical thinking, and creative problem solving—are all skills that they could be acquiring in the humanities disciplines. Our challenge, then, is to catch students early, shift the narrative they’ve been fed about the humanities, and help them see the value of a humanities education as it relates to their pursuits beyond the classroom.”

— Joanne Diaz, Chair of English Department, Illinois Wesleyan University

“Direct contact with students seems to be the strongest approach, as we are able to cultivate relationships before students even apply. I know that students have chosen our program for this reason alone. We send postcards and direct emails to prospective and accepted students that promote the English major and minor. We will be reaching out this summer to host department chairs from area junior colleges to tell them more. [And we are] meeting with admissions and marketing to develop a recruitment plan.”

— Ashley Bender, Assistant Professor of English, Texas Woman’s University

“Public events marketed toward students and their families are effective for us. Partnering with local elementary and high schools for public events helps raise awareness as to the importance of the humanities more generally. We also work with our local media outlets and PR consultants to advertise public programs when appropriate. [We’ve] been pleased that our local media outlets have covered various public events that we have organized.”

— Oliver Rosales, Professor of History, Bakersfield College

Branding and Messaging

Here, we point to institutions that have distilled persuasive messages for the value of the humanities into attention-grabbing brands and slogans. These messages frequently highlight applications of humanistic knowledge and skills, whether in terms of specific applications or broadly applicable transferable skills. The combination of succinct targeted messaging and memorable graphic design can help shift perceptions of the humanities.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- The College of Liberal Arts at the University of Nevada, Reno has crafted a dual approach to branding and messaging that promotes both the social and practical value of the humanities as part of its five-year strategic plan. The college's new tagline, "Elevating Humanity," emphasizes the value of the humanities and other liberal arts disciplines for promoting social justice and civic engagement. This tagline has been used to promote the Liberal Arts in Your Living Room series of virtual lectures, performances, and other activities broadcast during the COVID-19 pandemic. And new communications materials and media are being developed to promote the brand. Meanwhile, the college is working to demonstrate the value of humanities disciplines in the workforce through its Applied Liberal Arts program. The dean's office is working with each department to develop an applied pathway for its discipline, hiring a project director to support the creation of these pathways and promote them. Dean Debra Modellmog emphasizes the importance of taking these messages off campus as well, engaging elected officials, local business leaders, high school guidance counselors, and community colleges to shift perceptions about the value of the humanities in the broader community. "We are becoming known at the university and in the community for how vigorously we promote the humanities and liberal arts more generally," said Modellmog.
- Virginia Tech's Tech for Humanity initiative is elevating the profile of the humanities at a comprehensive technological university that is positioning itself as a leader in human-centered innovation. The university-wide effort is spearheaded by Sylvester Johnson, founding director of the university's Center for Humanities. His campaign, which has attracted attention from national media outlets, asserts the necessity of comprehensive education for ethical technological development, emphasizing the essential value of the humanities for this institutional mission. Under this banner, the Center for Humanities has launched a variety of initiatives that engage students (prospective and current), faculty, employers, and government officials. The center garnered a major grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support the establishment of a Tech for Humanity pathways minor, which explores technology policy, inclusion and diversity, ethics of artificial intelligence, the impact of technology on democracy, and the role of social justice in making technology accountable to public interest. The center created a summer institute to invite high school students to experiment with these humanistic

approaches to technology. It has also advocated for the contributions humanists can make to potential employers in the technology industry through the university's D.C.-area-based innovation hub and a partnership with social entrepreneurship accelerator DoGoodX.

- The School of Liberal Arts at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) launched a campaign called Liberal Arts Dual Degree Advantage to promote the professional advantage of adding a liberal arts major and degree to students pursuing majors in other schools at the university. The program removed barriers, making it possible for students to earn both degrees within a four-year time frame at no additional cost. More than a dozen humanities majors can be pursued through the program. The marketing of the program highlights stories of recent graduates whose liberal arts degree helped them land their first job, a message that has succeeded in attracting media attention, including a spot on local network news as part of its "Hiring Hoosiers" series. "This program is very much about diversity and inclusion," said Interim Dean Robert Rebein. "Every student should have a meaningful and transformative liberal arts experience. The program has attracted lots of first generation students. We are meeting students where they are; parents who would oppose a degree in history support pursuing it when in combination with something like engineering or public health."

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"About three or four years ago, we lobbied successfully for the creation of a \$2.5K award [called the Go: Fund] for humanities majors who enter the university as a humanities major and stay in that major until their junior year. In the junior year, they are eligible for this award to fund a travel experience or an internship. There was a separate brochure for the humanities related to this venture. It was entirely a way to increase applicants. ... We yield the applicants we get at a rate higher than the university average."

— Paul Eisenstein, Professor of English, Otterbein University

"With the help of our university's communications office, we have been trying to get the word out far and wide about our publicly engaged research, teaching, and programming! We have met with admissions officers (again and again) to try to adjust and polish the message they are sending. We run as much programming as they will allow at admissions and yield events, including student panels. We have the ear of upper administration ... [and institutional advancement is] helping get the word out about our humanities strengths. And we have designed a new public humanities minor which will bring together a number of faculty and courses that already exist on campus and galvanize teachers and students around public engagement. Our humanities classes have not dropped precipitously in enrollments, which we attribute at least in part to our efforts. We have increased the yield of high caliber humanities students."

— Jessica Berman, Professor of English, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Crafting Engaging Promotional Media

Several departments and colleges have reported that enhancing the content, messaging, and production value of their promotional media has helped increase their yield of prospective students. These efforts range from more modest departmental efforts to craft compelling websites and print materials to multimedia rebranding efforts across entire colleges, digital storytelling of humanities success stories, and effective strategies for leveraging social media to reach students.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- The Colby College Center for the Arts and Humanities created short films (1.5–3 minutes) to highlight its most engaging programming, including humanities “lab” courses that emphasize experiential learning and annual theme programming—classes, performances, screenings, lectures, and panels addressing one big topic (e.g. human/nature, the presence of the past, etc.) from a variety of perspectives. “The Center’s focus on engaging students through the theme has enabled the humanities to mount the most popular events on campus, and to drive the biggest intellectual conversations at Colby,” said the center’s director, Kerill O’Neill. The short films expand the impact of these events and courses and empower targeted marketing. “We partnered with admissions to embed our films in messages targeted at students with specific interests,” noted O’Neill. “These films have been downloaded hundreds of thousands of times.”
- The Division of Humanities and Fine Arts at the University of California, Santa Barbara has powered an aggressive online marketing campaign with a steady stream of image-rich posts to the News and Features section of the division website. New content is posted every few days during the semester; more than 350 features were posted in just the last three years. The engaging interface makes it easy for visitors to browse an extensive archive of posts categorized as alum all-stars, cool courses, student spotlights, focus on faculty, etc. The division highlights these features and humanities and arts events on campus through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts with several hundred followers each. Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts John Majewski points to this campaign as a primary strategy contributing to the health of his division. The number of majors has increased every year for the last four years, nearing the all-time high of 2006, and total enrollments have reached an all time high.
- The College of Humanities at the University of Arizona has invested in high quality promotional videos to promote humanities majors and highlight career pathways. The college hosted an inaugural two-day event in 2019 that brought together alums from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors to discuss the value of a humanities degree in their respective fields. The college captured those leaders’ reflections in a TV news interview-like setting, then selected the strongest 10–30 second segments from more than a dozen of these exchanges. These were sequenced into a 6.5-minute video that testifies to the value of the humanities

for an extraordinarily wide range of career fields in the voices of diverse experts. The college has also produced brief videos on how majors are applying their education that combine interview audio with video footage of alums on the job to provide a more dynamic perspective on humanities skills in the workforce. These career-oriented media, which dovetail with the Applied Humanities curricular innovation (see [pages 27-28](#)), have contributed to the college's growth; the number of humanities majors among incoming students doubled from 2018-2019 to 2019-2020.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"We have developed a website and Facebook page for our [Bilingual Professional Writing Certificate] program and have purchased marketing materials/items. Our marketing efforts have worked, and the website has attracted attention."

— Isabel Baca, Associate Professor of English, University of Texas, El Paso

"We are preparing foam-board, professionally produced posters featuring our alums and what they have done with their English major. We already have foam boards listing famous English majors, ones that list what our alums have done, and where our students intern. We have given the latter two to the Career Center and the Exploratory Studies Division—and we use [them] for prospective student days. ... We have collected and posted photos of alums and their career stories on our website. ... We also send articles about the viability of the humanities from Washington Post, NY Times, Forbes, and elsewhere (including NHA's Study the Humanities toolkit) to all English majors via our distribution learning management system devoted to our majors—especially during breaks when they are often thinking of their futures and having relatives and friends question them. We also share this material with the Exploratory Studies Division and Career Center. ... Overall, audiences have responded very favorably. We have succeeded in attracting some new majors."

— Eleanor Shevlin, Professor of English, West Chester University

Mobilizing Student Ambassadors

Some institutions have found that students are more open to their peers' efforts to promote the humanities. Student ambassadors bring a distinct kind of credibility and are poised to speak directly to student concerns in relatable language. They can find new ways to reach students and enhance the success of existing efforts, such as driving departmental social media campaigns, increasing turnout for events, and pitching the major/minor or additional courses. The testimony of fellow students to the value of the humanities in their lives holds special influence.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- The Institute for the Humanities at the University of Michigan recently formed an Undergraduate Engagement Group (UEG) to strengthen its efforts to produce and promote events and projects to undergraduates. The group contributes to a broader effort to sponsor lectures, workshops, and exhibitions that address undergraduate interests and concerns. For example, the High Stakes Culture Series offers a nuanced analysis of cultural conflicts in the news, including the removal of Confederate monuments, the NFL take-a-knee protests, and the surfacing of blackface photos from politicians' yearbooks. UEG students work with Institute staff to plan and advertise these events to maximize undergraduate turnout. To solicit applications for the competitive selection process, the UEG website advertises that "group members have unique opportunities to connect with our faculty, visiting scholars, artists, and staff; to learn real-world event planning, organizing skills, and social media marketing skills; and to develop an understanding of the inner workings of an academic humanities organization."
- The history department at Loyola Marymount University has developed multiple strategies for leveraging the advocacy of their most passionate students to attract others. The department has held themed poster contests to solicit student contributions to its Study History campaign; students combine a meaningful quote and a historical image to create posters that advertise the department across the campus. The overhauled department website features students' write-ups about department-sponsored programs and events and other activities they pursue as history majors. These articles are posted to the department's Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook accounts, which students follow and contribute to. The department also redecorated its space, reimagining it as a welcoming "village" to inspire implicit, organic student advocacy. "Students now hang out [there] to study, work on projects together, or just catch up," said chair Elizabeth Drummond. "It's a dynamic and growing program, with great students and a wonderful community." After suffering a 60% decline in majors from 2011 to 2017, the department achieved a 35% increase in majors and 120% increase in minors in just three years.
- The English department at Ball State University has maintained a healthy population of 300-400 majors while doubling the number of minors since 2014. Former department chair Cathy Day pointed to the importance of a student-driven

social media campaign in attracting students to the department. “Creating community online can help students find their niche through the major,” said Day. “Students are hungry for community, and they often start looking for it online.” Her department started ramping up its social media efforts in 2010 by leveraging work study funds. The department tapped students with strong communication skills and trained them to write for a broader audience. When Day became the supervisor of this effort in 2014, she drew from her experience as a writer who had to learn how to promote her own fiction to teach the students the basics of social media marketing. These students produced a steady stream of blog and social media posts, alum interview features, and plugs for departmental events, which “helped us get our mission into the university’s marketing story,” said Day. “The squeaky wheel gets the grease; the university is looking for content. The key is to present English events and courses in a jargon-free, accessible manner.”

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“We have a peer facilitated program that helps students identify their goals, strengths, and values and to connect with experiential learning opportunities that fit their individual profile. This is an effort to help them develop both depth and breadth of training and articulate how that training has produced a flexible, valuable skill set—something students in the humanities don’t always do on their own well in a culture that emphasizes the value of technical skills and expertise.”

— Samantha Swindell, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, Washington State University

“We have undergraduate interns who give us visibility on Twitter and Instagram.”

— Ivo Kamps, Chair, Department of English, University of Mississippi

Integrating a Marketing Mindset into Everyday Practices

Our research has surfaced examples of humanities departments that have succeeded in reversing declines in enrollments and majors and bucking national trends through a culture shift that challenges faculty to be more intentional about marketing their offerings. Many of the strategies they point to—promoting the value of the discipline in accessible terms, making the most of opportunities to expand the pipeline of prospective students, and personally reaching out to engaged students regarding opportunities for further study—do not require major financial investments so much as a steady team effort.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- The history department at Angelo State University has succeeded in attracting more majors through concerted attention to recruitment on multiple levels. It introduced new courses to connect with student interests and collaborated with faculty in other departments to contribute courses to new minors in Mexican American studies and gender studies. Department faculty have recruited effectively from required American history surveys, stressing the versatility of the skills acquired through the study of history and connecting local histories to national narratives. The department also maintains a regular calendar of events to foster a sense of community and get to know prospective students, including an annual barbecue, free movie nights offered through a newly organized history club, and a monthly afternoon of board games. And it has worked closely with student advisors to support students' progress in their degree plans. "Our faculty care about and pay attention to the needs of our students—not just their grades or their development of skills, but also their well-being," noted department chair Jason Pierce.
- The number of majors in the philosophy and religion department at Appalachian State University had dwindled to around 20. The department redoubled its efforts to engage students. They hosted regular "philosophy in film" screenings, student-faculty coffee hours, and guest speakers, in addition to sponsoring several student clubs organized around philosophy, religious studies, moral science, and other subjects. Faculty engaged students by inviting them to these events, suggesting additional courses to take, and encouraging them to consider becoming majors. Within five years, the number of majors had grown to 90.
- The history department at the University of Oklahoma has succeeded in reversing declining majors and enrollments, achieving a 17% increase in majors and 19% increase in minors from 2016 to 2020. A comprehensive recruitment effort spearheaded by senior academic counselor Sarah Olzawski, who meets with every student from sophomore year through graduation, has played a crucial role. She points to targeted data-driven outreach as crucial to this effort. For example, data analysis revealed that roughly one fifth of history graduates started as business or STEM majors. Consequently, Olzawski targeted students who were struggling in these majors and choosing to take history courses, sending them direct emails.

She also gave presentations on the personal and professional value of the major to classes that included many of these students. “When these students switch to history, they are overwhelmingly excited,” said Olzawski. “The turnaround on their transcripts is remarkable.”

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“My college has gone out of its way to prioritize recruitment, which has helped us a great deal. One successful strategy has been heavy faculty involvement. When parents and students get to talk to individual faculty about their research and classroom opportunities at recruiting events, suddenly the humanities start to sound fascinating, necessary, and important in ways parents may not have realized before. ... Another highly successful strategy was to find money in our College of Arts and Letters budget to hire our own recruiter. He is an employee of our college, not the admissions staff (although of course he operates in line with university practices), and he reports directly to the dean. This means we’ve had the opportunity to help him become an expert in the humanities in a much more in-depth way, which makes his pitch to prospective students that much stronger. He’s made a huge difference to our annual yield.”

— Melissa Gregory, Associate Dean for the Humanities, University of Toledo

“Our strategies have been: active faculty participation in recruitment during visitation days; active faculty participation in outreach for recruitment; involvement of alums; education of Board of Trustees via regular presentations; [and maintaining] an active cultural events calendar. All have measurable positive results assessed from feedback and entry surveys about decision-making factors.”

— Pedro Maligo, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Doane University

Case Studies

As the categories and projects featured above demonstrate, there is a broad spectrum of content—from individual courses to the humanities writ large—that humanists are working to market more effectively, as well as a wide range of approaches they might take, from sophisticated media-empowered marketing strategies to good old-fashioned hustle. These case studies illustrate that range. The first showcases a dynamic and intentional rebranding of the humanities themselves—empowered by market research of prospective student attitudes and high-quality media and design—that addresses student anxieties head-on while tapping into their deepest aspirations. The second is the story of a history department that has succeeded in attracting more majors in a time of steep decline in history majors nationally through a combination of tactics that have expanded the top of the major recruitment funnel and yielded more majors. The former illustrates what is possible with a significant investment in a coordinated marketing strategy while the latter illustrates the aggregate impact of more modest efforts.

CASE STUDY ONE

Arizona State University

In 2018, Jeffrey Cohen was hired as dean of humanities at Arizona State University (ASU) with a charge to raise the profile of the humanities on campus. He quickly saw an opportunity to invest in a thoughtful and compelling marketing campaign that would address students' concerns about job prospects and help them see ASU Humanities as a vibrant space offering insight into issues of importance to them.

He tapped a local marketing firm called Fervor to help shift student perceptions of the humanities. Fervor told him that they first needed to know more about what students already thought about the humanities. Together, they surveyed 826 randomly selected students about their perceptions of the humanities and their experiences in humanities classrooms.

They found that students' perceptions of the humanities were overwhelmingly positive, but many were confused about the areas of study comprising the humanities, the transferable skills acquired through them, and their potential impact in the wider world. Ninety percent affirmed that the study of the humanities is important because it helps us understand our place in society and different cultures. The survey surfaced a number of positive terms that students associated with the humanities—such as community, global, discovery, connected—that compelling messages could be built upon. On the other hand, students were less confident that they would acquire leadership skills and marketable skills that would help them succeed in a global market. Survey data revealed a large swath of students were potentially open to the humanities but needed to be better informed about the possibilities: 25% indicated they had considered majoring in a humanities discipline but had concerns about job prospects; 9% said they did not even realize it was an option for them. Students generally associated the humanities with a limited range of jobs that were lower paying and/or required advanced degrees.

Fervor also surveyed faculty about their observations of student attitudes. This not only provided valuable information but a starting point for securing buy-in for the new campaign. When asked about the single most important thing that could be done to increase student interest, the number one response (33%) was showing a link between humanities degrees and jobs, followed by appealing to students' sense of social and cultural engagement (27%). These widely shared views, as well as

individual responses (e.g. “[emphasize] getting ahead of every complex challenge facing us in this century”) shaped a campaign that faculty could get behind.

From there, Cohen and his colleagues worked with Fervor to establish a comprehensive marketing strategy encapsulated in the tagline “building better futures through the exploration of the human adventure across time and place.” They crafted a vision statement, mission statement, and **elevator speech** and identified marketing objectives, a hierarchical list of target audiences, key benefits of studying the humanities, and **compelling adjectives** for describing them. They broke down the task of elevating the humanities on campus into two phases: (1) unifying humanities faculty around core messages while encouraging each member to express these in their own words and (2) creating vehicles to deliver those messages to students and those who influence them. The latter phase was broken down into two stages: develop primary media vehicles—including an overhauled website, brochure, and brand video—and deliver more precisely targeted messages to specific audiences through events and communications.

ELEVATOR SPEECH

The Humanities explore the human adventure across time, culture and place. Through the examination of fundamental questions and experiences from diverse perspectives, students become problem solvers and leaders. With firm foundations in research, writing, language study and reasoned argument, the Humanities foster lifelong learners who are engaged in answering global challenges with empathy, creativity and verve. This combination of rigorous academics and a sense of adventure offers a tool kit for the creation not only of a career, but also a fulfilling life.

COMPELLING ADJECTIVES

Humane
Adventurous
Creative
Career Building
Interdisciplinary
Relevant
Entrepreneurial
Connected
Diverse
Lively
Necessary
Compassionate
Fundamental
Global

To initiate the first phase, Cohen delivered a brief summary of the comprehensive marketing strategy to the faculty. “It is not about trying to sell anything or to capitalize on fleeting trends,” emphasized Cohen. “Instead, our task is to empower our students to create satisfying lives for themselves by giving them access to the best of what humanities study provides. We know that the life skills imparted through our curriculum—research, writing, language study, and reasoned argument—are necessary for success in all careers ... our task is to share that message, consistently and confidently.” While some faculty are more enthusiastic about the project than others, many are excited about what it might do to boost majors and enrollments.

For the second phase, Cohen and his colleagues worked with Fervor to create image-rich media, including a new website, engaging videos, print materials, and HTML emails. They compiled a library of aesthetically pleasing, dynamic videos and images that convey passion and energy. These feature real ASU humanities faculty and students and illustrate how the humanities community on campus mirrors the diverse demographics of the overall university population, including approximately one third Latinx students. These media spotlight punchy messages—“forge your future,” “answer global challenges with empathy and creativity,” “connect your passion to your career”—that simultaneously address concerns about job prospects and tap into students’ deepest aspirations. Visitors to the new college

website are immediately directed to information about jobs and careers (including a link to the *Study the Humanities* toolkit) and 25 alum success stories. The overriding theme is one of empowerment: “make your experience your own; through the humanities you’ll gain everything you need to build a rewarding career, a satisfying life, and a better world.”

An outsourced comprehensive marketing campaign like this one is not as expensive as one might think. Cohen said that ASU Humanities budgeted \$20,000 for the project, which it has not yet exhausted—not an inconsequential amount but within the realm of possibility for many institutions. Such a project could be scaled down to fit a lower budget. For example, it would be considerably more affordable for those willing to forego the video production or who have access to an in-house videographer.

The new campaign, launched in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, has already generated momentum for ASU Humanities. “The number of humanities minors is rising, as is the number of students deciding to study non-English languages, film and media studies, and our new concentration in Philosophy, Ethics and Law,” observes Cohen. “I also think the energy this campaign created has made faculty feel that they are part of a wide community that is united in its desire to give students access to the best of humanities study. We have a lot of work to do but this has been a good starting point.”

CASE STUDY TWO

University of Oregon’s History Department

The department of history at the University of Oregon, unlike most history departments in the U.S., has been gaining majors. Like many history departments, it suffered a significant drop in majors in the years following the Great Recession, bottoming out in 2016 with 189 majors. By fall of 2020, the department of 29 faculty had 286 majors, an increase of 51% in just four years. The department’s overarching marketing approach is a two-pronged strategy: 1) expanding the top of the major recruitment funnel through curricular reforms and 2) strengthening arguments for the major to increase their yield. “We’re trying to do what we do well, to convey the value of what we do to students and academic advisors, and to build structural incentives into the university curriculum that channel people our way,” said department chair Brett Rushforth.

First, the department has increased its gen ed footprint by certifying as many courses as possible to fulfill core requirements. “When all departments were asked to re-certify core ed classes, we did more than any department,” said Rushforth. “Structural incentives to take history classes are worth more than hundreds of flyers or emails.” The department has also worked to make gen ed offerings more attractive. It renamed courses to emphasize topics and themes rather than periodization or geography; U.S. History to 1815 became *Inventing America*, 20th century U.S. History became *The American Century*. The department also diversified course offerings and hired faculty to teach in areas of growing student interest, including African American history, global environmental history, comparative colonialisms, legal history, and gender history. These curricular reforms helped attract students to history courses.

The department has made the most of these opportunities through efforts to ensure these students have the best possible experience. “We assign surveys to our most dynamic and experienced teachers,” said Rushforth. “We have excellent younger faculty, but the most experienced teachers tend

to draw in the majors.” The department has also invested more time and energy into enhancing the quality of graduate student teaching to ensure the discussion sections that accompany many of these larger gen ed courses are effective and enjoyable. This emphasis on delivering the highest quality teaching helps convince students who sign up for a one-off course to try for another.

This is the point in the major recruitment funnel where efforts to make a strong case for the value of the major are crucial. “We want people to major in history because we believe we offer something of great value to them and to society,” said Rushforth. “So we try to explain that value and recruit majors.” Recognizing that concerns about career prospects are a hurdle for many, the department has expanded its efforts to address them. “We bought 300 copies of the AHA's Careers for History Majors pamphlets and are distributing them zealously, nowhere more so than at the advising offices,” said Rushforth. The department also brings in alums from a wide range of fields for career night events to showcase the variety of career pathways available to history majors.

Finally, the department has worked to enhance the major itself with new elements that foster community and encourage students to think of themselves as historians. This helps with retention and makes the major more appealing to prospective students. The department created an introductory methods course called The Historian’s Craft to better articulate the value of the major and build community among majors. “Our unstructured major can make community formation a challenge,” said Rushforth. “This is new but already seems to be helping.” To help students end their degree on a high note, the department created an annual History Showcase, held right before graduation, where majors have the opportunity to present their capstone projects to family and friends as well as their peers. “Parents love it,” said Rushforth. “And majors have started to really look forward to it.”

Fostering Humanities Identity & Community

In this final chapter, we point to an often overlooked aspect of humanities recruitment: encouraging students to identify with the humanities and connect with a community of students and faculty through their studies. While a smaller proportion of Humanities Recruitment Survey (HRS) respondents emphasized this strategy, it is a crucial component of several initiatives that are generating enthusiasm for the humanities. These programs attract students through the traditional strengths of the humanities—smaller class sizes, deeper professor-student relationships, topical discussions, and opportunities for self-driven inquiry that cultivate habits of lifelong learning. And by providing a community of peers, facilitating connections with faculty, and offering special experiences, these programs reinforce students’ commitments to the humanities in the face of obstacles, such as discouragement from peers and parents.

As in other chapters in this resource, we see an opportunity to more effectively promote hallmark strengths of the humanities. The initiatives featured in this chapter—including cohort programs, interactive co-curricular experiences, and efforts to support incoming students and historically underrepresented students—highlight and deepen opportunities for intellectual exploration in the context of a community. Their success suggests that contemporary students are hungry for the kind of personally meaningful and richly interpersonal educational experiences offered in the humanities and that humanists can more successfully tap into that demand by more intentionally packaging and promoting those opportunities to students.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

We have an initiative called ‘The Humanities Visibility Project,’ which is student and faculty organized and supported by the humanities departments, a flagship gen ed program, ... and the Dean’s Office. Part of the goal is to build a social identity for humanities students on our campus. At present, humanities majors as a social class are nearly invisible. The project aims to address that. We are hoping for increased enrollments in our majors, to be sure, but also [to encourage humanities] departments to collaborate with students and with each other to our mutual benefit.”

— Andrew Slade, Chair, Department of English, University of Dayton

We have organized the initiatives that foster humanities identity and community presented in this chapter into several subcategories:

PROGRAMS FOR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS	62
CREATING A COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS THROUGH COHORT PROGRAMS	64
PROMOTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR IN-DEPTH (ONE-OFF) EXPERIENCES	67
FOSTERING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY AND ENGAGING UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS	69
STRENGTHENING AND SUPPORTING COMMUNITY COLLEGE PATHWAYS	71
PEER MENTORSHIP	72

These approaches are interrelated and are certainly not mutually exclusive. For example, peer mentorship can help strengthen programs aligned with all of the other categories, and efforts to support first-year students, community college transfers, underrepresented students, and burgeoning researchers may overlap and reinforce one another. By breaking strategies down this way, we hope to inspire faculty and administrators to think about how they might more effectively and inclusively foster humanities identity and community at each stage of students' educational journeys.

Programs for First-Year Students

Students are typically hungriest for community and world-expanding educational experiences when they first arrive on campus. First-year students who arrive without fixed plans of study may be searching for a field with which to identify. These programs, ranging from engaging seminars to cohort programs to co-curricular activities, offer entering students opportunities to connect with peers around humanistic learning. They also serve to elevate the profile of the humanities within the crowded menu of offerings presented to matriculating students.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- Illinois Wesleyan University created a First-Year Humanities Fellows program to highlight the humanities as a foundation for lifelong learning and public engagement. Now in its fourth year, the program begins with a seminar on the history of the university, the aims of liberal arts education, and an exploration of guiding ideals of truth, beauty, and justice. Meanwhile, students connect outside the classroom through field trips, poetry readings, and small-group discussions

with invited speakers. They write about and discuss creative performances on campus in preparation for Humanities Immersion, a five-day tour of Chicago cultural institutions over spring break. Through a half-credit spring course, students present individual research projects, develop a detailed plan for their remaining college career, and discuss strategies for articulating their humanities skills to future employers with career center staff. The first cohort of students so thoroughly appreciated the program that they volunteered to mentor subsequent cohorts. Inspired by the program's success, Provost Mark Brodi introduced seven additional first-year cohort programs, including humanities-rich tracks like Citizen Titans, Global Titans, Titans for Change, Justice Scholars, and Policy and Ethics Partners.

- The College of Letters and Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison created First-Year Interest Groups (FIGs) that expand upon the traditional freshman seminar model. The program emphasizes humanities strengths: an intimate learning community, dedicated attention from instructors, and interdisciplinary insights. Each FIG seminar is capped at 20 students and many include experiential learning opportunities outside the classroom. Instructors may also link their seminar to up to two complementary classes that further explore themes central to the seminar, enabling humanities faculty to craft enticing packages of courses to be promoted to the entire freshman class as a kind of mini-cohort program. For example, an American Identity and the American Dream FIG links an English course on American identity to a course on gender, women, and cultural representation offered by the department of gender and women's studies. The FIG model has also provided humanities faculty fresh opportunities to demonstrate the practical value of the humanities and draw fruitful connections to other areas of study. For example, the history department offered a FIG entitled Capitalism in America linked to courses on microeconomics and sociology of race and ethnicity, while the department of German, Nordic, and Slavic languages offered Sustainability in the North: Culture, Environment, and the Economy.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"We have beefed up and added sections to our core humanities sequence (two first-year courses that study a changing roster of 'great books'). The summer before students matriculate, we send them a brochure outlining the HUM sequence and inviting them to apply, pointing out that it is a competitive process. The numbers for these core courses have been steadily climbing—we now turn away half of all those who apply."

— Barbara Will, Former Associate Dean of Humanities, Dartmouth College

Creating a Community of Scholars Through Cohort Programs

These programs nurture promising students' burgeoning interest in the humanities by immersing them in a community of scholars. The community supports students' intellectual development and deepens their insights into the themes and content that bring them together. Such programs attract prospective students and highlight key strengths of humanities education—deeper connections with faculty and peers, opportunities to pursue personally meaningful research—showcasing the possibilities to the broader population of students. Many of these programs promote humanities identity and community through opportunities for self-driven research supported by a community of peers and mentors. These research-rich programs serve to counter misperceptions among students who associate research with STEM fields.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- The Engaged Humanities Initiative (EHI) at the University of Illinois at Chicago, funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, fosters publicly engaged undergraduate research in the humanities. The program is promoted as an opportunity to pursue personally meaningful research projects that make a positive impact on the community while experiencing faculty-student mentorship and a supportive community of peers. Students in EHI seminars visit cultural organizations throughout Chicago and have access to funding for additional self-directed experiential learning. Students are coached on research skills and encouraged to experiment with alternatives to traditional research papers. 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. As seniors, they become mentors for subsequent EHI cohorts, helping to build momentum for the program. "We anticipate participation in the program will increase as we have more students in the pipeline," said program director Ellen McClure. "They're by far our best ambassadors." Identity, community, and research are key selling points for the program. 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."
- The Baker-Nord Center for the Humanities at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) collaborated with university admissions staff to launch the Baker-Nord Scholars program in 2016, which is advertised as "the experience of a small liberal arts college within the setting of a world-class research university." Fostering humanities identity and community is central to the four-year cohort program's stated mission: "to help humanities students identify their academic passions and pursue their life goals by integrating incoming students into the life of the humanities community at CWRU." The Office of Admissions invites the most

promising humanities students in each incoming class to participate. Baker-Nord Scholars begin their college career together with an ungraded, one-credit humanities colloquium designed to facilitate collaborative learning and tease out students' passions and goals. From there, they enjoy faculty-guided tours of local museums, opportunities to meet with visiting speakers, additional advising services, a stipend to support relevant travel or research, and privileged access to the Baker-Nord Center for the Humanities' Humanities@Work programming (see [page 17](#)). Many participants have volunteered to serve as Humanities Ambassadors for prospective and incoming students. "We began in 2016 with 10 students; we now take in 30 a year; by the end of 2020 there were 120 Baker-Nord Scholars on campus," said center director Peter Knox. "We hope to continue to grow the program and make it a magnet that brings students to CWRU."

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"[One] of our most successful initiatives to increase applications and yield of humanities-inclined students has been to bundle already-existing financial and merit aid into 'Humanities Fellowships,' for which we created an exclusive seminar and additional co-curricular programming. We successfully doubled the number of our Humanities Fellowships [last year]."

— Dorothy Hodgson, Dean of Arts and Sciences, Brandeis University

"We have allocated some secondary funding from SUNY to develop both a scholarship program and a student fellows program to encourage students to explore our program. We hope that building a cohort of engaged students will help us raise its profile. And we are involving students in public scholarship/engagement projects to make their learning and work more visible to other students, administrators, and faculty. Anecdotally, we find that peer recommendations have a significant influence on what courses students take."

— Daryl Lee, Associate Professor of Humanities, SUNY Polytechnic Institute

IMPACT RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Murphy Scholars Program in Literature and Language, Hendrix College

The Murphy Scholars Program in Literature and Language at Hendrix College was established in 2014 to foster intellectual community and facilitate student-driven experiential learning opportunities. Students of all majors who are interested in pursuing advanced study in literature and language are encouraged to apply in the spring of their first year. Murphy Scholars gain access to \$4,000 to fund at least three co-curricular experiences—such as study abroad, unpaid internships, service-learning projects, and original research—and are invited to compete for additional funding. Meanwhile, Murphy Scholars experience a variety of community-building events, engaging guest speakers, visits to local cultural institutions, and fellow Scholars' presentations of their work. They also complete an Oxford-inspired tutorial course in which one to three students meet with a faculty member for in-depth exploration of a topic of personal interest. NHA partnered with the Hendrix-Murphy Foundation to survey and interview students about their experiences in the program.

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

100% of surveyed students agreed that the program structure and activities facilitated the formation of relationships with other Murphy Scholars.

We also asked what aspects of the program strengthened their sense of belonging to a community of scholars. Students highlighted several specific components:

84% hearing other Scholars' presentations

68% regular monthly meetings

68% attending plays and lectures on campus

58% fall retreat

STUDENT VOICES

"I came into Hendrix as a [molecular biology] major and pursued STEM courses throughout my first two years, but as I interacted more and more with the literary activities on campus, nearly all of them the result of Hendrix-Murphy, the more I found that English was the thing that made me happy. The program kept connecting me with positive experiences in the field of English, and I eventually jumped ship from the STEM program to major in literature."

"The relationships [established through the program] were special to me because they formed from shared interests in topics that I do not often get to talk about. It's hard to find a room of people who would all be interested in the intricacies of punctuation or in the ways that the Latin language is joked about by the likes of Monty Python's comedic troop. These friendships were meaningful and everlasting in the way that literature is, and they will continue to grow and evolve as language does."

Promoting Opportunities for In-Depth (One-Off) Experiences

These initiatives facilitate deep experiences of learning in community with more modest investments of time and resources than cohort programs. They range from reading and discussion groups to visits to cultural organizations to small-group discussions with visiting scholars about their work. These experiences can help students make personal connections with the humanities and like-minded peers, but the barriers to entry are lower for both the host institutions and student participants. Consequently, they offer opportunities to capture the interest of students not yet committed to studying the humanities.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- The Simpson Center for the Humanities at the University of Washington recently piloted a program called the Katz Scholars in the Humanities to facilitate a memorable, enriching experience for undergraduates around the quarterly Katz Distinguished Lectures in the Humanities. The program tapped a doctoral student mentor to guide six selected students through reading and discussion of major works by a visiting scholar. The group attended the evening lecture together before a small-group meeting with the scholar the following day. In a focus group feedback session, 100% of participants recommended the center continue the program and further expand outreach to undergraduates. The Simpson Center staff and board are responding to this call. “The beauty of this model is that it is affordable and achievable—it could be done at the department level—yet it was very substantive and high level,” said the center’s assistant director Rachel Arteaga. “All you need is one speaker to get started.”
- In 2017, the Arts & Humanities Council at Indiana University Bloomington launched an annual Global Remixed Festival that explores the global, contemporary impact of a single nation’s culture (e.g., China Remixed in 2017, India Remixed in 2018, Mexico Remixed in 2019). Students and faculty collaborate with artists and scholars in the featured country to produce an eclectic series of performances, exhibitions, film screenings, public lectures, and conferences that build foundations for future collaboration. “We have had a great response from the campus and the wider southern Indiana community [and] cultivated a more supportive scene for experiences in arts and humanities,” said council director Ed Comentale. “We see many more students involved in advanced work, attending events and programs, and expressing a greater commitment to public humanities.”
- A rich menu of more modest community-building academic enrichment programs at Yeshiva University have helped foster humanities identity and community by bringing faculty and students together to reflect on the ways the humanities enrich our civic, social, and professional lives. A series of three workshops on how history informs policy decision-making, held in the context of the 2016 election, demonstrated the immediate relevance of the humanities to the moment. Faculty-guided visits to local cultural organizations and performances connect the

guided visits to local cultural organizations and performances connect the humanities to experiences and institutions outside academia. Research competitions for students in the humanities and social sciences have enabled students to share their projects and passions with the wider campus community. Events on humanities career pathways and the broader value of humanities education help students connect those passions to real-world impacts and jobs. “Students have responded very positively to these efforts,” said academic advisor and special projects manager Meirah Shedlo. “They report that they feel encouraged by the professional support, love the cultural enrichment events, and find the timely intellectual programs ‘eye opening’ and ‘inspiring.’”

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“Encouraging first-year students to attend events they might not actively choose, e.g., poetry and fiction readings or events that blend arts and activism, gives them a sense that the liberal arts have impact beyond the page. ... Art events that reflect activism can inspire students. By having MacArthur Fellow A.E. Stallings visit campus to share her poetry and experiences teaching English to refugees via poetry workshops, my students’ eyes were opened: they gained valuable perspectives about community service and how the liberal arts can build bridges in communities.”

— Jane Satterfield, Professor of Writing, Loyola University Maryland

“We’re inviting speakers who will interest students, such as Yalitza Aparacio, the star of Roma who was nominated for an Academy Award and who now works as a human rights activist in Mexico. Also Min Jin Lee, Korean-American author who spoke to the students on self-realization as a woman of Asian descent. ... I counted audience numbers and we did very well in that regard.”

— Eve Zimmerman, Director, The Suzy Newhouse Center for the Humanities, Wellesley College

Fostering Inclusive Community and Engaging Underrepresented Students

Recognizing that many humanities fields and programs have historically excluded students from underrepresented groups, these initiatives strive to make access to the humanities more equitable. Many offer support in the form of community-building events, mentorship, professional development workshops, and funding for research and internships. Such programs foster community among underrepresented students and elevate their voices to help make the humanities community more inclusive and inviting to all students.

Both initiatives featured below are funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, a national leader in supporting historically underrepresented students in the humanities. While these robust, multifaceted programs have been bolstered by the foundation's generous support, several of their components and underlying strategies can be implemented on a smaller budget. For example, while the opportunities for funded research require substantial resources and coordination, it may be more feasible to offer the kind of professional development and community-building programming for underrepresented students created through these initiatives.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- The Humanities Inclusivity Program (HIP) at Georgia State University provides humanities majors from underrepresented groups with opportunities for intellectual enrichment, professional development, and community-building. The program, a partnership between the recently established Humanities Research Center (HRC) and the Center for the Advancement of Students and Alumni, encourages participating students to continue their studies into graduate school and ultimately help diversify the professoriate. Twelve to 15 students are admitted to HIP each year. They receive paid research assistantships and participate in workshops and seminars designed to prepare them for the rigors of graduate school. "We hope that the program will have an effect on the overall culture among students," said HRC director Denise Davidson. "Most of our students are first generation college students, so the potential impact of small numbers of them learning about what is involved in earning advanced degrees in the humanities is quite large."
- Heritage University, which has a student body that is 69% Latinx and 12% Native American, has developed several strategies for supporting historically underrepresented students and their families, including the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship that supports advanced study in the humanities. Each year, five fellows are selected for two-year awards, including a summer research stipend for the first year and support for faculty-mentored research in the second year. The program coordinator connects fellows with recognized scholars in their chosen fields from institutions across the country. A broader group of students benefit from "Pre-Mellon" mentoring, attending the academic workshops, oral presentations, and other professional development events funded by the program. These grant-funded opportunities are nested within a broader campus culture of

inclusion and support that encompasses students' families. "We're committed to consistent intentional outreach to the families of our students," said program coordinator and associate professor Winona Wynn. "When we welcome our incoming freshmen, we honor the commitment of both the students and their families." For example, Wynn and her colleagues send home Certificates of Success when students receive passing mid-semester grades and host monthly Community Welcome Dinners that celebrate specific Native and Latin American cultures through traditional foods, music, dance, and student presentations. Each academic year culminates with a Family Celebration Dinner that showcases exemplary student work in English and Spanish. "The outcomes resulting from including the families have been very positive," said Wynn. "Students have expressed that they are more connected to family support, their parents are more informed, and our commitment to honor our cultural communities has been validated."

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"Last year a group of motivated students created the History Club, which is creating a pipeline of new majors. Credit goes to our student leaders for purposefully building an inclusive community. That matters to students, and I've had conversations with multiple new majors about how that matters to them. It's an extremely effective recruiting tool (and the right thing to do). The online community we have built recruits for itself; the department Twitter account and club Twitter account both have more than 1,000 followers."

— Sarah Olzawski, Senior Academic Counselor, University of Oklahoma

"We're excited about the Engaged Humanities Initiative, which draws both on the research strengths of the exceptional UIC faculty (who are uniquely engaged with the larger community) and on the profile of UIC students, around half of whom are Pell-eligible and around 35% of whom are first generation students. As the program develops, we anticipate being able to serve as a model for articulating and practicing the engaged humanities while expanding the humanities' reach and appeal."

— Ellen McClure, Director, Engaged Humanities Initiative, University of Illinois at Chicago

Strengthening and Supporting Community College Pathways

Partnerships between two-year and four-year institutions expand pathways from community college to a humanities bachelor's degree and publicize these pathways to students. Many students enjoy substantial and meaningful exposure to the humanities through community college curricula but, for various reasons, do not see pursuit of a humanities bachelor's degree as an option for them. These initiatives help humanities faculty at two-year institutions more effectively promote humanities education as a path to success. They also help humanities departments and programs at four-year institutions connect with incoming transfer students and more effectively support them.

This is another area where The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has been a leader, funding both of the pathway partnership programs highlighted below. Once again, while these robust, multifaceted programs have been bolstered by the foundation's generous support, several of their components and underlying strategies can be implemented on a smaller budget. For example, while a five-week summer bridge and a funded internship program require substantial resources and coordination, it may be feasible to conduct outreach to local community colleges and offer special programming for transfer students to help them find a home in the humanities on their new campus.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- The University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and the San Diego Community College District (SDCCD) partnered to establish the PATH (Preparing Accomplished Transfers to the Humanities) program. PATH provides resources to prepare humanities majors transferring from three SDCCD colleges for success at UCSD. "The idea is to smooth and expand the transfer pathway [and] ensure that students on those campuses know that UCSD is a great place to study philosophy, literature, history and ... an intellectual and creative home for them," said associate professor of history Daniel Widener. Participating students benefit from a free five-week summer academy designed to help them acclimate to the UCSD campus and its workload and academic standards. They take two courses for credit, meet weekly with peer mentors, enjoy field trips and community-building activities, and attend career readiness workshops. The program provides stipends and covers expenses—including books, parking passes, and meals—making it possible for more students to participate. Thanks to a highly successful marketing campaign engaging thousands of students at the three participating community colleges, "student interest in majoring in the humanities has soared," said professor of English at San Diego Miramar College Carmen Carrasquillo Jay, resulting in a "higher number of transfers studying the humanities at [UCSD]."
- The Humanities Edge, a pathway partnership between Miami Dade College and Florida International University (FIU), aims to deepen transfer students' identification with the humanities in the context of a supportive community. Each summer, 60 students transferring into the history, English, and art programs at FIU complete an intensive, week-long research and writing bootcamp. As the initiative's title suggests, there is also a major emphasis on highlighting the

valuable skills and professional opportunities that can be accessed through the humanities through year-round Humanities at Work programming and the paid internship program referenced in the “Articulating Career Pathways” chapter (see [page 16](#)). At the same time, there is a strong appeal to students’ personal identification with their studies: “Study what you love, gain the skills you need to succeed,” the program website exhorts. The program also sponsors programming that connects the humanities to the experiences of a majority-Latinx student population, such as a panel on Miami’s Unwritten Immigrant Histories. Each of these components, as well as the collaborative streamlining of curricular pathways by humanities faculty from both institutions, have been intentionally adapted to accommodate the challenges of participating students, many of whom are first generation college students juggling substantial non-academic responsibilities.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“We have worked actively to create articulation agreements with local community colleges. [Students] who have applied to the university and indicated this program as a program of interest get a personalized email from me as well as three timed program specific emails that sing the praises of the program. We have seen a slight uptick in our numbers.”

— Jennifer DeWinter, Professor of Arts, Communications, and Humanities, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Peer Mentorship

Survey respondents have shared a variety of ways they have used peer mentors to foster humanities identity and community. Peer mentors help to smooth students’ transition to college, advise and tutor them in introductory seminars, and mentor their research projects and career preparation. They enrich curricular, co-curricular, and cohort-based programming, welcoming students into the spaces where they have found community through humanistic inquiry. Like student ambassadors (see [page 53](#)), peer mentors bring a distinct kind of credibility that positions them to testify to the value of the humanities in a particularly relatable way. Meanwhile, the peer mentor role provides mentors an opportunity to deepen their own identification with the humanities community.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

- Davidson College has revitalized a decades-old year-long humanities course for first-year students, increasing enrollments from 18 students in 2016 to 99 students in 2020 after decades of steady decline. Davidson Humanities Fellows, who serve as peer mentors to first-year students, are integral to the program. These peer mentors are trained to lead small-group discussion sections, tutor students in writing and research, and organize associated activities, including a pre-orientation

retreat and study trips. These activities familiarize students with the variety of disciplinary and career paths within the humanities as they learn alongside librarians, archivists, gallery directors, as well as the team of eight faculty instructors who take turns teaching course units from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives. “The fellows have brought about a transformative change in how the course works as a learning community: discussions are better and writing is more focused because the fellows have created a community of trust and mutual commitment to the course,” said faculty director Scott Denham. “It’s really magical to watch.” The program is now on track to reach 15–20% of the student body, a size and presence, Denham noted, that builds community across classes and elevates the profile of the humanities among alums, admissions, and parents.

- The Office of the Provost at Washington State University has created a university-wide peer mentorship program called LAUNCH that helps students make the most of current opportunities and prepare for their transition from college to the workforce. Peer mentors help connect students to experiential learning opportunities and identify their goals, strengths, and values. LAUNCH is a university-wide effort, but the model seems particularly helpful for humanities students and could be adapted to address them specifically. “This is an effort to help students develop both depth and breadth of training and articulate how that training has produced a flexible, valuable skill set—something students in the humanities don’t always do well on their own in a culture that emphasizes the value of technical skills,” said Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies Samantha Swindell.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“The peer mentorship really matters! This project allowed for peer mentors to guide them through pláticas or discussion sessions. The students really bonded with them. Having peers take the lead allowed them to see what they could be. The peer mentors talked about the struggles of being from marginalized communities (Latinx) and the first in their families to go to college. It is an amazing experience to see how the peer mentors, who are only a few years older than them, but who have a few years of college experience, take ownership of their education through their mentorship and guide the[m] to be better students overall. I think peer mentorship is crucial for a program that works with first generation minority students.”

— Jennifer Mata, Director, Mexican-American Studies, Texas Lutheran University

Case Studies

The two case studies presented here highlight institutions that have combined a variety of initiatives and strategies to foster humanities identity and community in a comprehensive way. These case studies illustrate widely varying approaches appropriate to their contexts. At UCLA, we see a coordinated effort to promote the value of humanities education to a large, diverse population of students and welcome students into an inclusive learning environment. And at the University of Richmond, humanities faculty are building upon a sequence of university-wide programs that foster community through humanistic learning with new humanities-specific programs designed to strengthen humanities identity among students.

CASE STUDY ONE

The University of California, Los Angeles

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.

Dean of Humanities David Schaberg has 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 eight to 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 Andrew W. 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 underrepresented student groups and make course material as accessible as possible. "EPIC is a call for cultural change across the humanities disciplines at UCLA," explained Schaberg, 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," said Schaberg. "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 historically underrepresented students, 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 gen students. More than 30 humanities faculty have identified themselves to students as being first gen, 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. "Although there is no way to be certain, I suspect that these efforts have helped keep up the overall number of students who choose to major in the humanities at UCLA," said Schaberg.

University of Richmond

The University of Richmond has long offered high-profile, community-building learning experiences through a set of university-wide programs geared toward first- and second-year students: the Bridge to Success, First Year Seminars, and Sophomore Scholars in Residence programs. While these programs have all included courses from other areas of study, they are all dominated by humanities offerings.

Before their first semester, students are invited to enroll in the Bridge to Success (BTS), a free, immersive five-week summer program created by the School of Arts and Sciences (A&S). Participating students get a head start acclimating to the campus and college life while completing one of the university's required wellness courses and a gen ed course typically taught by humanities faculty. Each participating student is matched with a peer mentor to help them find their feet on campus. While only a small portion of the incoming class completes BTS, every incoming student is required to enroll in First-Year Seminars (FYS) in the fall and spring of their first year. Approximately 70% of the 40-odd seminars offered each semester are taught by humanities faculty, who connect core humanities themes and student interests through courses like Race and Law in the United States, Rhetoric and Terrorism, The Search for the Self, and Epidemics and Empires. Each FYS is capped at 16 students and emphasizes the importance of core humanities skills for all students, including critical reading and thinking, information literacy, and written and oral communication skills. The highly popular Sophomore Scholars in Residence (SSIR) program offers students opportunities for even deeper experiences of learning in communities of no more than 16 students over the course of a full academic year. Each SSIR living-learning community integrates a traditional semester-long fall course, a half-credit semester-long group project in the spring, and extensive experiential learning activities culminating in group travel to a related site. Students also connect with members of other SSIR communities through residential cohorts. Much like FYS, the smaller menu of SSIR options is chock full of humanities offerings. Examples include Reading to Live, a course exploring the value of literature for navigating the human experience, and The Great War, Modernity, and Memory, a close examination of World War I as an inflection point in American and global history.

While these programs have clearly been successful in building community around experiences in the humanities, they do not always result in students identifying with the humanities since they are promoted as university-wide programs. "We conducted student focus groups; students said that their most amazing experiences of community are happening in humanities classrooms, but they often didn't recognize the humanities as the container," said Coordinator for the Humanities in Arts & Sciences Nicole Sackley. "There was a real lack of humanities identity across disciplines. We needed some signature programs to make the humanities more visible on campus."

Sackley and her colleagues designed two such signature programs, Humanities Connect and the Humanities Fellows Program, to build off students' experiences in the Bridge to Success, First Year Seminars, and Sophomore Scholars in Residence programs, offering them opportunities to pursue even more in-depth experiences in their remaining years on campus and identify themselves with the humanities. "We're uniting things and tying them together, creating coherent humanities-based paths for students not just through majors but through these experiences," explained Nathan Snaza, who has directed Bridge to Success since 2013 and will succeed Sackley as coordinator for humanities next year. "This helps students see the humanities less as a discrete set of academic disciplines and more as an

approach to living and thinking” that can enrich other areas of study as well as their personal and professional lives post-graduation.

Sackley and her colleagues began with the Humanities Fellows Program, which was launched in 2014 and reimagined in 2017. Selected fellows participate in an interdisciplinary seminar organized around a timely theme (e.g. Migration for 2020-2021 and Contagion and Connection for 2021-2022), travel together to Washington D.C., conduct funded mentored research, and present their research projects at the A&S Student Symposium the following spring. The program also “connects Fellows with mentors and alums as they match and market their skills to internships and careers,” observed faculty director Abigail Cheever. “But fundamentally, the program works to create a sense of community, uniting students and scholars across disciplines. The student response has been terrific; our young humanists clearly wanted a community of shared intellectual interests and commitments to contemporary challenges. The seniors mentor the juniors and sophomores and alums reach out as well. We’re starting to build a network and we hope to expand the program soon!”

Next came Humanities Connect, a selective interdisciplinary works-in-progress seminar that brings together faculty, advanced undergraduates, and community-based humanists to support one another’s research. The program promotional materials explain that “the word ‘connect’ emphasizes the power of humanistic questions to draw together many perspectives and [the university’s] commitment to innovative intellectual exchange across disciplinary, faculty-student, and community-university lines.” Each seminar is focused around a common theme (e.g. Race, Nation, and Conflict) that participants explore through and across their projects. Participating students receive a half unit of course credit as they learn alongside faculty and conduct research under their mentorship. Faculty participants earn a small stipend. An aim of both Humanities Connect and the Humanities Fellows Program is to “introduce students to humanities research earlier in their college careers and to provide them with a student cohort for support and encouragement,” explained Sackley. “Students flourished when they shared their ideas and research process with one another and experienced their individual research as connected to a wider community of humanists.”

The payoff of these efforts is a pathway through community-building, humanities-rich, university-wide programs like BTS, FYS, and SSIR toward increasingly robust engagements with humanities scholarship in community. From matriculation to graduation, students are presented with opportunities to forge deep connections with faculty and peers around the humanities, pursue more of them, and come to understand themselves as humanists who are part of a broader community. As a result, students can more easily see how the humanities can serve their immediate needs for connection, reflection, and exploration throughout their undergraduate experience.

While this comprehensive sequence of robust programs is no doubt empowered by the greater availability of resources at this generously-endowed university, underlying strategies and program components could be extracted and adapted to a smaller budget. In this way, this case study offers a menu of options for fostering humanities identity and community and an opportunity to reflect upon the distinct opportunities for doing so at each stage of a student’s educational journey. More broadly, it is a call for reflection concerning how humanities faculty can promote and link opportunities for impactful experiences of humanistic learning to encourage students to identify with the humanities.

Next Steps

In the preceding chapters, we have highlighted a range of recruitment strategies that help to expand access to the humanities by removing barriers—such as concerns about career prospects, return on investment, and the applicability of humanities knowledge and skills—that we might assume have disproportionately impacted historically underrepresented groups of students. Whether these strategies have also succeeded in attracting a diverse group of students necessary to a thriving community of humanities students, scholars, and practitioners remains less clear.

In each chapter, we see individual examples of initiatives that are intentional about communicating that individuals from all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds belong in the humanities community: The Humanities Edge (see [page 16](#)) internship program, carefully designed to be accessible and beneficial for community college transfer students; Texas Lutheran University's *¡Sí, Más!* initiative (see [page 34](#)), a summer bridge program that immerses local Latinx high school students in local history and Mexican-American studies while preparing them for college with help of undergraduate peer mentors; ASU Humanities' marketing campaign (see [pages 57-59](#)), crafted to reflect the considerable diversity of its faculty and student population and directly address students' concerns and goals; and efforts at Heritage University (see [pages 69-70](#)), an officially-designated Hispanic Serving Institution and Native American Serving Institution, to engage students' families in supporting their education and offer students opportunities for professional development and advanced study in the humanities.

Strategies such as the ones above are excellent examples of how humanities initiatives can encourage and enact inclusivity in the humanities. However, there is more work to be done in understanding the range of approaches that exist and how effective they are in attracting underrepresented students—including racial and ethnic minorities, first generation college students, community college transfers, and recent immigrants—to the humanities. Further, even if these interventions lead students from historically underrepresented groups to take humanities courses or declare a humanities major, which initiatives are intentional in engaging such students throughout their undergraduate careers and innovating to better serve their needs? Which initiatives have been particularly effective in that vein? Answering these questions is an essential component of a broader reckoning with the ways the field itself has been exclusionary.

To address these questions, we plan to extend our research to identify initiatives that proactively engage students from historically underrepresented groups, effectively address their concerns and priorities in efforts to recruit a diverse population of students to the humanities, and foster an inclusive learning environment that promotes academic and professional success for students of all backgrounds. We will look for strategies that are intentional in these goals, not out of a misguided mission to remediate supposed deficits among underrepresented students but out of recognition that many institutions and humanities fields have been explicitly and implicitly exclusionary. We will also look at the full field of humanities recruitment efforts to identify initiatives that have resonated with underrepresented groups

of students even if that was not a stated goal of the intervention. We will turn a particular eye to the ongoing efforts of institutions to interrogate and redress legacies of racism and exclusivity and how those might intersect with efforts to build humanities programs that are more inclusive of underrepresented students.

To better capture these interventions, we plan to develop an updated version of the Humanities Recruitment Survey that asks specifically about initiatives that are intentional in attracting underrepresented students to the humanities and deliberate in their efforts to engage them throughout their college careers. We will ensure that our survey outreach captures a wide range of institutions including minority serving institutions, community colleges, and regional comprehensive universities, as well as liberal arts colleges and public and private research institutions. With a well crafted survey that foregrounds that goal, we hope that respondents will share a variety of ways they are engaging with this work on their campuses. While recognizing the crucial role that The Andrew W. Mellon foundation has played in moving work of this nature forward, we also hope to learn about initiatives being undertaken on smaller budgets and at less-resourced institutions to fulfill our goal of gaining a comprehensive understanding of strategies that have been effective.

We plan to share findings from this next phase of research through resources modeled on the chapters presented here. Collectively, they will identify strategies for engaging underrepresented students and supporting them throughout their undergraduate career. Each will highlight the partnerships that have been most effective in supporting these strategies. For example, in considering how faculty and administrators can best support students once they choose to study the humanities, we will look to partnerships with departmental advisors, student success centers, offices of diversity and inclusion, and internship offices, among others, to identify models that have effectively supported underrepresented students. Through this next phase of our research, we aim to demonstrate how making access to humanities education more equitable and attracting more students to the humanities go hand in hand.

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

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



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