Introduction

The humanities—including the study of languages, literature, history, jurisprudence, philosophy, comparative religion, and ethics—are disciplines of memory and imagination, telling us where we have been and helping us envision where we are going.

They provide the knowledge, skills, and understanding we need to thrive in a twenty-first-century democracy. They equip us for leadership in an interconnected world and help foster a society that is innovative, competitive, and strong.

How are they faring? This report card provides a snapshot of where the humanities are today—their value to American society, their continuing vitality, and at the same time, the many challenges they currently face.

Unless otherwise noted, the information presented here comes from the American Academy’s Humanities Indicators, available at www.humanitiesindicators.org. Visit the website for complete graphs, supporting data, notes on methodology, and further resources.

According to The Heart of the Matter, the recent report from the Academy’s Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences, the humanities provide a valuable foundation for our efforts to learn, adapt, and share our culture. With the information available from the Humanities Indicators, the Academy hopes to enrich the conversation about the future of the humanities in American public life.

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The Value of the Humanities

Three out of four employers want new hires with precisely the sorts of skills that the humanities teach: critical thinking, complex problem-solving, as well as written and oral communication.

Source: *It Takes More Than a Major* (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2013)

84%

Percentage of humanities majors who, a year after college graduation, are satisfied with their choice of major

More humanities courses in college

= greater probability of
civic engagement


Humanities graduates are more widely distributed throughout different economic sectors than degree holders in most other fields.

College majors for members of Congress
Signs of Health

The percentage of high school students taking world history courses increased by **43%** over the past 20 years.

Despite reports on the drop in the number of humanities majors since the 1960s, the number of bachelor’s degrees in the humanities has grown appreciably since its nadir in the mid-1980s, with more than 185,000 degrees reported in each year from 2009 to 2011.

In 2009, the number of Advanced Placement tests taken in the humanities was more than 3 times the number in 1996—**far surpassing every other subject field**.

Between 2000 and 2009, humanities majors scored **9%** higher on the Graduate Management Admission Test than business majors.

The number of adults and children participating in programs sponsored by public libraries increased **12%** from 2006 to 2010.
Challenges

Reading for pleasure declined 11% from 1992 to 2008.

Under 30%
Percentage of 12th grade students proficient in writing, history, and civics

Also the percentage of public high school students who took history courses with a teacher certified in the subject area and with a degree in the field

13%
“Critical Need” Languages

37% Other Languages
50% Spanish

In 2011, humanities research received only 0.48% of the amount dedicated to science and engineering R&D in higher education.

On a recent international assessment, the United States ranked 10th in high school students' reading proficiency.

The gap between average math and verbal scores on the SAT is growing.

Decline in the proportion of young children read to regularly by a family member

8%

Only a tiny fraction of college students learn languages critically needed for international security and global competitiveness.