Energizing Humanities in California’s San Joaquin Valley
Bakersfield College
NEH Community College Humanities Initiatives
Project Summary

Energizing Humanities in California’s San Joaquin Valley proposes a three year project from interdisciplinary humanities perspectives promoting cultural competency in humanities instruction at Bakersfield College. A two-year Hispanic Serving Institution in the Southern San Joaquin Valley of California’s Central Valley, Bakersfield College is one of the oldest two year colleges in the state. Known as a major contributor to California’s “energy” economy, the southern San Joaquin valley is rich in agricultural and oil production, as well as renewable energies, e.g., sun and wind. Complementing this legacy of energy production, Energizing Humanities in California’s San Joaquin Valley examines the concept of energy broadly from historical and literary perspectives, as well as the intersection of humanities with music/performing arts. Historically, the southern San Joaquin Valley has been an epicenter of labor and civil rights activism in California and beyond throughout the twentieth century, stemming especially from the broad impact of the farm labor movement at the state and national levels. The region too has been a powerful landscape for literary production and narratives of self and place, as well as music and cultural performance. This project holistically explores the overlap, interchange, and commingling intersection of history, literature, and the arts.

Each year community college faculty cohorts will engage critical scholarship within the fields of history, literature, and cultural performing arts. The first project year will examine recent scholarship in the area of California’s diverse agricultural history. Topics will include the origins of agribusiness, organized labor, significance of undocumented migrant labor, and the farm labor movement broad impact upon political and economic development in California and beyond. From a literary perspective, California’s diverse energy economy has provided a rich template for literary production. Project year two will examine the intersection between California’s energy economy and literary landscapes, including the context of the Dust Bowl migration, ethnic Mexican communities, and Asian immigration. The first two project years will also include humanities summer bridge programs, targeting area high school seniors from migrant backgrounds making their transition to Bakersfield College. These summer bridge programs will expose incoming freshman to important local humanities topics, as well as provide participating faculty place-based pedagogical models and cultural resources available in the southern San Joaquin Valley to energize humanities instruction. During the final third year, the performing arts will address a number of topics regarding energy humanities. Music faculty will use lenses of sound and music which amplify histories and critical issues facing the region. All faculty cohorts will be given training in digital humanities in order to create interdisciplinary assessments for wide distribution and sharing of learning beyond the classroom. A regional conference highlighting faculty pedagogical innovation, student panels, as well as keynote speakers, will conclude the grant project. A theatrical performance based upon student testimonials/writings and music/sound design collected from the first two project years’ summer bridge programs will supplement the closing conference.