

LITERACY STUDY

America's Most Literate Cities 2004

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In the 2004 study of America's Most Literate Cities, 22 variables were measured, rankings made, and grouped to form five categories of literate behavior. Each category is discussed separately below.

Newspaper Circulation

The database utilized for determining newspaper circulations came from the Audit Bureau of Circulations. The publishers' statements were analyzed from the March 31, 2002 report. These were utilized because some cities and newspapers had more up-to-date reports, but March 2002 was the most recent that all newspapers submitted.

There were six variables measured to determine the total ranking for newspaper circulation. The variables came from weekday circulation and Sunday circulation figures. The dates for weekday circulation varied from newspaper to newspaper. For example, some reported Monday through Wednesday, and Thursday through Saturday circulations, while some reported Monday through Friday, and Saturday separately. The largest reporting segment for weekday circulations was utilized for weekday circulation. Under weekdays and Sunday, a figure is presented for city zone circulation, which was the smallest, most immediate target. A figure is reported for the designated market circulation, which was determined by Audit Bureau of Circulation and the Newspaper. This is a larger target. Finally, the total paid circulation, which included all papers distributed within the city zone, the designated market, and elsewhere. The total population figure was derived from the U.S. Census Bureau 2002 Population Estimates because that coincided with the database year from the Publishers' Statements. The six variables were as follows:

- 1 Weekday City Zone Circulation divided by total population
- 2 Weekday Designated Market Circulation divided by total population
- 3 Weekday Total Circulation divided by total population
- 4 Sunday City Zone Circulation divided by total population
- 5 Sunday Designated Market Circulation divided by total population
- 6 Sunday Total Circulation divided by total population

Each of these six variables was then given a rank order. In turn, those six rank orders were combined to a single rank order, with one score for each of the 79 cities.

Libraries

The quality of libraries was assessed using six different variables. One of the variables related to public school libraries, and the other five to public libraries. The database for both the public school libraries came from the National Center for Educational Statistics and Core of Common Data, and contained data in school districts for the 2002-2003 school year. The data for the public libraries came from Library Statistics Program for fiscal year 2002. The population figures also varied for this category and these six variables. The public school number of students came from the fiscal year 2002-2003 enrollments. The library populations were a determined figure based upon library service areas as reported in the National Center for Education Statistics, and included the library service population for fiscal year 2002. The following six variables were calculated to determine quality of library, and were as follows:

- 1 Number of school media personnel per 1000 public school students
- 2 Number of branch libraries per 10,000 library service population
- 3 Number of library internet connections per 10,000 library service population
- 4 Volumes held in the library per capita of library service population
- 5 Number of circulations per capita of library service population
- 6 Number of library professional staff per 10,000 library service population

Each of these six variables was then given a rank order. In turn, those six rank orders were combined to a single rank order, with one score for each of the 79 cities.

Bookstores

This category was measured with three variables. The variables of Retail Bookstores and Rare/Used Bookstores were determined from the database of yellowpages.com, and were based on the number of listings with city addresses. The third variable was the number of members of the American Booksellers Association, which is a not-for-profit trade association representing independent bookstores. The population used for this category was U.S. Census 2003 Population Estimates. This was because the data from both the yellowpages.com and the independent booksellers association were the most recent available, and the U.S. Census Population Estimate for 2003 was the most recent available. The three variables were as follows:

- 1 Number of retail bookstores per 10,000 population
- 2 Number of rare and used bookstores per 10,000 population
- 3 Number of members of the American Booksellers Association per 10,000 population

Each of these three variables was then given a rank order. In turn, those three rank orders were combined to a single rank order, with one score for each of the 79 cities.

Periodical Publishers

The category of Periodical Publishers was included four variables. The data for these four variables were collected from MediaFinder.com of Oxbridge Communications, Inc., which searches the National Directory of Magazines,

and the Standard Periodical Directory for journals. The population used was the U.S. Census 2003 Estimates. This was used because it was the most recent data available, and the most recent editions of the Standard Periodical Directory, and the National Directory of Magazines were the databases searched. In the case of these variables, the rank orders were established in two different types of variables. One dealt purely with the number of periodicals published. This was done because a publishing center is not publishing periodicals only for the immediate population. Being a “center of literacy” sometimes means providing magazines and journals for broad national and international audiences. However, a number of periodicals are published with a local interest in mind, such as the local business journal, etc., so a calculation was used in determining the number of publishers in ratio to local population. The four variables were as follows:

- 1 Number of magazine publishers with circulation over 2,500
- 2 Number of magazine publishers with circulation over 2,500 per 100,000 population
- 3 Number of journals published with circulation over 500
- 4 Number of journals published with circulation over 500 per 100,000 population

Each of these four variables was then given a rank order. In turn, those four rank orders were combined to a single rank order, with one score for each of the 79 cities.

Educational Level

The educational level of the adult population over 25 years of age was assessed using three different variables. The U.S. Census Educational Attainment Statistics were used to determine the scores for these variables, and the U.S. Census 2000 Population figure was used because the Educational Attainment Statistics were from that same year. The three variables were as follows:

- 1 Percentage of the adult population with an educational attainment level of 8th grade or less
- 2 Percentage of adult population with an educational attainment level of high school diploma or more
- 3 Percentage of the adult population with an educational attainment level of Bachelors Degree or more

Each of these three variables was then given a rank order. In turn, those three rank orders were combined to a single rank order, with one score for each of the 79 cities.

Changes From 2003 to 2004 Study

There were a number of major changes from the initial literacy study completed in 2003 to the second annual literacy study completed in 2004. Perhaps the largest single change was the inclusion of 15 additional cities raising the number of cities ranked from 64 to 79. This was done because the population threshold was dropped from 250,000 to 200,000 based on the actual U.S. Census data from the year 2000.

Another major change was the refinement of a number of existing variables. Although the same 5 categories were used, there were a number of refinements made to the way the calculations were done. These included adding more understandable per capita figures by moving to populations per 10,000 people, populations per 1000 public school students, etc. Threshold rates for publishers was another example of changes where magazine publishers, magazines over 2,500 population were used to eliminate more uncirculated or very small, inconsequential types of publications.

A final area of change was the addition of numerous new variables. For example, under educational attainment level, those with 8th grade educations or less were added into the previous year, while previously only high school diploma and bachelor recipients were variables. The number of variables measured to index the five categories was increased from 13 to 22. For example, under libraries, to reflect forms of electronic literacy, the number of Internet connections per 10,000 library user population was added as a variable. Under periodical publishers, professional journals were added as two more variables beyond magazine publishers. Newspaper circulations were changed to reflect city zone, designated market, and total circulation, whereas previously, only total circulation was assessed.

In summary, the new version of America's Most Literate Cities contains considerable refinement, both through improvement on the measurement of existing variables within the 5 categories, and through the addition of 9 new variables subsumed under the same 5 categories. The change in population also allows more cities of still a similar type to be considered.