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Report to the Council¹
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Those of you who are veterans of ACLS meetings know that we've had more than one occasion to tell the story of the conversation that led to the creation of the Council in 1919. In the wake of the First World War, European statesmen sought to rebuild international institutions destroyed by the great conflict and to create new ones. James Bryce, the former British ambassador to the United States, asked his friend J. Franklin Jameson, a former president of the American Historical Association and the editor of the *American Historical Review*, about one of these. What organization, Lord Bryce inquired, might represent the United States in a new international union of academies? The American Academy of Arts and Sciences? The American Philosophical Society? No, replied Jameson. Eminent as those associations were (and still are), they were exclusive, self-selecting bodies and thus—in Jameson's word—too "aristocratic" to be fully in keeping with the American democratic ethos. Better to create a new federation, one that would include those eminent eighteenth-century associations, but would be constituted by a majority of learned societies with open, inclusive membership. This suggestion made great good sense to Bryce, who had served as the fourth president of the American Political Science Association in 1907-08, and shortly after his meeting with Jameson, ACLS came into being.

¹ A video of President Yu's report is available on the ACLS website; see www.acls.org/media.

His role in the founding of ACLS notwithstanding, Bryce is probably best remembered today as the author of *The American Commonwealth*, a presentation of the dynamics of US politics and society. Based on visits to the US between 1881 and 1883 and first published in 1888, this was intended as a successor to Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. The title of one chapter of Bryce's two-volume work tackles question that resounds rather loudly in 2016: "Why Great Men Are Not Chosen Presidents."

"Europeans often ask, and Americans do not always explain," Bryce wrote, "how it happens that this great office, the greatest in the world . . . to which anyone can rise by his own merits, is not more frequently filled by great and striking men." Political culture was partly to blame, Bryce asserted, for "the ordinary American voter does not object to mediocrity," and thus "the proportion of first-rate ability drawn into politics is smaller in America than in most European countries." But, he felt, the bigger problems were structural. "The methods and habits of Congress . . . seem to give fewer opportunities for personal distinction, fewer modes in which a man may commend himself to his countrymen by eminent capacity in thought." Most important, according to Bryce, was that "in America party loyalty and party organization have been . . . so perfect" that they produced a system of "artificial selection" that was unlikely "to bring the highest gifts to the highest place."²

Clearly, Bryce was writing about a political system that has since utterly collapsed. Were he to behold this year's election he would see, as many have observed, that the organization of one great party has been disintegrated by a candidate with great media power but not the "highest gifts" the British visitor would prize. And, if you will allow me to play the "woman card," the direction of the other party would astonish and alarm him as well. The gendered category of "Great Men" made perfect sense to Bryce, for he was a prominent opponent of women's suffrage. It goes without saying that structures and values that seemed in 1888 to be powerful and durable have been significantly transformed in the span of 130 years.

The basic framework of American higher education was also taking shape in the late nineteenth century when Bryce was writing about politics. Are we beholding a similar transformation in our domain? Will our current structures be overwhelmed and transformed? Many might welcome that prospect. There are the heralds of serial "disruptions" that will establish new paradigms for the creation and distribution of knowledge and education. And

² James Bryce, 1st Viscount Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, 2 vols. (Macmillan, 1888): pp. 69, 69, 70, 70, 75.75.

there are the critiques, disparagements, and potshots taken at the academy each year by political figures eager to justify diminishing public support of higher education.

The same declining social mobility, heightened economic inequality, and anxiety over the closing frontier of middle class prosperity that are roiling politics today are challenging higher education and the humanities in particular. The political structure is being shaken precisely because it does not offer answers to the anxieties produced by those dynamics. In higher education, the opposite is the case, and in fact, education is the prescription. As William Bowen and Michael McPherson note in their new book, *Lesson Plan: An Agenda for Change in American Higher Education*: “There is probably no better-documented finding in the social sciences than that education pays.”³

But the questions remain: who will make that investment and who will benefit from it? Will an empowering education, one that liberates and expands horizons be widely available, or will it be reserved for a privileged segment of society? The problem of growing social stratification confronts us again. We see the emergence of what the *New York Times* has labelled “the velvet rope economy,” in which goods and services are increasingly offered in distinct tranches, with a more expensive premium product reserved for the more affluent. “With disparities in wealth greater than at any time since the Gilded Age, the gap is widening between the highly affluent—who find themselves behind the velvet ropes of today’s economy—and everyone else,” writes reporter Nelson Schwartz, in an article entitled “In the Age of Privilege, Not Everyone Is in the Same Boat.” This gap, he continues, “represents a degree of economic and social stratification unseen in America since the days of Teddy Roosevelt, J. P. Morgan and the rigidly separated classes on the Titanic a century ago.”⁴

Has the velvet rope economy created a velvet rope academy in which high quality education is allocated only sparingly to those willing and able to pay? We may be on that path. The stratified academy is precisely the outcome desired by those policy-makers who suggest that the opportunity to study anthropology, philosophy, or French literature are luxury goods available only to those who can pay a premium at public universities or enroll at well-resourced private institutions.

³ William G. Bowen and Michael S. McPherson, *Lesson Plan: An Agenda for Change in American Higher Education* (Princeton UP, 2016): p. 3.

⁴ Nelson D. Schwartz, “In an Age of Privilege, Not Everyone Is in the Same Boat.” *New York Times*, 23 April 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/04/24/business/economy/velvet-rope-economy.html.

I trust you'll agree that the humanities do not belong behind the velvet rope. The humanities are integral to a holistic education, to social and cultural progress. We see higher education as an enterprise of active learning, with students and faculty at every type of institution engaged with the growing and dynamic knowledge in all fields, including the humanities. We see the humanities, in the words of the 1964 *Report of the Commission on the Humanities*, "not merely as academic disciplines confined to schools and colleges, but as functioning components of society that affect the lives and well-being of all the population."⁵

How can ACLS, our member societies, and our larger community work toward achieving that vision? Our discussion last night [at the meeting session on "Extending the Research of the Humanities PhD"] focused on one effort to extend the reach of the humanities so as to build a broad social and cultural presence. Funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Mellon/ACLS Public Fellows program is intended to demonstrate the wide applicability and keen salience of advanced education in the humanities and to thereby extend the circulation of humanistic knowledge, methods, values, and perspective. This year, it will name its 100th fellow, and we can hope that the cumulative example of these new public scholars will help transform how we think of the PhD career. This is one of several programs we have been developing to extend the reach of scholarship and to engage with new partners and broader publics.

Let me give you another example. Amidst the growing din of misstatements and misconceptions about the role of religion in international affairs, we were encouraged by the Henry Luce Foundation to consider how we might develop a program that fosters connections between scholars in the humanities and journalists who report on international affairs. Thus, with the aid of the Luce Foundation, we convened a series of conversations last year at ACLS with scholars, public policy experts, and journalists to suggest strategies for encouraging greater communication and collaboration among them as they pursue their important, and complementary, work of exploring the roles of religion in world affairs. As a result of those conversations, we launched this year the Luce/ACLS Program in Religion, Journalism & International Affairs. There are two components to this initiative. In the coming weeks we will announce our first set of university grantees, whom we will support as they develop new collaborations across the humanities, journalism and media, and international affairs on their campuses. Second, this fall ACLS will mount a fellowship competition for scholars engaged with

⁵ American Council of Learned Societies, Council of Graduate Schools in the United States, and United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, *Report of the Commission on the Humanities* (American Council of Learned Societies, 1964): p. 2.

the study of religion who wish to develop the capacities and interdisciplinary networks necessary to relate their specialist knowledge to media and policy audiences interested in world affairs. In addition to pursuing their own research, this cohort of fellows will participate in special public events hosted by our grantee universities.

The increasingly reckless rhetoric about religion and religious freedom of this year's presidential campaigns is just one reason that our work at ACLS must attend both to supporting the creation of new knowledge and to promoting the greater circulation of knowledge and understanding throughout society, within the academy and beyond. We hope that this new program will contribute to this effort.

Another new program is the latest iteration of a series of ACLS digital projects stretching back to the 1960s. I might note that this year marks the 10th anniversary of the publication of *Our Cultural Commonwealth*,⁶ the report of the ACLS Commission on Cyberinfrastructure in the Humanities and Social Sciences, whose recommendations served as the charter for the NEH's Office of Digital Humanities, led by Brett Bobley.

This year, with the support of the Mellon Foundation, we began to offer Digital Extension Grants. The overall aim of this program is to extend the opportunities for more humanities scholars to participate in digital transformation and to expand the definition of humanistic scholarly engagement in the digital realm. This program will shift the focus of ACLS awards in digital humanities scholarship to projects rather than to individual scholars, and to enhancing those projects rather than to initiating them. We hope that the funded projects will promote new inter-institutional collaborations, new forms and sites for training, new modes of engagement with a project, and new modes of making project content available.

These Digital Extensions Grants will build upon the many successes of our recently-concluded Digital Innovation Fellowship (DIF) program. Over the course of the past decade, DIF has supported 60 scholars pursuing innovative, computationally sophisticated approaches to humanistic research. The scholarly products of the fellowships include annotation and text-mining tools that have been widely adopted by the academic community (including [Zotero](#) and [Open Context](#)); new approaches to publishing and peer review (such as the Black Press Born-Digital Project, developed by Kim Gallon F'15 of Purdue University, who will present her work

⁶ *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).

in a later session);⁷ and big data projects that have refigured long-held understandings of literary genre, tonality, and historical periodization. Besides providing the means to generate new knowledge and model new methodologies, the program has also contributed to the validation of digital humanities scholarship in the American academy

Digital technologies can provide more than new tools for seeing patterns and new means for aggregating data. They also are social technologies that provide new sites for working that can bring together scholars in new constellations of inquiry, provide new means of collaboration, and potentially offer new ways of recognizing scholarship. These new worksites are considerably more open and accessible than the conferences, workshops, residential fellowships, and research trips that have been the traditional building blocks of scholarly achievement. [SAHARA](#), the curated and peer-reviewed image collection of the Society of Architectural Historians, is one example of such a worksite.

These three programs illustrate some of ACLS's newer directions, but in its considerations of the future, our Board of Directors has also affirmed that the creation of new knowledge through peer-reviewed national fellowship competitions must remain in the foreground of our work. We are determined *not* to make zero/sum choices about the needs of humanities researchers. As we develop new programs to extend the reach of scholarship, we want to sustain our broad support for core scholarship. I'd like to call your attention to how that support has grown. In 1965, ACLS awarded \$467,000 in fellowships and grants. That figure equals \$3.53 million in 2016 inflation-adjusted dollars. This year, in the 2015-16 competition year, we awarded a record \$18 million, more than a 410 percent increase. We are able to accomplish this thanks to the generous gifts of many here today, and I want to thank you on behalf of all the scholars you have benefited.

We are constantly reflecting on, analyzing, and adjusting our fellowship competitions to achieve the greatest possible effect. Our programs support scholars at a wide range of institutions, but there is no doubt that faculty from research universities and selective liberal arts colleges are particularly successful in our competitions. That may not be surprising, but we also realize that faculty from less well-off institutions, where high teaching loads and other institutional circumstances discourage semester- or year-long research leaves, are benefitting from our fellowship opportunities less often, and we are thinking about additional programs that, we hope, will fit their requirements more closely. In our planning, we will continue to

⁷ A video of Professor Gallon's presentation is available on the ACLS website; see www.acls.org/media.

consult with scholars and leaders at every category of institution. This fall, together with the Teagle Foundation, we will be convening at ACLS presidents of community colleges and leaders of the Community College Humanities Association to learn from them about their research aspirations, expectations, and needs.

We know that many new PhDs from R-1 institutions will spend the bulk of their careers at teaching-intensive institutions. Support for faculty at less well-resourced colleges and universities helps assure that careers begun in research-intensive institutions can maintain contact with the scholarly enterprise in the longer term. Having had eight cohorts of Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Completion Fellows complete their degrees and look for academic employment, we are in a position to say something about the institutions at which these fellows land positions. Of the 244 fellows who received tenure-track faculty appointments in the US (and leaving out the 36 that landed such positions abroad), nearly 43 percent are at institutions that are not ranked as doctorate-granting universities with very high research activity. Over 100 of these recently minted PhDs are teaching at small liberal arts colleges, at regional and comprehensive universities, and non-flagship campuses of state systems.

When we recall that humanities scholars working in comprehensive universities and community colleges teach the majority of college students in the United States, we realize that the support of faculty at teaching-intensive institutions has broad implications for the vitality of the humanities in our country. If the humanities are to thrive, they must have a broad base, one that allows for wide access to and participation in the creation of new knowledge through research.

And they must flourish abroad as well. Our international programs continue to extend support for research across borders and to help build global scholarly networks. If you attended the 2015 annual meeting you will recall hearing Grace Musila of Stellenbosch University in South Africa speak on British and Kenyan social imaginaries.⁸ I am pleased to note that in 2016-17 she will be a fellow at the National Humanities Center. Now in its eighth year of funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, our African Humanities Program (AHP) has had a transformative impact on the humanities in Africa. It has received 1685 fellowship applications and awarded 84 dissertation and 224 postdoctoral fellowships. Sixty-five African universities have had at least one faculty member receive an AHP fellowship. Additionally, over eight competitions, 158 fellows took up residencies at African centers for advanced study with our

⁸ A video of Professor Musila's presentation is available on the ACLS website; see www.acls.org/media.

support. During the last four years of the program, AHP awarded 49 travel grants to senior scholars and organized eight Manuscript Development Workshops—week-long retreats for intensive review and revision of fellows’ works in progress. Six books supported by AHP have been published (or are in production).

Who will advance the humanities in the next generation? 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 society it seeks to interpret. We are therefore particularly pleased to have been working with the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program (MMUF) since 2014, and, since it’s so important to us, I’d like to remind you of its goals and elements.

MMUF was founded in 1988 as the Mellon Minority Undergraduate Fellowship with the goal of redressing the underrepresentation of minorities in college and university faculties by encouraging minority undergraduates to pursue PhDs in the humanities and social sciences. The program prepares undergraduate fellows for graduate study by providing intensive academic research experience, access to faculty mentoring, and opportunities to prepare for graduate school and network with members of their cohort across institutions. Undergraduate fellows receive small stipends to allow them to devote more time to research; fellows who continue to graduate school are eligible to receive up to \$10,000 of undergraduate loan repayment upon completion of the PhD.

Forty-two colleges and universities plus a 39-member consortium of Historically Black Colleges and Universities represented by the United Negro College Fund participate in the program. The foundation provides block grants to member institutions, which use the funds for fellowship stipends and for convening fellows and faculty mentors for a variety of cohort-building events. As part of the program, fellows attend regional MMUF conferences where they present their research, engage with that of other fellows, and thus make connections outside their own institution. Fellows also are encouraged to publish their research and scholarship in the “MMUF Undergraduate Journal,”⁹ which provides a window on to the processes and expectations for academic publishing.

We were honored when the Mellon Foundation asked ACLS to coordinate the reporting and proposal processes among participating institutions and to provide analyses of those reports

⁹ Published annually as *The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Journal: A collection of scholarly research by fellows of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program*.

to the MMUF staff. It's been a new direction for ACLS, but working with this sterling program is providing a keener understanding of the formation of scholars in the baccalaureate years and the pressures facing minority undergraduates as they consider a future career in the professoriate.

Before concluding this report, I want to commend to you the work of the National Humanities Alliance under the leadership of Stephen Kidd. Steve and his colleagues have taken seriously the word "National" in their title and, without slackening in any way their advocacy for the humanities on Capitol Hill and within the executive branch, have been pursuing a major initiative to spotlight, celebrate, and cultivate local humanities communities across the country. With initial support from the Whiting Foundation, they have catalyzed a series of Humanities Working Groups, in which academic, cultural, and social service organizations in local areas around the country can work together to make the humanities a public resource. In one of the breakout sessions later in the meeting, Steve will be presenting a new toolkit that NHA has created to help learned societies with their advocacy efforts. One major milestone in all these efforts will be a National Humanities Conference, co-sponsored by NHA and the Federation of State Humanities Councils in Salt Lake City from November 10-13, 2016. I hope to see many of you there.

In conclusion, let me return to the connection J. Franklin Jameson drew between democracy and scholarship. Since our founding, ACLS has offered a model of democratic scholarship in setting the standards and direction of research through open, national competitions for fellowships and grants. As a federation of self-governing, inclusive scholarly societies, we are representative of and responsible to the ideals and dedication of humanities scholars and have earned the trust that allows us to direct attention to critical issues concerning the production and transmission of humanistic knowledge in society.

In 1919 the challenge facing the academic humanities was to secure a place in the research culture that had emerged only recently in US higher education. In 2016, with increased stratification and inequality within higher education, the challenge is how to assure that the values and cultural power of the humanities remain a common wealth available to many. We can, and we must, rise to that challenge. Thank you.