**Strengthening the Arts and Humanities Across ACS Schools**

**Report on the summer working group**

August 15, 2023

With frequent headlines now hailing the death of the Arts and Humanities, colleges and universities are facing a challenging environment, especially with regard to attracting majors and sustaining curricular programs beyond STEM or business. Increasingly, students are more likely to choose a minor in English, Theater or French than they are to major in it, even at liberal arts colleges. This working group dedicated to Strengthening ACS schools’ Arts and Humanities programs brought together stakeholders within ACS institutions who studied and brainstormed solutions for addressing current challenges faced by the Arts and Humanities.

After completing four virtual sessions that took place over Wednesday afternoons in July, the working group identified a variety of problems and situations faced by the Arts and Humanities, collected preliminary data across institutions, familiarized itself with recent studies and practices designed to increase student involvement in the Arts and Humanities, and developed a shared set of tools for handling the challenges faced by ACS schools.

**Facilitator:** Genelle Gertz (Washington and Lee)

**Participants**:

Leigh Lassiter-Counts (Hendrix)

Aaron M. Carter-Enyi (Morehouse)

Cory Wikan (Centenary)

Amy Frederick (Centre)

Sandi George Tracy (Rhodes)

Kyle Gillette (Trinity)

Kathleen Wessel (Spelman)

Johann van Niekerk (Centre)

Caroline Fache (Davidson)

1. Problems and situations faced by the Arts and Humanities:

Over each of the four sessions, group members discussed particular problems faced by the Arts and Humanities. The reading for the very first session introduced participants to the National Humanities Alliance’s [Study the Humanities Toolkit](https://www.studythehumanities.org/toolkit), recent articles on the [death of the humanities](https://wlu.box.com/s/ca1mcp97ane45zo2mp53b21uamn7vp9r) as well as some [humanities programs that have reversed declines](https://wlu.box.com/s/ifkczxrrq7eoopjhve3lwac997nooppk) in enrollments and [majors](https://wlu.box.com/s/ltfj1ky2bx9cxnthjlj6w33i19lhazax), and the National Humanities Alliance Report on [Strategies for Recruiting Students to the Humanities](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/nhalliance/pages/2320/attachments/original/1632495745/Strategies_for_Recruiting_Students_to_the_Humanities_-_Final.pdf?1632495745). The group elected for the next two sessions to do a deep dive into selected parts of the NHA’s “Strategies” report, focusing on Section 1, Articulating Career Pathways, and Section 4, Fostering Humanities Community and Identity. For the fourth session, the group explored readings on [defunding the Humanities](https://wlu.box.com/s/6n5eauhudbfkqz9xtkkhrs0nsa2nczsl) to try to get a sense of how to combat political opponents, a topic not in the resources provided by the NHA.

The final session also returned to a topic started the week before, on fostering humanities community and identity. We asked how the humanities are serving underrepresented students, both in terms of skill sets, and in terms of modified curriculum that represents the needs, interests, and backgrounds of marginalized students. The example of Morehouse and Spelman’s Africana Music Experiential Pedagogy project described in our [Resources Document](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17KMkD7vPxHMjzzNk0Wsu041GQQhIR40rGMx34ymLuFc/edit) provides an idea of how to revise a music general education course in service to underrepresented students. This program not only held workshops geared at changing course content, but also, involved service learning through outreach to underserved secondary school students. In addition to discussing ways of meeting the needs of underserved students, we discussed the work of fostering humanities identity and community among faculty. Ideas for gathering humanities faculty and creating a sense of belonging among them are also listed in our Resources Document.

1. Preliminary data across institutions

During our four weeks, we drafted our [Resources Document](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17KMkD7vPxHMjzzNk0Wsu041GQQhIR40rGMx34ymLuFc/edit), which gathers information in Part I about the Arts and Humanities at each of the participants’ home institutions. We felt it would be useful to gather this information in one place to provide an idea of what is possible across our campuses, and to serve as a guide for others who may want to implement some of the programs and initiatives described here.

1. Practices designed to increase student involvement in the Arts and Humanities

Weeks two and three concentrated on discussions about how to implement career readiness training and how to develop humanities community and identity. Each of these was identified as an important strategy for recruitment by the National Humanities Alliance. There were robust conversations about these areas, and the two Career Services members of the group spearheaded dialogue about teaching career competencies in the classroom. As described above, Part II of the [Resources Document](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17KMkD7vPxHMjzzNk0Wsu041GQQhIR40rGMx34ymLuFc/edit) responds to a series of problems faced by Arts and Humanities Programs and suggests how they might be addressed. Teaching career readiness is front and center in this section. Other areas include messaging about the humanities to external audiences, addressing the needs of underrepresented students who study the humanities, explaining the value of the humanities in fostering community engagement and doing social justice work, seeking grant funding for the Arts and Humanities, and fostering community among humanities faculty.

1. A shared set of tools for handling the challenges

Within our Resources Document, we created Part II to serve as a “How to” Guide for tackling common challenges in the Arts and Humanities. Each of these challenges was identified as common to our institutions, and members of the group volunteered to contribute to these sections. The list of “How to’s” includes:

How to infuse pedagogy with career competencies

How to ensure that the Arts and Humanities are serving underrepresented students

How to seek grant funding and how ACS might support this

How to foster community among Humanities faculty

How to hone messaging of humanities studies for external audiences, especially parents and students

How to explain the value of the humanities in fostering community engagement and doing social justice work

**Note:** We ask that ACS waits a few days to publish the Resources Document on the ACS website, as a few members of the group are waiting for their home institutions to review for accuracy. Genelle will be in touch with Stephanie in the coming days to confirm readiness to publish.

Overall, many members of the group expressed their appreciation for the forum provided by the ACS for discussing ways of strengthening the Arts and Humanities. There was a strong feeling of camaraderie among group members, and each session lasted the full hour and a half that was allotted. While not everyone was able to attend each session, two sessions where there were absences were recorded on Zoom and distributed. Many people discussed interest in continuing the conversation, and in finding out whether any joint applications for grants aimed at supporting the Arts and Humanities might be pursued.