

The Arts and Humanities at Indiana University

State of the University Address 2000

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Since last spring, Indiana University, and especially the Bloomington campus, has been preoccupied with issues surrounding the IU men's basketball program. Indeed, I postponed my State of the University address to ensure that its important academic message was not lost in the flurry of reaction to Coach Knight's dismissal. While intercollegiate athletics have a role to play in university life, the point must be strongly made that the focal mission of Indiana University, and other institutions of higher education, is, first and foremost, academic. This mission is teaching and learning, research, scholarship, creative work and professional service.

In the past I have used my State of the University address to review the previous year and discuss prospects for the current one. But today, I want to take a different approach. I want to discuss a critical focus for Indiana University and for all of higher education. This issue is the future of the arts and humanities, which are facing serious challenges across the nation. Not only do these challenges threaten the heart of our academic enterprise, they also endanger our culture and, indeed, our souls.

Excellence in the arts and humanities is a bright and strong motif in the rich tapestry of IU's history. Our grand traditions in the liberal arts promote the ideal of knowledge as an end in itself, as an experience that ennobles our lives. As David Starr Jordan, the president who instituted IU's liberal arts curriculum, put it, "the whole of one's life must be spent in one's own company, and only the truly educated person is good company for himself." Today IU Bloomington's great traditions in the arts and the humanities can be seen most immediately in our world-class School of Music, in the IU Art Museum, and in a large number of other prominent fields, such as literary and religious studies, folklore, and history.

Our other campuses also have much of which to be proud. IUPUI has a strong record of excellence exemplified by the Herron School of Art and the Charles Sanders Peirce critical edition project, just to name two areas. Our regional campuses have also flourished. IU South Bend has become a center for fine music, drawing such distinguished performers as Russia's Kirov Symphony Orchestra. The Ogle Center at IU Southeast hosts consistently well-attended dramatic and musical performances. Indeed, all of our regional campuses are centers of culture that are important to the well being of their communities. And like Bloomington and IUPUI, the regional campuses offer students outstanding liberal arts curricula.

But unfortunately, recent decades have brought decreased public interest in and support for the arts and humanities. Thus, we find ourselves peering into the chasm between C.P. Snow's now-famous two cultures of science and humanities and wondering how to bridge the gap. Today we might refigure Snow's oppositions in terms of intellectual and artistic work that does not seem to offer immediate or practical applications and work whose benefits are clearly apparent. Yet, under close examination, even this distinction seems arbitrary. In the same way that the discovery of a new subatomic particle can alter our understanding of the world, so can the creation of a new novel or sculpture or piece of music. Nevertheless, it has become increasingly difficult to persuade those outside the academy to value the arts and humanities. Today I would like us to think together about these challenges and consider some strategies for addressing them.

The Current State of the Humanities and the Arts

What are the causes of the current state of affairs? They include a rising interest in professional education and changes in priorities for federal research funding. Universities' increased involvement in economic development and technology transfer also challenges us to find new ways to promote the value of the humanities and arts. Moreover, theory-laden academic discourse that excludes from public intellectual life much of the work produced by scholars and artists has eroded popular support for the liberal and fine arts.

Our students are among the best indicators of these challenges. The percentage of undergraduates majoring in humanities fields has diminished almost by half since the 1970s. Several decades ago, 75% of entering freshmen indicated that their primary reason for attending college was to develop a philosophy of life, which is a surrogate for interest in the liberal arts. Now 75% say they attend college to gain career skills. IU Bloomington's experience bears this out. In 1970, COAS arts and humanities majors accounted for 10% of our undergraduate enrollment. By the fall semester of 2000, the number had fallen to 6.7%. This percentage does not, of course, include students in University Division who intend to major in the humanities or fine arts.

Increased public interest in and support of the medical and life sciences and information technology contribute to this national trend. In medicine for example, breakthroughs in diagnosis

and treatment procedures have led to greater quality of life and to longer life expectancy. Federal funding has supported much of the research that has generated these advances. The National Institutes of Health now allocate more than half of all the federal funding for research. While NIH funding is doubling, support for research in the humanities and the arts has decreased. The NIH has a budget of \$18 billion for the fiscal year 2000. The combined budgets of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts are slightly over 1% of that, or a little more than \$200 million. Unfortunately, the NEA budget has diminished almost by half since 1992. As a result of recent changes in priorities, little of that money is available to individual artists and scholars for serious work. This is a significant and growing challenge. To add to the problem, salary differentials among the sciences, professional schools, and liberal arts disciplines have become more dramatic. All this has not gone unnoticed by faculty members, and it has understandably produced discontent and low morale.

Not only has medical science attracted attention, but so has information technology. To say that the World Wide Web, which did not exist a decade ago, has become ubiquitous, is to make an understatement. For better or worse, we can now communicate by e-mail, cell phone, pager, and palm pilots, so that we are literally never out of touch.

These remarkable developments in the health sciences and information technology have transformed our economy. Not long ago, college students worried whether they would be able to achieve the income and lifestyle their parents enjoyed. Now many of them worry how to best position themselves in the new economy so that they create and sell a company before they are 30.

The driving force behind our current economic expansion is research--university research. Throughout the nation, faculty members and their students are involved in product development and company startups. The dangers posed to the academic enterprise through over-zealous engagement in the business sector have been widely discussed. I, myself, believe that universities--particularly public universities--can and should support economic development. Doing so responsibly requires sound policies for intellectual property, clear rules about propriety and conflict of interest, and careful monitoring, especially for human-subject research. But again, while these advances have great value, attention to practical applications can lead to neglect of the humanities and the arts, and perhaps even of some fundamental work in the sciences.

Though information technologies and the medical and life sciences have attracted the public's attention, especially as they concern economic opportunities, there are other reasons for the retreat from the humanities and the arts.

The growth of cultural studies, with its attendant blurring of the boundaries between high art and mass culture, departures from the canon of great books, along with the emergence of identity politics and critical theory have led many--both inside and outside the academy--to conclude that

the humanities have gone astray. From the perspective of the non-academic public, our theoretical disputes can appear pedantic and contentious. But in many ways, these disputes have enlivened and renewed the humanities. Other fields--the social sciences and the law, for example--have also engaged in and learned from these approaches. However, no one should be surprised that there is a reluctance on the part of the general public to invest in the humanities. The aloof disdain with which some scholars approach the uninitiated does little to encourage support for our enterprise.

Social constructionist theories add fuel to these debates. Science is based on confirming laws and theories through empirical facts and testing. But scientists and others committed to the scientific method are dismayed by the claims that all facts are socially constructed. They object to the idea that there is no person-independent truth. They have little interest in assertions that there is ultimately no way to adjudicate between alternative interpretations of a text, assuming there is such a thing as a text, and alternative interpretations of nature, assuming there is such a thing as free-standing natural phenomena. All we can do, as intellectuals, it is said, is keep the conversation going.

Some would argue that this rejection of objectivity undermines science. I offer a different perspective. The theoretical rejection of objectivity is as much a skeptical challenge to science as it is to, say, literary studies. This response requires a careful re-examination of the grounds for scientific knowledge and a better explanation of the nature of a literary text. Descartes' skepticism was not a rejection of knowledge claims, rather it was a challenge to provide a firm foundation for objective knowledge. His solution, which was built on an appeal to first-person experience through his famous claim, "*Cogito, ergo sum*," may not be the best answer to skepticism, but it does make the point that skepticism is a step toward truth and knowledge. The negative reactions to the humanities and the arts have been further amplified by a culture in which artistic and intellectual value is sometimes defined by ethnic, gender, or political identity. The movement toward inclusiveness that has occurred over the last few decades and that has led to a much broader list of authors, artists, and subjects worthy of study has left some critics feeling that the balance has shifted too far. They fear the great works of the past are being neglected.

Along the same lines, an increasing emphasis on the political has prompted longings for the era of representational art. Strong political statements and the rejection of traditional standards of beauty and taste have fostered negative reactions. To understand the point, one has only to think of the controversy surrounding the Mapplethorpe exhibition in the Cincinnati museum of several years ago or Andre Serrano's crucifix in urine, not to mention Chris Ofili's application of elephant dung to a painting of the Virgin Mary.

Of course, artists have been social and political critics through the ages. The appropriate response to those who are offended by contemporary art is not to ban or censor the art, but to

promote understanding of the artistic statement. Here as elsewhere, the good must be distinguished from the bad and the merely shocking. But equating the good with what is comfortable or familiar is too easy an answer.

In short, a number of factors have led to the loss of status and support for the humanities and the arts. The leading cause, I believe, is the increased attention to the medical and life sciences and information technology, to the apparent neglect of other fields. The seemingly esoteric discourse in the humanities and arts reinforces the negative view of these fields.

The growing neglect of the liberal arts is a serious national problem. Unless it is checked and reversed, we will become a people who are readily entertained by a rapidly expanding media, who can check stock market prices anytime, anywhere, but who have lost touch with our history, with sophisticated aesthetic pleasures, and with the wisdom necessary for moral action.

Since the academy is home to the most thoughtful advocates for the humanities, leadership to resolve this problem must come primarily from the nation's premier universities. The artistic community is more diverse, with musical performers and visual artists often working in non-academic settings. But here too, university leadership has a vital role to play. And I dare say that Indiana University is crucial to this national effort, given that within IU's faculty are outstanding members of these fields. For example, the IU Bloomington School of Music contains some of the most accomplished musicians and performers in the world. A number of our departments, such as English, studio arts, foreign language and literature programs, clearly are among the very best.

Some would argue that a university's attention to technology and applied and clinical science is incompatible with leadership in the liberal arts. This argument is unsound, and it is rife with problems. The humanities and the arts are actually advantaged by technologies that provide new vehicles for scholarly communication and artistic performance. Conversely, the humanities and the arts make advances in science and technology more worthwhile. Consider the new digital music library, which is now under development, supported by grants from the NSF and the NEH. With the click of a mouse, students and faculty will have access to musical compositions in a variety of formats. They might listen to Mozart's *Requiem* while displaying a range of musical scores. Or they could hear computer generated music while viewing the score notation and improvising a new part on a computer keyboard. These are amazing advances that open up new possibilities for artists and scholars.

Life would be impoverished, no matter our health and wealth, without art and music and literature. Rather than being incompatible, science and technology and the arts and humanities nourish one another and call upon a common set of intellectual qualities and habits of mind. I want to emphasize this crucial point. There is room at Indiana University for success in the arts and humanities *and* in science and technology. They are *not*—I repeat *not*—incompatible.

Unfortunately, the debate is often cast as a zero-sum game, with one side believing advancement is possible only as the other side is diminished. Reaching out across Snow's divide will have salutary affects for all, if we extend our hands. To help rectify the situation, to join the two cultures, a better understanding of the value the humanities and the arts is needed.

The Value of the Humanities and the Arts

The humanities and the arts have both intrinsic and extrinsic value. To start with the former, there is abiding value in works of art and music, literature and philosophy. These works merit attention not only as reflections of a time and place, or as an expression of an author's or artist's thoughts and intentions, but also by virtue of their insight into the human condition in all of its individual and social complexity. Deprived of these works, the world would be less interesting and far less meaningful.

Though it may appear that I am advocating for a great books and great works approach to the humanities and the arts, that is not my intention. Certainly, I believe that the literature, art, music, and philosophy of the great authors and artists bear renewed and continued attention. But I also see value in other cultural artifacts, in contemporary drama, in a well-crafted film, in some recent music, in a story well told, or a poem well written. Aesthetic pleasure and insight are not limited to works produced in the distant past or created in familiar forms. One does not have to be an elitist to enjoy art and literature that have stood the test of time, nor does one have to be among the vulgar to appreciate creative popular culture. There is good and bad in both, and it takes practiced judgment to tell the difference.

Along the same lines, I believe strongly that there is much to be learned by reading and rereading the great texts of western civilization. But if we restrict ourselves to these texts and works of art, we miss the beauty, excitement, and insight that other cultures and perspectives provide. The diversity of the human experience is breathtaking; and rather than limit our inquiry and study, we should seek to expand it.

Indiana University has a long and vital history in embracing a diversity of nations and cultures. This is one of the great legacies of Herman B Wells. For some time, we have been among those universities with the greatest number of federally supported area studies programs. But our dominance in area studies is at risk. Retirements, transfers, and changing faculty interests could diminish the critical mass of faculty expertise required for continued success. Moreover, competition for the Title VI funding that supports area studies centers has increased markedly in recent years. As a result, our grant proposals must be innovative and soundly presented if we are to maintain our leadership position. All of our international programs are critically important to IU's future, and we must reaffirm our institutional commitment to their success.

In addition to the humanities and the arts being good in themselves, these disciplines are

instrumentally valuable. The humanities and the arts are essential for an educated citizenry. As important as science and technology are, without considerable exposure to the humanities and the arts, a person's education is woefully incomplete. These studies are the foundation of a democratic society.

It is for these reasons that professional education cannot stand alone, but must be complemented by exploration of the arts and humanities. For not only do these subjects give students important issues to contemplate, study in the liberal arts helps them learn how to think, how to seize an important point, how to frame a question, how to gather pertinent evidence, and how to argue their perspective rationally and cogently. More importantly, study of the arts and humanities offers new lessons for our students' moral imagination. Watching a play or a movie, viewing a painting or a sculpture, they are invited to exercise their capabilities for sympathy and understanding. They have the opportunity to see the world through someone else's eyes and to live in someone else's experience.

College is most often the environment in which the education and appreciation of the arts and humanities occur in depth. I worry, however, that in the desire to accommodate student choice, we have retreated from our responsibility to ensure that our students gain a sound acquaintance with the liberal arts. Last spring I had the privilege of teaching the Wells Scholars Senior Seminar. These are truly wonderful students--bright, conscientious, energetic, creative and gregarious. But I was surprised to find that few of them were acquainted with the central philosophical questions of the western tradition. As we read Plato's *Republic*, they quickly found these issues of significant interest. Indeed, many of our undergraduates, including our best students, could benefit from and enjoy greater exposure to the humanities. A number of undergraduate programs provide the opportunity to combine career preparation with study in the liberal arts. The LAMP program, which is a collaboration between the College and the Kelley School of Business on the Bloomington Campus, as well as journalism and the School of Education come immediately to mind. Indiana University graduates should not only be capable of having successful careers, they should also have the basis for a lifetime interest in art, music, literature, history, and philosophy.

It may well be that the primary instrumental value of the humanities and the arts is that they can lead to a better sense of community. Through an appreciation of the commonalities of human experience, one can gain a deeper understanding of the benefits of civil discourse and action in the service of others. Of course, the connection between civility and tolerance and the study of the arts and the humanities is not direct, and mean-spiritedness, intolerance, and incivility are not solely the province of the unread.

Incivility as it directly affects our university community is especially disturbing. We have experienced it recently when students expressed their displeasure over Coach Knight's dismissal. In an academic community, strongly expressed disagreement couched in forcefully argued

debate is the order of the day. It is the engine that propels the academic enterprise forward. But threatening those with whom one disagrees or destroying property has no place in a civil society, and especially not in an intellectual community.

Exacerbating threats to the sanctity of the academy is the disturbing trend of incivility among faculty members. Of course, there will be—and should be—disagreements among faculty members on scholarly, academic issues, and on matters of policy. But in the recent past, some of these disagreements have assumed an increasingly hostile and personal tone. A particularly shameful trend is the manipulation of the popular press to try to embarrass one’s opponents. Such actions inevitably lead to an escalation of acrimony and the degradation of the civil community that is necessary for a successful university.

In the end, personal conduct depends on both knowledge and character. Through the study of the humanities and arts and related social sciences, this knowledge can be gained. We can assist our students’ moral development by demonstrating, in our teaching and through personal example, the deep pleasures of living in a civil and tolerant community that is enlivened by difference and debate but also informed by respect, honesty, and fairness. Building and sustaining a civil community is everyone’s business. It entails a dual obligation: to act civilly and to help others do the same.

The Future of the Humanities and the Arts: **An Action Agenda**

While there is no easy solution to the serious challenges facing the arts and humanities, we can take steps to restore them to their proper status. One way to proceed is to revitalize the role of the public intellectual. The public intellectual makes a special kind of contribution--through writing that is earnest and rigorous, yet relevant and accessible--that advances interest in and respect for the liberal arts. I refer to the role Ralph Waldo Emerson so eloquently described in *The American Scholar*, a speech he delivered to the Phi Beta Kappa Society in 1837. In Emerson’s words, “the office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, to guide men [and women, I would add] by showing them facts among appearances” Emerson saw the public intellectual as someone who “raises himself [or herself] from private considerations and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts He is the world’s eye,” wrote Emerson. “He is the world’s heart.”

Nationally, a growing group of respected academics have taken this role. Gertrude Himmelfarb, Louis Menand, Martha Nussbaum, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Richard Rorty, and Cornel West come immediately to mind. In writing and speaking to a wide audience, they are reinforcing the importance of learned discourse and the value of intellectual pursuits. Their public profiles help to place the humanities center stage in our national intellectual life. If we hide our knowledge behind ivy-covered walls, then it is ironic, at best, to bemoan the loss of public support.

The recommendation, then, is for artists and humanists to reach out to the general public, in part through the historical role of the public intellectual, but also through bridging the cultural gaps in their home institutions. This does not mean we should popularize or dilute our research, but rather that we should seek to make known the centrality of our work and that we should avoid disciplinary silos. Building an increased level of appreciation for the humanities and the arts in a wider proportion of the population is the best long-term strategy for better support and more interest among potential students.

With due caution, progress can be made. The real threat lies in not taking action and allowing the current view of the humanities and the arts to become even more negative. If these fields are to flourish in the coming decades, we must do everything we can to facilitate a retreat from defensiveness and isolation and to encourage an atmosphere of inclusiveness that demonstrates the critical role of the arts and humanities to contemporary American life. We must connect the humanities to the immediate challenges in our culture and our world.

So much for the general. Our grand traditions suggest that Indiana University can and should take a national leadership position in enhancing research in the humanities and creative production in the arts and in strongly advocating for their central place in public discourse.

Indiana University has made major investments in the sciences and technology in the recent past, including crucial investments in the medical school. In this coming legislative biennium, the state is most likely to support incremental funding in higher education programs that contribute to the development of a 21st-century Hoosier economy. Thus, the first priority of our biennial budget request is the new School of Informatics. Our first capital priority is a new science building for the Bloomington campus. All this is good. Strong science programs are crucial to our success.

However, lack of adequate funding in the arts and humanities puts at risk the research and creative work necessary to enliven and advance these disciplines. We must not neglect the scholarship so critical to exploring new levels of knowledge and creativity in the arts and humanities. In order to support the research, scholarship, and creative work of IU's humanities and arts faculty, I will make available, through the President's Office, \$4 million in research grants. Funding for serious research is becoming unavailable from other sources, and IU must find ways to support its own scholars and artists. The allocations will begin this spring semester and extend over a four-year period. I will ask Vice President for Research, George Walker to work with the chancellors of the IU campuses and appropriate faculty advisory groups to establish guidelines and review processes for the allocation of these funds. These monies may be used as matching funds for external grants, as original support of faculty research and creative projects, and for research leaves. Here, the arts and humanities are to be defined in terms of subject matter and not necessarily academic disciplines. Thus, faculty members in the social sciences, or indeed, any area of the university, are eligible for these grants. The track record of

senior scholars and artists will be a major consideration in awarding the grants. In the case of junior faculty members, the potential for outstanding achievement will be a primary criterion.

I am fully aware that this initiative leaves many issues and concerns unresolved. The funding is not permanent. It does not respond to programmatic and departmental needs. It does not address salary disparities among disciplines. It does not answer the demand for increased graduate student support. Nor does it speak to the dearth of research funding opportunities in other fields, most notably, some of social and behavioral sciences and the professions.

But it is a beginning. Not all problems can be resolved immediately and finally. On the issue of faculty salaries, for instance, I should note that I have been an advocate for higher faculty salaries since I came to IU. Four years ago, the Trustees committed to the goal that faculty salaries should be in the 60th percentile of comparable institutions, which, in the case of Bloomington, are the Big Ten public universities. I continue to believe that competitive faculty salaries are in the long-term interest of Indiana University. I hope that I have support for giving high priority to faculty salaries, even as we try to meet other, quite genuine, needs.

Fortunately, the dramatic success we have had in private fund raising for endowed chairs and professorships has enabled us to retain and reward many outstanding faculty members and to attract others to the university. The Bloomington campus had five faculty endowments in the arts and humanities when the campaign began. Now there are 28 endowed arts and humanities chairs, curatorships, and professorships. University-wide, endowments for faculty have more than doubled in the past five years, increasing from 139 in 1994 to 318 presently and growing. Our current number of faculty endowments moves us from near the bottom of the Big Ten to the upper tier.

Similarly, two matching programs for students have shown genuine promise. At Bloomington, the chancellor's office matched the \$1.2 million my office has made available over a three-year term to support outstanding graduate students. Approximately \$1 million has gone to arts and humanities fellows. And, looking to the future, our new IU Student Endowment Income Matching Program will increase privately endowed graduate and undergraduate student support and help us attract the best and brightest students.

There is a more personal side, too. During the IU Bloomington campaign, faculty members were very generous in their support. Indeed, faculty and staff contributed over \$26 million, much of it for endowments. That is nothing short of incredible! Peg and I were proud to participate by endowing a graduate student fellowship on the Bloomington campus and an undergraduate fellowship at IUPUI, both in the humanities.

While there is no guarantee, and while private fund raising in the humanities is difficult, the IU Foundation and campus fund raising staffs have had excellent results in meeting the University's

priorities. This past year the Foundation has set records for both the amount raised and the number of donors participating. Private giving at IU is at an all-time high and the Foundation holdings have surpassed the billion-dollar mark. By way of capitalizing on this success, I will ask the IU Foundation to emphasize the arts and humanities as a priority.

In focusing on private fund raising in the arts and humanities, IU is setting a national example for other institutions. For instance, we will join with a group of other leading universities to support a national ACLS faculty fellowship program in the humanities and related social sciences. Let us hope and encourage others to follow, with the result that a trend will develop.

I make a personal commitment to you today to speak out on behalf of the humanities and the arts, not only on the IU campuses, but in other forums open to me, in the state and nationally. I did so last spring, for example, at a conference on the future of higher education, and I plan to do it again at major national conferences this year. I hope that IU faculty members and administrators will join me in publicly advocating for the arts and humanities.

I will also appoint a university-wide task force of faculty members and administrators to recommend other strategies for enhancing the humanities and the arts at Indiana University. This task force will review the role of the liberal arts in the general education curriculum on all IU campuses and make recommendations to the appropriate faculty committees, if changes are warranted. I will also ask the task force to review the facility needs of arts and humanities programs on all IU campuses. For example, at Bloomington, I expect the task force to come forward with a recommendation for a new building to house a number of our international studies and humanities programs. I will give such a project high priority on our future list of capital requests to the state. And last, but not least, the task force will explore how we might best tell the story of our grand tradition in the arts and humanities to our various publics, including elected officials and potential students.

Conclusion

We must do our best to make the case for the humanities and the arts, for as they thrive or wither, so do our professional and science programs, so do our universities and, indeed, our culture. If we do not take an active role in shaping our local and national intellectual environment, it will shape itself around us. If we do not work to transcend the disciplinary boundaries that divide us from one another, we will fragment our energies. If we do not breach the ivy-covered walls that prevent us from demonstrating the value of the arts and humanities in our culture, we can expect further erosion of support for the liberal and fine arts.

Our responsibility to support research, scholarship and creative work in the humanities and the arts reaches past each of us into the world of our children and their children. Humanists and artists have a sacred trust to transmit the past to the future and to add their own creative voices to

the continuing dialogue about our shared humanity. We must take that sacred trust to heart. I welcome your comments and questions about what I said today. Please feel free to write to me at pres@indiana.edu. *Thank you.*