

## "How can we model the behavior we seek to inspire?" An On-going Series

### Education & educational opportunities

*"How can we model the behavior we seek to inspire? Do our boards, staff and volunteers reflect the diversity of the communities we serve? How can we be more inclusive?" –theme of the November 2013 Federation of State Humanities Council conference in Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>1</sup>*

The state and jurisdictional humanities councils provide educational services—the humanities approach of seeking out evidence, looking at it from various angles, weighing it against other evidence, and discussing it with respect for differing points of view. Councils require that projects they fund incorporate the services of humanities professionals so as to provide balance. Initially founded on university campuses, some councils have acquired a certain amount of independence from academic establishments, both in terms of staff and board credentials and affiliations. Others remain located on academic campuses; benefit from academic services, healthcare, and pensions; or retain an academic bent on their boards. Some councils fund academic research; many support K-12 teacher professional development. All are at least in touch with their educational systems and institutions.

Regardless of the relationship between a council and its academic and educational institutional context, that context is an important part of the cultural toolkit with which councils work. The institutions of higher education, however, must be counterbalanced with the educational levels of the populace. Does a council program for those with baccalaureate or professional degrees, does it seek to mediate between the academic world and a less educated populace, does it serve the educationally underserved? Does it do all three? Educationally, how do councils model the behavior they seek to inspire?

The Lumina Foundation did an analysis of educational achievement in the 50 states, based on the 2010 census. Looking at adults, aged 25-64, they found that the US average is as follows: 8% had some attendance in grades 9-12 but had no diploma, 27% had a high school diploma, 22% had attended college but not graduated, 19% had a bachelor's degree, and 11% had a graduate or professional degree. Here is the educational context in which six councils work.<sup>2</sup>

- **Wyoming** has one university and seven community colleges. A four-year Catholic college has recently opened and a tribal college hopes to gain accreditation. Ninety-two percent of the population has high school or GED degrees or more. This is higher than the national level, but the number of residents holding college degrees is lower than the national average. Due to earlier energy boom revenues, Wyoming is one of nine states that spends \$13,000 or more per student on K-12 education, higher than the national average. Because of recent strong economic health, the legislature has committed to Hathaway Scholarship funds for Wyoming high school students who attend the University of Wyoming, with current requirements including humanities courses.
- In **Texas**, education is often at the center of public debates over spending, the appropriate size of government, and the state's civic and economic health. The Texas public school system consists of 1,227 school districts and charters, 8,529 campuses, more than 320,000 teachers, and 4.9 million students. Funding for public schools was decreased by \$4 billion in the 2012-13 budget, though it appears that some of that support will be restored in 2014--15. According to the Texas Education Agency, nearly one in three teachers leave the profession within five years. Humanities Texas works with universities to hold rigorous teacher professional development institutes, placing special emphasis on recruiting early-career teachers from low-performing schools and districts.

- **Connecticut** remains a state of stark, often shocking contrasts. The gaps between the rich and poor and between the highly educated and the barely educated are wider than almost anywhere else in America. School humanities content is increasingly shallow and unappealing, and is getting weaker as the emphasis on STEM curriculum grows. Although home to many museums, libraries, historical societies, theaters and other cultural institutions, school field trips have all but disappeared as budgets are slashed and test scores rule. Particularly in urban areas, basic literacy is the crisis of the day. Connecticut businesses cannot find qualified workers, though the unemployment rate hovers around 8.5%.
- Although **South Carolina** often ranks in the bottom ten states in educational attainment, it is incorrect to generalize that it neglects education or does not value it. It has 85 school districts and 79 public college campuses. For the first time, almost 80% of South Carolinians over 25 have a high school or GED diploma, and more than 20% have a college degree. The two-year technical college program is stellar, and many teachers have national certification. Twenty-six of the 46 counties are mainly rural, however, and it is there that education has difficulties. There, the 2011 poverty level was 20% or more than that of the state, the median household income was at least 10% lower, and unemployment was higher. Some of these counties graduate fewer than 50% of entering freshmen.
- **Louisiana** continues to be a victim of poverty and low educational levels, in part due to natural disasters and external factors, but also to persistent policies of low-taxes, tax rebates, de facto segregated schools and even school systems, and inadequate investment in communities and infrastructure. While Louisiana has enacted significant education reform in the last seven years at all education levels, the correlation between Louisiana's poverty and educational performance persists. Under the current administration, more than \$650 million was cut from appropriations to higher education and a law to permit vouchers of for use in private and parochial schools has passed, but is presently suspended, having been ruled unconstitutional. There are 23 colleges and universities.
- **North Dakota** had an 86% graduation rate for high school students in 2008-09. The breakdown by racial and ethnic groups was: White, 90%; Hispanic, 76%; African-American, 74%; Asian, 88%; and Native American, 62%. The high percentage of Native American students dropping out of high school is a serious problem. Twenty-eight percent of North Dakotans ages 21-74 have a bachelor's degree, compared with a national average of 28%. Currently more than 30% of high school graduates take a least one remedial class in college. In 2009 North Dakota had 291 accredited public elementary schools and 196 accredited public middle level and secondary schools. There are eleven colleges and universities in the North Dakota University System, four private colleges, and five tribal colleges. In December 2012, the Census Bureau reported that North Dakota is the fastest growing state in the nation.

Kathleen Mitchell  
 Senior Program Officer, Federal/State Partnership, National Endowment for the Humanities  
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<sup>1</sup> In 2013, each issue of Federal/State Partnership's *Working Together* newsletter is surveying the challenges councils face within their states and jurisdictions as they confront such issues as geography, educational and cultural resources, audiences and demography, technology, and the economy. The primary source for these surveys is the contextual section of councils' self-assessment reports, augmented as needed by census and other data. We will use examples from all 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils in this series. Each article is available online in both Federal/State Partnership's [e-newsletter archive](#) and in its [Resource Library](#).

<sup>2</sup> The executives of each of these councils have reviewed and, in some cases, edited these thumbnails.