The media (especially college newspapers) provide an anatomy of problems in the humanities that frames them within larger issues of higher education.

Although WE1S largely failed to detect topics dominated by “crisis”-related words and rhetoric in the media generally (see KF-1-1 and KF-4-3),¹ public and academic media discourse discusses a constellation of problems affecting the humanities at various levels. Turning to our Collection 4 (28,375 articles mentioning “humanities” from U.S. top newspapers) and Collection 13 (16,573 articles mentioning “humanities” from student newspapers on the UWire service), we identified discrete sets of problem-oriented topics that amount to the media’s analysis of issues affecting not just the humanities but academia generally.

In a 250-topic model of Collection 4, we found 35 topics explicitly about the humanities. Of these, 24 were problem-oriented. These converge around concerns for: curriculum (topic 84 on classes/degrees and 197 on classes/grades), teaching (90, 78, 231 on shortage of faculty and funding), and infrastructure (29, 115). Such humanities-themed concerns are a microcosm of larger worries about higher ed in general. The following, for example, are two issues we found in our model in sets of education-themed topics not specifically about the humanities: career opportunities (topic 106 on institutions and their rankings, 131 on degree and jobs, and 226 on tenure) and education infrastructure (102 and 206 on admissions, 95 and 116 on test performances, and 167 on curriculum and classes).

When we moved to a 250-topic model of Collection 13, we found that 31 topics are explicitly about the humanities. Of these, 13 are problem-oriented. These aggregate around issues of: discipline and interdisciplinarity (topic 44, 45, 210, and 249 on concerns about the status of single disciplines; 117, 124, 167 on interdisciplinary concerns) and career choices (143, 148, and 162 on the future of the humanities). Once again, these issues reflect in microcosm general problems in higher education we observed in sets of education topics not specifically about the humanities: pedagogy (topics 63, 240, 248 on research; and 137, 6, 22 on standardized tests and grade performance) and institutional infrastructure (21, 16, 118 on fellowships, hiring, and tenure; 217, 7, 189 on admissions and enrollment; and 11, 105, 129, 138 on academic structure and curriculum).

The media, in other words, may not concentrate generally on the “crisis” of the humanities and higher ed. But it provides what is de facto an anatomy of problems in the humanities that mirror those in the large structure of higher education, especially those affected by financial, economic, and career constraints (see KF-4-TBD).

¹ The notable exception is the discourse about “crisis” and related problems we did find in student newspapers covering the humanities. See KF-1-2.