

Charge for University-wide Committee on Data-Intensive Social Science

*From Provost Ben Polak
December 7, 2017*

President Salovey has identified data-intensive social science as a top academic priority for Yale (see [University Priorities and Academic Investments](#)). This committee will play a key role in investigating and guiding to this priority.

Social science at Yale is quite strong, thanks to investments we have already made in people, programs, and facilities. It takes place across the campus: in departments in the FAS, in the Law School, the School of Management, parts of Forestry, Public Health, and elsewhere.

The application of data to public policy questions – to the great issues of the day – is an area that spans schools and departments, and that would complement our existing strengths. A great university should be engaging in the great debates of its era, and our students – the leaders of tomorrow – should participate. But that engagement must be grounded in evidence-based inquiry and rigorous analysis of facts.

The first task of this committee is to gather input from faculty across the university and to take inventory of our current resources and strengths that could support data-intensive, policy-relevant social science. The committee should also look outside of Yale to understand how other universities are responding to similar challenges and opportunities. The committee should examine the potential for progress in this area for Yale, and what progress might mean.

Then, keeping in mind our missions of teaching and research, I ask that the committee

1. Establish the key priorities in data-intensive social science for the next decade. These could include common courses or particular sets of skills for students, shared resources (analogous to science cores), or other initiatives. Please assess each idea in terms of impact, resources required (funding, space, faculty, etc.), feasibility, and whether Yale has a comparative advantage.
2. Develop prioritized lists of ideas that could be accomplished at current levels of resources, as well as those that would be possible with an additional \$2m or \$4m in annual expenditures.
3. Make suggestions about organizational structures and behaviors that could support data-intensive social science at Yale. In particular, I would appreciate recommendations about mechanisms for better coordinating across Yale to improve efficiency, innovation, and

impact, and mechanisms for rapidly learning relevant developments and innovations occurring at other universities.

4. Consider what we should we expect our students to know - or at least to have the opportunity to learn - in this area. What are we in fact teaching them, and how are we teaching it?

Finally, I ask each member of the committee not to think of themselves as representing their particular subject 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.