

# THE AMERICAN ACADEMY

## O F A R T S & S C I E N C E S

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### Academy Report Finds Empirical Information About Humanities Lacking

#### Recommends Creation of Humanities Database Similar to *Science and Engineering Indicators*

The **American Academy of Arts and Sciences** is releasing a groundbreaking report that finds that the Humanities lack even the most basic empirical information about the state of the field or those who teach in the humanities disciplines. The report contrasts this situation with the wealth of statistical information compiled for the sciences and social sciences by the National Science Foundation and other federal agencies. The authors of the study believe that such data is critical for policymakers and philanthropic institutions to shape the future of the Humanities.

“**Making the Humanities Count**” was published with support from the **Rockefeller Foundation** and reflects the work of an Academy advisory committee composed of representatives from many of the nation’s leading scholarly organizations.

The report features a critical analysis of currently available Humanities databases, as well as essays explaining the need for more comprehensive and reliable data about the Humanities by **Robert M. Solow**, a Nobel Prize winner and professor emeritus of economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; **Francis Oakley**, former president of Williams College and current director of the Oakley Center for the Humanities at Williams College; **Phyllis Franklin**, executive director of the Modern Language Association; and the late **John D’Arms**, president of the American Council of Learned Societies at the time of his recent death.

According to Academy Fellow Robert M. Solow, “the humanities community itself, including its funders, knows deplorably little about what is taught to whom and by whom, how long it takes, where graduates and post-graduates go, what they do when they get there, and how many of them there are.”

Solow’s conclusion is based on a review of over 100 datasets compiled by a variety of humanities organizations and professional associations to answer critical questions concerning the degree candidates, institutions, funding, and practitioners of the Humanities. Conducted by consultant **Calvin Jones**, this analysis concludes, “the humanities are, at present, lagging behind the science and engineering disciplines in developing the systems of data resources needed to monitor even the most basic trends in the number, activity levels, and productivity of, and the future prospects for, practitioners in humanities fields at all degree levels.”

Former college president Francis Oakley challenges most of the criticism directed at American universities during the height of the “culture wars” in the 1980’s and 1990’s. Oakley finds that such negative evaluations of the Humanities were created in a vacuum of information and were based on little more than anecdotal observation.

Oakley says, “Academic overspecialization, incoherent curricula, failure ‘to bring the humanities to life’ ... were the explanations for the ‘flight from the humanities’ that the critics advanced with a degree of confidence that stood in almost inverse proportion to the actual dimensions of the factual base on which these explanations appeared to rest.”

Phyllis Franklin and the late John D'Arms advocate for the creation of a comprehensive set of *Humanities Indicators*, similar to the *Science and Engineering Indicators* that the National Science Foundation publishes. Both D'Arms and Franklin argue that better and more systematized data collection will help illustrate the importance of the Humanities and Humanities-based study. The Academy has formed a consortium of leading organizations dedicated to developing an initial framework for the proposed *Humanities Indicators*. These institutions include the American Council of Learned Societies, the Modern Language Association, and the American Historical Association, as well as the National Humanities Alliance and its member organizations.

The report, available at the American Academy website at [www.amacad.org](http://www.amacad.org), is the first publication to emerge from the Academy's *Initiative for Humanities and Culture*. This program was established by the Academy to improve understanding of the state of the humanities and to provide a framework for examining their significance to our national culture. It will develop analyses and data to enable scholars and policy makers to examine the history and outcome of these transitions and develop resources and policies that will advance the humanities in the 21st century.

The American Academy was founded in 1780 by **John Adams** and other scholar-patriots "to cultivate every art and science which may tend to advance the interest, honor, dignity, and happiness of a free, independent, and virtuous people." The current membership of over 3,700 Fellows and 600 Foreign Honorary Members includes more than 150 Nobel laureates and 50 Pulitzer Prize winners. Drawing on the wide-ranging expertise of its membership, the Academy conducts thoughtful, innovative, non-partisan studies on international security, social policy, education, and the humanities.

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