

Overview and Background of *The 2007–08 Humanities Departmental Survey*

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences is pleased to make available the final report of the pilot study of the Humanities Departmental Survey (HDS), which reports data collected in 2007 and 2008 from approximately 1,500 departments in the fields of history, English and literature, foreign languages, art history, history of science, linguistics, and religion. The project was undertaken with the collaboration of the American Academy of Religion, the American Historical Association (AHA), the College Art Association, the History of Science Society, the Linguistic Society of America, and the Modern Language Association (MLA), each of which surveyed departments in its disciplines. The American Political Science Association and the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) also provided important assistance.

The HDS is a component of the Academy's Initiative for Humanities and Culture, one goal of which is to build a new data infrastructure for the humanities. The data collection efforts of the Initiative have proceeded along two parallel tracks:

- the development of a comprehensive portfolio of statistics on the humanities based on *existing* data (the Humanities Indicators project); and
- the collection of *new* data about the humanities (the Humanities Departmental Survey).

We believe the collaboration of disciplinary associations and societies in seeking such information from departments is unique and has yielded significant new data that have not been available from sources used by the Humanities Indicators project. The 66 percent questionnaire return rate is testament both to the responsiveness of departments to national membership groups and to the persistence of the staff of the Statistical Research Center of the American Institute of Physics (AIP), which served as the data host for the project.

The project was undertaken as a pilot effort to test the feasibility of collecting new data through membership organizations by using a template questionnaire crafted to eliminate ambiguities in interpretation. The data collected by the project provide not only new information on each of the disciplines but also allow us to make comparisons across these disciplines. We are especially grateful to the Teagle Foundation for supporting this project and to Roman Czujko, Susan White, and Rachel Ivie of the AIP's Statistical Research Center for preparing the report.

Data collection efforts in the humanities have a complicated history. Since 1985, the legislation authorizing the National Endowment for the Humanities has mandated the agency to develop a "national information and data collection system on humanities, scholars, educational and cultural groups and audiences." However, Congress has never appropriated the funds to create such a system. In its early years the agency built a substantial data collection capability by undertaking special surveys and studies in response to requests for proposals, by establishing a Planning and Assessment Studies Program that supported research on humanities disciplines and institutions through regular peer reviewed competitions, and by cooperating with the National

Science Foundation, the Department of Education, and other federal agencies. Over the years, however, constraints on the NEH's budgets and personnel have eroded that commitment, and the agency is now severely compromised in its ability to demonstrate the value of expenditures on the humanities or to describe the needs of humanities disciplines and institutions.

Over the years, this need for funding as well as data has been addressed in various ways. In 1991 the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation commissioned the Organization of American Historians and its then-executive director Arnita A. Jones to survey existing data sets relating to the humanities. A second and expanded version of this effort was taken up by the MLA and the ACLS, with support from the Mellon Foundation. The results of the second survey, as designed, were transferred to the NEH, where it was made available online. Eventually, this effort, too, was abandoned for lack of funds.

In the meantime, however, the large discipline-based societies in the humanities were steadily and substantially increasing their capability to develop data on their constituencies, conducting annual departmental surveys and undertaking analyses of existing data sets that related to their fields. They also began to analyze existing data sets collected by federal and other surveys of higher education and humanities institutions in order to develop a more nuanced picture of conditions in their disciplines.

In the late 1990s, in order to measure the impact of the rising use of part-time and adjunct instructors in the humanities in higher education, Phyllis Franklin of the MLA underwrote development of a survey on the issue of the increasingly widespread replacement of full-time faculty positions with part-time and non-tenure track employment. This led to the creation of the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW). Under CAW a template questionnaire was developed and administered to humanities departments by several ACLS disciplinary societies. The collected data provided a clearer picture of the drift toward increased use of part-timers, usually without benefits. The effectiveness of the template led the Academy and key disciplinary societies to believe that a template for collecting data from humanities departments could prove useful in providing significant new information on such key issues as faculty hiring patterns, teaching loads, faculty and tenure policies, aspects of the student experience, and teaching and instruction.

The HDS—initially called the Template Project—was designed to collect much-needed *original* data directly from humanities departments. The survey will provide important information about roughly one-third of the disciplines that form the core of a liberal arts education.

The study examined departments or programs granting degrees in:

- art history;
- linguistics;
- English;
- MLA combined English/foreign languages;
- foreign languages;

- religion;
- history; and
- history of science.

The data will be incorporated into the second iteration of the Humanities Indicators. Specific goals of the Humanities Departmental Survey include:

- development of a pilot survey instrument based on a template developed by several humanities associations in collaboration with the Academy;
- survey administration and data collection;
- analysis of the data;
- evaluation of the survey instrument, administration, and analysis; and
- dissemination of the survey results.

The Academy is considering a second stage of the project that would include departments from all disciplines in the humanities (philosophy, musicology, and so forth) and would place greater emphasis on identifying interdisciplinary programs. Future efforts along these lines will be closely tied to the Humanities Indicators.

The project was overseen by an advisory committee and a technical committee. The latter was involved in management and assessment of the data collection process, including all reports. The advisory committee consisted of representatives from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (Leslie Berlowitz), American Academy of Religion (John Fitzmier), American Council of Learned Societies (Steven Wheatley), American Historical Association (Arnita Jones and Robert Townsend), American Political Science Association (Michael Brintnall), College Art Association (Linda Downs), History of Science Society (Robert Jay Malone), Linguistic Society of America (Alyson Reed), and Modern Language Association (Rosemary Feal and David Laurence). The technical committee comprised Robert Townsend, Michael Brintnall, and David Laurence. In addition, Norman Bradburn (Humanities Indicators Project director and National Opinion Research Center) and John Hammer and Alice Noble (American Academy of Arts and Sciences) worked closely with both committees.

In the essays that follow, David Laurence of the MLA and Robert Townsend of the AHA analyze the HDS data and highlight key findings relating to their fields. Townsend and Laurence were active members of the technical committee and brought considerable expertise and experience to this project. We appreciate their efforts.