



Joint Statement on the “State of Scholarship” Report

June 11, 2026

The Vanderbilt University and Washington University chapters of the American Association of University Professors express our profound disagreement with the “State of Scholarship” report commissioned by our universities’ chancellors. The report distorts the state of humanistic and social scientific scholarship at our universities and in the academy overall. Worse, it proposes a shocking intrusion of university administration into faculty governance and portends greater threats to academic freedom that should concern all faculty.

The report currently appears on Vanderbilt’s website under the insignia of both Vanderbilt and Washington Universities. It is already receiving public condemnation. As the American Council of Learned Societies [makes clear](#), the report is founded on false premises and anecdotal evidence and thus does nothing to “ensure deeper and more meaningful relations among scholars and members of the public.” No doubt more rebuttals from scholars, departments, and professional societies will follow. It suffices for us to say that the report falls far short of the standards of political neutrality and disinterested inquiry it claims to champion. Historians, literary scholars, and anthropologists are singled out for caricature while the authors fail to acknowledge their own public biases against scholarship performed in the name of social justice. Nor does the report divulge its source of funding or conflicts of interest that may entail – standard practice for any work of humanistic or social scientific scholarship. In sum, the report is itself a clear example of “politicized” research that its authors attempt to decry.

What is most alarming is the guidance the report offers to its intended audience of university chancellors and presidents. By falsely arguing that humanities and social science departments are in the throes of an epistemological crisis, the authors lay the groundwork for university administrators to intervene in faculty governance with a heavy hand. Although the authors concede that their conclusions are “not yet supported by the kind of quantitative evidence that would be expected in a peer-reviewed study,” they brazenly argue for the end of “administrative deference” to departmental autonomy. Because some humanities disciplines are no better than “astrology,” they reason, administrators must reform departments based on “advice from minority voices within the discipline and from adjacent disciplines with better standards.”

Such a scenario would represent a shocking breach to the principles of academic freedom on which our universities are founded. In essence, the report proposes giving a heckler’s veto to any syllabus or research project that university administrators do not care for; it suggests it is legitimate to place departments into receivership based on administrators’ perception of faculty politics. The argument exposes the report as a pseudo-intellectual pretext for administrators to remove faculty power to govern our own departments based on the standards of our disciplines. It is a pretext unwarranted by the flimsy research presented in the report, and should alarm not only humanists but faculty across disciplines in all colleges and universities.

Weakening faculty governance does nothing to solve the real challenges facing our universities, and undermines our ability to effectively address society's most profound problems and challenges, from the inequalities of wealth and white supremacy to the political consequences of climate change. Indeed, the direst threats to public trust in higher education are not philosophical debates about the nature of truth. Currently, the federal government is dramatically cutting funding for the humanities and social sciences as well as for the natural sciences, engineering, medicine, public health, and the arts. In response, university administrations have instituted austerity measures, even as administrative salaries and administrative positions have taken up an increasing share of decreasing budgets.

The best way for scholars to cultivate diverse opinions and advance knowledge is by strengthening academic freedom. Political threats to higher education have degraded, and will continue to degrade, the quality of all fields of our universities' research, to the detriment of America's global standing. We note that the organizations now working most actively and successfully to defend academic free inquiry from politicized federal interference are not university leaders but the American Council of Learned Societies, the Modern Language Association, and the American Historical Association – professional societies of the very disciplines chastised by the report.

We call on our chancellors to rescind the report and affirm their commitment to the intellectual autonomy of faculty, academic departments, and governing faculty bodies. Administrative interference into academic departments, as licensed by this report, is a violation of the standards of academic freedom that have made American universities the envy of the world. Rather than undermining these bedrock principles, administrators should vigorously and publicly defend them.

Vanderbilt University AAUP
vanderbiltaaup@gmail.com

Washington University AAUP
wustl_aaup@proton.me