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**Report to the Council**  
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**Pauline Yu**  
**President, American Council of Learned Societies**

On August 2, 1826, Senator Daniel Webster delivered in Boston’s Faneuil Hall a “Discourse in Commemoration of the Lives and Services of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.” In a startling coincidence the two former presidents had died earlier that year on the same day, the Fourth of July, a date which marked the fiftieth anniversary of one of their great collaborative achievements, the signing of the Declaration of Independence here in Philadelphia. As was expected in the early nineteenth century, Webster delivered a substantial speech, recounting in some considerable detail the lives, beliefs, and actions of the two founders.

There is much to parse in this ornate oration, but two passages speak to our purposes in gathering together today. Webster opens his address by noting the dignity and solemnity of the assembly, appropriately including not just “the chief-magistrate of the commonwealth,” but also representatives of “the university, and the learned societies.” Before concluding with an invocation of “the common parent of us all . . . the Divine Benignity,” he specifies the qualities of a “new era . . . in human affairs” commenced by American independence. “This era is distinguished,” Webster proclaimed, “by free representative governments, by religious liberty, by *a newly awakened and an unconquerable spirit of free inquiry, and by a diffusion of knowledge through the community, such has been altogether unknown and unheard of.* America . . . is inseparably connected, fast bound up . . . with these great interests.” [emphasis added]<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tefft, B.B. editor. *Speeches of Daniel Webster*. A.L. Burt Company, n.d., pp. 193, 236.

One might ask how strong this inseparable connection is today. How fares the “unconquerable spirit of free inquiry” when research funding is reduced or in peril? How does the commitment to “the diffusion of knowledge through the community” jibe with the lately acquired conventional wisdom that “college isn’t for everyone”?

A sequence of meetings I attended this spring highlights these concerns. This series began in late March when, as a member of the Academic Advisory Council of the Schwarzman Scholars program, I visited the almost completed building designed by Robert A.M. Stern on the campus of Tsinghua University in Beijing that will house the program’s students and instruction. The Schwarzman Scholars program has been called the “new Rhodes scholarship” and “the first scholarship created to respond to the geopolitical landscape of the 21st Century.” It will bring together 200 students from the US, China, and throughout the world “in an environment that emphasizes interaction and collaboration,” so that students may “learn to cultivate broader perspectives, a key characteristic of successful leaders.”

This is a vigorous public-private venture. Stephen Schwarzman has donated \$100 million of his own money, which has been matched more than twice over by donors all over the world. The original \$300 million goal has been more than met and has now been raised to \$400 million, which will fully endow the program in perpetuity. It is the single largest internationally funded philanthropic effort in Chinese history.

In early April, I attended a meeting of the Lincoln Project sponsored by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The project is named for Abraham Lincoln in recognition of his signing the Morrill Act of 1862, which offered federal funding to the states for the establishment and support of what became known as the public system of land-grant universities.

This is less an effort to construct than to converse and to inform. It is charged with considering “the implications of state disinvestment in public higher education; assessing the role of the federal government in funding our great public research universities; and developing recommendations for ensuring that public universities continue to serve the nation as engines of economic development and opportunity for Americans from all backgrounds.”

Third, an invitation to speak at Hamilton College took me to upstate New York, just as the winter’s hefty deposit of snow was finally melting. Hamilton, founded in 1812, is a small, selective college with an admirably vigorous emphasis on liberal education and the humanities. Great energy was evident on

Hamilton's campus, and keen interest in the fellowship opportunities we offer. But one might also have imagined an undercurrent of anxiety, as the news of the closing of Sweet Briar College (since reversed) reverberated in the background.

One might be tempted to contrast the ambition of the new undertaking in Beijing with the uncertainties dogging two of the great building blocks of American higher education: the public university and the liberal arts college. Doing so would ignore the great irony that it is, of course, American models of higher education that inspire much of the university development across the world, and particularly in East Asia. The emulation of these models poses interesting challenges: just to take one example, those of us engaged in these international ventures must make clear that academic freedom is integral to effective education and can't be discarded as new curricula are imported. Nevertheless, I am sure that Daniel Webster would not be surprised that American higher education has become a global lodestar.

But even as we inspire abroad, what lights are guiding educational policy and practice here at home? Recently, Nicholas Kristof wrote in the *New York Times* of what he called the "education wars," a phrase clearly intended to resonate to memories of the "culture wars" of unblessed memory.<sup>2</sup> Kristof was concerned with the struggles over the organization and content of K-12 education, but forgive me if my first thought on reading the headline was the present national reshaping of higher education, for there is indeed a struggle over the future of the university.

As you listen closely, you can detect different strains in the calls for the transformation of higher education. There are, first, the disrupters, those who embrace Clayton Christensen's paradigm of social change in which long-established enterprises and practices are disrupted by the application of new technologies. I'm sure you're familiar with the current instances of this notion: Amazon.com destroys the business model of brick-and-mortar stores; Uber upends the taxi industry. One recent articulation of this view has come from Kevin Carey, the author of *The End of College: Creating the Future of Learning and the University of Everywhere*. Carey foresees an educational revolution in which "open badges" displace diplomas and online courses substitute for the physical campus, making higher education more accessible, practically and economically. He writes in detail about technological innovations, but some subjects he gives only a glance. The research function of higher education he dismisses, writing about the "hybrid university" rather than the "research university." And what about the humanities?

The tens of thousands of scholars working in fields without external funding are being supported by student tuition, government subsidies, and, in a relatively small number of

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<sup>2</sup> Kristoff, Nicholas. "Beyond Education Wars." *New York Times*, 23 April 2015.

institutions, endowment earnings. When the hybrid model breaks apart, that money will disappear. Where these scholars will go and how they will support themselves are questions that today have no easy answers. There is no escaping the fact that the inefficient hybrid university model has served as a shelter and benefactor for important scholarship with no immediate value in the free market or obvious source of external patronage.<sup>3</sup>

The disruption trope has earned justifiable critique, from Jill Lepore in the *New Yorker* and from Jim Grossman in *AHA's Perspectives on History*.<sup>4</sup> But we should be careful not to conflate the disrupters, dripping with Schadenfreude, with those trying to deploy technological and organizational innovations so as to preserve the integration of discovery and education that is the research university. You probably know that Arizona State University is a leader in expanding its enrollment through online options. But it's worth noting that its president, Michael Crow, also earned praise for his "commitment to the idea that research is a fundamental feature of the university, not one that can be dispensed with on the road to the mass delivery of education," in a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* piece by Chancellor Nick Dirks of the University of California, Berkeley.<sup>5</sup>

Singing alongside the chorus of disrupters is another choir. These critics share the premise that the model of higher education is broken, but they see many things wrong beyond technological displacement. They see corruption, self-dealing, ideological straitjackets, and, most forcefully, a product that has been oversold. They do not want to expand educational opportunity, but to constrict it, often in the name of economy. "College isn't for everyone," says *Forbes* magazine. These voices don't want to disrupt higher education as practiced today so much as to dilute it. We can't afford the teacher-scholar in our state universities, said a proposal before the North Carolina state legislature; let's just have teachers who offer eight courses a year; they will have to forsake scholarship. While the proposal has been tabled, I must note that one of its promoters suggests that its eventual resubmission will exempt faculty in STEM fields, requiring more teaching and less research only from those in the humanities and social sciences.<sup>6</sup>

Where do we find a response to disruption and dilution? One reply is to echo Daniel Webster's assertion that inquiry and the diffusion of knowledge—that is, a structure of higher education that

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<sup>3</sup> Carey, Kevin. *Creating the Future of Learning and the University of Everywhere*. Riverhead Books, 2015, p. 251.

<sup>4</sup> Lepore, Jill. "The Disruption Machine." *The New Yorker*, 23 June 2014; Grossman, James. "Disrupting the Disruptors." *Perspectives on History*, vol. 51, no. 9, December 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B. "Rebirth of the Research University." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 27 April 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Will, Madeline. "8 Courses a Year for Every Professor? N.C. Lawmakers Ponder the Possibility." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 23 April 2015.

includes research—are essential assets to democracy. This certainly was a theme 50 years ago as ACLS argued that the humanities should have a place in federal efforts to provide for the common good. In my report to the Council last year, I noted in some detail the arguments of the Commission on the Humanities sponsored by ACLS, the Council of Graduate Schools, and the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa in the United States, but they might be repeated now.

One of the Commission’s formulations of the *public purpose* of the humanities was repeated in the legislation creating the NEH: “Democracy demands wisdom of the average man.” And further: “This Commission conceives of the humanities, not merely as academic disciplines confined to schools and colleges, but as functioning components of society which affect the lives and well-being of all the population.”<sup>7</sup>

Fifty years later, I know that NEH Chairman William (“Bro”) Adams shares this concept, that combining research vitality with public engagement is the Endowment’s cause. I know also that he shares my belief that while anniversaries are valuable opportunities to appreciate past accomplishments, they are, more importantly, occasions to consider the future.

We are doing just that as ACLS prepares for our centennial four years hence, in 2019. At its meeting this past January, the ACLS Board of Directors considered the principles that may guide our work in the decades ahead. I’d like to share those ideas with you this morning and solicit your thoughts.

The board expressed this vision of ACLS’s role:

ACLS provides leadership to the academic humanities in bringing knowledge of human creativity and values to students and to society. That knowledge must be active and vital, renewed by continuous research and insistent questioning. And it must be democratic, for students of every circumstance and institution of higher learning deserve access to the humanities. This is especially important today as financial pressures and policy memes currently work in the opposite direction. In the twenty-first century, this grand project must be a global effort: global in terms of the knowledge it transmits, global in terms of the scholarly community it builds.<sup>8</sup>

ACLS’s role is empowered by our very structure, the board noted. ACLS has many partners in the effort to bring forth and diffuse new knowledge, but its constitution as a federation of independent, broad-

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<sup>7</sup> National Commission on the Humanities. *Report of the Commission on the Humanities*. American Council of Learned Societies, 1964, pp. 4, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Internal document. American Council of Learned Societies, 30 January 2015.

based scholarly associations gives it a particularly powerful means to mobilize scholarly energies and to transmit new ideas and methods.

The board identified several areas where ACLS has been effective in the past and might expand and deepen its work in the future: creating new knowledge, catalyzing and curating communities of knowledge, and experimenting with new forms of the diffusion of knowledge. I'll say more about these in a moment.

What is the "democratic" dimension of this vision? I would cite three principles. The first is the open and inclusive nature of most of our constituent societies. The motive for the creation of ACLS in 1919 was to represent the United States in the new International Union of Academies, but the choice to form a federation of scholarly associations was quite deliberate, and perhaps even more consequential. Lord Bryce, the former British ambassador to the US, was seeking to determine what organization could be the US delegate. Should it be an exclusive academy that chose its own members? No, answered J. Franklin Jameson, Bryce's historian friend. Exclusive honorary societies were too "aristocratic" to be in keeping with the nation's democratic ethos. Better, he suggested, to form a federation of modern scholarly societies, such as the disciplinary societies created alongside the research university.

A second democratic principle is embodied in our fellowship programs, which foster the widest expression of the "unconquerable spirit of free inquiry." While several of our programs focus on particular research areas, such as American art or Buddhist studies, most are open to proposals on any topic relating to the humanities, and none of our programs prescribe pre-conceived research goals. The aim is to allow for new approaches to bubble up so that it is the broad base of active scholars, applicants, and peer-reviewers that sets the research agenda in the humanities.

The third democratic principle is to help make the vital knowledge of the humanities, knowledge renewed through research, broadly accessible. We strive to maintain the humanities as an essential element across higher education by supporting the research engagement of teacher-scholars in all types of institutions. This is a hard challenge, given the steepening of inequality within colleges and universities (e.g., more contingent faculty and proportionately fewer scholars on the tenure track) and across the institutional spectrum.

On this point, we have more work to do, for we realize that faculty from less well-resourced institutions, where high teaching loads and other institutional circumstances discourage semester- or year-long research leaves, are only occasionally benefitting from our fellowship opportunities and that we might design new programs that fit their lives and conditions more appropriately.

The vision expressed by the board is meant for long-term guidance, but we can see it evident in several current developments and programs, so let me now move from looking to the future to give you a report on some aspects of ACLS's work over the past year.

Our fellowships and grants give scholars the opportunity to create new knowledge through disciplined research and practiced writing. But ACLS awards convey more than just money. The rigorous peer-review process that determines our awards bestows the validation of the broader scholarly community just as it gives the community as a whole the ability to identify promising new lines of inquiry. His report will have several numbers, but I will mention just one now: \$16 million, the total amount of fellowship stipends and other grants awarded this year, the highest total in our history.

We are constantly recalibrating our programs. I am pleased to announce today that we will expand our very successful Frederick Burkhardt Fellowship Program for Recently Tenured Scholars, by offering 10 new residential fellowships each year for recently tenured liberal arts college faculty specifically. While college faculty always have been and will continue to be eligible to apply to the traditional Burkhardt program, which allows for residence at several national and international research centers, this new opportunity, exclusive for college faculty, will invite proposals for residence at research university departments or centers.

The expansion of the Burkhardt program thus creates a new avenue for ambitious research from post-tenure liberal arts college faculty with an overlapping but broader rationale for residency in those cases. While the research of some college faculty may continue to be best served by the scholar's residency at an interdisciplinary research center, other projects will benefit from the environs on a university campus, where a scholar will have the opportunity to work with graduate students, to develop relationships and collaborations with scholars and departments that they have determined are best suited to advance their research, and, overall, to broaden the institutional and disciplinary bonds that will help maintain the momentum of their work.

I am also pleased to announce that ACLS will make possible 10 additional postdoctoral fellowships next year in a new pilot program. As you may recall, we began, in 2009 during the Great Recession, working with the Mellon Foundation on the New Faculty Fellows program for newly minted PhDs who were confronting a jobless market. In so doing, we gained significant insight into both the evolving postdoctoral landscape in the humanities as well as some key elements of these types of opportunities that helped them serve as launching pads for scholars' careers, as opposed to mere holding pens. We will be engaging in an effort over the next couple of years to contribute to better understandings of the

postdoc space, how it works for individuals as well as for host institutions, and to develop a set of institutional partners with whom to collaborate in addressing issues related to the changing humanities workforce. In that partnership, we will help fund selected institutions to offer additional high-quality two-year post-docs that are genuine career-building positions.

The Mellon/ACLS Public Fellows program is one major effort to make the humanities, in the words of the 1964 Commission report, “functioning components of society which affect the lives and well-being of all the population.”<sup>9</sup> ACLS launched the Public Fellows program in late 2010, building upon our accustomed role of providing fellowships to support advanced research in the humanities. The program is designed to expand the reach of doctoral education in the humanities by placing recent PhDs in two-year positions at an array of nonprofit and government agencies. In other words, the Public Fellows program is not just about knowledge creation—though it certainly is about that as well—but also about knowledge circulating into new areas of society.

We’ve placed four cohorts of fellows: 8 in 2011, 13 in 2012, and an average of 20 fellows in 2013 and 2014. That makes a total of 60 fellows so far, with up to 22 fellows to be selected in the 2015 competition, which is nearing a close. As the program has grown over the years, so too has the diversity of institutional partnerships that facilitate the placement of our fellows. We work with a wide variety of host organizations in the government and nonprofit sector—over 70 so far. These include government agencies at the federal level, like the US Departments of State and Health and Human Services; at the state level, with the policy and evaluation department of the North Carolina State Legislature; and at the municipal level as well, with fellows taking up a variety of roles in arts management and digital capacity building in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. These are in addition to a wide variety of nonprofit public policy, cultural, advocacy, and social service organizations.

Our ever-expanding network of organizational partnerships is an important feature of the Public Fellows program at this stage in its life; by connecting with as many organizations as possible, we hope to signal the broad utility of the humanities PhD to wide non-academic audiences. ACLS Public Programs Director John Paul Christy is both vigorous and vigilant in pursuing every promising partnership.

Many of our fellows are adding further dimension to their “publicness” by taking on outward-facing initiatives at their host organizations. Several have been lead author on publications in the fields of investigative journalism, equal justice and economic policy, and international human rights work.

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<sup>9</sup> *Report of the Commission on the Humanities*. p. 2.



Public Fellows is a resource-intensive program—and we are grateful to The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for its generous support of this initiative. As the program gains further traction among government and nonprofit organizations, we are requiring higher cost-sharing measures with each new roster of host organizations, which of course extends the opportunity to greater numbers. Ultimately, as the program continues to demonstrate not just the value of the humanities PhD in general, but the value of our fellowship and its selection process in particular, the level of cost-sharing with host organizations will increase.

Moreover, as the program is predicated on partnerships, we have been especially encouraged to see our learned society and university partners pursuing complementary approaches to our own efforts to support careers beyond the academy. The AHA's career diversity initiative has set an impressive array of programming at its annual meeting, and in the past year, with the assistance of the Mellon foundation, the society has partnered with four university graduate departments to test a variety of approaches to support non-academic careers within pre-doctoral training programs. Over the past months, the MLA has ramped up its *Connected Academics* program, which provides models and resources for graduate students and PhDs alike who wish to pursue fulfilling work outside of the classroom. As ACLS Vice President Steve Wheatley has noted, it would be a missed opportunity if efforts like these and those of the learned societies were thought of only as a sort of depression-era WPA for PhDs, an ad hoc emergency employment program that is but a temporary expedient, to be dispensed with once normal conditions resume. This may be the “new normal.” If that is the case, let us consider an expanded positive vision, one which sees the widest possible role for historians, for all humanities scholars, in the knowledge society.

ACLS has helped develop and sustain communities of knowledge as learned societies and as scholarly networks crossing many fields of study. When we note that the second part of the constitutional mission of ACLS is “to strengthen and maintain relations among national societies” dedicated to “humanistic studies in all fields of the humanities and social sciences,” we might interpret that charge as a mandate to uphold a vision of scholarship that is both inclusive and dedicated to excellence. ACLS's federative operations have taken many forms over our history, including incubating new scholarly communities that develop into learned societies. But the center of it has been the work of the Conference of Administrative Officers. The Conference's meeting last fall discussed initiatives focused not just on societies per se, but on how ACLS societies can work collaboratively to analyze and even engage with the issues affecting the professional lives of their members, such as the efforts to assess learning outcomes or adjunctification.

But ACLS's focus on building communities does not stop at our national borders. Working outside the US, the African Humanities Program, led by Andrzej Tymowski, director of ACLS international programs, and so ably represented by Grace Musila on this morning's fellows panel,<sup>10</sup> is designed to catalyze community among humanities scholars in the five countries in which it operates: Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, and South Africa. This year, the program made a special effort to mobilize its community's insight and commitment into a Forum on the African Humanities, which presented recommendations to the African Higher Education Summit, a major convocation of global policy makers, entrepreneurs, academics, and international development partners for strategies to transform higher education in Africa.

The Forum's recommendations note that:

In today's landscape of higher education and research in Africa ... the humanities find themselves in a parlous state. Studies of humanistic subjects have been deprioritized, . . . delegated by policymakers, and even by some university officials, to the bottom of any list of national goals, if they appear at all.

This marginalization . . . must be remedied, because every knowledge-led development strategy must have a solid humanities core. To envision the future, we need to understand the lessons of the past. To act in the present, we must be sensitive to current cultural complexities.<sup>11</sup>

The measures the forum recommends for reinvigorating the humanities in Africa are sensible and straightforward: strengthening PhD programs, improving mentorship, and nurturing a culture of research and teaching. We can hope that the policy-makers who gathered in Dakar will attend to them, for the forum makes a forceful case for the practical utility of the humanities. But equally compelling is the assertion of their ultimate value:

[T]he key contribution of the humanities goes beyond cultural education and training in analytic skills. Humanistic studies help ground national dialogue on urgent issues in enduring humane values. Technical and technological solutions today raise ethical questions that require public understanding and public debate. Humanities research and

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<sup>10</sup> A video of Professor Musila's presentation is available on the ACLS website; see [www.acls.org/media](http://www.acls.org/media).

<sup>11</sup> African Humanities Program. "Recommendations for Reinvigorating the Humanities in Africa." American Council of Learned Societies, 2014, p. 3.

teaching illuminate the ethical principles that frame the discussion and provide examples of objectivity and fairness in dialogue.<sup>12</sup>

Our national (and international) systems of scholarly communication are both stressed and potentiated by economic and technological change. ACLS has participated in the changes coursing through the system through studies, publishing experiments, and support for digital innovation in scholarship. Next year will mark the tenth anniversary of the publication of *Our Cultural Commonwealth*, the report on cyberinfrastructure that, among other results, inspired the NEH to create its Office of Digital Humanities.<sup>13</sup> The report's call for developing new mechanisms for the review and validation of digital work has been followed by disciplinary guidelines developed by some of our member societies including the MLA and, in the last weeks, the AHA. For the past decade, ACLS itself has been recognizing promising forms of research through our Digital Innovation Fellowships supported by the Mellon foundation. We are now engaged in preliminary discussions about a successor program that will focus on building communities of practice that may give new opportunities for scholarly engagement across the institutional spectrum of higher education.

Before concluding, let me mention one new collaboration we began last year. While ACLS has supported humanities research and scholarly careers since its inception, we are pleased to have made our first foray into the undergraduate domain this past fall through a new partnership with The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program (MMUF). MMUF, which recently celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, addresses the underrepresentation of minorities in college and university faculties by encouraging more students from underrepresented minority groups to pursue PhDs in the humanities and social sciences. The program has grown to include 46 member institutions, including three South African universities and a consortium of historically black colleges and universities within the membership of the United Negro College Fund. Through programs administered on each participating campus, undergraduate fellows receive academic and professional mentorship, financial support, assistance with the graduate school application process, and connections to a robust and growing network of "Mellons," as MMUF fellows and alumni refer to themselves.

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<sup>12</sup> "Recommendations for Reinvigorating the Humanities in Africa." p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Our Cultural Commonwealth: The Report of the American Council of Learned Societies Commission on Cyberinfrastructure for the Humanities and Social Sciences*. American Council of Learned Societies, 2006.

ACLS received a grant from the Mellon foundation to coordinate the reporting and proposal process among MMUF member institutions and collaborate with the Foundation's MMUF staff to analyze the program's activities and results both program-wide and comparatively across its participating campuses. This partnership affords ACLS the opportunity to learn a great deal more about the formation of scholars in the undergraduate years, and especially about the pressures upon minority undergraduates. Indeed, in just the first year of our partnership, through the reports and relationships we have built with MMUF's diverse member institutions, which range from research universities to small liberal arts colleges to South African universities to historically black colleges to urban comprehensive universities, we have already gained a more robust understanding of the rewards and challenges of recruiting and supporting the next generation of the humanities professoriate.

Our motive for this effort is simple. If it is the function of the humanities to make the heritage of human creativity meaningful today and into the future, then the humanities will not thrive without a professoriate as diverse as the culture and society it seeks to interpret.

Nor can the humanities thrive if they are not constantly renewed by new knowledge distilled by a vibrant research enterprise resting on a broad base of colleges and universities, of learned societies, and an engaged public, and benefiting from Webster's "unconquering spirit of free inquiry." Much has been accomplished since the establishment of NEH in 1965 and since the founding of ACLS in 1919. But there will always be more to do. Thank you in advance for your contributions to this effort.