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Bard leads battle of books against poverty

The catalyst for Notre Dame's course comes from New York author Earl Shorris, who wrote *New American Blues: A journey Through Poverty to Democracy*, then developed a humanities course for the poor on the Lower East Side of Manhattan four years ago. Shorris uses his book to make a strong case for Great Books education as "an answer to the problem of poverty in the United States."

With Shorris as the teacher,

Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., sponsored the pilot course in 1995. Based on the program's success, Bard now sponsors 11 similar courses in about seven states: New York, Florida, Alaska, Washington, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Massachusetts. The goal is to develop 50 such courses in five years, says Martin Kempner, national director for the Bard College Clemente Course in the Humanities.

Of the 122 students who enrolled in Bard's course

nationwide during the 1998-99 academic year, 56% completed it, earning certificates of achievement, and 46% earned college credit. Shorris is working on a new version of *New American Blues*. The new book, *Riches for the Poor: The Clemente Course in the Humanities*, is slated to be released in August.

He says the book will concentrate on the Bard course, as well as versions of the course in Mexico, Canada, and Alaska.