

Center for the Study of Evaluation  
University of California, Los Angeles

Humanitas Program Evaluation  
1991-92 School Year

**Humanitas: A Synthesis of  
Four Years of Evaluation Findings  
Final Report**

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**Other UCLA/CSE-authored Humanitas final reports, 1991-92**

Humanitas Portfolio Project

Institutionalization of the Humanitas Program: Report of Interviews

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## **HUMANITAS: A SYNTHESIS OF FOUR YEARS OF EVALUATION FINDINGS**

**FINAL REPORT, 1991-92**

**Pamela R. Aschbacher and Joan L. Herman**

The Humanitas Program was initiated in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) in 1986 by Los Angeles Educational Partnership (LAEP) to promote the professional growth and effectiveness of teachers and to improve humanities education for the full range of students in an urban district. Grants from private foundations and organizational leadership from LAEP, a consortium of business leaders that supports innovation in the public schools, have supported this model program for six years. The program began in eight schools and has grown significantly, now involving 37 schools, 267 teachers, and about 4500 students. The program faces an important juncture as the LAUSD and various funding agencies consider the degree to which they can support the program. To facilitate such decisions it is helpful to take stock. What demonstrable effects does Humanitas have on students and teachers? Under what conditions? What minimal conditions are necessary for the program to succeed?

UCLA's Center for the Study of Evaluation (CSE) has evaluated the program for LAEP since 1988. During that time, CSE collected a variety of data from observations, interviews, surveys, school records, standardized tests, portfolios, and performance assessments on Humanitas and comparison classes in 16 schools, and survey and interview data from teachers, counselors, school and district administrators, and LAEP staff. Key findings from this evaluation follow.

### **What Effects Does Humanitas Have on Students?**

- Essays written by students in Humanitas showed better overall quality, more conceptual understanding of content, and more interdisciplinary knowledge than those written by comparison

students in regular classes. Both groups were equally able to support their ideas with factual knowledge.

- More Humanitas students than comparison students felt their classes had strong positive effects on their overall academic achievement, including their understanding of history, ability to synthesize information, and their ability to write well. Teachers and administrators agreed.
- Humanitas students rated their Humanitas classes as tougher and the teachers as having higher expectations for students than comparison students rated their classes and teachers. Humanitas teachers had higher expectations for their students than comparison teachers did.
- Humanitas students, according to self-ratings, were more willing to work hard in class, enjoyed the class more, and thought about their future more than students in comparison classes.
- Humanitas students were absent less often than comparison students.
- Among traditionally low achieving students, the annual school dropout rate was lower in Humanitas classes (1%) than in comparison classes (7%). The annual school dropout rate among Humanitas students overall was consistently about 3% to 4% lower than among comparison students.
- Humanitas students take more college-oriented courses and apply to more four-year colleges than do comparison students.
- Humanitas students spend more time in cognitively complex class discussions than do comparison students, according to classroom observations.

### **What Effects Does the Program Have on Teachers?**

- Humanitas teachers are more satisfied with their work environment than comparison teachers in such areas as intellectual stimulation, making use of their talents, and opportunities to take risks and to innovate. School administrators agreed.
- More Humanitas than comparison teachers feel their voices are heard and respected by district administrators and others.

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### **What Effects Does the Program Have on Schools?**

- Administrators, counselors, and teachers agree that the program enriches the school through its effects on students. The program is known as a caring yet challenging environment for students, particularly for those with limited English skills or at risk of dropping out of school.
- Humanitas is considered by many as a model for school-based restructuring efforts, with its strong emphasis on critical thinking skills, shared decision making and teacher empowerment, innovative teaching strategies, and professional renewal. Eleven of the 21 approved site-based management proposals for senior high schools specifically mention Humanitas or refer to elements of the program.

### **Under What Conditions Does Humanitas Operate?**

The program was started under fairly optimal conditions: adequate outside funding to support teacher time for planning and staff development as well as money for field trips; philosophical support from the district Senior High Schools Division; and support from LAEP through provision of high quality staff development, networking and communication among participants, and overall vision, leadership, and coordination of the project.

Over the past few years, however, LAUSD has faced great financial problems. The district has been forced to cut about \$800 million from its budget, and faces still further drastic cuts, resulting in increased burdens for all teachers: greatly increased class size, reduced planning time, heavier preparation and grading loads, and transfers from school to school of students and teachers. Humanitas teams, in addition, have been disrupted by the threat of forced transfers of trained project teachers, loss of funding for field trips, and loss of money for substitutes to cover staff development time; interdisciplinary teaching was also disrupted with the enrollment of some non-Humanitas students in some of the Humanitas classes. Teacher morale throughout the district is very low as a result of the financial difficulties and concomitant changes.

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## Prognosis and Needs

Humanitas teachers appear to be relying on their teams and larger Humanitas network for support to cope with the difficulties in the district. They are continuing to operate with some special program resources, but the impending withdrawal of external funding (from LAEP) and possible further decline in the district's financial status portend a mortal blow to their program.

To continue Humanitas, the following minimum resources are required:

- Overall coordination of the program, including the Teacher Centers, with one full-time position in the district office and administrative support;
- Time, resources, and commitment of administrators and counselors to allow for recruitment and enrollment of appropriate students in sufficient numbers to fill Humanitas classes;
- Block scheduling of Humanitas core courses;
- Scheduling of Humanitas team members' conference periods at a common time;
- One extra planning period per day for those Humanitas site coordinators (currently 8) who oversee several teams and/or Teacher Centers;
- Money to cover copying of curricular materials to supplement textbooks (since interdisciplinary texts are not available and the program makes use of primary source documents, newspaper articles, and so forth);
- Money to cover buses and substitutes for one field trip per year (Admission fees are often contributed by community agencies and businesses, or they may be raised by students); and
- Time and resources to allow teachers to participate in staff development activities (e.g., 5- to 10-day summer academy, Teacher Center, and about four other cultural and professional events or meetings a year).

## Summary and Conclusion

In summary, the Humanitas Program has been highly successful and is viewed favorably by students, parents, teachers, counselors, and

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administrators alike. Minimal resources outlined above are needed to support the program: (a) moderate funding and (b) a serious commitment from district and school administrators and from counselors to support and protect the operation of the program. The current operating cost of the program is relatively modest considering its impact on the morale and effectiveness of teachers and on the lives of students. Improved attendance and prevention of dropouts among Humanitas students probably recovers some of the cost through increased revenue from the state. More importantly, the program also reduces the larger social and economical costs to our community when students fail to finish high school, and it increases society's social capital by contributing to students' complex thinking and communication skills.