

# The Humanities in the Eyes of Texas and Florida Politicians – Addendum to “What U.S. Politicians Say About the Humanities: White Paper on the Humanities in Political Discourse, 2009-2015”

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**Abstract:** *This is an extension to the March 2016 4Humanities study [“What U.S. Politicians Say About the Humanities: White Paper on the Humanities in Political Discourse, 2009-2015,”](#) which examined United States political discourse during 2009 to 2015 in the legislative and executive branches of the federal government and also the legislative branch of one state (California) to discover how politicians talk about the humanities. By now analyzing records from state legislatures in the second and third most populated states behind California (Texas and Florida), 4Humanities concludes that the humanities do not always figure in U.S. political discourse in a drama of “recognition.” Both Texas and Florida state legislators frequently drafted bills referencing the humanities during 2009 to 2015 that created substantive change. This is different than in California, where state legislators in the same years overwhelmingly recognized the humanities just through resolutions.*

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**About 4Humanities:** 4Humanities is an international initiative for advocacy of the humanities, drawing on the technologies, new-media expertise, and ideas of the international digital humanities community. Digital methods have an important role to play in effectively showing the public why the humanities need to be part of any vision of a future society.

**About the Author:** Austin Yack earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science and minor in English at the University of California, Santa Barbara in spring 2016. He has intern experience covering politics in Washington, D.C. See his full biography at the end of this paper.

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## Introduction

Earlier 4Humanities research on United States political discourse in 2009 to 2015 in the legislative and executive branches of the federal government and the legislative branch of the most populous state, California, studied how politicians talk about the humanities (Austin Yack, “What U.S. Politicians Say About the Humanities – A Dataset and Analysis”).<sup>1</sup> The white paper that capped that study concluded that while the Obama administration was successful in augmenting the humanities within the scope of its resources, the U.S. Congress and the California State Legislature were ineffective.<sup>2</sup> In what 4Humanities called a “drama” of recognition, both legislatures mainly honored the humanities in the educational sector through simple resolutions rather than enacted positive change through substantive bills. These findings led 4Humanities to wonder whether all state legislatures were like California in 2009 to 2015 in staging hollow “recognitions” of the humanities.

4Humanities has thus extended its research from California to the state legislatures of the next two currently most populous states: Texas and Florida.<sup>3</sup> An examination of these legislatures in the same time frame of 2009 to 2015 shows that both were more effective than their California counterpart in augmenting the humanities. They frequently produced substantive bills endeavoring for positive change, not simple resolutions exemplifying a drama of recognition.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://4humanities.org/4humanities-research-projects/what-u-s-politicians-say-about-the-humanities/>

<sup>2</sup> Austin Yack, “What U.S. Politicians Say About the Humanities: White Paper on the Humanities in Political Discourse, 2009-2015,” 4Humanities.org, 1 March 2016. <http://4humanities.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/yack-white-paper.pdf>. For the HTML version of this paper, see: <http://4humanities.org/austin-yack-what-u-s-politicians-say-about-the-humanities-2016/>.

<sup>3</sup> As ranked in 2015. See Public Information Office, “North Carolina Becomes Ninth State With 10 Million or More People, Census Bureau Reports,” *United States Census Bureau*, December 22, 2015, <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-215.html>

## Research Sources and Methods

To study the actions of the Texas and Florida state legislatures, 4Humanities drew on the five following documentary sources available online:

Texas State Legislature	Florida State Legislature
1. <a href="http://Capitol.state.tx.us">Capitol.state.tx.us</a>	3. <a href="http://Flsenate.gov">Flsenate.gov</a>
2. <a href="http://Legiscan.com">Legiscan.com</a>	4. <a href="http://Archive.flsenate.gov">Archive.flsenate.gov</a>
	5. <a href="http://Myfloridahouse.gov">Myfloridahouse.gov</a>

*Capitol.state.tx.us* is the primary website for the Texas State Legislature. It provides access to archives and updates of committee information, bills, calendars, and more from both the Texas House and Texas Senate. Using this resource, 4Humanities searched for documents mentioning the “humanities” in every legislative session dating back to 2009 and recorded the bills, bill analyses, and bill drafts in a spreadsheet. There were 77 relevant documents, though these could be reduced to a core of 28 bills once repeated drafts and amendments were omitted.

*Legiscan.com* is the “nation’s first impartial real-time legislative tracking service,”<sup>4</sup> and includes data on bills from all state legislatures. *Legiscan.com*’s broad database is especially useful for identifying a bill’s authors and sponsors, as well as for tracking how far each piece of legislation went in the legislative process.

For studying political discourse related to the humanities in the Florida State Legislature, *Flsenate.gov* is essential because of its vast number of archived bills drafted in the Florida House and Senate dating back to 2010. The website also includes updated information on Florida senators, the legislature calendar, press releases, laws, and more.

In order to reach back to 2009 in Florida (to match the 2009 to 2015 span of the earlier study of California), 4Humanities also drew on *Archive.flsenate.gov* and *Myfloridahouse.gov*.

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<sup>4</sup> “LegiScan: About Us,” *Legiscan.com*, accessed June 2016, <https://legiscan.com/about>

The former provides Florida Senate materials prior to 2010, including bills, statutes, and committee publications. The latter is the primary website for the Florida House, and includes information on representatives, committees, calendars, legislation, and other material.

Spreadsheets of the information collected by 4Humanities from the above sources, including metadata and annotations for all documents referring to the humanities during 2009 to 2015, are presented at <http://bit.ly/4humpoliticsdata2> along with supplemental original datasets for California and the U.S. Federal government.<sup>5</sup>

### **Analysis (1): Texas**

During 2009 to 2015 as recorded in the above described resources, the Texas State Legislature produced 77 documents—including bill drafts, bill amendments, and bill analyses—mentioning the “humanities.” Discounting iterative drafts and amendments, there were 28 pieces of actual legislation. Often, these bills related to Lamar University’s Texas Academy of Leadership in the Humanities, which—as described in one such bill, [HB 771](#)—“provides academically gifted and highly motivated junior and senior high school students with a challenging university-level curriculum and allows students to complete high school graduation requirements while attending a public institution of higher education for academic credit.” HB 771 in particular was signed into law “to provide the academy with additional funds to enhance program initiatives, increase student services, expand support personnel, and further develop marketing and recruitment efforts to provide a wider selection of gifted and talented students

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<sup>5</sup> For the datasets presented in 4Humanities’s earlier study of the U.S. government and the California State Legislature, see <http://4humanities.org/4humanities-research-projects/what-u-s-politicians-say-about-the-humanities/>

opportunities for rigorous academic experience at the university level.”<sup>6</sup> Other examples of the Texas State Legislature acting in regard to the humanities include [HB 5](#), which was also signed into law. In its regulations on students earning endorsements on diplomas and transcripts after completing requirements set by the State Board of Education, the bill incorporates consideration of the “arts and humanities” defined as “courses directly related to political science, world languages, cultural studies, English literature, history, and fine arts.”<sup>7</sup>

Most significant among signed bills were ones like General Appropriations Bill, [SB 1](#), which provided humanities funding. In 2009, an [amendment](#) to SB 1 thus passed with a clause that funded Humanities Texas (Texas’s state council for the humanities):

In addition to amounts otherwise appropriated by this Act, the sum of \$1,000,000 is appropriated out of the General Revenue Fund to the Texas Education Agency for each year of the 2010-2011 state fiscal biennium to be used for Humanities Texas for the purpose of supporting the teacher institute program targeting public school teachers in their first or second year of service in geographic areas of this state with low student achievement on state assessments.<sup>8</sup>

Article 3 of the bill’s text also allocated \$285,184 to the Texas Academy of Leadership in the Humanities, and \$150,000 to the University of Texas at Dallas Graduate School of Arts and Humanities.<sup>9</sup> Regarding the above \$150,000, SB 1 explains that for the 2010 fiscal year the

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<sup>6</sup> Joe Deshotel and Charles Creighton, “HB 771,” 2015-2016 sess. (Texas State Leg.), <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/Search/DocViewer.aspx?ID=84RHB007713A&QueryText=%22humanities%22&DocType=A>

<sup>7</sup> Jimmie Don Aycock, et. al, “HB 5 – Introduced Version – Bill Text,” 2013-2014 sess. (Texas State Leg.), <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/Search/DocViewer.aspx?ID=83RHB000051B&QueryText=%22humanities%22&DocType=B>

<sup>8</sup> Jim Pitts and Steve Ogden, “SB 1 – Appropriations Amendment,” 2009-2010 sess. (Texas State Leg.), <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/Search/DocViewer.aspx?ID=81RSB00001H2318M&QueryText=%22humanities%22&DocType=M>

<sup>9</sup> Jim Pitts and Steve Ogden, “SB 1 – Article III Education,” 2009-2010 sess. (Texas State Leg.), [http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/scanned/ApproBills/81\\_0/81\\_R\\_Article03.pdf](http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/scanned/ApproBills/81_0/81_R_Article03.pdf)

funding would contribute to offering “graduate level courses for students in the Humanities, students in Medicine, practicing physicians, and others involved in the Health Professions leading to a Certificate in Medicine and Technology,”<sup>10</sup> among other things.

Many other bills in the Texas State Legislature discussed the humanities but were not signed into law. For example, Sen. Judith Zaffirini introduced [SB 1249](#), a bill “relating to the creation of a pilot program to improve curricula alignment between junior colleges and general academic teaching institutions for engineering degree programs.” Had it been enacted, the bill would have amended the Education Code to define core curriculum as “the curriculum in liberal arts, humanities, and sciences and political, social, and cultural history that all undergraduate students of an institution of higher education are required to complete before receiving a bachelor’s degree.”<sup>11</sup> Another example is [HB 2746](#), a bill “relating to the establishment of the School of Ethics, Western Civilization, and American Traditions at The University of Texas at Austin.” Sen. Lois Kolkhorst and other legislators outlined the curriculum in the proposed “School of Ethics,” so that it would satisfy multiple topics of study, including humanities, communications, government, and more.<sup>12</sup> Such bills may not have passed the legislature, but they kept the humanities alive as a topic of political discourse.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Judith Zaffirini, “SB 1249 – Engrossed Version – Bill Text,” 2009-2010 sess. (Texas State Leg.), <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/Search/DocViewer.aspx?ID=81RSB012493B&QueryText=%22humanities%22&DocType=B>

<sup>12</sup> Lois Kolkhorst, et. al, “HB 2746 – Introduced Version – Bill Text,” 2009-2010 sess. (Texas State Leg.), <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/Search/DocViewer.aspx?ID=81RHB027461B&QueryText=%22humanities%22&DocType=B>

## Analysis (2): Florida

The Florida State Legislature drafted 38 pieces of legislation referencing the humanities in 2009-2015. Just three were “resolutions” of the symbolic sort 4Humanities earlier studied in California. The FAMU Day Resolution, which recognized a specific day to honor Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University and mentioned the arts and humanities among other fields, was adopted on three separate occasions.<sup>13</sup> The majority of Florida legislation consisted of actual bills.

The yearly general appropriations bill, for example, allocated funds to the Florida Endowment for the Humanities, and significantly increased these funds in recent years (from \$350,000 in grants and aid from the General Revenue Fund in 2012 to \$750,000 in 2014 and \$500,000 in 2015).<sup>14</sup> Various stipulations constrained such allocations to the Florida Endowment for the Humanities to narrow purposes. For instance, the General Appropriations Bill [HB 5001](#) in the 2013-2014 session stipulated that “\$250,000 shall be used for activities to promote and enhance the 450th Anniversary of the City of St. Augustine.”<sup>15</sup> Constraints aside, however, there was still a significant boost in money to be used at the Endowment’s discretion. In the 2015 Appropriations Bill, [SB 2500-A](#), moreover, the State Legislature did not tack on any stipulations. The author, Sen. Tom Lee, simply allocated \$500,000 to the Florida Endowment for the Humanities.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Alan Williams, “HR 9051: FAMU Day,” 2013-2014 sess. (Florida State Leg.), <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2014/9051/BillText/Filed/PDF>

<sup>14</sup> Denise Grimsley and Appropriations Committee, “HB 5001: Appropriations,” 2011-2012 sess. (Florida State Leg.), <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2012/5001/BillText/er/PDF>

<sup>15</sup> Seth McKeel and Appropriations Committee, “HB 5001: General Appropriations Act,” 2013-2014 sess. (Florida State Leg.), <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2014/5001/BillText/er/PDF>

<sup>16</sup> Tom Lee, “SB 2500A: Appropriations,” 2015-2016 sess. (Florida State Leg.), <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2015A/2500A/BillText/er/PDF>

Beyond the funding bills, two other Florida bills are especially noteworthy for substantive discussion of the humanities. One was [SB 1076](#), an education bill on “Next Generation Sunshine State Standards” that established “the core content of the curricula to be taught in the state and specify the core content knowledge and skills that K-12 public school students are expected to acquire.” Besides decreeing that “Social Studies standards must establish specific curricular content for, at a minimum, geography, United States and world history, government, civics, and economics, including financial literacy,” the bill aimed to keep the humanities in K-12 public education.<sup>17</sup> The other, Sen. John Thrasher’s [SB 0946](#), amended multiple Florida statutes, one of which concerned higher education in the Florida College System. The bill decrees that

The universities and Florida College System institutions shall work with their school districts to assure that high school curricula coordinate with the core curricula and to prepare students for college-level work. Core curricula for associate in arts programs shall be adopted in rule by the State Board of Education and shall include 36 semester hours of general education courses in the subject areas of communication, mathematics, social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences.<sup>18</sup>

The bill thus confirms the place of the humanities in general education requirements across the Florida College System.

## **Conclusion**

This extension to the 4Humanities study, “What U.S. Politicians Say About the Humanities,” is significant because it shows the way politicians discuss the humanities in legislation across three distinct states. The analysis reveals that not all state legislatures

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<sup>17</sup> Jeff Brandes, Kelli Stargel, et. al, “SB 1076: K-20 Education,” 2013-2014 sess. (Florida State Leg.), <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2013/1076/BillText/er/PDF>

<sup>18</sup> John Thrasher, “SB 0946: Florida Statutes,” 2011-2012 sess. (Florida State Leg.), <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2011/0946/BillText/er/PDF>



exclusively follow the pattern of California's "drama of recognition." The legislatures of Texas and Florida paid explicit attention to the humanities in providing and sometimes increasing funding for the educational sector from K-12 education through higher education. Besides offering some "resolutions," both frequently drafted substantive bills that mentioned the humanities.

The 4Humanities studies on U.S politicians conducted thus far have been limited chronologically and geographically. Future research, as projected in the earlier 4Humanities study, could usefully incorporate data going back to 2000 rather than just to 2009. This would allow for comparing data for the federal administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. 4Humanities may also examine state legislatures chosen to represent different geographical regions. After all, though selected based on criteria of population, the states included in the present extension of the original 4Humanities study already suggest that looking at different parts of the nation may yield different conclusions about how U.S. politicians talk about the humanities.

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**Austin Yack** graduated magna cum laude from University of California, Santa Barbara with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science and a minor in English. Under the supervision of Dr. Alan Liu, Austin joined 4Humanities in Summer 2015 as the team’s research specialist focused on United States political discourse at both the federal and state levels. The 4Humanities project, *[WhatEveryISays](#)*, is collecting and analyzing a corpus of public discourse about the humanities and liberal arts, and Austin’s knowledge in politics, law, and journalism allowed him to bring a diverse perspective to the project. He has interned at *[The Hill Newspaper](#)* in Washington, D.C. and the Santa Barbara District Attorney’s Office.