

# In Progress: The Idea of a Humanities Workforce

DAVID LAURENCE

That college graduates earn bachelor's and higher degrees in humanistic fields of study, find employment, and go on to make successful careers hardly qualifies as news. To affirm, as the Humanities Indicators Prototype<sup>1</sup> does, that a significant subset of these graduates defines a humanities workforce advances a novel public-policy idea. Even those who make up the humanities workforce do not customarily use the term to describe themselves, nor is the humanities workforce so named in discussions of humanists' work or of public policy as it affects the institutions and organizations where they do their work. As a normative idea informing public policy and perception, the humanities workforce has yet to be brought into existence, whether among policy makers, the general public, or even the members of that workforce.

By contrast, the idea that a science and engineering (S&E) workforce exists is well established in public-policy circles. The U.S. Congress invokes the concept and affirms the significance of the skill sets and specialized expertise for which the concept serves as a shorthand reference in (for example) its mandate to the National Science Foundation (NSF) to track the employment, educational, and demographic characteristics of scientists and engineers in the United States. And the scientific community reinforces the

concept in the biennial NSF publication *Science and Engineering Indicators*.<sup>2</sup> Some NSF studies have included what the NSF terms, in a symptomatically negative phrase, "non-S&E graduates"—most notably the National Survey of College Graduates (NSCG),<sup>3</sup> the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED),<sup>4</sup> and the Survey of Doctorate Recipients (SDR).<sup>5</sup> But the direction of developments has unfortunately been toward eliminating coverage of humanities fields and graduates from these government-sponsored data-collection efforts.

---

*To affirm, as the Humanities Indicators Prototype does, that a significant subset of these graduates defines a humanities workforce advances a novel public-policy idea.*

---

With support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and four other federal agencies, the SED continues to provide an annual census of new doctorate recipients across the entire spectrum of academic disciplines, including the humanities as well as the sciences and social sciences. And up until the 1990s the NEH provided funding to support the canvassing of humanities doctorates in the SDR, a

survey and complement to the SED that gathers information about the occupational histories of a representative sample of the entire population of research doctorate holders from the time they receive their degrees to age 76. For the disciplines it covers, the SDR offers an incomparable source of systematic longitudinal information about the career paths of doctorate recipients over their entire working lifetimes. But funding for humanities' participation in the SDR did not survive the reductions in the NEH budget that occurred in the mid-1990s, and the last report of findings from the SDR for humanities doctorate recipients, published in 1997, refers to data collected in 1995.

Unlike the SDR, the NSCG has included humanities graduates in its design by necessity rather than by choice. Based on the decennial censuses of 1990 and 2000, the two surveys in the NSCG series (conducted in 1993 and 2003) aim to capture information about the occupational and educational histories of those holding at least a bachelor's degree in a science or engineering field. Humanities graduates have been included because the census data from which the NSF developed the sample of individuals canvassed for the survey provides no information about the field of undergraduates' majors. To capture

adequate numbers of college graduates with science and engineering degrees in its sample, the NSF has had to include graduates with degrees in the humanities. But this happy accident, too, may be reformed away. Once the recently inaugurated American Communities Survey<sup>6</sup> program collects information about respondents' major fields of study as well as highest educational attainment, as it is scheduled to do starting in 2010, the NSF will no longer need to canvass humanities graduates in order to fulfill the congressional mandate for the NSCG. Such a change would make the NSCG considerably cheaper to administer.

The SED, SDR, and NSCG are ongoing federally sponsored data-collection efforts repeated at regular intervals. They stand as baseline sources of systematic trend data about the demographic characteristics, educational backgrounds, and occupations of people who have become equipped with valuable forms of specialized expertise and intellectual capital. Disciplines included in these studies have at their disposal authoritative information about how expertise is acquired, who is studying (and who gets to study) the necessary subjects, and how expertise gets applied over a working lifetime. For the humanities to go missing from these fundamental pieces of the government's data-collection infrastructure, whose aim is to provide an account of the intellectual resources the society has available and how those resources are developed and utilized, should be unthinkable. The lapse of the humanities from the SDR, for example, is especially unfortunate for having occurred during a period when systematic information of the kind these data sets provide was gaining in influence and importance because the Internet put publicly available government databases within easy reach and because increased computing power put advanced data-

analysis capabilities on every administrator's desktop. A priority for the government agencies charged with tracking the state of the nation's intellectual resources, as well as for the humanities community, should be to see that the asymmetry, already significant, between the depth and quality of systematic information routinely available about the humanities on the one hand and the sciences on the other does not become more pronounced and is reduced as much as possible whenever possible.

---

*The employment outcomes of college graduates with baccalaureate degrees in humanities disciplines—and these graduates' further career paths and educational attainment—form a second group of questions about which there has been considerable interest but sparse awareness of what data exist for achieving answers.*

---

As the Humanities Indicators demonstrate, substantial quantitative information about the humanities is available, but those of us in the humanities community have used it less than we might or ought to have done—in part, perhaps, because in many institutional contexts and contests for resources we humanists want to see the perspectives and analyses of our own disciplines acknowledged and credited but cannot fail to notice how frequently the advantage belongs to the quantitative tools and mappings familiar to the sciences and social sciences. The Humanities Indicators should help us see beyond this (understandable) bias and defensiveness. Much more than a data pile, the Humanities Indicators bring together in an organized way statistical documentation that gives the humanities workforce plausibility as a public

idea. The idea of the humanities workforce, in turn, makes more readily apparent how the functioning of key cultural institutions and significant sectors of the national economy depends on the continued development and reproduction of humanistic talent and expertise. By collecting and presenting in an organized way what up to now have been scattered fragments of data, the Humanities Indicators make it possible both to see and to collect under a common name the reality of an important network of social institutions and valuable pools of intellectual expertise that up to now have remained more-or-less hidden and lacking the means to gain the recognition they—and the humanities—deserve.

Institutions of research scholarship and higher education form an important part of the total picture, but only a part. The institutional infrastructure includes in addition the schools; libraries; museums; publishing, including commercial publishing as well as scholarly presses and journals; and certain editorial and storytelling work carried on in the broader entertainment and news industry, especially work having to do with the commercial production and distribution of books, newspapers, and magazines, broadcast television and radio, film, and the Internet. Making this infrastructure visible so it can be named as such—as an infrastructure—is important because once we see it and name it others have a basis to understand how the cultural life of the society flows from this great array of institutions built over many decades of investment and grounded in forms of humanistic learning that the society has a vital stake in supporting and sustaining.

To make this infrastructure visible and offer an initial accounting of its substantial economic footprint, the Humanities Indicators bring forward employment and salary data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational

Employment Statistics (OES) survey.<sup>7</sup> Using the OES data, which are published annually, the Humanities Indicators begin documenting the scale of the contribution that the humanities and humanities-related institutions make to the U.S. economy and the distribution of humanities professionals into various occupations that require or call on humanistic skill sets. One great advantage of the OES data derives from their regularized, annual character, which makes the OES an especially good source for achieving in short order one major goal of the indicators project: to develop a picture of trends in humanities-related employment and salaries over time. (For more on the Humanities Indicators' rationale for using OES data for the first edition of the prototype, as well as a description of the data sources that will be utilized for the second edition, see "Note on the Use of Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Data.")<sup>8</sup>

The employment outcomes of college graduates with baccalaureate degrees in humanities disciplines—and these graduates' further career paths and educational attainment—form a second group of questions about which there has been considerable interest but sparse awareness of what data exist for achieving answers. The Humanities Indicators make a good start by drawing on the U.S. Department of Education Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B) study.<sup>9</sup> The strength of these data lies in the longitudinal character of the B&B study, which followed up with its sample of 1992–1993 bachelor's degree recipients in 1997 and again in 2003. The B&B study allows the Humanities Indicators Prototype to develop a portrait of how, over a ten-year period postgraduation, humanities majors in a specimen graduating class moved forward in their careers, describing their occupational distribution, earnings, and levels of satisfaction with

their jobs.<sup>10</sup> A limitation of the B&B data is that they are confined to the single class of 1992–1993. The data form an excellent source of information about the first phase of graduates' lives after college, but they cannot tell us whether the postgraduation paths of the class of 1992–1993 are more typical than atypical and therefore generalizable to the wider population of graduates holding degrees in humanities disciplines.

---

*Because college and university humanistic degree programs function as the chief educational source points for graduates who enter nonscience school teaching, editing, journalism, and other humanities occupations apart from teaching at the postsecondary level, the Humanities Indicators give special attention to developing a portrait of the postsecondary humanities faculty.*

---

Because college and university humanistic degree programs function as the chief educational source points for graduates who enter nonscience school teaching, editing, journalism, and other humanities occupations apart from teaching at the postsecondary level, the Humanities Indicators give special attention to developing a portrait of the postsecondary humanities faculty.<sup>11</sup> This series of indicators makes good use of the SED and SDR along with a third U.S. government survey, the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF).<sup>12</sup> Across four administrations at roughly five-year intervals since 1987, the NSOPF has canvassed a representative sample of faculty members employed by U.S. public and private not-for-profit colleges and universities; it is one of the few sources from which

information can be developed by specific disciplines. Data from the SED—the annual U.S. government-sponsored census showing the number and initial employment plans of new doctorate recipients—are much better known among members of the humanistic academy than the B&B data for bachelor's degree holders. Since the collapse of the academic job market in the 1970s, anxious concern about overproduction of Ph.D.'s and the fate of new graduates from doctoral programs has made the number of humanities doctorates being awarded and the employment outcomes for degree recipients common topics of discussion, and also controversy, among faculty members and graduate students alike. Questions about what happens over time as people who hold terminal degrees in humanities disciplines move out of graduate school and into the workforce are both important and hard to answer. The Humanities Indicators use the last report about humanities doctorates from the SDR to show that, depending on discipline, between 55% and 65% of the entire pool of humanities doctorate holders were employed as postsecondary teachers/professors.<sup>13</sup> Those figures date to 1995, the final year humanities doctorates were included in the SDR. The NSOPF continues to provide a rich source of information about humanities faculty members in higher education. But the account remains incomplete and potentially misleading, even about the academic workforce, absent a continuing source of information about the scale, timing, and character of advanced degree holders' movement out of professorial careers and into other types of work. Citing the 1995 SDR data, the Humanities Indicators offer a tantalizing documentary hint that something on the order of 40% of the people who have humanities doctorates move into occupations outside the academy

(Figure III-7). This is a large population about which to know so little and to have so few (and diminishing) sources for tackling what must be regarded as a deplorable ignorance about where they work and how their workplaces and the wider society benefit from the advanced humanistic expertise they acquired during years of graduate education.

How to describe these forms of humanistic expertise and their uses in the humanities sector and the multifarious enterprises pursued within it? An account might begin by observing that these enterprises, whether they produce rarefied works of scholarship or mass-market entertainments, depend on advanced knowledge of how to stage encounters with cultural objects—on sophisticated skill reading, understanding, and creating narrative structures or, more broadly, symbolic action, to invoke Kenneth Burke’s useful term.<sup>14</sup> Under the rubric of symbolic action, “reading” extends beyond the printed word to include visual media and also forms of social action whose qualities of meaningfulness invite (or require) analysis through interpretation and commentary as well as (or instead of) through counting. “Reading” also needs to be understood here in its most capacious sense, where it extends to acts of writing, both discursive and imaginative. The sophisticated expertise members of the humanities workforce deploy might be knowledge of narrative procedures and symbolic action as performed from the creative, or writer, side. Or it might be knowledge as exercised from the editorial and critical, or reader, side; it might be historical and philological scholarship of the sort needed to establish the provenance and authenticity of books, art works, artifacts, and antiquities at auction, for example, or to document events and personages treated in a historical television drama like *Into the West* or a popu-

lar film like *Shakespeare in Love*, which simultaneously completely depends on and (to great comic effect) shrewdly flouts what humanistic scholarship knows.

Examples of applied humanities, especially highly visible examples from the mass media, should not be allowed to obscure the role academic scholarship

---

*On either side, the artistic or the analytical, and in many mixed activities utilizing capacities characteristic of both, humanities workers deploy knowledge and skill sets developed through disciplined encounter with cultural objects, both past and present, and draw on traditions of scholarly inquiry and artistic activity that grow up around such encounters.*

---

and critical investigation have in supporting and supplying expertise and talent to them all. The humanistic research space needs to be acknowledged as a social space where are maintained the forms of knowledge that allow continued access to the documentary record of history and the philological record of thought and imagination. The documentary record of books, manuscripts, art, and artifacts—the tangible, meaning-saturated remains of human intelligence, imagination, folly, and striving—remains inert and unreadable apart from the humanistic scholarship and knowledge needed to access it: knowledge of languages; knowledge of the techniques of historical and textual scholarship; and knowledge of the critical methodologies, questions, problems, controversies, and conundrums that surround acts of reading and interpretation. All these forms of inquiry

and knowledge have to be re-created, from scratch, in each generation, whether through formal academic training or extra-academic traditions of craft and artisan knowledge.

The size of the humanities workforce is difficult to determine, although rough estimates are possible. The following discussion draws on the NSCG in order to explore some possibilities offered by a source alternate to those used to develop estimates for the Humanities Indicators Prototype. In contrast to the B&B study, which tracked the single graduating class of 1993 up to 2003, the NSCG affords a snapshot view and cross-section of the entire population of college graduates and their occupations as of November 1, 2003. Using census information about educational attainment, the NSCG canvasses a sample of people who hold bachelor’s or higher degrees. The indicators use the OES and the humanities-related function of an employing institution as a criterion for inclusion in the humanities workforce; the discussion below experiments with the alternate criterion of educational attainment in a humanities discipline. One advantage of the NSCG data set is the possibilities it offers for exploring relations among occupation, field of study, and degree attainment. That is, an analyst can examine the destination occupations for people who hold bachelor’s, master’s, or doctorate degrees in various disciplines, and one can also examine the source fields in which graduates with the occupation postsecondary teacher of (for example) English, history, or foreign languages earned bachelor’s, master’s, or doctorate degrees. Unsurprisingly, given the different criteria used, the estimates produced here are (with one important exception) somewhat smaller than those of the Humanities Indicators. The exception is the academic workforce. The OES survey produces figures for employment in postsecondary teaching

that are significantly lower than those from either the NSCG or NSOPF.

The 2003 NSCG counts just under 1,112,000 people as employed in arts and humanities occupations outside of postsecondary teaching, or 2.7% of a total population of more than 40 million college graduates. (All figures extracted from the 2003 NSCG dataset have been rounded to the nearest thousand.) In the NSF's categorization scheme, the arts and humanities occupations aggregate two subcategories, "historians" and a catch-all subcategory: "artists, broadcasters, editors, entertainers, public relations specialists, writers." If arts and humanities occupations are extended to include the clergy, the number of college graduates employed in arts and humanities occupations rises to over 1,457,000 (3.6%). (The NSCG groups clergy with mental health and social workers in the category "social service and related occupations." I consider it here as an occupation that has significant commitments to reading, writing, and interpretation as subjects of disciplined inquiry, which prospectively could be one criterion for inclusion in the humanities workforce.) Postsecondary arts and humanities teachers add another 221,000 (0.5%). Included here are college and university teachers of English (weighted estimate 81,000); foreign languages (40,000); history (26,000); and art, drama, and music (74,000). (Those teaching philosophy and religion cannot be captured because the NSCG aggregates them in the category "other non-S&E postsecondary teachers.") This accounting places the humanities workforce at between 1.3 and 1.5 million people.

What about elementary and secondary school teachers? The precollege non-science teacher corps presents an NSCG category with a large population and considerable ambiguity about whether its occupants should be included as part

of the humanities workforce. In the category non-S&E precollegiate teachers (i.e., K–12 teachers except those who teach math, sciences, or social sciences at the secondary school level) the NSCG counts almost 3.3 million people or 8.1% of the total population of college graduates. While we do not directly know how many of these teachers to count as members of a humanities workforce, the NSCG does tell us that the educational background of the K–12 teacher corps is overwhelmingly in education: 1,880,000 (57.0%) of the entire group hold both their first bachelor's degree and highest degree in non-science education. Those who earned their first bachelors degree in an arts and humanities discipline number 478,000 (14.5%); 295,000 (8.9%) hold both a first bachelor's and higher degree in an arts and humanities discipline (the second figure includes those whose highest degree is a bachelor's degree). Those who start in education stay in education. Of graduates who received their first bachelor's degree in non-science education and went on to earn an advanced degree, 90.5% earned a post-bachelor's degree in education. By contrast, of the 478,000 members of the K–12 teaching corps whose first bachelor's is in an arts and humanities discipline, 237,000 (49.6%) hold a degree beyond the bachelor's—226,000 (47.3%) a master's degree. Of these last, 150,000 (63.3%) earned a master's degree in education and 58,000 (24.5%) a master's degree in an arts and humanities discipline. (The remainder earned master's degrees in other disciplines.) On the other hand, the NSCG counts only 31,000 teachers who earned a first bachelor's degree in fields other than arts and humanities but whose highest degree is in an arts and humanities discipline. While these 31,000 teachers represent a miniscule 0.9% of the 3.3 million total non-science precollege teacher workforce, education

was by far the leading source discipline: 67.4% of the 31,000 earned a first bachelor's degree in non-science education. The NSCG thus indicates that the corps of precollege non-science teachers contains at least half a million individuals with an educational background in an arts and humanities discipline. Granting an educational background in an arts and humanities discipline as a reasonable criterion for adding members of the K–12 teacher corps to our accounting, the humanities workforce would have a population somewhere between 1.8 and 2.0 million.

What work does the humanities workforce distinctively do? We may usefully think of humanities workers as a segment of what Peter Drucker called knowledge workers and Robert Reich called symbolic analysts: they are the segment in occupations that investigate or manipulate the nonquantitative symbolic phenomena characteristic of humans as language-bearing, meaning-seeking beings. Humanities work calls on educated skill with the grammatical, rhetorical, and dramatic properties through which artifacts and social actions become invested with meaning. Questions about value, purpose, meaning, and belief (including their cynical variations) typically belong to the humanities and humanities-dependent work because in both aesthetic and moral matters determinations of value and judgments of better or worse are typically encoded and transmitted verbally, through symbolic actions that are nonquantifiable and capturable and expressible only in humanistic terms, artistic as well as analytical. Artistic work, whether carried on in high or popular culture or for mass markets or coterie audiences, evidently shares many of the interests and preoccupations of humanistic inquiry and analysis, but its procedures and use of human powers of intellect and imagination differ. Artistic productions typically serve as objects

rather than examples of humanistic inquiry. Yet the products of humanistic inquiry also share characteristics with the products classified as art. On either side, the artistic or the analytical, and in many mixed activities utilizing capacities characteristic of both, humanities workers deploy knowledge and skill sets developed through disciplined encounter with cultural objects, both past and present, and draw on traditions of scholarly inquiry and artistic activity that grow up around such encounters.

What practical difference prospectively follows from a general acknowledgment of the public idea of a humanities workforce? For the public at large, the concept of a humanities workforce would broaden recognition of the reach and contributions scholarship and intellectual study in the humanities make to a surprising variety of social institutions and occupations beyond but not excluding teaching. The 2003 NSCG indicates that, although the contribution the humanities make to the nation's teaching corps is great, even greater numbers of graduates whose first bachelor's degree is in an arts and humanities discipline work at jobs in the category of "artists, broadcasters, editors, public relations specialists, and writers" (735,500 or 13.6%) than work as elementary or secondary school teachers (640,600 or 11.8%). In the sphere of public policy, the concept of a humanities workforce would open the way for recognition of the intellectual capital and forms of expertise study in humanities disciplines develops and the significant institutional, cultural, and economic investments these forms of expertise represent. From a public policy perspective, the academic humanities merit tangible support, especially for their specialized research scholarship as well as general teaching functions, in significant part because humanistic scholarship is one of the main sources of the forms of intellectual expertise

and creative talent needed by an important array of cultural and educational institutions, including the news and entertainment industries. The concept of the humanities workforce makes visible the connection, too often obscured, between humanistic research and scholarship and development of a talent pool for the cultural sector of the economy, not excluding (although also not limited to) the business of producing popular culture.

---

*This brief account will have accomplished its task if it documents how the idea of the humanities workforce arises from consideration of occupational information drawn from data sources like the OES, NSOPF, SDR, and NSCG and gathered by the Humanities Indicators into a form that lets those data begin to tell their story.*

---

But some of the most significant effects to be expected from recognition of a humanities workforce could occur within the academic humanities community itself. Few academic humanists are accustomed to thinking of their research scholarship as specific examples that, cumulatively, function to keep alive the possibility of access to the cultural record and keep in good repair the tools, skills, and knowledges necessary to that access. Few are accustomed to recognizing how those tools, skills, and knowledges find application in cultural work and institutions beyond the academic. To be sure, the past fifteen years have witnessed discussion, and some heated controversy, about graduate education, especially research doctorate programs and just what they should be preparing their graduates to do,

whether as future academics or in careers outside postsecondary teaching. That discussion has largely revolved around a view, on the one hand, that as preparation for the future academic workforce doctoral programs place too much emphasis on research scholarship and a view, on the other, that the humanistic skill sets developed through scholarly research and writing give Ph.D. recipients decided advantages in the world of work outside the academy. By articulating the connections among humanistic scholarship, capacities for sustaining serious and productive intellectual encounters with cultural objects, and the knowledge and skill sets utilized in the cultural sector, the concept of the humanities workforce could give clearer focus to a discussion that has been characterized by an odd simultaneous devaluation of scholarship in the academic context and promotion of it for the world outside the academy. The concept of the humanities workforce offers one possible means to articulate how humanistically informed work and academic humanistic inquiry share sophisticated awareness of and curiosity about symbolic action, an awareness and a curiosity that motivate scholarly inquiry and stand as characteristic distinguishing marks of intellectual accomplishment in humanistic disciplines.

One practical result would be a shift in the focus of discussion from the relatively small but much-studied world of doctoral education to the far larger but almost invisible and unstudied world of the master's degree. Or, better, it would enlarge the discussion of advanced humanistic study and its problems to consider the M.A. and the Ph.D. in their relations to one another. The role of master's degree programs as preparation for faculty positions in postsecondary education has received almost no attention. The SED and SDR are restricted to people who earned doctorates. But, if data from the 2004

NSOPF<sup>15</sup> are to be credited, doctorates are held by only 47.4% of all humanities faculty members—by 65.3% of faculty members in four-year institutions and 15.9% in two-year institutions. To be sure, the doctorate is overwhelmingly the qualification for holding a tenured or tenure-track faculty appointment in a four-year postsecondary institution: 95.0% of all tenured and tenure-track humanities faculty members in four-year institutions hold doctorates, according to the 2004 NSOPF. But the 2004 NSOPF also shows that non-tenure-track faculty members make up 49.0% of the faculties in humanities disciplines (defined as English, foreign languages, history, philosophy, and religion) and that outside of the tenure track in four-year institutions a doctorate degree is held by only 34.6% of humanities faculty members.

In the field of English, for example, numerically the largest in the humanities with a total of some 80,000 faculty members, data from the 2004 NSOPF tell us that the majority of these faculty members—more than 47,000 (58.5%)—hold a master’s as their highest degree. Included among these 47,000 master’s degree holders are over 30,000 (77.2%) of the more than 39,000 faculty members teaching English in Carnegie associate’s institutions and over 16,500 (40.5%) of the close to 41,000 faculty members teaching English in Carnegie four-year institutions. More, data from both the NSOPF and NSCG suggest that of these 47,000 postsecondary English teachers, only between half and two-thirds have English language and literature as the field of their master’s degree, while between 20% and 30% (or more) hold their master’s degree in the field of education.

These NSOPF data bring to light realities about the master’s degree in the demography of the faculty that may

contain some surprises. The surprises underscore the value of the information and the losses entailed in remaining unaware of it or, worse, being excluded from the data-collection projects that produce it. Even this brief excursion into the data about the master’s degree and its role in educating the humanities workforce prompts several important questions: about the character of doctoral and master’s degree programs and what is needed, and wanted, as preparation for teaching in humanities disciplines at either the postsecondary or secondary level; about the intellectual values of humanities education and the kinds of classroom experiences typically available to undergraduates, especially in the first two years of college; and about whether and how postsecondary education in the humanities advances beyond the secondary school.

---

*These data make evident why authoritative, systematic, quantitative information of the kind they uniquely make available is important for the humanities to have and attend to and why such information is in the best interest of the society to continue to collect.*

---

The bias of the professorial faculty, at least in institutions that grant baccalaureate or higher degrees, is to think of itself normatively as composed of those holding tenured or tenure track appointments. This bias comes about in no small part because those in the tenure-eligible ranks become deeply and directly aware of their tenure track colleagues through the intense and lengthy processes of hiring and evaluating them. But the professorial faculty has limited or no involvement in the hiring and evaluation of those not on

the tenure track and thus remains largely disconnected from colleagues in the non-tenure-track faculty ranks. Yet in the absence of the sort of systematic information that exposes the distortions of personal experience and professional mythology, the import of the master’s degree and master’s degree programs for the character of the faculty and of undergraduate programs remains unacknowledged, and the substantial population of master’s degree holders remains all but invisible.

The picture remains incomplete, however, and any description of the problem posed by the master’s degree is inadequate apart from information of the kind provided by a source like the NSCG, which affords insight into the array of occupations where master’s degree recipients make careers. The NSCG data remind us that “postsecondary English teacher” is but one of more than 50 NSCG occupational categories reported by the 184,000 graduates who hold a master’s degree in English language and literature as their highest degree. Of the 50-odd occupational categories, three each claim more than ten percent of these graduates and represent in total more than 77,000 people: elementary and secondary school teachers, 21.1%; postsecondary English teachers, 13.7%; and artists, broadcasters, editors, entertainers, public relations specialists, and writers, 12.6%. (The field of English is only one of several that send master’s degree graduates to these three NSCG occupational categories.)

Together, the media and entertainment industries, elementary and secondary school teaching, postsecondary teaching and scholarship, museums, and libraries likely contain most of what this essay has prospectively called the humanities workforce—prospectively, because as a public idea the humanities workforce does not yet exist. Whether

public policy and perception will one day recognize a humanities workforce and give the idea influence in the political sphere only the future knows. This brief account will have accomplished its task if it documents how the idea of the humanities workforce arises from consideration of occupational information drawn from data sources like the OES, NSOPF, SDR, and NSCG and gathered by the Humanities Indicators into a form that lets those data begin to tell their story. That story points up the broad range of occupational roles that draw on skill sets and specialized knowledge—modes of sustaining articulate relations with cultural objects and symbolic actions—that are characteristic of the humanities and that are typically

passed from one generation to the next through investigations and analyses that are kept alive and available to society in advanced humanistic study and scholarship. We do not yet have maps that let us trace the byways connecting humanistic inquiry, scholarship, and intellectual work to their consequential occupational incarnations and reincarnations. What we do have in the Humanities Indicators and the NSCG data about college graduates are tantalizing hints about the degree program and disciplinary sources for humanities-related occupations—hints that expose how limited have been our perspectives on the social and educational importance of intellectual work in the humanities. These data make evident why authorita-

tive, systematic, quantitative information of the kind they uniquely make available is important for the humanities to have and attend to and why such information is in the best interest of the society to continue to collect.

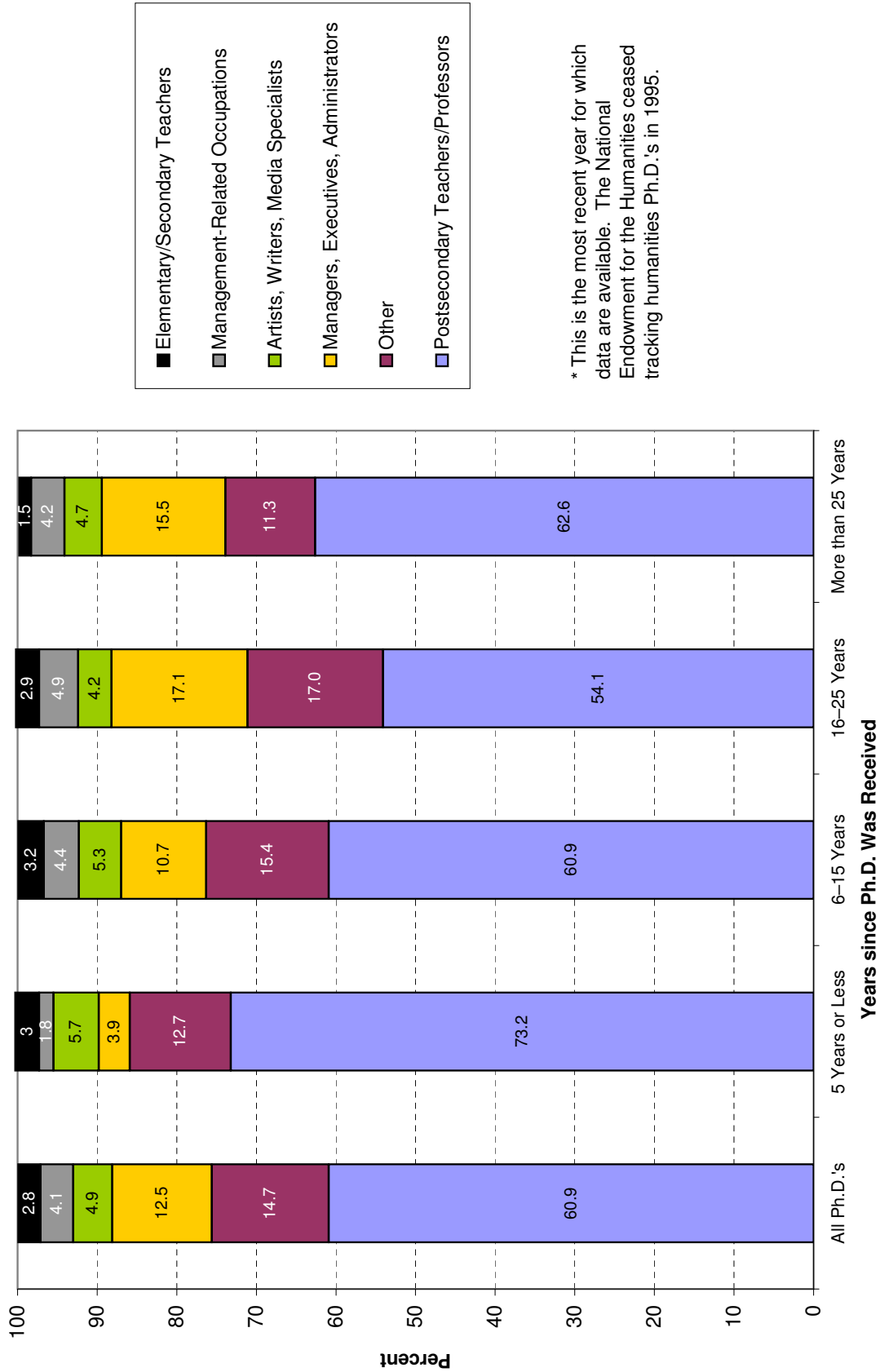
---

**David Laurence** is the Director of Research and the Association of Departments of English at the Modern Language Association. He is the senior staff member responsible for MLA data collection and analysis. He has authored numerous editorial pieces and staff reports written for the *MLA Newsletter* and *Profession*.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Humanities Indicators Prototype, *Part III. The Humanities Workforce*, [www.humanitiesindicators.org](http://www.humanitiesindicators.org) (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2008); hereafter cited as HIP. All data discussed in this essay can be found in Part III.
- <sup>2</sup> National Science Foundation: National Science Board, *Science and Engineering Indicators 2008*, <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/seind08/>.
- <sup>3</sup> National Science Foundation, *2003 National Survey of College Graduates*, [http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/showsrvy.cfm?srvy\\_CatID=3&srvy\\_Seri=7](http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/showsrvy.cfm?srvy_CatID=3&srvy_Seri=7).
- <sup>4</sup> National Science Foundation, *2006 Survey of Earned Doctorates*, <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/srvydoctorates/>.
- <sup>5</sup> National Science Foundation, *2006 Survey of Doctorate Recipients*, <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/srvydoctoratework/>. See also National Science Foundation, *SESTAT: Scientists and Engineers Statistical Data System*, <http://sestat.nsf.gov/>. SESTAT is a comprehensive, integrated database of data collected from the NSCG, SDR, and the National Survey of Recent College Graduates (NSRCG).
- <sup>6</sup> The American Communities Survey, which replaces the long form on the decennial census, is administered monthly by the U.S. Census Bureau using sampling techniques. For further information, see <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/index.html>.
- <sup>7</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Employment Statistics*, <http://www.bls.gov/OES/>.
- <sup>8</sup> HIP, Part III, *Indicator III-1. Size and Occupational Distribution of the Humanities Workforce*.
- <sup>9</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study*, <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/B&B/>.
- <sup>10</sup> HIP, Part III, *Indicator III-3. Occupations of College Graduates Who Majored in Humanities Disciplines*; and HIP, Part III, *Indicator III-4. Salaries & Job Satisfaction of Humanities College Graduates*.
- <sup>11</sup> HIP, Part III, *Section D. Postsecondary Humanities Faculty*.
- <sup>12</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *National Study of Postsecondary Faculty*, <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/nsopf/>.
- <sup>13</sup> HIP, Part III, *Indicator III-8. Career Paths for Specific Disciplines*.
- <sup>14</sup> Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).
- <sup>15</sup> United States Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, *2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty*, DAS Online Data Analysis System, <http://nces.ed.gov/dasolv2/tables/index.asp>.

**Figure III-7: Principal Occupations of Employed Humanities Ph.D.'s, by Number of Years since Receipt of Doctorate, 1995\***



\* This is the most recent year for which data are available. The National Endowment for the Humanities ceased tracking humanities Ph.D.'s in 1995.

Source: Linda Ingram and Prudence W. Brown, "Humanities Doctorates in the United States: 1995 Profile" (National Research Council, 1997). The report describes the findings of the 1995 Survey of Humanities Doctorates, which was sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and conducted by the National Research Council.

Humanities Indicators, 2008 · American Academy of Arts & Sciences