Early Findings From Humanities-Indicators Project Are Unveiled
at Montreal Meeting

By JENNIFER HOWARD

When the American Council of Learned Societies held its annual meeting in Montreal last week, topics such as open access, scholarly publishing, and "The Global Academy and the Geography of Ideas" figured on the agenda. But the first item of business was a decidedly pragmatic one: the debut of the Humanities Indicators project, with a first set of hard facts and figures about the health of the humanities.

A long-term data-collecting effort led by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the project seeks to do for the humanities what the Science and Engineering Indicators have long done for math and the sciences (*The Chronicle*, April 14, 2006).

For more than a year, the Humanities Indicators project has been gathering, sorting, "scrubbing" (cleaning up), and analyzing statistics on almost every aspect of the humanities at every academic level, from preschool to postgraduate — courses offered, degrees earned, faculty members hired, research supported. It also attempts to assess how well the humanities fare in the public sphere as indicated by public-library resources and state humanities councils' activities, among other measures.

In a telephone interview with *The Chronicle,* Leslie C. Berlowitz, chief executive of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and Norman M. Bradburn, the man in charge of collecting and analyzing all the numbers, previewed some of the new statistics. Mr. Bradburn is a former director of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago and a professor of psychology and public policy there.

The first round of findings includes both good news and bad news for women in the humanities. Women are well-represented over all on humanities faculties; only the health sciences and education can boast a higher percentage of female faculty members. But when it comes to tenure-track and fully tenured positions, the numbers are less rosy. While the percentage of tenure-track jobs in the humanities held by women did increase from 1988 to the early 1990s, it then began to decline, dropping from approximately 55 percent of faculty in 1993 to less than 50 percent in 2004.

"The really bad news," Mr. Bradburn said, is that "the highest proportion of women are not on the tenure track."

The proportion of non-tenure-track humanities positions that are filled by women climbed from just over 50 percent in 1988 to close to 60 percent in 2004. In part that reflects an increased use of adjunct labor throughout academe, but it may also point to factors that specifically affect female faculty members.

Surprises and More Study

Among the other tidbits that Mr. Bradburn unearthed was that 10 percent of history teachers at the middle-school and high-school levels do not have certification or a degree in their subject area, a figure that mirrors that of their colleagues in mathematics and science. As Mr. Bradburn put it, "The situation is as bad or worse in the humanities as it is in science and math, which is usually where you hear all the discussion."

All those figures and many more will eventually be available online, perhaps as early as this winter. Over the next few months, Mr. Bradburn and Ms. Berlowitz will make other presentations to various humanities groups "so we can get feedback on the content and the process," as Ms. Berlowitz told *The Chronicle.*

Both she and Mr. Bradburn emphasized that much work remains to be done, but she expressed the hope that once they achieve a critical mass, the Humanities Indicators will become a regularly updated resource, as the Science and Engineering Indicators are.

"What we're learning so far is that by aggregating data from multiple sources, we're getting a much richer picture of trends," Ms. Berlowitz said. "As with any data, it's the beginning of a conversation."