

Miami University finds its mission uncertain, its vision clouded, and in deep need. Here, there are no solutions. Instead, a provocation— toward large changes or small – hopeful for new paths toward rethinking the humanities. So, a first provocation: “I am increasingly unsure that our task is to ‘save’ the humanities, a discourse that keeps us entrenched in the past rather than looking to the future,” [Ignacio M. Sanchez Prado](#). And, another: “Anyone who has an ‘abiding faith in the algorithm and has developed ‘new metrics’ cannot, by definition, be any kind of an iconoclast because believing in ... algorithms and ‘metrics’ actually means you are pretty well drawing within the lines ... those are in fact by now long-established industry standards,” [Yasmin Nair](#).

Humanities in Place – [Loneliness](#) and [mental health distress](#) haunt U.S. universities. Amid pressures to specialize for a vocation in an abstract, global workforce, let’s emphasize pragmatism. We’ll build a curriculum that encourages students to nurture life where they are – regardless of career. As Wendell Berry [observes](#), this “would collapse the rigidly departmental structure of our present academic and professional system into a vital, wakeful society of local communities elegantly adapted to local ecosystems.” In such a vision, the humanities empower our students with the responsibility to find global solutions in local histories, to diagnose challenges, confront injustices, heal wounds, protect a sustainable commonwealth, and build resilient communities wherever they are after graduation.

History in this Place – Our challenge is not new. The “New Miami” of 1885 reconsidered the role of the humanities in a U.S. economy flourishing amid scientific innovations. Almost a century later, President Shriver observed, “Buffeted by excessive careerism ... the cry for ‘relevance,’ the intrusions of government, the strangulating constraints of budgets, and the fragmentation of the curriculum, liberal education has all but disappeared from many campuses.”¹ At the close of that decade, the University implemented its “Miami Plan.” We will learn from this current famine. We will teach a new model for humanities teaching and research. Others will see this and learn along with us before the close of the decade. We’ll struggle to regain trust and support regardless of state allocation.

Challenges in this Place – The national challenges [involving tuition discount-rates](#), changing [demographics](#), declining [funding](#), and [declining public trust](#) require no further attention here. Institutional challenges are numerous. A decade’s-worth of budgetary policy silenced cross-divisional curricular innovation. APEIP optimization re-allocated institutional resources toward areas of curricular demand and growth. The academic and career profiles of students recruited to Miami shifted. Now, Tuition Ordinance R2023-02 [imposed](#) a new fee. Students enrolled in 17 of the top 30 majors at Miami will likely **be unable to complete a double major, minor, or certificate in a humanities-related field** without incurring added expenses. We will challenge the structures at the core of institutional imbalance.

Changing this Place – A future for the humanities at Miami should challenge patterns from others – such as the “[fifth wave](#)” of Arizona State. We must unify our messaging, crumble the walls between divisions, challenge disciplinary conventions, create new metrics, yet be mindful of our budgetary constraints.

- **Miami Plan** – Must we disrupt it? Signature Inquiries are a possible area to restore humanities work across divisions. [Humanities First](#) at Washington seems intriguing. We must facilitate humanities inquiries across our science, technology, medical, business, and engineering curricula at all levels.
- **Divisional Re-Alignment** – If we imagine new alignments, what might we learn? MIT, for example, has a School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, a School of Engineering, and a School of Science, among others. This allows for joint-degrees such as a [B.S. in Science and Humanities](#).
- **Embedded Humanities** – If most students enroll in only 30 majors, we must embed humanities scholars within them. We must imagine new metrics. Co-taught courses are a must. What of embedding “Humanities Fellows”? Each Fellow proposes an innovative 3-2 teaching load of courses to be taught for one-year cross-divisionally. Or, receives course releases to innovate new materials.
- **Challenging Parents** – Must we conserve the liberal arts? Or reintroduce them? We must continue to bring the value of the humanities to parents and students *where they are, as they think* – in public spaces.

The Humanities at Miami must become a provocation. As technology accelerates, we will create spaces for students to slow and find value in reflection. As the world globalizes, we will demand that students interrogate the local. We will challenge the externalities made by data-driven decision-making. The Humanities will know no one Department or Division. So liberated, they will be woven into Miami’s very fabric once again, renewing our institution.

¹ Curtis W. Ellison, ed., *Miami University 1809-2009: Bicentennial Perspectives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), p. 316