

AMERICAN ACADEMY
OF ARTS & SCIENCES

The Heart of the Matter

The Humanities and Social Sciences

for a vibrant, competitive, and secure nation

REPORT BRIEF



Who will lead America into a bright future?

Citizens who are educated in the broadest possible sense, so that they can participate in their own governance and engage with the world. An adaptable and creative workforce. Experts in national security, equipped with the cultural understanding, knowledge of social dynamics, and language proficiency to lead our foreign service and military through complex global conflicts. Elected officials and a broader public who exercise civil political discourse, founded on an appreciation of the ways our differences and commonalities have shaped our rich history. We must prepare ourselves and invest in the next generation to be these enlightened leaders.



As we strive to create a more civil public discourse, a more adaptable and creative workforce, and a more secure nation, the humanities and social sciences are the heart of the matter, the keeper of the republic—a source of national memory and civic vigor, cultural understanding and communication, individual fulfillment and the ideals we hold in common.

The humanities remind us where we have been and help us envision where we are going. Emphasizing critical perspective and imaginative response, the humanities—including the study of languages, literature, history, film, civics, philosophy, religion, and the arts—foster creativity, appreciation of our commonalities and our differences, and knowledge of all kinds. The social sciences reveal patterns in our lives, over time and in the present moment. Employing the observational and experimental methods of the natural sciences, the social sciences—including anthropology, economics, political science and government, sociology, and psychology—examine and predict behavioral and organizational processes. Together, they help us understand what it means to be human and connect us with our global community.

Scientific advances have been critical to the extraordinary achievements of the past century, and we must continue to invest in basic *and* applied research in the biological and physical sciences. But we also must invest more time, energy, and resources in research and education in the humanities and social sciences. We must recognize that all disciplines are essential for the inventiveness, competitiveness, security, and personal fulfillment of the American public.

At the very moment when China and some European nations are seeking to replicate our model of broad education in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences—as a stimulus to innovation and a source of social cohesion—we are instead narrowing our focus and abandoning our sense of what education has been and should continue to be—our sense of what makes America great.

This report invites all stakeholders, public and private alike, to embrace a new commitment to collaboration, and a new sense of mutual obligation to the critical role of the humanities and social sciences for a vibrant democracy.

The Heart of the Matter, a report of the Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences, is intended to advance a dialogue on the importance of the humanities and social sciences to the future of our nation. The report was requested by Senators Lamar Alexander (R-Tennessee) and Mark Warner (D-Virginia) and Representatives Tom Petri (R-Wisconsin) and David Price (D-North Carolina).

The Academy gratefully acknowledges the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Carnegie Corporation of New York for their support as well as the hundreds of individuals who contributed to this work.

The Heart of the Matter identifies three goals and thirteen broad recommendations for advancing the humanities and social sciences in America.

1

Educate Americans in the knowledge, skills, and understanding they will need to thrive in a twenty-first-century democracy.

The humanities and social sciences provide an intellectual framework and context for understanding and thriving in a changing world. When we engage with these subjects, we learn not only *what* but *how* and *why*.

- *Support literacy as the foundation for all learning.*

The nation depends on a fully literate populace—on citizens whose reading, writing, speaking, and analytical skills improve over a lifetime. The humanities and social sciences must be nurtured at every level of education.

- *Invest in the preparation of citizens.*

A thorough grounding in history, civics, and social studies allows citizens to participate meaningfully in the democratic process—as voters, informed consumers, and productive workers.

- *Increase access to online resources, including teaching materials.*

Expand collaborative partnerships and use new technologies to ensure that quality education materials reach all students, especially among the disadvantaged.

- *Engage the public.*

Through public-private partnerships, support a strong network of schools, museums, cultural institutions, and libraries that engage the public in humanities and social science activities.

Less than a quarter of 8th and 12th grade students are proficient in reading, writing, and civics.

Three out of four employers want schools to place more emphasis on the skills that the humanities and social sciences teach: critical thinking and complex problem-solving, as well as written and oral communication.

2

Foster a society that is innovative, competitive, and strong.

The ability to adapt and thrive in a changing world is based not only on instruction for specific jobs of today but also on the development of professional flexibility and long-term qualities of mind: inquisitiveness, perceptiveness, the ability to put a received idea to a new purpose, and the capacity to share and build ideas with others.

- ***Increase investment in research and discovery.***

To ensure the vibrancy of humanities and social science programs at all levels, philanthropists, states, and the federal government should significantly increase funding designated for these purposes, including support for the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, and other relevant agencies.

- ***Communicate the importance of research to the public.***

Scholars and the public will both benefit if scholars project the broader implications of their research and writing, and if they articulate these implications for a wider audience.

- ***Create cohesive curricula to ensure basic competencies.***

To ensure that graduates of K-12 education, as well as two-year and four-year colleges, are prepared for a satisfying and productive adult life, scholars and teachers should begin to reverse the trend toward an ever-more fragmented curriculum.

- ***Strengthen support for teachers.***

The Commission encourages the creation of a Humanities Master Teacher Corps to complement the STEM Master Teacher Corps. It recommends enhanced partnerships between elementary and secondary schools and higher education institutions and loan-forgiveness programs to encourage the entry of advanced-degree holders into K-12 classrooms.

- ***Encourage all disciplines to address “Grand Challenges.”***

Humanists and social scientists are critical in providing cultural, historical, and ethical expertise and empirical analysis to efforts that address Grand Challenges, such as the provision of clean air and water, food, health, energy, and universal education.

3

Equip the nation for leadership in an interconnected world.

The humanities and social sciences teach us about ourselves and others. They enable us to participate in a global economy that requires understanding of diverse cultures and sensitivity to different perspectives. And they make it possible for people around the world to work together to address issues of mutual importance, such as peace and sustainability.

- ***Promote language learning.***

State and local school districts and colleges and universities should establish and expand programs to increase language learning.

- ***Expand education in international affairs and transnational studies.***

The Commission recommends the creation of a new “National Competitiveness Act”—which, like the original National Defense Education Act, would include funding for education in international affairs and transnational studies.

- ***Support study abroad and international exchange programs.***

Because government agencies including the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce as well as the U.S. military require the kinds of expertise that students can acquire only through advanced study and immersion in other cultures, the federal government should increase support for the Fulbright Program and the Department of Education’s Title VI international and language programs, among others.

- ***Develop a “Culture Corps.”***

Encourage cities and states, libraries and museums, and other organizations like the Corporation for National & Community Service to develop a “Culture Corps” to transmit humanistic and social scientific expertise from one generation to the next.

Federal funding for international training and education has been cut by 41 percent in four years.

Members of the Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences

Cochairs

Richard H. Brodhead, President,
Duke University

John W. Rowe, retired Chairman
and Chief Executive Officer,
Exelon Corporation

Members

Danielle S. Allen, Professor of
Political Science, Institute for
Advanced Study

Kwame Anthony Appiah, Professor
of Philosophy, Princeton University

Norman R. Augustine, retired
Chairman and Chief Executive
Officer, Lockheed Martin
Corporation

Robert M. Berdahl, former
President, Association of American
Universities

Leslie C. Berlowitz, President,
American Academy of Arts
and Sciences

Robert J. Birgeneau, former
Chancellor, University of
California, Berkeley

Philip Bredeesen, Jr., former Governor
of Tennessee

David Brooks, Journalist,
The New York Times

Louise H. Bryson, Chair Emerita,
J. Paul Getty Trust

Ken Burns, Director and Producer,
Florentine Films

Tom Campbell, Dean, Chapman
University School of Law; former
U.S. Representative from California

Francisco Cigarroa, Chancellor,
University of Texas System

G. Wayne Clough, Secretary,
Smithsonian Institution

James Cuno, President and
Chief Executive Officer, J. Paul
Getty Trust

Gerald Early, Professor of Modern
Letters, Washington University
in St. Louis

Karl W. Eikenberry, former U.S.
Ambassador to Afghanistan; retired
U.S. Army Lieutenant General;
Fellow in International Security,
Stanford University

Drew Gilpin Faust, President,
Harvard University

Roger W. Ferguson, Jr., President
and Chief Executive Officer,
TIAA-CREF

Richard B. Freeman, Professor of
Economics, Harvard University

Dana Gioia, Professor of Poetry
and Public Culture, University
of Southern California; former
Chairman, National Endowment
for the Arts

Annette Gordon-Reed, Professor
of Law, Professor of History, and
Professor at the Radcliffe Institute
for Advanced Study, Harvard
University

Anthony Grafton, Professor of
History, Princeton University

Amy Gutmann, President,
University of Pennsylvania

Emmylou Harris, Musician/
Songwriter

Robert M. Hauser, Executive
Director, Division of Behavioral
and Social Sciences and Education,
National Research Council,
National Academy of Sciences

F. Warren Hellman†, Cofounder,
Hellman & Friedman LLC

John L. Hennessy, President,
Stanford University

Jill A. Hornor, Director,
Sound Postings, LLC

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Professor
of Communication; Director,
Annenberg Public Policy Center,
University of Pennsylvania

Rev. John I. Jenkins, President,
University of Notre Dame

Steven Knapp, President,
The George Washington University

John Lithgow, Actor

George Lucas, Producer,
Screenwriter, Director, Skywalker
Properties, Ltd.

Yo-Yo Ma, Musician

Carolyn “Biddy” Martin, President,
Amherst College

Anthony W. Marx, President,
The New York Public Library

James McNerney, Chairman,
President, and Chief Executive
Officer, Boeing Company

Eduardo J. Padrón, President,
Miami Dade College

Carl H. Pforzheimer III, Manager,
Carl H. Pforzheimer and Co. LLC

Earl A. Powell III, Director, National
Gallery of Art

Hunter R. Rawlings III, President,
Association of American
Universities

John Sexton, President,
New York University

Donna E. Shalala, President,
University of Miami; former U.S.
Secretary of Health and Human
Services

David J. Skorton, President,
Cornell University

David Souter, former Associate
Justice, Supreme Court of the
United States

Eric Sundquist, Professor of English,
Johns Hopkins University

Billie Tsien, Architect,
Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects

Charles M. Vest, President, National
Academy of Engineering

John E. Warnock, Chairman of the
Board, Adobe Systems, Inc.

Diane P. Wood, Federal Judge,
United States Court of Appeals
for the Seventh Circuit

Pauline Yu, President, American
Council of Learned Societies

† *Deceased*

We live in a world characterized by change—and therefore a world dependent on the humanities and social sciences. How do we understand and manage change if we have no notion of the past? How do we understand ourselves if we have no notion of a society, a culture, or a world different from the one in which we live? How do we ensure our security and competitiveness in the global community? A fully balanced curriculum—including the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences—provides opportunities for integrative thinking and imagination, for creativity and discovery, and for good citizenship. The humanities and social sciences are not merely elective, nor are they elite or elitist. They go beyond the immediate and instrumental to help us understand the past and the future. They are critical to a democratic society and they require our support.

Join this national conversation.

**The report of the Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences
and a short film produced by Ewers Brothers Productions, LLC,
are available at www.amacad.org.**



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES

136 Irving Street • Cambridge, MA 02138

Phone: 617-576-5000 • Email: aaas@amacad.org • www.amacad.org