

The Heart of the Matter



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I am writing this blog on the Fourth of July weekend. It is appropriate to spend time as we celebrate the beginning of our democracy thinking about *The Heart of the Matter*, the long-awaited report designed to advance a dialogue on the importance of the humanities and social sciences to the future of our nation. Commissioned by Congress in 2011, the report is written by a prestigious committee established by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The committee persuasively argues that the humanities and the social sciences are the cornerstones of a vibrant, competitive and secure nation. The humanities and the social sciences play a critical role in maintaining the vibrant democracy we established in the 18th century. In other words,

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. They are critical to a democratic society and they require our support (www.humanitiescommission.org/)

The commission included major university, government, corporate and foundation leaders who held regional forums around the country and heard testimony from a number of other distinguished individuals. From these conversations, the commission identified three major goals and a number of specific recommendations for advancing the humanities and social sciences.

First, an education in the humanities and the social sciences provides the knowledge, skills and understanding that our citizens need to thrive in a twenty first century democracy. Students must master the ability to analyze massive and ever changing sources of data, to construct logical arguments from that information, and to communicate their values eloquently and persuasively in a socially responsible manner.



Second, an education in the humanities and the social sciences fosters a society that is

innovative, competitive and strong. Universities around the world are racing to adopt our model of higher education because they understand that narrow technical educational experiences do not serve to foster creativity in the same way that a grounding in the humanities and the social sciences does.

Third, an education in the humanities and the social sciences equips citizens of our nation for leadership in an interconnected world. An understanding of our society as well as the diverse cultures of the world, their histories, languages, struggles and concerns, is necessary to address problems that have no borders.

Take a few moments and watch the short video released by the commission (<http://vimeo.com/68804620>). Join the conversation about the centrality of the humanities and the social sciences.

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