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ARTICLE

Stolen Valor: How the Humanities "@ Work" Are Hidden in Plain Sight

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Abstract

This article examines the paradox of the humanities: they are simultaneously denigrated while non-humanities disciplines utilize (and champion) the very skills that are considered uniquely cultivated by a humanities education. My examination reveals that with the fissure between the humanities and other disciplines, knowledge about what the humanities do—and thus contribute to education in other fields—continues to diminish, furthering the cycle of marginalizing the humanities while also benefitting from them without attribution. I consider a time when a humanities education explicitly played a crucial role in the development of leaders, especially in business, because of the role the humanities played in the cultivation of analytical skills and the development of good judgement. I use this examination to consider what this lost connection means not only for the development of leaders but also for realizing the significant role that the humanities play across the professions and in our universities. The pedagogical role of the humanities in its development of analytical ability and judgment is crucial to public life from the flourishing of the business world to the lives we lead living with each other as fellow citizens.

Keywords: disciplines; education; humanities; judgment; philosophy

> A well-trained [person] knows how to answer questions, they reasoned; an educated [person] knows what questions are worth asking.
>
> — Executives at Bell Telephone, c. 1955

> It would seem as if the rulers of our time sought only to use men in order to make things great; I wish that they would try a little more to make great men; that they would set less value on the work, and more upon the workman.
>
> — Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

In his 1955 article published in *Harper's Magazine*, the sociologist E. Digby Baltzell explained the Bell Telephone Company leaders' concerns that initiated the Bell Telephone experiment. Bell, then one of the largest industrial concerns in the country, needed more employees

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capable of guiding the company rather than simply following instructions or responding to obvious crises. In 1952, W. D. Gillen, President of the Bell Telephone Company of Pennsylvania and a trustee of the University of Pennsylvania, met with representatives of the University of Pennsylvania to develop a leadership program that would be different from the typical executive leadership training programs that were common for companies at that time. These American business leaders in the 1950s believed that a "firm grounding" in the humanities would mitigate the "trained incapacity" of the narrow expert who had been recruited from business or engineering.[1]

When asked what makes a good leader or what they are looking for in future employees, today's employers still list traits that are strongly associated with a humanities education: analytical thinking, the ability to listen and consider different perspectives, ethical decision-making, and the development of good judgment.[2] Yet, despite this desire voiced by prospective employers, we do not see an increase in humanities majors, nor do we see an increase in the support for a humanities education. In fact, we see the opposite: a recent survey from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences shows a steady decline in humanities majors over the past twenty years.[3] Responding to this decline, colleges and universities are shuttering humanities departments, including philosophy, religious studies, and many languages.[4] Moreover, core course curricula, which could provide the supplementary humanities education within a four-year college degree often require more credit hours in STEM courses than in the humanities.[5]

In contrast to the intentional humanities education provided in the Bell Telephone experiment in the 1950s, what we currently see across disciplines such as business and engineering, which attract large numbers of majors, is an attempt to incorporate what the humanities do, for example, promote critical thinking, into their respective program requirements and course offerings, without considering that those skills should be developed within the larger context of a robust humanities education.[6] Thus, when we study the

[1] Baltzell 1955, 73.

[2] Flaherty 2021. Colleen Flaherty, reporting on the AAC&U 2021 report on "How College Contributes to Workforce Success," shares the following: "Ashely Finley, vice president for research and senior adviser at the AAC&U, and author of the report, said Monday that "the bottom line is that at a time when colleges and universities might be tempted to retrench resources, specifically to limit breadth of learning and skill development, they should not." Employers continue to find high value in students developing a "broad skill base that can be applied across a range of contexts," Finley said. "Our results also point to how much fostering mind-sets—like work ethic and persistence—matter for workplace success," as far as employers are concerned. Not necessarily related to the pandemic, Finley also said that the consistent differences of opinion expressed by employers under 40 and those over 50 suggest that liberal arts-related skills and civic and community mindedness are becoming more important to employers, not less."

[3] Although all fields showed some decline between 2012 and 2022, "the humanities had the most substantial decline..., falling by almost a third, from 13.1% to 8.1%" (Bradford and Townsend).

[4] The assault on higher education, often with humanities programs in the crosshairs, continues at the time of this writing. Most recently, cuts to programs at universities across the state of Indiana will be devastating to higher education in that state. See, for example, Rafford 2025. Sadly, the assaults are ramping up, even though recent surveys suggest that public perception of the university has improved. In a recent study, "Americans also believe colleges should help students become informed citizens (93%) and critical thinkers (91%)" (see Nguyen et al. 2025). This specific belief, even if unwitting, demonstrates bipartisan support for both the need for and value of the humanities as a foundational part of a college education. The attack on the humanities at the federal level is not helping. See Anderson 2025.

[5] A cursory look at core course requirements for several universities in the Southeastern Conference of Universities (SEC) reveals that although courses in the humanities are often required, the requirement is significantly fewer credit hours than the math/science courses combined.

[6] Although the "X across the curriculum" programs that proliferated in the 1980s and 1990s had good intentions, we might find the source of the appropriation of the humanities without credit in this movement.

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downturn in humanities majors and the decreased emphasis in the humanities in a university core curriculum, when we hear negative statements about the humanities, we must remember that the skills that a humanities education cultivates are, in fact, highly valued. Decoupling these skills from the humanities disciplines that foster them has, over time, submerged this important connection. Having stripped the humanities of what they uniquely provide, these other disciplines leave the humanities to be associated with only the negative mythologies (they are either useless and/or dangerous), which are perpetuated not only by the public but also, unfortunately, by the academy.

In what follows, I demonstrate that the humanities are positively appropriated in myriad ways without acknowledgment.[7] I then examine what this repressed connection between the desired traits for future employees and an education in the humanities means not only for the development of leaders but also for realizing the significant role that the humanities play across the professions, in our universities, and in the lives we lead as responsible citizens.

1. The humanities: What are they and what do they do?

The humanities, which typically comprise literature, philosophy, languages, and history, entail the study of the human world and human experience from a critical perspective.[8] Our engagement with these fields helps us understand ourselves and the world by showing us the complexity of human experience, examining emotions, considering different perspectives, and tracing the development of both ideas and events. These fields encourage us to explore different forms of government, ethical choices, human nature, and the meaningfulness of life. Housed in colleges of liberal arts (the names of these colleges vary, e.g., arts and sciences, and arts and humanities), frequently with the social sciences, the humanities often remain a mystery to people inside and outside the academy. When asked, many people (academics and non-academics) cannot identify the significant differences between, for

[7] My interest in this topic began several decades ago when I first started considering the aim of an undergraduate education. When I graduated with my master's degree in the Philosophy for Children program (1987), my elder brother had begun the process of applying to law schools. Having pursued a degree in chemical engineering as an undergraduate, he realized two things several years later: with a bachelor's degree, he did very little chemical engineering but rather was placed in management positions overseeing others; his degree plan, like most in engineering, left very little room for elective courses that would broaden his undergraduate education. He regretted this gap in his undergraduate education, and shortly after I graduated with my master's degree, he stated the following to me: "You were educated. I was trained." His observation has stayed with me nearly forty years later. Additionally, so has the irony that those with bachelor's degrees in engineering are often placed in leadership positions even though their degree plans do not afford them the opportunity to take the courses that might help them develop into people who can lead others. Although my brother was interested in patent law, he was applying to law schools that had a theoretical orientation, which he hoped would provide the intellectual supplement to his undergraduate education. The idea of the humanities hidden in plain sight came into full view when I was an associate dean of faculties and read all the faculty promotion and tenure files in that year's cycle. Nearly every teaching impact statement declared that the instructor "engaged in critical thinking" with their students. The term was never defined, and at a closer look, the activity looked more like problem-solving than what we in the humanities would call critical thinking. Several other humanities themes started to appear, for example, ethics education in various professional disciplines. It was difficult not to see the contrast—at the same time that higher education was under assault, and the humanities were specifically in the crosshairs, the very important skills the humanities deliver were being appropriated without acknowledgment by disciplines across the university.

[8] There are of course other fields such as classics or religion. Although we classify art or music as creative arts, they would fall under the purview of the humanities when they are the object of study, for example, when one studies a sculpture rather than creates one. History is often categorized as a social science. See McKeown 1947; Jarrett 1973; Breu 2018; and Richards 1947.

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example, the field of psychology and the field of literature. As an example, in 2023, I attended an annual conference on the humanities. In a conversation over lunch, a program manager for a state humanities council, whose job is to review grant applications for humanities projects in their state, asked me what I did. After I replied that I was a philosophy professor, she responded, "Oh, I didn't know that philosophy was a humanities [discipline]." My experience as a faculty member has taught me that many of our students and colleagues do not know what the humanities are (e.g., what disciplines are included in this category) or what they do. Some of this lack of knowledge can be attributed to the structure of core curricula and how we talk about the humanities in everyday language.

In their fascinating study, "What Everyone Says: Public Perceptions of the Humanities in the Media," Liu et al. share several key points that contribute to the public perception of the humanities that may provide some insight.[9] Although we often lump the sciences together under the acronym "STEM," there is nonetheless a more common understanding of the different subjects classified as science, for example, biology or chemistry. Even the STEM acronym stands for the different areas within science and technology. By contrast, the humanities are frequently referred to as "the humanities," with infrequent references to the specific subject matter that the humanities comprises, for example, history, literature, or philosophy, to name a few. Referring to the humanities in this way leads to several challenges, including but not limited to lumping the humanities together in such a way that they are not identified individually, making it more difficult to see how the content of these disciplines pervades our everyday lives. The average person on the street, although they may interact with the humanities daily, might not be able to identify the humanities character of a discussion about a television character's ethical dilemma, much less identify specifically that the discussion is philosophical.

This portrayal of the humanities contrasts with what we typically find in the media representation of the sciences. Additionally, the applied nature of the humanities is rarely identified. Again, this absence runs contrary to the sciences, where we often read or hear, "Recent scientific research finds that...," which clearly links science to a discovery that may prove beneficial, or harmful, to us. But what the authors also found was how the humanities permeated our lives, including references in unlikely places, for example, obituaries. The analysis of key terms across a variety of media outlets helps us see how extensively the humanities are simultaneously hidden and appropriated: they pervade our lives and yet most people remain unaware of how much they interact with humanities content.[10]

[9] Liu et al. 2022.

[10] There are numerous resources available that provide empirical evidence demonstrating how a humanities education translates to professional success. I am citing a few of those sources here, but my focus is not to establish this point. My claim is that the appropriation of the humanities either to name-drop or to adopt the skills (e.g., critical thinking) into the curriculum confirms the humanities' value. My claim is that the humanities are not given sufficient credit, and thus the connection the "things we value" has to the humanities remains hidden. For that important information, however, see the National Humanities Alliance data published in *Strategies for Recruiting Students to the Humanities* (Muir and Oliver 2021) and the *Humanities Recruitment Survey* (Oliver and Muir 2020). Many also cite the long-range salary information demonstrating that while humanities majors, depending on what they do immediately after graduation (e.g., if they attend law school and become lawyers), might not make salaries that are competitive with their engineering peers, their salaries are competitive with other terminal bachelor's degree holders. See American Academy of Arts and Sciences: Earnings of Humanities Degrees with a Terminal Bachelor's Degree: https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/workforce/earnings-humanities-majors-terminal-bachelors-degree#. See also Collini 2015.

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What the humanities "do" is a much less settled question. In general, the humanities are associated with the development of myriad skills, such as critical thinking, perspective taking, analytical reasoning, the development and application of good judgment, ethical decision-making, listening to others, and self-correction, but there is less consensus around their role or purpose. There are some who believe that the humanities are good in themselves insofar as reading books is joyful on its own and the humanities are not intended to do anything other than provide that pleasure.[11] In stark contrast to this group, there are others who claim that the humanities should and do make us better people.[12]

The more compelling response to the question takes both positions into account while also acknowledging the shortcomings of each.[13] However, these two views about what the humanities do also provide the fodder for the two primary attacks on the humanities: The suspicion—and fear—of what the humanities do on the one hand and the accusation of their uselessness on the other.[14] Current assaults on programs, courses, and research that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), critical race theory, and sexuality studies in U.S. education have allowed critics of the humanities to launch a straw man attack by targeting a few of the theoretical frameworks in the humanities as if they represent the humanities writ large. By using language like "indoctrination," these critics can scare the public into believing that certain segments of the universities are dangerous. As a consequence, they successfully move the discussion from the "humanities are useless" to "the humanities are dangerous," preying on the fears people have precisely because of what they imagine the humanities may do to their children or young adults.[15] In K-12 schools and in some public universities, the result is to ban books, control course curricula, and intimidate or silence teachers.

However, *at the same time* that the humanities are attacked, they are also praised for what they do accomplish. Indeed, the reason they are attacked and the reason they are valued are

[11] See Fish 2008; 2018.

[12] See Danisch 2023; Gopnik 2013; Nussbaum 2010. Gopnik's essay does not focus explicitly on the humanities making us better people, but rather that the humanities need to be focused less on developing us as critics and more as people who are "creators, builders, visionary architects, planners and inventors." In other words, people who will make the world a better place.

[13] I have addressed both positions in Katz 2013. See also Garber 2012, who also argues against the view that the humanities make us better people.

[14] I suspect that many colleges of liberal arts suffer from bad press and negative reactions simply because they are called colleges of liberal arts rather than colleges of arts and letters or humanities and social science, or some other name that does not include "liberal." Even if we concede that the humanities can make us better people, it is not clear that some university boards or state legislatures would agree with the faculty (even if the faculty could agree) on what "better" means, and indeed, they might think that this aim is precisely what they find dangerous.

[15] See Roochnik 2008 and Small 2013. At this writing, the Texas legislature recently amended the state penal code: Offenses Against Public Order and Decency: https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/docs/pe/htm/pe.43.htm. In the section regarding the sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to minors, they removed the affirmative defense to prosecution for a person having a scientific or educational justification. As we know, what gets labeled obscenity is a moving target, and there is the famous Potter Stewart confession to "know it when he sees it," which allowed him not to classify the film in question as pornography. But not all images or texts will be as fortunate. The effect of this amended version of the law is having a chilling effect on instructors at colleges and universities in the state who are teaching courses where the material might be deemed harmful to minors, and they may unknowingly have minors in their classroom. This material could range from nude images in art history to sexually explicit scenes within films that have LGBTQ themes to scenes in novels such as *Madame Bovary*. The discussions about this recent amendment to the statute suggest that the "actual" target is K-12 schools, not universities. However, given that any material could be captured in this description of what is harmful to minors, we should not take consolation in this explanation, nor should we assume that this is not a thinly veiled attack on the humanities and on the humanistic parts of non-humanities fields.

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often two sides of the same coin—or two interpretations of the same act. The view that the humanities are useless emerges from their focus on social and cognitive development rather than the production of objects. An education in the humanities appears not to "do" anything, which translates as not doing anything tangible. Recognized as fundamental to the cultivation of analytical thinking, ethical judgment, and critical thinking, and to the development of effective leaders, the incisive questions that a humanities education teaches us to ask of others and ourselves, while valued by some, are viewed by others as dangerous.[16] Although a humanities education is not intended to tell us what to think, this kind of education may influence how we think. The target of these same attacks dating all the way back to ancient Greece, the humanities have never enjoyed an unfettered existence.[17] Yet, the Bell Telephone experiment that I mentioned at the beginning of this article illustrates a different attitude toward the humanities, one in which the business community valued not only the practical skills but also the overall personal and social transformation that a humanities education can foster.

2. The Bell Telephone experiment

In contrast to the current view that the aims of a humanities education would necessarily oppose the values of the business community, the Bell Telephone executives in the 1950s believed precisely the opposite.[18] Timothy Aubry explains that the Bell executives wanted managers who could adapt to a world that was rapidly changing and who would not be restricted by having been trained in a specific technical field.[19] The Bell executives believed that a "deep and sustained education in the humanities... would serve as an antidote to [this kind of] specialization."[20]

As the very term suggests, the discipline of the humanities purports to offer knowledge about human beings: how they think, how they act in various situations, and how they organize themselves in relation to each other. "The need of such understanding," Chester Barnard [president of NJ Bell in the 1920s] concluded, "is of first importance for the executive; for human relations are the essence of managerial, employee, public, and political relations; and, in most cases, these rather than science, technology, law, or finance are the central areas of executive function."[21]

[16] Many of us are also familiar with the story that Aristotle was invited by King Philip II of Macedon to tutor his son, Alexander in philosophy among other subjects. Sadly, Alexander the Great turned out to be not so great, but the point stands that philosophers were frequently hired to tutor future leaders. A noble friend of John Locke sought Locke's guidance on the ideal education for his son. This guidance was published as *Some Thoughts Concerning Education.*

[17] These same two attacks were launched at philosophy as far back as ancient Greece. Accused of engaging in a useless activity, Thales of Miletus (c. 600 BCE) used his philosophical insight to predict a large olive harvest. He secured all the olive presses to be used later. When the harvest did prove to be plentiful, he rented out the olive presses at a higher price and he made a fortune. Having demonstrated that philosophical wisdom was not useless, he promptly returned to philosophical activity. In 399 BCE, Socrates was put to death, having been accused of corrupting the youth, among other crimes.

[18] The Bell Telephone Experiment provides an interesting counter-narrative to the easy claim that the humanities simply positioned themselves in opposition to the values of a "capitalistic, industrial society," as suggested by Reitter and Wellmon in their book, *Permanent Crisis: The Humanities in a Disenchanted Age.* See Liu et al. 2022. See also Reitter and Wellmon 2021. See also Bowles 1998. For an insightful examination of the tension seen in the wealthy who support education at the same time that they are threatened by it, or see their way of life threatened by it, see Donoghue 2009 and Fish 2009.

[19] Aubry 2014, 8.

[20] Aubry 2014, 8.

[21] Aubry 2014, 8.

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Bell launched the pilot program in 1953.[22] Seventeen men, all managers at AT&T, were brought to the University of Pennsylvania for ten months to receive an education in the humanities. More than half were between thirty-five and forty years of age; 15 had college degrees—9 were B.S. degrees, and 6 were B.A. degrees. All the participants had been trained in a technical subject such as business or engineering. They had been granted a paid leave of absence with full salary, and for ten months—approximately 550 hours—they would read, attend plays and lectures, engage in discussions, and socialize with leading poets, artists, and authors, visit museums and art galleries, and attend concerts by the Philadelphia orchestra. They began their ten months with an introduction to the *Bhagavad Gita*, and they ended their ten months with a study of James Joyce's *Ulysses.* The courses were taught primarily by the University of Pennsylvania faculty, with additional faculty from Swarthmore and Bryn Mawr.

The participants' feedback on the surveys used to assess the program reveals the impact the experience had on them. As Aubry observes, "Many of the participants believed that their experience at the Institute made them better communicators, better able to grasp the complexity of the problems that they confronted, and were better equipped to engage in long-term economic planning. A majority also reported feelings of increased tolerance for other opinions and an awareness that certain questions may yield more than one answer."[23] Their comments included sharing the following experiences: they "approached newspapers and periodicals with much more curiosity and speculation than before; politics make more sense; the art section in *Time* is not only readable but interesting; questions concerning McCarthyism are thought through with some real attention to ultimate questions."[24] Many shared a general sense that they were simultaneously more confident as managers while also cognizant that there was not necessarily one right approach or solution to a problem. Their confidence was rooted in their willingness to realize that they were not certain and did not need to be.[25]

Yet, as Aubry also notes, justifications for and against the program can be found in the participants' responses, and "in certain frequently repeated admissions the risks of justifying the humanities based on their ability to serve corporate interests become apparent."[26] One person commented that while they were still committed to the company, they understood the commitment and responsibility they had to their family and community.[27] Others commented that the "course stimulated a creeping discontent and a loss of complacency."[28] The most poignant comment suggested that the individual had developed a sense of agency that they did not previously believe they had: "Before this course, I was like a straw floating with the current down the stream. The stream was the Bell Telephone Company. I don't think I will ever be like that straw again."[29]

Although the participants identified themselves as more able to accept feedback, more thoughtful in their decision-making, more willing to defer judgment until they had more

[22] The following summary of the program and these details were taken from Baltzell 1955, 74–75. See also Baltzell et al. 1994. See also Davis 2010.

[23] Aubry 2014, 12. See note 29, where Aubry refers to the following articles: Viteles 1959; 1971. See also "Report of Presidents' Committee on Management Development," 1958, AT&T Archives.

[24] Baltzell 1955, 76.

[25] Baltzell 1955, 77.

[26] Aubry 2014, 12.

[27] Baltzell 1955, 76.

[28] Baltzell 1955, 76

[29] Baltzell 1955, 76

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evidence, more inclined to use reasoning to come to a decision, they were also reluctant to commit definitively to the conclusion or the causation that it was their experience in this humanities program that led to these changes.[30]

Without this definitive connection, *the positive and effective impact of the humanities education led to the eventual shuttering of the humanities institute.* Aubry points out that "Barnard and others at AT&T, of course, valued the humanities not merely for the practical skills that they provided, but also for their ability to foster a deeper understanding of the world and a capacity for critical introspection."[31] And yet, in spite of that initial recognition, the shuttering of the Bell Telephone program revealed a sad irony: "upon initiating the program, the company immediately sought to measure its effectiveness, thus hoping to establish the utility of that which it had already defined as opposed to the notion of measurable utility."[32] In other words, the aim of the Institute of Humanistic Studies was precisely to provide an education that could not be measured by its utility. Although the education did nurture the leaders Bell sought—"sympathetic and informed listeners"—their personal transformation also led them to have an "emotional detachment" vis-à-vis the job.[33]

Aubry's description of this irony may help explain why the humanities as a discipline are not appreciated or understood. The inability to measure "the capacity for critical introspection" or "fostering a deeper understanding of the world" means that the most profound dimension of a humanities education does not comply with an institutional need to assess its programs.[34] To satisfy this institutional or bureaucratic need, the humanities are reduced to and mined for their practical skills, like critical thinking, that can be measured and appropriated by other disciplines. This shift helps us see how we moved from a time not that long ago when a deep and sustained humanities education was viewed like a beating heart, central to the life of an executive and sought for executive leadership to our current moment when a humanities education is viewed more like a swollen appendix, a now useless vestige of an older time that needs to be kept in check lest it rupture and poison the rest of the body.

3. Humanities without humanities

In the final chapter of her 2012 book, *Loaded Words*, the Shakespeare scholar Marjorie Garber describes a current trend in the humanities that she calls "the humanities as accessory." Playing on the double meaning of accessory—"enhancement and accomplice"—Garber describes the way the humanities have taken on the form of a cultural accessory on the one

[30] Aubry 2014, 14.
[31] Aubry 2014, 9.
[32] Aubry 2014, 18–19, emphasis added.
[33] Baltzell 1955, 77.
[34] In "The Grim Threat to British Universities," Simon Head reviews three books on business and higher education with an eye toward focusing on the various funding models for British universities (Head 2011). He locates the root of the assault on higher education in Great Britain in the "theories and practices conceived in American business schools," which have then been exported to the British universities. References to key performance indicators (KPIs), metrics, assessment, cost–benefit, "value," and so forth, of programs whose success cannot be reduced to these qualitative examinations were developed by U.S. business schools and then applied to assess specific business models. As Head states, once the schools have been admitted into the university, thus conceding their legitimacy, the university then uses those models to assess everything. Neither the Bell Telephone experiment nor the myriad humanities programs and faculty in universities around the world can be measured using KPIs that are designed for a program model that does not deliver nor is it intended to deliver the kind of result that is unique to a humanities education.

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hand and a participant in their own demise on the other.[35] Focusing on the accessory as an enhancement trend, Garber refers to the increased popularity of "lifelong learning, alumni weekends, and cultural tours" where, for example, people who are content with their financial success are now able to participate in a version of a "humanities offering."[36] Garber worries, however, that lacking the serious discussion that we would find in the university, these kinds of offerings reveal the divide between "public humanities of this kind and scholarly humanities."[37] In other words, our efforts to make the humanities relevant may have unwittingly made our scholarly profession irrelevant —or, maybe by comparison, more abstract and inaccessible.[38]

Turning her attention to what she calls, "applied humanities," Garber writes, "it may surprise you to learn that some of the most successful current uses of the humanities are in the realms of business, executive training, 'leadership' institutes, and motivational speaking...Just as a case in point, consider the remarkable number of books on Shakespeare and management (all of them have been published between 1999 and the present)."[39] Here is a sampling of those titles that Garber provides:[40]

- *Shakespeare in Charge: The Bard's Guide to Leading and Succeeding on the Business Stage* (1999),
- *Power Plays: Shakespeare's Lessons in Leadership and Management* (2000),
- *Shakespeare on Management* (1999),
- *Inspirational Leadership: Henry V and the Muse of Fire; Timeless Insights from Shakespeare's Greatest Leader* (2001),

[35] Garber 2012, 180.
[36] Garber 2012, 181.
[37] Garber 2012, 181.
[38] Although many of us who teach in colleges and universities in states in the United States that are politically charged and increasingly hostile both to higher education and the humanities, the act of teaching is generally not the issue—they just want us to teach their ideas their way. But it does seem to the be the case in a more widespread way that administrators at colleges and universities do not understand or appreciate the value of humanities research. A recent survey done by the National Humanities Alliance confirms that one of the most pressing concerns for faculty in the humanities is resources to help administrators and external constituencies appreciate the value of humanities research.
[39] Garber 2012, 181–82. Having just taken you on a brief journey of the Bell Telephone experiment documenting the foundational role a humanities education has intentionally played in cultivating effective executive leadership, I would be surprised if you were surprised—as Garber thinks her readers might be—by this recent development.
[40] An anonymous reviewer asked if name dropping for these leadership seminars, for example, Shakespeare and Plato, truly indicated the untapped potential or overlooked value of the humanities. I must answer yes, and this response is independent of whether the humanities are actually used in these seminars. The point here is that trading on the cultural capital is precisely the point—they did not call their seminar Taylor Swift and Leadership, for example. Shakespeare and Plato are not only famous names, but they are also fundamentally associated with the humanities: Shakespeare is the quintessential figure in English departments and Plato similarly in philosophy departments. These entrepreneurs are trading not on the cultural capital of the name, but on its association with the humanities—and in these two cases, their writings on leadership. In some sense, my case that the humanities are hidden but appropriated is made ever more regardless of whether there is any Shakespeare in the course. That the course is humanities impoverished does not undermine my claim that they chose a title that signifies the role the humanities played in leadership training.

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- *Say It Like Shakespeare: How to Give a Speech Like Hamlet, Persuade Like Henry V, and Other Secrets from the World's Greatest Communicator* (2001).

After citing from one of the books that references a quote from Macbeth to illustrate that "proper preparation can prevent professional failure," Garber sharply comments that "no one bothers to point out that Lady Macbeth is trying to urge her husband to kill the king."[41] Maybe some knowledge of Shakespeare would be valuable?

Garber narrows her focus on Kenneth and Carol Adelman, who have developed a cottage industry offering a series of leadership workshops, each one named for a Shakespeare play, although it is not clear that there is any actual Shakespeare in the workshop itself. She refers to the Adelmans' venture as a "fabulous gimmick," and indeed, it is.[42] For example, with a brief glance at their website, *Movers and Shakespeare*, we see the following:

> Drawing on their extensive experience in top positions in government, public corporations, and non-profit groups, Carol and Ken Adelman work closely with companies and universities to customize each program to address the key issues facing their particular organization at the time. The Adelmans select the most apt Shakespeare play to fit the program's purpose. For leadership and ethics, they draw on Henry V, for change management, Taming of the Shrew, for risk management and diversity, Merchant of Venice, and for crisis management, Hamlet. No prior knowledge of Shakespeare is required.[43]

But as gimmicky as their program is, it is so much more than that. These leadership institutes, like the one that the Adelmans offer, trade not only on the prestige of a humanities education (why reference Shakespeare?), but also on the very old-fashioned role of the humanities in cultivating an effective leader. They have taken what would be part of a classical liberal arts education that an individual could receive as part of their college education and they have repackaged it as a dumbed down yet very expensive program for developing effective leaders.[44] Indeed, Adelman, quoted in *The Seattle Times*, admits, "We make so much money [$28,000/day bringing in $600,000 from this business alone] because we are good. They don't pay us to teach Shakespeare. They pay us to teach leadership."[45]

In other words, the college education in the humanities, which was effective at training leaders but is now viewed as valueless in the university, has been replaced with the million-dollar business offering training workshops, which do not even rise to the level of being described as a diluted humanities education, to which companies pay a hefty fee to send their executives-in-training. Looking at what the Adelmans charge, we can see that a liberal

[41] Garber 2012, 182.

[42] Garber 2012, 183.

[43] Garber 2012, 182. See also the Adelmans' website Movers and Shakespeare: https://www.moversandshakespeares.com/about-us. Adelman and Adelman, 2017.

[44] Whatever else we might say, the description the Adelsons have on their website suggests that the type of leader they have in mind is not the leader the Bell Telephone experiment hoped to cultivate.

[45] Heath 2013. Garber also comments on the Adelmans' credentials. Adelman has a PhD in public health. Kenneth Adelman claims years of teaching Shakespeare at Georgetown and George Washington. His PhD is in political theory with a master's in foreign service studies. Their "credentials in government and business" provide their "clout in the world of the leadership institute" (Garber 2012, 183). Although it is not clear that there is much humanities content embedded in the institute, as Garber observes, "the humanities are in this case being used to teach business" (Garber 2012, 184). See Garber 2012, 183–84.

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arts education is a bargain. The real magic trick is that they have taken their low-quality product and persuaded the executive elite that their overpriced version of a humanities program that merely trades on the historic connection the humanities have to leadership development is a Veblen good—a luxury product whose demand increases with the increase in price.

So maybe we in the humanities should take our cue from the business world. Perhaps the humanities fields in universities that employ a differential tuition model should be charging more—not less—than the other colleges in the university, and we should be pointing to the business world and these leadership training programs as the evidence for their value.[46]

4. The humanities (hidden in plain sight) across the curriculum

The Bell Telephone experiment provides an example of a company that traded its standard executive leader training program for an intensive education in the humanities precisely because of the outcome a humanities education produces. By contrast, the Adelsons' leadership seminars include Shakespeare in the title of their workshops, but that is where the inclusion of the humanities ends. When considering the fissure between the humanities and the other disciplines that inhabit a university, however, we cannot lay all the blame at the feet of the business schools or the consulting companies that provide these workshops. Indeed, both models could be the response to a problem that already existed. The Bell Telephone participants confided that their college experience did not resemble the education they received through the experiment: "It was the degree as a ticket to a job, not an education, that we were after in those Depression days."[47]

The appropriation of specific humanities skills, like ethical decision-making, by other disciplines allows the Adelsons to offer leadership training without any actual connection to the humanities. Examining the university, we can see how the skills that have been separated from the humanities are included in the learning outcomes of most of the non-humanities disciplines. Never having been taught the connection these skills have to a humanities education, faculty in the academic community integrate the humanities skills into their courses or leadership programs (e.g., critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and appreciating different perspectives) without giving explicit credit to the humanities, in part because they simply do not know to do so. As a result, the connection between these skills and the humanities from which they are derived is buried. Moreover, the distinctive way that these skills develop through humanities courses remains unknown.

We might look to the "X across the curriculum" programs, which proliferated in the 1980s and 1990s as a source for this trend on our campuses. These programs, which included Writing Across the Curriculum, Ethics Across the Curriculum, and Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum, emerged out of the view that the teaching of certain skills should not be

[46] As an example, when our elder daughter attended the University of Texas, Austin for her undergraduate degree, she was a dual degree student—her primary major was a BS in Biochemistry (College of Natural Science) and her secondary major was a BA in Plan II Honors (College of Liberal Arts). The tuition is higher per semester in the College of Natural Science than it is in the College of Liberal Arts. Since biochemistry was our daughter's primary major, we were charged the higher amount. This differential tuition approach is common in universities.

[47] Baltzell 1955, 75. Degree plans for undergraduate degrees in engineering are known for being so carefully structured that there is very little room for additional courses in the liberal arts. See my introductory comments in note 1. Thus, regardless of whether the intention of the undergraduate education has changed from the times of The Great Depression, the structure of the undergraduate programs for many STEM fields makes it difficult for STEM students to receive a holistic education.

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shouldered by a single discipline but rather it should be shared across the campus.[48] The growth in university student enrollment, the increased diversity of the student body, and the specialization of the professions contributed to discussions about providing more opportunities for students to write during their four years in college. Similarly, the emphasis on increasing critical thinking skills in the late twentieth century led to discussions about whether critical thinking is best taught as a stand-alone course or embedded in course content across disciplinary areas, the latter leading to critical thinking as a learning outcome on all course syllabi.[49] Courses in disciplinary specific ethics were developed to satisfy professional accrediting bodies like the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, which requires a course in professional ethics for degree programs in engineering. Medical (or healthcare) ethics, a philosophical field in its own right, also developed into a course specifically for students pursuing degrees in health fields, for example, nursing.

Believing that the acquisition of these skills would be reinforced if they were learned in courses across the disciplines, the proponents of the "across the disciplines" programs were admirable in their dedication to introduce these skills across the university. They held pedagogy workshops and provided resources, training, and other support for faculty who wished to develop writing-intensive courses, discipline-specific ethics courses, or embed critical thinking into their curriculum. Unfortunately, multiple unforeseen problems emerged. Critical thinking was not uniformly defined, faculty teaching writing in their courses were themselves not confident writers, and the ethics courses that were discipline-specific were narrow in focus, in addition to not having agreement about how ethics should be defined or what the outcome of the course should be. Additionally, the "across the disciplines" approach gave rise to a sense that one need not have scholarly expertise to teach ethics, for example.

Although the proponents of the X across the curriculum programs would insist that these programs are intended to enhance or supplement a humanities education rather than replace it, the effect seems to have been the reverse.[50] This approach excised, for example, the teaching of critical thinking from the discipline of philosophy and philosophical argument so that critical thinking was viewed as a discrete skill rather than one that is embedded in a robust humanities education where students would engage in close readings of a text, provide evidence for an interpretation, consider alternative perspectives, and

[48] See Ennis 2013; Kidd et al. 2010; Kiefer et al. 2018.

[49] The expansion of universities in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s included the development of specialized colleges, for example, communication (journalism, radio, and television), engineering, science, business, and education. Unfortunately, the development of these specialized colleges created silos. Colleges saw themselves as operating independently of the others. The more colleges saw themselves as independent of the rest of the campus, the more they provided for their students internally.

[50] See, for example, the Texas A&M University Core Curriculum requirements: https://catalog.tamu.edu/undergraduate/general-information/university-core-curriculum/. To satisfy the core curriculum requirements, students must take 42 credit hours spread over a set of eight categories that correspond to the development of different skillsets. There is a distinct category for the social and behavioral sciences, one for the life and physical sciences, and one for the creative arts. However, there is not a separate category just for the humanities. The category that appears to satisfy this classification is "Language, Philosophy, and Culture," but the courses in this category from which students can choose include many in the social sciences. Students are required to take 6 hours of American history, but even American history is often classified as a social science course, not a humanities course. The core curriculum at Texas A&M University emphasizes the development of critical thinking, communication, social responsibility, and personal responsibility in *each* of the eight areas, yet an undergraduate student at Texas A&M University could graduate without ever having taken a single course that is explicitly in the humanities.

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analyze arguments. Severed from philosophy (not to mention rhetoric and literature), the critical thinking engaged in these other disciplines is absent of perspective taking, careful listening, and analytical thinking. This one-dimensional approach to critical thinking, especially in fields like engineering, became narrowly focused on problem-solving rather than on learning to formulate questions and identify problems.[51] Taught in this way, critical thinking is not associated with the humanities or the role the humanities play in the cultivation of judgment. Severed from the humanities, critical thinking cannot realize its full power.[52]

5. Humanities as countermeasure

In her 2021 article in *Forbes*, Dr. Kimberly Janson describes the paradox of judgment and experience in developing a leader's ability to make good decisions.[53] Judgment, which she defines as the ability to examine a situation and decide how to proceed, relies on a set of skills: examining data, weighing pros and cons, and then deciding how to move forward. She acknowledges that these skills can be developed, but she also concedes that these skills alone do not make for *good* judgment. That comes with the cataloging of experiences. The paradox then is that you cannot have good judgment without experience, and experience takes time to develop. Janson laments that in the past this kind of experience was developed through apprenticeships—the hands-on experience one would acquire, usually in lieu of a formal education—but in our current "cost-cutting, fast-paced approach," businesses and organizations do not invest "the necessary time it takes to build these important skills."[54]

Janson's "six elements of a training system" to develop judgment include "facilitating exposure to different perspectives," features we would find in a humanities education.[55] Yet the strategies for developing these elements do not include any activities related to an education in the humanities, for example, reading literature or studying philosophy, which would develop not only the analytical skills but also provide the opportunity to engage with

[51] In addition to critical thinking appearing as a learning outcome on course syllabi, it also shows up on teaching philosophy statements or teaching impact statements. Similar to its appearance on course syllabi, the critical thinking referenced in these statements is not defined. So it may appear as simply as the following statement: "I ensure that critical thinking is part of my course." The term is not defined and upon closer examination of course materials, the critical thinking referred to resembles problem-solving more than it does the kind of critical thinking that would be cultivated in the humanities, and especially in philosophy courses.

[52] In 2016, we hosted our inaugural week-long philosophy summer camp for teens. At the end of that week, the campers were asked why they philosophy camp was important. As if channeling Tocqueville's American ideal of how strangers may come together to form a political community, Joey (who had just finished the sixth grade) responded: "Who would not benefit from deeper discussions of ethics, justice, and education? We need those kinds of discussions," he continued, "to be better friends and to make a better society." Now a rising senior in college majoring in mechanical engineering, Joey returned for several summers in high school and college to facilitate philosophy discussions with both middle and high school students. In June 2023, when he was interviewed again about his experience in the philosophy camp, Joey shared that he uses everything he learned in philosophy camp every single day as an engineering major. He confided that philosophy and philosophy camp discussions have taught him how to take an abstract idea that he has in his head and translate that into something physical in the world. See Anderson et al. 2021.

[53] Janson 2021. This is especially ironic—and unfortunate—in an article that fails to mention the role of a humanities education. Since we often hear that authors do not get to choose their own headlines, the charitable reading of this mistake is to attribute it to *Forbes*, and not to the author: https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbescoachescouncil/2021/06/07/the-paradox-of-judgement-and-experience-how-to-develop-a-leaders-ability-to-make-good-decisions/.

[54] Janson 2021.

[55] Janson 2021.

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different perspectives, cultivate imagination, consider the consequences of a decision, analyze character, and so forth. In other words, an undergraduate core curriculum with an emphasis on the humanities could render this kind of training system unnecessary.

Siphoning off the skills associated with a humanities education and then claiming the development of those skills as part of one's discipline shortchanges the humanities, the other disciplines, and our students. Extracting the practical skills, like critical thinking, from the humanities hides how the aggregate of a humanities education is greater than the sum of its discrete skills. This is what the Bell Telephone executives realized and valued. The myriad humanities disciplines contribute to the development of judgment. For example, philosophy teaches reasoning, introduces us to ethical frameworks, and encourages us to question our deeply held beliefs. Close textual readings of philosophical texts that yield multiple interpretations nurture a tolerance for ambiguity. Engaging with philosophical texts and discussions develops critical thinking and logical reasoning, teaches ethical frameworks, and fosters the ability to ask questions. The study of literature presents opportunities to consider moral dilemmas, teach perspective taking, and develop empathy. Studying the visual arts presents the opportunity to analyze media and identify propaganda. The study of religions promotes global thinking, introduces ethical complexity, and instructs us in textual hermeneutics. In other words, an education that comprises the study of these subjects together develops a combination of skills needed to cultivate judgment and make thoughtful, nuanced decisions. When the cultivation and exercise of judgment could not be more important, this attempt to separate the specific skills from the humanities, giving the impression that a holistic humanities education is unnecessary, could not be more dire.

The dangers from the disinformation circulating over social media, which allows not only for the volume of disinformation but also for the speed at which this information travels (although sadly not corrected), are more difficult to mitigate when they coincide with the decline in humanities education nationally (humanities programs and departments are closing at an astounding rate) and the alarming statistics that reveal the staggering decline in reading by middle school age children.[56] The hindrances to an individual's ability to cultivate judgment as a shield against the disinformation campaigns that assault them daily begin in elementary school and continue through university, for those fortunate enough to have an opportunity to pursue a college education.

With the advancement of AI and its integration into the university, the dangers of disinformation are magnified. The role that the humanities play in the development of judgment, not just cherry-picked skills like critical thinking, could not be more urgent. It is with the advent of AI that we can see most clearly the productive interplay between science and the humanities working together, as Humboldt originally envisioned their relationship in the university.[57] The lessons learned from our recent discussion of business can be applied to

[56] Between 1984 and 2023, the percentage of 13-year-olds who read for fun on their own time at least once a week declined by 34% (the percentage who did was just above 70% in 1984). And 13-year-olds who never or hardly ever read for fun on their own time increased 33% (the percentage of those who fell in this category was barely 5% in 1984). These statistics are from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Long-Term Assessment Results: Reading and Mathematics: https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ltt/reading/student-experiences/?age=13.

[57] See Bartsch 2024. Bartsch is worried that the separation of science from the humanities "depletes the richness of multiple perspectives on reality" and she argues that is precisely in the university where scientists can stage an intervention.

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other fields, including the sciences, where the development of analytical skills, appreciating different perspectives, and good judgment are necessary skills for scientists.[58]

Referencing C. P. Snow's *The Two Cultures* in his December 2022 essay in *The Atlantic*, "The College Essay Is Dead: Nobody Is Prepared for How AI Will Transform Academia," Stephen Marche astutely points out that the rupture between the humanistic and scientific communities that Snow identified in the 1950s has only deepened. For Snow, there was too much emphasis on the humanities in the 1950s at the expense of the STEM fields. One could not be viewed as educated without having read certain pieces of literature.[59] But in fact, we have now swung too much in the other direction with the overemphasis of STEM not only at the expense of the humanities but also with what is frequently a sustained and direct assault on the humanities.

Indeed, we have strayed significantly from the vision of the research university offered by Humboldt, in which Humboldt identified two incommensurable spheres of knowledge—questions of science and questions of value—that are both necessary for the creation of knowledge in the university.[60] The two intellectual areas are so frequently described as discrete, with the voices on the STEM side often so strident and even occasionally mean-spirited, that it would be surprising if the misunderstandings about the role of the humanities within a STEM education were *not* present. Here is but one contemporary example of what happens when we privilege STEM but forget the significant role that the humanities play in the creation of knowledge, including scientific knowledge. In the January 10, 2015 issue of *The Week*, the astrophysicist, Neil deGrasse Tyson, shares this thought:

> When a scientist encounters someone inclined to think philosophically, his response should be to say, "I'm moving on, I'm leaving you behind, and you can't even cross the street because you're distracted by deep questions you've asked of yourself. I don't have time for that."[61]

In addition to being an astrophysicist, Tyson has become somewhat of a celebrity figure with a substantial social media following. His pronouncements on the humanities are not insignificant. In the 2015 statement above, he simply lampoons philosophy—not unlike what Aristophanes said about Socrates or what Thales' countrymen said about him: wise in philosophy, not so wise in business. Thales, of course, put his philosophical (i.e., analytical) skills to work, made his fortune, and proved the naysayers incorrect—and then went back to doing philosophy.[62] Here, Tyson simply contradicts himself two years later by revealing that he, in fact, does not know what philosophy is or does. In a 2017 post, Tyson makes the following statement on X [formerly Twitter]:

> "In school, rarely do we learn how data become facts, how facts become knowledge, and how knowledge becomes wisdom."[63]

[58] See Bartsch 2024; Strauss 2017.
[59] Snow 1959, 16.
[60] See von Humboldt 1854.
[61] Linker 2015.
[62] See note 17.
[63] Tyson 2017.

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It is more than a little humorous that a comment closest to the top was posted by Justin Weinberg, an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of South Carolina, and the Founder and Editor of *Daily Nous*, an online website for academic philosophy. Recalling Tyson's comment from 2015 in which he dismisses philosophy, Weinberg responds: "Nice to see Neil deGrasse Tyson finally getting on board with the idea that philosophy is valuable."[64] Many of the responders, like Tyson, did not understand the problem, and some called the kind of learning he was referring to the scientific method. Several people called for reforming education. But then, there was this absolute gem posted by Librarianshipwreck:

> Hi, Neil,
> That's literally what we teach.
> Thanks for the shoutout!
> Sincerely,
> The Humanities.[65]

If we ever need an abbreviated or concise argument for demonstrating the value of the humanities, it would be in this brief exchange.

Humorous rejoinders aside, Tyson's comment, although astonishing, is not surprising. More common than not, the humanities are denigrated not because of what they do (although this happens also), but because most people do not know what the humanities do. The critics make gross assumptions, and, in many cases, assume the humanities do nothing of value, even when they use the skills the humanities produce nearly every day.[66] We see this lack of knowledge revealed vividly when politicians yell at universities to produce more people with employable skills and, in the same breath, suggest that they ramp up their STEM recruitment and cut back on the "useless" [usually code for the humanities] degrees. Bracketing the discussion of whether it is the job of the four-year university to supply workers for specific careers, we can nonetheless attest to the fact that universities with robust programs in the humanities are, in fact, producing those individuals the politicians are demanding. These politicians, however, do not know enough about what the humanities do to realize, or excavate, this buried connection. Instead, these politicians' comments spread the narrative that the humanities are useless.[67]

Tyson's post communicates his worry, which emerges from his belief that we do not learn how data become facts, how facts become knowledge, and how knowledge becomes

[64] *DailyNousEditor* 2017.

[65] Librarianshipwreck 2017.

[66] "The humanities don't do anything!" "The humanities are powerful and dangerous!" These are the two rallying cries expressed by those who oppose the role of the humanities in higher education and who are active in the weakening of a humanities education in colleges and universities across the United States. To be clear, these opposing claims about the humanities are frequently expressed by lawmakers in their efforts to reduce or control humanities offerings in higher education. For a recent article on this logical problem, see Rogers 2025. Rogers describes the trending phenomenon of this logical gap in the attacks on the humanities, which I also have discussed elsewhere, and argues that these two statements cannot both be true. Rogers is correct. The humanities cannot simultaneously "do nothing" and indoctrinate (which is something) young minds. See also Katz 2013.

[67] The Texas legislature is a case in point where its influential members simultaneously believe that a humanities education is useless, not leading to employment, and the source of a dangerous indoctrination of undesirable ideologies. In Texas, although Texas is not alone, the larger concern that politicians express is that the humanities are dangerous. Driven by concern that the humanities indoctrinate, Texas legislators have introduced bills that aim to limit the influence that the humanities have in the university.

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wisdom. The responses from Weinberg and Librarianshipwreck take him to task for not knowing enough to know that *we are* taught this—or more pointedly, that we could be taught this more effectively—but this specific skillset is developed through a humanities education. The role of judgment (the data are not going to analyze themselves), which is the core of Tyson's lament, is uniquely developed by an education in the humanities. The transformation that occurs in the process of humanistic inquiry and the creative mind that develops from humanistic engagement, as Steve Jobs unequivocally credited for his own development, is what the Texas billionaire Marc Cuban stated cannot be done by proxy, or by a chatbot.[68] Indeed, Cuban declared philosophy the major of the future precisely because "the human judgment of philosophy" would resist the radical moves to automation spurred by advances in artificial intelligence.[69]

Being able to think critically and assess from a global perspective cannot be reduced to a decision procedure programmed into a computer. Those of us who teach in the humanities do not ask our students to write because we need something to grade. We ask them to write because writing is a creative activity not only used to express what we think or believe, but also through which we often figure out what those beliefs are. With so many of the discussions about ChatGPT and generative AI focused on concerns about cheating, we are not discussing what is lost when students do not do their own writing. Of course, cheating is a problem, but the lack of intellectual and social growth might be a bigger one.

Marche humorously provides several examples related to the business and social media arenas, where the humanities and its cultivation of better judgment might have proved helpful in preventing some major failures that resulted in huge losses of dollars and/or social trust. Marche writes, "these failures don't derive from mean-spiritedness or even greed, but from a willful obliviousness. The engineers do not recognize that humanistic questions—like, say, hermeneutics or the historical contingency of freedom of speech or the genealogy of morality—are real questions with real consequences. Everybody is entitled to their opinion about politics and culture, it's true, but an opinion is different from a grounded understanding. The most direct path to catastrophe is to treat complex problems as if they're obvious to everyone. You can lose billions of dollars pretty quickly that way."[70]

[68] "But what set all of Jobs's companies apart, from Pixar to NeXT to Apple, was, indeed, an insistence that computer scientists must work together with artists and designers—that the best ideas emerge from the intersection of technology and the humanities. 'One of the greatest achievements at Pixar was that we brought these two cultures together and got them working side by side,' Jobs said in 2003" Lehrer 2011. "He views previously lucrative jobs in industries like accounting and computer programming as subject to the powers of automation. To remain competitive, Cuban advises ditching degrees that teach specific skills or professions and opting for degrees that teach you to think in a big picture way, like philosophy. 'Knowing how to critically think and assess them from a global perspective, I think, is going to be more valuable than what we see as exciting careers today which might be programming or CPA or those types of things,' says Cuban, speaking at SXSW in Austin in 2017." Montag 2018.

[69] Cuban made this observation in 2018—and with the recent advances of generative AI, Cuban's observation about philosophy as the major of the future has only become more compelling.

[70] Marche 2022. Here, it is worth recalling the December 2022 Southwest Airlines epic meltdown as an object lesson in bad leadership and worse judgment, not only because leadership is clearly to blame but also because the respective profiles of the leaders are quite illuminating. In short, Herb Kelleher was co-founder (1967) and CEO of SWA 1981–2001. SWA was known as the airline whose employees "took themselves lightly but their jobs seriously." *Fortune* called him perhaps the best CEO in America. Kelleher was known for his attention to operations and the day-to-day work of the airline. Kelleher's degrees: *BA from Wesleyan, English major, minor in philosophy. JD from NYU.* When Gary Kelly (BBA) assumed the role of CEO (2004–2022), he did not focus on operations. In contrast to Kelleher, Kelly did not have much contact with the day to day or the people; neither did the others on his leadership team. Kelly named another accountant, who also had little background in operations, his COO. Kelly's leadership style eventually took its toll on the company, and the operations began to deteriorate. Technology was not upgraded, even though they were warned about the deterioration of the equipment. Then, in the fall of 2022, SWA experienced

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Marche's discussion was about more than just the fissure that Snow identified in the 1950s. Marche, rightly, suggests that the fissure is more widespread—not only between the humanities and the sciences, but also between the humanities and other fields such as business. But Marche also suggests, like Snow, that the humanists must also understand the significance of the other side: "The humanists will need to understand natural-language processing because it's the future of language, but also because there is more than just the possibility of disruption here. Natural-language processing can throw light on a huge number of scholarly problems." This necessary dynamic relationship among the disciplines is increasingly more challenging, given the current configuration of the modern university. Despite Humboldt's brilliant vision, the modern research university —with its design based on seemingly independent colleges housed within it (e.g., engineering, business, and architecture)—has come to resemble the multiversity that Humboldt had intended to avoid. When these colleges offer their own courses in critical thinking and ethics, and establish programs in leadership development, rather than encourage an education in the humanities, we can see how the humanities are marginalized, like a useless appendix, rather than being seen as fundamental to a university education.[71]

6. A call to action

We have certainly arrived at a time when civil discourse appears impossible, when people cannot differentiate between an opinion and a reasoned position, when anyone with a phone can call themselves a journalist (and readers cannot discern an opinion piece from a vetted news article), and discussions are so polarized that pointing out nuance or complexity is roundly rejected. The humanities, and the pedagogy a humanities education employs, might be more relevant and more necessary than they have ever been. The practical skills and the holistic education that the humanities promote—analytical thinking, considering different perspectives, developing good judgment, and cultivating effective leaders—could not be more needed. We know that what the humanities deliver is viewed as valuable. If this was not the case, so many disciplines would not try to simulate that education. So, what can we do to address this challenge? I do not have the definitive answer to this question, but I do share below a handful of recommendations.

1. *Assume some of the responsibility:* I would suggest first that we begin with ourselves as humanities scholars and teachers. We should take some responsibility for the misunderstandings and mythologies about what the humanities are. We have not always clearly identified what we do and why what we do is important. One way that we can do that is to point out when those traits and skills identified with a humanities education are appropriated by other disciplines.

2. *Act on teachable moments:* When a colleague tells us that their pedagogy includes critical thinking, we can ask them what they mean by that term. If their description

a complete and epic meltdown. There was a failure of operations, and much of the conversation focused on Kelly not listening to those who said the technology needed to be updated, and so forth. Kellner's humanities degrees informed his humanistic approach to the company and the initiatives he developed. Although we can only indicate correlation and not causation to the CEO's backgrounds and success/failure, it is certainly the case that one can build a beloved and successful company with degrees in the humanities.

[71] See, for example, the Texas A&M University Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications, which offers a B.S. in Agricultural Leadership and Development: https://alec.tamu.edu/b-s-ag-leadership/.

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sounds more like problem-solving rather than the robust critical thinking produced by the humanities, we can gently share the difference and ask if they are interested in developing their approach. This example is an opportunity to highlight what the humanities do and why what they do is significant.[72]

3. *Enlist colleagues as allies:* For institutions that have a humanities center, we can enlist them to aid in this education. Reading groups in the humanities or "meta" discussions about the humanities could accompany discussions that focus on the content of the humanities.[73]

4. *Work with administrators:* We can provide our administrators with the data from reliable sources about the skills that the humanities produce—skills that we know employers explicitly seek in new employees and in leaders; we can show these same administrators how the development of these skills has been appropriated by fields across the university, indicating on the one hand that the idea of these skills is valued but also that the humanities have been excluded from this development; and we can engage those same administrators in conversations about how to share that data with parents of prospective students, deans of all the colleges, and all advisors so that they are educated not only about the value of the humanities but also how an education associated with the humanities in fact permeates the campus.

5. *Teach our students:* Many of our students do not know these disciplinary categories. We should take the time to explain to them what the humanities are, how they differ from other intellectual fields, and why it is important that the humanities are part of their university education. We might need to be more "meta" than we are typically in a class, but we might need to point out the unique way that a humanities class is taught —focus on discussion, reflection papers, argumentation, and considering perspectives—so that they can appreciate the contribution of the course not only to their degree but also their own personal growth.

6. *Lean into the humanities:* We need to resist the defensive posture that many of us take. If we do that, we can take back the narrative and spread the message that the humanities are not to be feared and nor are they useless.

Providing this education to our administrators, students, and faculty colleagues will take time and patience. But doing so will accomplish two goals: it will help us articulate what the humanities do and why our teaching and research in these areas is important, something at which humanists have not been adept; and it will provide an opportunity for us to collaborate with our colleagues who want their students to succeed. We can help them achieve this goal by pointing out how a different approach to something as "common" as critical thinking could enhance that education or how a broader understanding of ethical theory (not just

[72] I am currently the outside reader on a doctoral committee for a PhD student in engineering. The student's very interesting project includes examining how critical thinking is developed in students. One of the engineering faculty on the committee, who over several decades has been very close professionally to faculty in the humanities, cautioned the student to consider how they were understanding what critical thinking is, including how it is defined. She ended her discussion with the student by suggesting—strongly—that the way critical thinking was being used in the project more closely resembled problem-solving, and was being described very differently from how scholars and teachers in the humanities would understand the development of that skill.

[73] We can help our colleagues and students see that the humanities and the sciences inform each other and the silos that have been created in order to organize the university do not have to prevent the disciplines from interacting with each other. Bartsch 2024.

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utilitarianism) could deepen their students' approach to social and personal responsibility. But when the aim to develop these humanistic skills is divorced from the humanities education itself—from the books, films, and creative works that we discuss—the result is an impoverished approximation to what a humanities education can deliver, threatening not only the vitality of economic health but also the health of our nation and the individuals in it.[74] The humanities are hidden in plain sight—in disciplines, departments, and colleges across the university and throughout our culture at large—and it is our responsibility to identify those places and [re]claim them, loudly, unabashedly, and often.

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[74] Engell 2023; Spencer 2014.

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