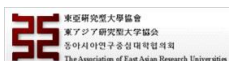


**LEIDEN STATEMENT**  
**THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES IN THE GLOBAL**  
**RESEARCH LANDSCAPE**  
**ANNOUNCED BY**  
**AAU, AEARU, LERU, GO8, RU11, RUSSELL GROUP AND the U15**  
**CANADA**



## PURPOSE

The social sciences and humanities are indispensable to understanding and addressing contemporary global challenges and to grasping emerging opportunities. Every challenge the world faces has a human dimension, and no solution can be achieved without enlisting the support and efforts of individuals, communities and societies. The social sciences and humanities cultivate knowledge about human expression, behaviour, and social life that is essential to understanding the human context of these challenges and crafting viable solutions to them. Because of the centrality of these disciplines to these issues, as well as their intrinsic value, it is essential within the global research landscape to promote, nurture, and cultivate social science and humanistic research. The purpose of this statement is to restate and champion the fundamental role that the social sciences and humanities play in the new global community and call for an expanded role for the social sciences and humanities in tackling problems through interdisciplinary research.

In October 2013 four groups representing the research-intensive universities in their regions signed the Hefei Statement on the ten characteristics of contemporary research universities. Since then five similar groups representing the research-intensive universities of other regions have expressed their support by becoming signatories to the statement. Seven signatories to the Hefei Statement are signatories to this Leiden statement. They are: *The League of European Research Universities (LERU)*, *the Association of American Universities (AAU)*, *the Association of East Asian Research Universities (AEARU)*, *the Group of Eight Australia*, *the RU11 Japan*, *the Russell Group (UK)*, and *the U15 - Group of Canadian Research Universities*.

The purpose of the Hefei statement was to identify and affirm the importance of those general characteristics of research universities which enable them to play a unique role within modern societies and to draw attention to the need for a policy environment which protects, nurtures and cultivates the values, standards and behaviours that underlie these characteristics. The development of the statement took place in a global environment having an uncertain economic outlook and with tight financial controls in most countries. In this environment, policy makers were taking an increasingly short-term view, seeking

immediate and practical outcomes from their investments in education, research and scholarship.

One consequence of this policy environment has been growing pressure to refocus areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) research onto more applied areas and to increase the purely vocational aspects of teaching in these disciplines. In the social sciences and humanities (SSH) disciplines, the debates in some cases have been more stark, questioning the need for government support, at least for some disciplines, in both education and research. However, investing in the SSH disciplines is essential if the global community is to develop the knowledge and expertise needed to address the fundamental problems facing the world, to make effective use of the opportunities presented by STEM research, and to develop as societies and individuals functioning effectively in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.

The signatories to this statement commit themselves to working collaboratively to:

- ensure that the SSH disciplines continue to receive effective support within their institutions and play an explicit role in forming institutional curriculums;
- increase recognition of the importance of SSH disciplines within their countries and regions by highlighting the contributions of these disciplines to national and global wellbeing;
- ensure that the benefits of SSH research and education programmes flow without unnecessary constraint to the wider community in order to maximise the return on the investments in SSH research, scholarship and education made by governments, the business sector, donors, and students;
- promote strong funding and support of SSH research;
- facilitate international cooperation in the SSH fields to foster a deeper, shared understanding of the commonalities and differences that contribute to the world's social and cultural realities; and
- advance global research collaborations including interdisciplinary approaches to global societal challenges in partnership with the natural and life sciences and engineering.

## PREAMBLE

Although the humanities and social sciences have distinct methodologies and perspectives, together, they help us understand what it means to be human in a complex world that is dynamic and multi-dimensional.<sup>1</sup>

- By emphasizing philosophical and historical perspectives, critical thought and imaginative response, the humanities - including the study of languages, literature, history, law, philosophy, religion, and the arts - help individuals fulfil their potential, fostering creative thinking, providing a deep understanding of cultural diversity, and thereby updating and expanding the global store of knowledge about human expression, actions, and institutions.
- The social sciences - including anthropology, economics, sociology, psychology, education, human geography, political science and government - reveal patterns in our lives as individuals, groups and society at large, and they address questions of critical importance in times of global change and conflict by employing a range of research methods, including observational, qualitative and quantitative methodologies and experimental methods.

Social science research and humanities scholarship at research-intensive universities focuses on expanding knowledge, leading to new understandings that improve the quality of life of the nation's citizens by promoting global understanding, invigorating national economies and educating citizens.

### *Promoting Global Understanding*

The humanities and social sciences teach us how to understand, interpret, and respect our commonalities and our differences. Because increased interconnectedness brings increased cultural, social, and economic tensions, a peaceful and sustainable future based on successful economic and societal development requires an awareness of different perspectives and an understanding of diverse cultures, histories and social institutions. Mutual understanding can foster the respect necessary for a peaceful and stable world order in which economic and societal progress is possible.

In this regard it is important to re-examine the relationship between the social sciences and humanities and country-specific studies or area studies. Area and regional studies constitute a production ground where new understandings about human society can be generated. They are also sources of interdisciplinary theory and method that can expand the boundaries of disciplines, again producing new knowledge and understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *The heart of the matter*  
[http://www.humanitiescommission.org/pdf/hss\\_report.pdf](http://www.humanitiescommission.org/pdf/hss_report.pdf)

### *Invigorating Nations*

Innovative societies are those with the ability to understand, absorb, and drive social, cultural and economic changes. The effective development and implementation of effective societal policies requires concomitant progress in understanding the behaviour of the individuals and groups who create and face today's opportunities and challenges. Research in the social sciences and humanities addresses issues that are essential to social stability, social progress and social understanding while also promoting individual creativity and inspiration.

### *Educating Citizens*

Humanities and social science research promote the cultivation and dissemination of knowledge about civic institutions, citizen participation and the foundations of community. A sustainable future for the world depends in significant measure on a global citizenry educated in the humanities and social sciences. Although the focus of this statement is social science and humanities *research*, it is important to recognize the connection between research and vibrant *educational curriculums* for first-degree (undergraduate) students. Strong humanities and social sciences faculties, in addition to their own research agendas, contribute to the salience and effectiveness of the educational missions of the institutions of which they are a part. Indeed, in the context of a "general curriculum," these disciplines play a crucial role in providing the educated citizenry that an increasingly interconnected world will need to draw on, as well as providing the foundational education of future social science and humanities researchers and scholars.

### *Tackling Global Challenges*

The world is changing rapidly and faces formidable challenges concerning individuals, societies, nations and regional groupings. Increasingly, these challenges are global and costly, and present political and other risks whose consequences could be very serious. To list just a few examples: the anxieties and unease resulting from the geopolitical situation in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and parts of Africa; the continuing apprehensions around global economic fragility, financial austerity and how people are responding to these; the need to understand what generates jihadists in developed countries, or why religious extremism is becoming more evident around the world; coping with population aging and population decline; understanding and responding to the growth in prison populations; appreciating the drivers and consequences of growing inequality at scales from local to the global; understanding and adapting to the declining or changing importance of the nation state; and responding to climate change. Developing the understanding necessary to solve or mitigate just some of these challenges would provide profound benefits to human wellbeing.

Confronting these complex social issues will need to build on research and scholarship in the SSH disciplines and on the widespread dissemination of the resultant new knowledge through education. Research that contributes to better cross-cultural understanding, whether this be through history, comparative theology, law, comparative literature, philosophy, anthropology, criminology, the basis of human behaviour or decision making, is an imperative if we are to make the world a better, more tolerant and peaceful place. The concepts, theories and practices that flow from high quality research in SSH disciplines can create the tools and knowledge that will help manage the many significant risks that arise from the current political, social and economic environments.

A fully effective implementation of technological responses to such global challenges or to newly recognised opportunities requires a profound understanding of human needs, values and motivations. The effective use of new technologies as diverse as genetic engineering, nuclear power, stem cells and cyber monitoring systems all depend on community acceptance, community understanding, and the willingness of individuals to change their behaviours. These require an awareness of what, how and why people believe, behave and change - an awareness that only the SSH disciplines can produce. For instance, the initial responses to the 2014 Ebola outbreak were deficient because they did not take into account factors such as local knowledge, beliefs and cultural practices.

### *The Role of Research Universities*

Because the world today is more interconnected than ever before, the many challenges we face are by definition global. The world's best comprehensive research universities have a vital role to play in addressing these global challenges by bringing together the largest number and highest quality of social science and humanities (SSH) researchers, complementing the depth and breadth of the capabilities of these institutions across their natural science and engineering disciplines. The collective university memberships of AAU, AEARU, LERU, Go8, RU11, Russell Group and the U15 Canada embrace the full range of academic disciplines, making them ideal sites for developing interdisciplinary research related to contemporary global issues and problems.

As the *Humanities World Report* has indicated, humanists are deeply committed to the social value of their work, both its fundamental role in promoting the intellectual and moral development of the individual and the long-term importance that role has in building the capacity for addressing global challenges.<sup>2</sup> By definition, social scientists are engaged in addressing questions of social relevance. While the benefits of advancing this knowledge are extensive, the path to exploiting this new knowledge is usually long, indirect, iterative and requires contributions from outside the university environment. However, research universities are increasingly under pressure to shift from basic to

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/humanities-world-report-2015-poul-holm/?isb=9781137500267>

applied research in pursuit of short-term results at the expense of the longer term benefits of advancing the frontiers of knowledge. The increasing tendency of research funders in many countries to focus on short-term projects with narrow, practical objectives and easily applicable research results is a dangerous trend; it threatens to constrict the broad pursuit of new knowledge and to foreclose extraordinary breakthroughs that could not initially be envisioned. It is critical that all relevant policies recognize the broad, pervasive and long-term benefits of university research and education and provide the support and environment that will ensure that these institutions continue to flourish, sustaining the foundational characteristics that make research universities an invaluable part of any national infrastructure.<sup>3</sup>

The following statement identifies actions by research universities, the networks of these institutions, and governments to assure the essential contributions of the social sciences and humanities to national and global wellbeing.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.leru.org/files/news/Hefei\\_statement.pdf](http://www.leru.org/files/news/Hefei_statement.pdf)

## STATEMENT

1. Commitment to Humanities and Social Sciences. Comprehensive research universities commit themselves to the development within their institutions of strong programmes of research and education in the social sciences and humanities. These institutions will provide opportunities for students from other disciplines to benefit from exposure to social sciences and humanities. In particular, the universities will promote the benefits of SSH study and research in supporting generic skills such as: skilful communication, critical and independent thinking based on sound evidence and transparent analysis, the ability to recognise and move beyond a personal perspective, the ability to acknowledge and respect differing perspectives by developing an empathy with those holding them, an ability to accept ambiguity, and a recognition that local conditions and cultures can be as important as universal laws, especially when the intent is to change rather than just describe the world. In a fast-changing world in which we will face many new national and global challenges, the role of social sciences and humanities research will be of vital importance in enabling the nations of the world and their citizens to think critically, be tolerant, and become more innovative and inclusive.
2. Interdisciplinary Research. In addition to helping us understand what it means to be human and to connecting individuals with the global community, the social sciences and humanities also foster practical applications that enhance the effectiveness of technical solutions. Research universities recognize the growing potential of interdisciplinary research to expand knowledge and understanding in ways not otherwise achievable. Most global challenges, such as those related to health, population aging and population decline, war and terrorism, cultural diversity, religious tolerance, environmental sustainability, climate change or the diminishing supply of natural resources, are by their very nature complex, and tackling them requires drawing on insights, perspectives and methodologies from across the entire research base. Research universities can function as the optimal platform on which scholars from all disciplines can develop interdisciplinary research questions. Integrating social sciences and humanities with the natural sciences and engineering, including appropriate programmes of post-graduate education and training, can provide the broad interdisciplinary connections that bring to bear multiple perspectives, knowledge bases, and analytic techniques to tackle major global challenges. For example, intercultural competencies, linked with expertise in the humanities and social sciences, enable health sciences investigators to analyse and understand health-care disparities (linked both with variations in health-care access and health-care practices and lifestyles), differing responses among ethnic groups to therapies and treatments, and differences in resilience in the face of trauma and hardship. Cultural expertise derived from the social sciences aids engineers in the development of devices and technologies that will be more rapidly deployed and adopted in particular communities. Human factors research in engineering requires collaborations with social scientists and, to address linguistic issues, with humanists.

3. Academic Freedom. As is true for researchers and scholars in all disciplines, those in the social sciences and humanities must have the freedom to conduct investigator-initiated research without undue constraint. To maximise the benefits of research and innovation, national and international funding agencies and organisations must give researchers the opportunity to use their expertise to develop their research in ways they consider most appropriate and productive to advance knowledge in and beyond their disciplines.
4. Funding. Given the importance of the social sciences and humanities, the networks of the leading research universities urge governments and research funders to provide strong funding for social sciences and humanities research and particularly to reverse the downward trend in the funding for these disciplines seen in some parts of the world. Most research done at research-intensive universities, including in the social sciences and humanities, is fundamental or basic research, expanding the frontiers of knowledge through researcher-directed methodologies of discovery and analysis. The expansion of knowledge is, of course, important for its own sake, but the countless practical applications that arise from research in all disciplines often take a long and unpredictable path. Strong and stable research funding will enable both the short-term and long-term benefits of university research to be fully realized.
5. International Research Cooperation. The networks of the leading universities will promote international cooperation in education and research and explore the feasibility of creating more formal collaborative projects in social sciences and humanities research. International cooperation in education in the fields of social sciences and humanities will be developed also through the use of modern online learning technologies.<sup>4</sup> International cooperation is essential if researchers in the social sciences and humanities are to address successfully global challenges and to understand social and cultural reality on the global scale. Global networks of research universities can play an important role in supporting international cooperation. European and North American universities have played a leading role in this cooperation. In recent years, Asian universities have also been developing their own networks in various fields of social sciences and humanities. However, networks of leading research universities have not been established in every region. The signatories to this statement will work with research universities, especially in Latin America and Africa, to establish cooperative relationships and assist them in building strong sectors of comprehensive research universities.

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[http://www.leru.org/files/publications/LERU\\_AP16\\_Online\\_Learning\\_at\\_RIUs\\_final.pdf](http://www.leru.org/files/publications/LERU_AP16_Online_Learning_at_RIUs_final.pdf)



**Dated on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2014**

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