

## Charge for University Humanities Committee

*From Provost Ben Polak*

*March 27, 2018*

President Salovey has noted that the Humanities are an “undisputed area of excellence for Yale, a true comparative advantage.” (see *November 21, 2016 email re: University Priorities and Academic Investments*). The University has recently made or committed to a number of major investments in the humanities. These include the reinvention of 320 York St. (HGS) as a central home for the humanities on campus; investment in new methods and areas of study with the founding and expansion of the Digital Humanities Lab, the creation of the Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, and the launch of the Center for Race, Indigeneity and Transnational Migration; and an historic recommitment to our collections, including the renovation of the Beinecke, Sterling Memorial Library, the Center for British Art, and the Yale Art Gallery. New administrative structures and grant opportunities are enabling integration between areas of humanistic study on campus and creating new synergies across campus between scholarship in the humanities and the creative arts. Building on these recent investments, this committee will play a key role in deploying them in ways that will most benefit and strengthen the humanities and the university as a whole.

The committee will create a strategic plan for these investments in the humanities at Yale that will look to the college and graduate school, to our world-class collections, to our unparalleled professional schools, to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, to the Law School, to the Divinity School, and beyond. The immediate task of the committee is to provide a set of priorities around these investments which will define the humanities at Yale for decades to come.

I am certain that the committee will generate many creative and exciting ideas for these investments, and that we will not be able to accomplish them all. Understanding that we will not be able to do everything comes with a second (and harder) task. I ask the committee to prioritize its ideas. This will require the committee to make difficult choices.

What would constitute a compelling vision of the humanities for the community of Yale students and faculty, today and in the future? What are the problems, both intellectual and practical, that Yale should address? How can the humanities thrive within the university but also help to reinvigorate humanistic approaches to problems and realities outside our walls? This committee is well-situated to identify in which these investments can cross traditional boundaries and invite connections to the world outside the academy. Other ideas might involve the way we create large-scale campus conversations around particular issues or areas, how to address the challenges and the continuing vitality of graduate education in the humanities, and how to ensure that Yale students from all backgrounds, prepared in many different kinds of school systems around the world, can engage the humanities at Yale no matter what their focus of study, so that they graduate with that contextual understanding of human endeavor that makes for wise leadership and creative thinking throughout one’s lifetime.

What are the principles that might guide us? First, the committee should consider Yale’s comparative advantages, including our world-class arts schools and collections. Second, the

committees may recommend redirecting existing efforts or structures. Perhaps most difficult to consider, are there enterprises that require ongoing resources of time and funds that have largely fulfilled their purpose, from which we can step away and forward to new endeavors? And we must always maintain focus on our core mission: teaching, research, and the dissemination and preservation of human knowledge.

I ask that the committee

1. Develop prioritized lists of ideas that could be accomplished at the current level of resources and with the planned additional investments detailed above.
2. Make suggestions about organizational structures and behaviors that could buttress and extend—or even transform—Yale’s leadership in the humanities.

Finally, I ask each member of the committee not to think of themselves as representing their particular area, school, or department but instead as representing Yale, to take a long-range and university-wide view. I appreciate the creativity, wisdom, and institutional citizenship that this will require, and I thank each of you in advance. I look forward to working with you - and learning from you – on this important undertaking.