

# Diversity Is Up in Humanities at 2-Year Colleges

**An increasing number of minority students are pursuing associate degrees in humanities and liberal arts at community colleges.**

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September 6, 2017



At a  
time

when many four-year institutions are worried about decreasing numbers of humanities graduates, the number of underrepresented minorities earning associate degrees in the humanities and liberal arts has increased in recent years.

A report released today by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences reveals that, in 2015, 32.1 percent of the associate degrees in the humanities were awarded to black, Hispanic or Native American students -- a 149 percent increase from 1989, when the data were first

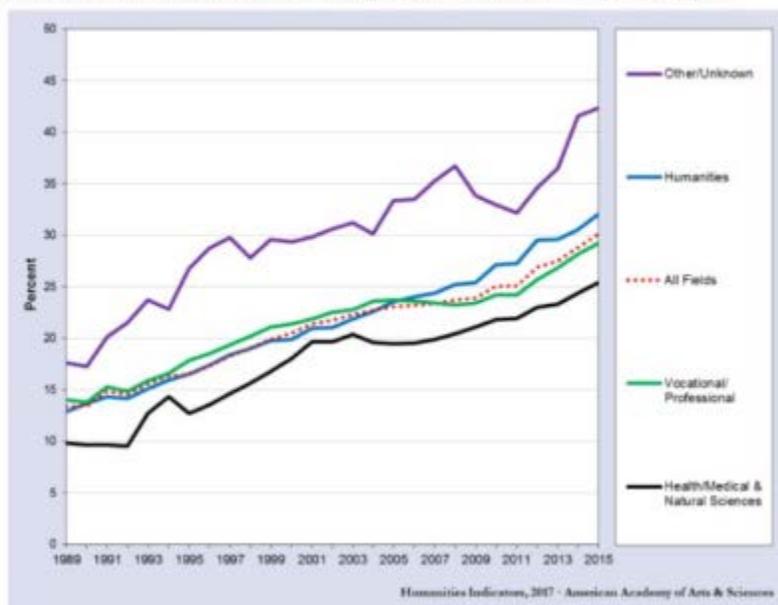
collected. In 1989, 12.9 percent of those degree recipients were from those racial and ethnic groups.

Associate degrees in the humanities also tracked higher with minorities compared to other associate-degree fields. In 2015, the percentage of minority students earning an associate degree in health, medical and natural sciences was 25 percent and vocational and professional fields was 29 percent, according to the report. However, 42 percent of minority students fell into "other" fields.

"The million-dollar question is where do these folks end up, because we don't know where they go after they receive these degrees," said Robert Townsend, director of the Washington office of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. "If they're just getting their general-education requirements out of the way at the associate level and moving to another field for the bachelor's degree, it's a question of what the humanities programs might do to draw them in and take humanities all the way through all four years of studies."

Unlike humanities degrees awarded by four-year colleges and universities, nearly all of the degrees counted in the study were classified as liberal arts or liberal studies, because that is the typical designation used by most community colleges. However, the report noted that those associate degrees in humanities that were awarded in a specific discipline grew from 1.6 percent in 2006 to 2.9 percent in 2015.

II-a4: Percentage of Associate's Degrees Awarded to Members of Traditionally Underrepresented Racial/Ethnic Groups,\* Selected Academic Fields, 1989–2015



For many community colleges, associate degrees in the liberal arts are often used as the degree that leads to transfer, Townsend said.

Despite the increases in minority students pursuing humanities or liberal arts, numbers of bachelor's degrees awarded in the humanities have been decreasing. Earlier this year, an analysis of humanities degrees found the number of four-year degrees awarded in 2015 was down 5 percent from the year before and down 10 percent from 2012.

"This presents an opportunity for humanities departments," Townsend said, adding that the earlier analysis also showed that over all, associate degrees awarded in the humanities increased in number every year since 1987, by an average of 4.3 percent per year. The new report "shows some of that growth is from attracting students from a more diverse population."

Townsend points to a recent initiative from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Higher Education and Scholarship in the Humanities initiative to create better relationships and partnerships to promote transfer from community colleges to research universities.

"If you care about increasing and diversifying access to a great humanities education, as the Mellon Foundation does, strengthening humanities transfer success from the highly diverse community colleges is very important," said Mariet Westermann, executive vice president of the Mellon Foundation, in an email.

The initiative sets up programs for transfer students to give them early exposure to university campuses and provides seminars and workshops for humanities faculty on the partnered campuses to collaborate and support students, Westermann said.

"Too often, humanities courses taken at community colleges don't count for credit in the major at the university," she said. "This problem can be resolved when humanities faculty across the institutions share the common goal of supporting these aspiring humanities majors."

The foundation has seen more student interest in the partnerships that have already been established between the San Diego Community College District and the University of California, San Diego; the Community College of Baltimore County and Johns Hopkins University; Foothill-De Anza Community Colleges and the University of San Francisco; and the New Hampshire Community College System and the College of Liberal Arts of the University of New Hampshire.

"These students have had a good encounter with humanities at the community college level," Townsend said. "The question is what would it take to attract them to taking another two years of humanities?"

Link to story: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/09/06/diversity-increases-community-college-humanities-students>