

The Crisis of the Humanities

It "will be a sad, sad day if and when we allow the humanities to collapse." Those words, written in a comment on Stanley Fish's *Opinionator* column unknowingly set off a chain of commentary focused on the "crisis" occurring in the humanities. To be fair, it was an outside event that truly put the precarious state of humanities and liberal education in the US in sharp focus; namely the announcement by the president of SUNY Albany, George M. Philip that the French, Italian, Russian, classics, and theater majors were all being cut due to budgetary problems.

The following articles have been pulled from those shared on the Humtalk listserv as well as from postings on facebook and twitter. Clearly, this is a hot button issue not only for the humanities community, but also for the general public.

Stanley Fish: *The Crisis of the Humanities Officially Arrives*

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/11/the-crisis-of-the-humanities-officially-arrives/>

"But it is the job of presidents and chancellors to proclaim the value of liberal arts education loudly and often and at least try to make the powers that be understand what is being lost when traditions of culture and art that have been vital for hundreds and even thousands of years disappear from the academic scene."

Crisis of the Humanities II

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/18/crisis-of-the-humanities-ii/>

"When it comes to justifying the humanities, the wrong questions are what benefits do you provide for society...and are you cost-effective. The right question is how do you – that is, your program of research and teaching – fit into what we are supposed to be doing as a university."

Dan Edelman: *The University vs. Liberal Education*

<http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2010/10/14/edelman>

"But they do remind us that the cost of an education can act as a filter for intellectual choices. Students will be far less willing to take rises when they're paying a fortune to enroll. It's not the zeitgeist: it's common sense."

Heather Horn: *How to Keep the Humanities Alive*

<http://www.theatlanticwire.com/opinions/view/opinion/How-to-Keep-the-Humanities-Alive-5414>

"So: what to do, as funding is pulled from university humanities programs? University heads need, at the very least, to speak out – currently they're all too complicit in the evisceration of these departments"

Do Colleges Need French Departments?

<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2010/10/17/do-colleges-need-french-departments>

Debaters: Martha Nussbaum; John McWhorter; Ellen Schrecker; Richard Vedder; Louis Menand; Mark Bauerlein; Gaye Tuchman; Anne E. McCall

"Should these humanities programs be saved at public universities that are hard pressed to meet the needs of all sorts of students? Are they luxuries that are 'nice to have' but not what taxpayers need to support? What's lost, if anything, if they are eliminated?"

Cathy Davidson: *It's Not a Crisis in the Humanities, It's a Crisis in Society*

<http://www.hastac.org/blogs/cathy-davidson/its-not-crisis-humanities-its-crisis-society>

"You can't have great science without great art and great *thinking*. It's not the humanities that are in crisis but society if the humanities are faltering, whispering, insipid, and weak (hear that, Mr. Hobbes)."

"Dean Dad": *Tossing Bottles*

http://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/confessions_of_a_community_college_dean/tossing_bottles

"Instead, Albany did what few of us have the courage to do: it chose to toss some bottles and wake everyone with the noise of their shattering. It chose to face the truth, and in so doing, to maintain higher levels of resources for the programs that survived."

Andy Martin: *In Defence of our Noble Humanities*

<http://license.icopyright.net/user/viewFreeUse.act?fuid=MTAzODYxNzE%3D>

"In the humanities we are always looking at crashes, with the idea it could help to avoid crashing in the future – or at least understand the art of the crash."

Macy Halford: *The Crisis of the Humanities and Obama's Town Hall*

<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2010/10/the-crisis-of-the-humanities-and-obamas-town-hall.html>

"Historically, though, a humanities education has been a luxury, and what we're facing now is a return to this scenario, in which only the privileged few who can afford to dabble in the philosophical arts do so. Obama must understand the implications of this: with a degree from a technical training college, you might avoid taking on a lot of debt and get a decent job, but will you ever become President?"

Christopher Newfield: *Humanities Cuts of Choice*

<http://utotherescue.blogspot.com/2010/10/humanities-cuts-of-choice.html>

"... then get real numbers so we can have national discussions about how to fund what, discussions that include humanities professors and students before their fields get whacked in the night."

Luke Brinker: *Humanities Education Still Critical*

<http://www.kansan.com/news/2010/oct/18/brinker-humanities-education-still-critical/?opinion>

"...it's most critical to ensure that in the face of tough choices, students from other disciplines are not deprived of the richness of the humanities. Even if that required two-semester sequence of Western Civilization initially triggers eye rolls."

George M. Wallace (president, SUNY Albany): *UAlbany will continue to excel*

<http://www.timesunion.com/default/article/UAlbany-will-continue-to-excel-710832.php>

"Critics, without corroborating the facts, have quickly and incorrectly concluded that UAlbany no longer values the humanities and that these actions have placed the institution's reputation in harm's way."

Keith Burnett (Vice Chancellor, The University of Sheffield): *Priority Subjects and the Browne Review*

<http://www.shaf.ac.uk/vc/blog.html>

"In a world of global competition and profound change, we want our children to have more than just bread to live on. And to do that, they will also need to appreciate the value of the full range of knowledge, and why our good colleagues do need, and deserve, some bread."

Bob Samuels: *Everything Stanley Fish Knows About Higher Education is Wrong*

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-samuels/everything-stanley-fish-k_b_768875.html#

"Instead of calling for the end to the Humanities, we should celebrate and protect these areas, and to do this, we need to recognize who really pays the bills and delivers the goods in higher education. It turns out that it is the disrespected required courses that provide the cash and the student satisfaction for many colleges and universities."

Richard S. Fogarty: *Save SUNY for all our sake*

<http://www.timesunion.com/default/article/Save-SUNY-for-all-our-sake-713997.php>

"A reputation for excellence must be both earned and maintained. Sadly, our state government is squandering this precious resource."

For further reference:

Christopher Newfield: *Avoiding the Coming Higher Ed Wars*

<http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2010/MJ/feat/newf.htm>

Robert N. Watson: *Bottom line shows that humanities really do make money.*

<http://www.today.ucla.edu/portal/ut/bottom-line-shows-humanities-really-155771.aspx>

Mark G. Yudof: *University of California's problem is unreliable state support*

<http://chronicle.com/article/U-of-Californias-Problem-Is/65346/>