

The National Humanities Faculty: A New Program

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THE first effort on a national scale to help schools improve their teaching in the humanities was organized in April 1968, under grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the S and H Foundation. As recipients, Phi Beta Kappa, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the American Council on Education have established The National Humanities Faculty.

The new program brings scholars and practitioners of the arts together with high school teachers to work in a variety of ways to help American secondary schools refocus their teaching about man: his achievements and problems, his past and present, in order to awaken greater awareness of human values. Members of the Faculty are chosen for those qualities as individuals and scholars which fit them for communicating to our schools the excitement and stimulation of work in their fields.

For some years, the school world has expressed a need for this kind of assistance, and scattered individual school systems have undertaken visiting scholar programs with keen enthusiasm about the results. The National Humanities Faculty was created to meet this need on a wider scale.

Goals of the Program

Such cooperative ventures apparently have worked best when the initiative has come from the schools rather than being introduced from the outside. It is intended, therefore, that the school systems should take the lead in formulating their plans for making the best use of all that a scholar or artist can bring to them, not necessarily in the direct planning and remaking of the curriculum, but certainly in catalyzing such work to improve instruction in a specific area.

The program, then, is designed to be innovative and to stimulate

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creativity on the part of schoolteachers. Therefore, its immediate short range goals should and will be evolutionary, even evanescent.

In one instance, the overt aim may be to supply scholarly advice in the creation of curriculum materials, while in another, it may be to help teachers within a large and complex school system define the community's needs and develop plans for an approach through the humanities to meeting those needs. Always the underlying aim is to help humanities teachers in service to achieve a new enthusiasm for and lively dedication to teaching youngsters about man.

Interdisciplinary Approach

While the NHF was planned to work within specific disciplines, its conceivers wisely left its organization flexible enough to permit interdisciplinary work as well. As it turns out, our wide correspondence with schools all over the country indicates that there is a rapidly growing movement toward interdisciplinary humanities courses particularly at the high school level, but in many instances in junior high and elementary schools as well. The real need expressed by these schools is for assistance either in creating such courses or in further refining courses already being taught.

The interdisciplinary approach is both good and bad. Done with intelligence and perception, such a course meets many of the needs of today's youngsters for deeper involvement in vexing human questions while at the same time continuing to be intellectually valid. History, for example, takes on meaning for students as they realize that it can shed some light on present dilemmas, and that it involves real people handling problems and making decisions which to some extent partake of the age-old universal human questions.

On the other hand, such courses can be worse than anything they supplant. There is confusion and controversy as to just what the humanities are, and there is always the danger of superficiality.

In some schools, for example, the traditional tenth-grade world history course, nearly always an overambitious survey, is now turned into world history plus history of philosophy, history of art, and history of literature, without the real focus which might permit one to range intelligently over some 24 centuries of Western man's past. To add to the problem, the accusations of ethnocentricity in the traditional courses have often been met by simply adding sections on Far Eastern and African history as well. Needless to say, the teachers of such courses are in deep trouble, and many are crying for help.

Faculty Members for Pilot Year

Moreover, the tendency is still to offer humanities courses only to the college bound students, although in a sense, they are the ones who need it least, since they will have some experience of this kind in college. Bringing the non-college bound to a richer and more enjoyable understanding of what it means to be truly human not only is vastly important to the future of our society, but can be a most exciting experience for

teacher and student alike, as has been amply demonstrated in a few truly innovative programs.

With some of these thoughts in mind, the NHF this year has a program which involves O. B. Hardison, in the field of English at North Carolina; David Tyack, in history and education at Illinois; W. Astor Kirk, a political scientist in the Office of Economic Opportunity in Washington; and Erich Gruen, in ancient history at Berkeley. These scholars are being sent to Gainesville, Georgia, to help the teachers there think through an interdisciplinary course designed in part at least to help the children (and parents) of a Southern community to come to grips with the problems and the glories of cultural differences.

What precise form such a course will take is up to the teachers and the scholars. I believe, however, that such a course has a strong chance of success, and, if so, may well serve as a model for many similar communities.

We are sending Irvn DeVore, in anthropology at Harvard; C. L. Barber, in English at Buffalo; Lynn White, in history at UCLA (Visiting Professor at Cornell this year); Max Black, in the humanities at Cornell; and Charles Keller, a historian from New York City, all to the Utica, New York, area. In this area the city teachers, those in a suburb, and those in a rural district want to learn to communicate with each other and in turn teach their children how. One hopes to see developed a common course with appropriate pedagogical adaptations for the students of different backgrounds, but with a common subject matter so that they may share their experiences in truly meaningful ways.

We are sending Bartlett Hayes, in art at Andover; Bernard Weisberger, a historian writing for *American Heritage*; John Silber, in philosophy at Texas; Cornelius Golightly, in philosophy at Wisconsin; and one or two others to Grosse Pointe, Michigan. Here a school system rich in resources and opportunities has tried without complete success to bring its suburban youngsters to some fresh understandings of urban man. We hope to lead these young people to a closer focus on the fascinating and tragic problems of their own city of Detroit.

We are sending Richard Schickel, a senior editor and the specialist on film for *Life* magazine; James Silver, in American studies at Notre Dame; Charles Keller; and Vincent Scully, in art at Yale, to Minneapolis. Here they will spend an intensive week of seminars and discussions on the topic, "How Can the Humanities Speak to Youth in Revolt?"

The San Francisco project, chosen for its geography, for its racial variety, and for its size, represents what I think of as a bold and risky attempt to help a large, complex city system come to grips with extremely pressing problems at a crucial moment. There we are concentrating in the beginning on simply permitting some extremely good but discouraged teachers to communicate with each other and to dream again. We will supply scholars and consultants at the appropriate time to help them consider more broadly their humanities courses.

During its second year of operation, the program hopes to work in 15 school systems, building on the experience of this pilot year. Much evaluation of the pilot projects will have been carried out, with an end of the year conference for some of the key figures involved, from which we hope to draw up some reports which can be widely disseminated.

National Humanities Faculty Board

Moreover, there is a constant flow of exciting ideas for related ventures both from the schools and from the members of the NHF Board. The latter group consists of one representative from each of the sponsoring organizations and 12 members selected by the Senate of Phi Beta Kappa. They are at present the following individuals:

Representative from Phi Beta Kappa: Dorothy Bethurum Loomis, Emeritus Professor of English, Connecticut College.

Representative from ACLS: Walter J. Ong, S.J., Professor of English, St. Louis University.

Representative from ACE: Henry R. Winkler, Vice Provost and Dean of the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rutgers.

Elected by Phi Beta Kappa Senate: Henry W. Bragdon, retired teacher of History, Phillips Exeter Academy; J. Carter Brown, Deputy Director, National Gallery of Art; William A. Clebsch, Executive Head, Humanities Special Programs, Stanford University; John B. Davis, Jr., Superintendent of Schools, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Donald M. Frame, Professor of French, Columbia University; Paul L. MacKendrick, Professor of Classics, University of Wisconsin; Benjamin E. Mays, President Emeritus, Morehouse College; Franklin K. Patterson, President, Hampshire College; Norman P. Ross, former Editor of Time-Life Books, Time, Inc., Visiting Fellow at Yale University; John R. Silber, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Texas; Daniel J. Whitaker, Vice-Principal and former Chairman, Department of Social Sciences and English, Lebanon High School, New Hampshire; Henry I. Willett, Superintendent of Schools, Richmond, Virginia.

It is our hope to be of aid to as many schools as we possibly can. We welcome information from any school which is doing new things in the general area of humanities, and hope very much that those who would like help from us will get in touch with us without any hesitation.

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