

# Revitalisation of the Humanities in Higher Education: Premise and Promise

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## Abstract

In a rapidly changing, digitalised world around us, the humanities appear to be fading into oblivion. STEM subjects, Information technology and artificial intelligence are shaping a machine-driven universe where humanity does not seem to matter. Soaring unemployment across the world is making youth question the value of the humanities. Higher education institutions are facing a continuous decline in this domain. In an ever-changing atmosphere, academics in the humanities are themselves uncertain about the direction of their disciplines. The advent of COVID-19 has only deepened the decline in the value of humanistic education. At the same time, it is evident that humanity has suffered the greatest loss. This literature review-based research argues that in the revelling of STEM research, we should not forget that we need more and not less human connection. A reinvigoration of the discipline is required to bring it on par with society's demands. In this changing landscape, the onus is on the academia to transform the negative perceptions surrounding this area and revitalise the humanities to make them relevant and desirable to higher education aspirants. The humanities scholars need to prepare their students to confront change and forge new paths for themselves that can establish the relevance of the humanities in the increasingly unequal world. We require humans to address the human-driven problems of the world.

**Keywords:** Decline of the Humanities; higher education; impact of COVID-19 on society and education; revitalisation of the humanities; value of the Humanities

## 1. Introduction

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2022), the humanities are “those branches of knowledge that concern themselves with human beings and their culture or with analytic and critical methods of inquiry derived from an appreciation of human values and the unique ability of the human spirit to express itself.” The humanities include the study of literature, linguistics, philosophy, religion, ethics, jurisprudence, history and the arts. The humanities differ in content and method from the physical sciences and to some degree from the social sciences. The humanities include the study of all languages and literatures, the arts, history, and philosophy. Humanities help us explore human thought and expression. Through studying the humanities, we discover how we were in our past and what the future could perhaps hold for us.

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Klugman (2017, 421) argues that “the humanities are essential for understanding our place in the world, our connections to each other, and to the functioning of our society” because they provide citizens with the insight necessary to establish democracies. The humanities enable people to see others not as objects but as human beings like themselves, intelligent, imaginative and sensitive, worthy of respect.

Holm et al. (2015) discovered the following attributes of studying the humanities through their widescale global study:

### 1.1 Intrinsic value

Although the study of humanities carries other advantages, it has an inherent value in learning history, culture and the arts. The study of literature and the arts encourages aesthetic appreciation and promotes personal and spiritual development. The humanities inspire members of a culture to realise, preserve, and at times even challenge their cultural heritage.

### 1.2 Social and economic value

The humanities “help create tolerance and understanding between citizens, thereby leading to social cohesion. They aid decision-making, especially on the complex ethical issues that confront society as a whole” (Holm et al., 2015, 12). Humanities students can accrue economic benefits through their scholarships and training students in different professions. Their research is utilised by many other disciplines such as the social sciences, medicine and engineering.

### 1.3 Critical thinking

The cornerstone of the humanities is critical thinking. Although other disciplines incorporate critical thinking, the humanities are predicated upon it. In addition, creativity and human motivation exemplified and explored by the humanities are essential for action in society.

### 1.4 Decline of the humanities

Research indicates that the humanities are in constant decline. With rising tuition costs, unsustainable student loans and soaring unemployment, the humanities are under threat of becoming redundant (Fein, 2014). Enrolment rates in the humanities are decreasing and many are questioning the value of pursuing the humanities as career choices. Some are dissatisfied with the quality of courses being offered and others are worried about their immobility toward the needs of minorities.

While the “automation technologies such as machine learning and robotics play an increasingly great role in everyday life, their potential effect on the workplace has, unsurprisingly, become a major focus of research and public concern” (Chui et al., 2016, 1). In the pursuit of greater output, better quality and fewer labour relations issues, rapid and vigorous automation of several occupations is taking place. The question in people’s minds is which jobs are likely to be replaced by machines. Although automation will not wipe out all occupations, it is expected to impact nearly all professions to varying degrees. The face of automation has changed from manufacturing to integration in and transformation of entire sectors, for example, healthcare, agriculture and food service, finance, transportation and law enforcement.

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Automation implies a change in the workplace for all. The relentless inundation of technology presents problems in harnessing its capability and preventing its pitfalls. The humanities seem to become redundant as machines take over many jobs that require a human touch. In this context, it is essential to deliberate on the place of the humanities in our society.

Nussbaum (2010) warns of drastic changes occurring in the education of young minds in democratic societies around the globe. In the quest for profit, educational systems abandon the skills necessary to preserve democracies. These changes are heralded by the progressive removal of the humanities at both primary and higher education levels. Policymakers view the humanities as superfluous to remain competitive in the markets. These courses are not only being disregarded in the curricula, but they are also losing respect in the eyes of students and their parents. Instead of focusing on unnecessary knowledge of the humanities, the purpose of education is considered to impart testable skills necessary for producing financial success. “If this trend continues, nations worldwide will soon be producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements” (Nussbaum, 2010, 2).

Since the beginning of the pandemic, science has taken centre stage. The world is eager to engage with scientific research about the damage caused by COVID-19, its remedies and the production and efficacy of different vaccines. The humanities are deemed to be irrelevant to what the world's priorities are. The humanities are constantly criticised for self-serving and trivial research for the sole purpose of professional development. Insiders and outsiders question the legitimacy and the value of the humanities, especially when the students have to pay huge fees and the government has to fund research that seems to have little meaning. Humanities graduates are unhappy with lower salaries than their STEM subjects counterparts and the pressure to publish in academia. They face uncertain futures under heavy student loans as there seem to be few opportunities after graduation.

“One might conclude that the Humanities cannot be saved. The speed of change in a world driven by IT and AI and STEM is so profoundly different from the deep contemplative reflection expected in the Humanities. Yet it is at this time that we need the Humanities more than ever to assist our students to see through the cant and misinformation that is all consuming in our world” (Atkinson, 2021, 148).

The study aims to explore the reasons behind the decline of the humanities, establish justification and propose approaches for revitalising the humanities in higher education.

### 2. Methods

The study is qualitative. A review of the literature prior to and after the pandemic was conducted to ascertain the state of the humanities in higher education. A thematic analysis was conducted to extract the debates about the value of the humanities, their decline, the impact of the pandemic and the way forward for the humanities. Research databases and the web was searched to obtain relevant material. This topic has not been widely researched, especially in the context of the pandemic. Hence, the present study would contribute to understanding the revitalisation of the humanities in higher education. It will justify the revitalisation and how it can be accomplished.

### **3. Results**

The findings of the thematic analysis of the literature review are given below.

#### **3.1 Decline prior to COVID-19**

Lea (2014) notes that compared to the first World War, when students were required to take courses in literature, languages, history, philosophy, social sciences, natural sciences and mathematics, only a small percentage of students are required to take liberal arts course. This decline in the requirement of the humanities courses means a downturn in the hiring of the humanities faculty.

Interest in the institutions of the liberal arts has been waning as they are being judged on the criteria of years to graduation, average initial graduate salary and the number of graduates gaining employment within the first year after graduation (Klugman, 2017).

With the minimisation or closure of humanities departments, the funding available for these programmes has been significantly reduced. There is a concomitant over production of PhDs unable to find tenure-track academic employment. At the same time, the spiralling costs of postgraduate education and huge pressure on graduates to publish and teach contributes to the relinquishing of PhD studies.

The humanities faculty are being asked to incorporate professional development modules to train research students for non-academic careers. This has been met with reluctance. "The humanities and the social sciences demonstrate that the professionalization of graduate education is gradually transforming the norms and values of liberal arts disciplines in response to societal and workplace demands" (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2005, 76).

#### **3.2 Discourse of irrelevance**

Le Ha (2021) argues that for many years we have constantly encountered a forceful and overwhelming discourse that, compared to the STEM graduates, the humanities graduates are irrelevant, ill-equipped and unprepared for today's competitive world of the knowledge economy. This message has been communicated in countless reports and articles and has been adopted by and repeated by the higher education students, academics, administrators, employers and parents. This idea has become a norm and has led to the closure and cancelling of humanities programmes. The discourse of irrelevance is centred on employability only. It does not consider the knowledge and skills gained by the humanities students or their role in the transformation of society.

#### **3.3 Rise of the STEM and business management subjects**

The scepticism about the value of humanities is being propagated in both public and private arenas. Many politicians have voiced strong anti-humanities and antiliberal arts sentiments. (Klugman, 2017; Adams, 2016). Conversely, there is a shift towards the attractiveness of STEM and management subjects. With the entire world looking for remedies for the pandemic and diseases like cancer and HIV and the problems of sustainable growth, it is not a surprise that STEM programmes are the primary beneficiaries of research funds and employment opportunities.

Lea (2014) argues that universities adopt a more managerial ideology that requires more business-like governance. The growing financialisation of Western economic markets has increased the demand for organisational standardisation. “Based on these imperatives, managerialism can be interpreted as an ideology and theory of organizational efficiency that promotes a hierarchical managerial form of governance, specifically one that imposes procedural controls in order to limit the independence of the professional practitioner and other employees in the pursuit of greater organizational efficiency” (Lea, 2014, 262).

In incorporating this liberal ideology, the focus on the public good in cultural achievements and society's well-being is lost to individual self-concern. The marginalisation of the humanities supports the view of education as a private instead of a public good. With reduced liberal arts courses and the declining humanities faculty, the available funding is ploughed into the social sciences, business management and technology-oriented programmes. In addition, the number of administrative and support staff has increased. The interest in social sciences is linked to their relevance to the knowledge economy.

### **3.4 Academic capitalism and the knowledge economy**

The term knowledge economy was introduced in the 1960s to describe a move from a traditional economy to one where the production and consumption of knowledge are vital. This type of economy results from the collaboration between organisations and academic institutions engaged in research and development. This collaboration is further extended to the programmers who enable individuals to access and utilise the research data to improve applications. Information and communication technologies are necessary for a knowledge economy (Piotrowski, 2015).

The world bank (2013) identifies the following pillars of the knowledge economy.

- The education and training of individuals who can create, share and apply knowledge are essential.
- An efficient communication system to distribute and process the knowledge.
- An economic environment to facilitate and promote the free flow of information and entrepreneurship.
- Partnership between private companies, community, universities and think tanks to generate and use new knowledge.

One of the main reasons the humanities have seen a decline in enrolments is the escalating cost of tertiary education, with government funding diminishing as the expenses arise. As a result, universities are thinking of ways to compensate for the shrinking public support by liaising with businesses to generate external revenue.

Therefore, the emphasis of higher education is twofold firstly, to reduce costs for students and to generate income “in the form of patents, grants, contracts, gifts from corporations and individuals, fees for services, and other entrepreneurial activities. Collectively, these activities are labelled academic capitalism, a term developed by Slaughter and Rhoades (2009)” (Somers et al., 2018, 23). Academic capitalism or academic entrepreneurialism is the practice of market and market-like behaviours to produce external income. This practice motivates the universities to adopt a more commercial and business-like approach. In an entrepreneurial university, the focus shifts to cutting costs and generating revenue (Somers et al., 2018; Park, 2011).



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Lea (2014) supports this view by stating that as a response to the knowledge economy's demand for profitable knowledge products and services, higher education has supported the growth of academic capitalism. The practice of academic capitalism has meant that the university's function is to serve the knowledge economy by producing individuals acting as economic agents. The knowledge produced from these activities is considered a commodity instead of a public good.

“In this manner, academic capitalism has sought to reshape the university to serve the new/knowledge/information economy. As universities increasingly embrace these ends, the focus is no longer on social welfare but on wealth production and on ‘enabling individuals as economic actors’” (Lea, 2014, 276).

However, in this race of knowledge production for economic benefit, the humanities have trailed behind in their desire to grant-allocating organisations compared to the disciplines with greater value to the industry. As a result, the humanities are disregarded by the organisations and students who assign importance to knowledge only for its financial viability (Lea, 2014).

### 3.5 Impact of COVID-19 on society

According to the United Nations (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic is more than a health crisis. It is a human, social and economic disaster. Prior to the pandemic, disparities and suffering in our society were already there. COVID-19 has exposed and heightened these deep-seated gaps and the pain. It has caused widespread loss of lives and livelihoods. It has affected all sections of the human population and is especially damaging to the most vulnerable members of society. The disabled, women, low-income households, children, youth, migrants and minorities have been disproportionately affected (OECD, 2022).

People without access to safe shelters, running water, nutritious food and health facilities are disproportionately affected by COVID-19. With the closing down of businesses and public institutions, millions have lost employment. Struggling economies have been further pushed into poverty and hunger. Inequity, injustice and discrimination have increased to alarming levels, with the resources becoming ever scarce. It is clear that COVID-19 is not just a health crisis. If these challenges are not addressed, the pandemic's social crisis will worsen.

### 3.6 COVID-19 and higher education

As mentioned above, even prior to the pandemic, the STEM subjects were gaining popularity, parallel to the decline in the importance of the humanities. This trend has grown as the world faces the most brutal job market. Soaring unemployment rates have resulted in uncertainty for the graduates. Governments and educational institutions inject funding into the vaccine development programmes and technological support, whereas cultural activities have been halted and funding for the humanities cut. The message seems clear to the youth that there is no future in the humanities. In this uncertain environment and with STEM subjects being associated with higher job prospects, students are looking to recession-proof their degrees and reconsider their choices for their majors at universities (Goldsworthy, 2021).

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Baker et al. (2021) argue that human beings depend on science and technology for necessities and luxuries. “Life-saving and life-prolonging medicines, communication technologies, modes of transportation, energy-efficient building materials, or early severe weather warning systems are just a few examples of STEM inventions with a global impact. More than ever, the future depends on STEM disciplines to support health, economic advancement, and equality for diverse populations” (Baker et al., 2021, 3).

They maintain that due to the significance of STEM education, it should not be limited to those majoring in these subjects but also be included in the study of all disciplines. They believe that investing in STEM education will yield profits for future generations.

Braund (2021, 3) similarly emphasises critical STEM literacy for all to be able to engage with STEM issues. He points out that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed people to vast amounts of scientific, mathematical and technical knowledge. “It seems that overnight, we were confronted with concepts in virology, immunology and epidemiology and bombarded by numbers and equations from mathematical modelling and statistics and graphical representations of varying kinds and complexity” (Braund 2021, 2). Thus, the pandemic has highlighted the importance of solutions based on STEM knowledge and to understand it clearly, one needs critical STEM literacy.

### 3.7 Science is not enough

The above authors have highlighted that science is not sufficient to address the extensive challenges that humanity faces today. STEM knowledge is vital to leading healthy and comfortable lives; however, without the human ability of critical thought and evaluation, STEM-related knowledge can be used to manipulate the consumers of such information.

“As educators in STEM pedagogy and STEM content areas, we passionately want all students to be informed citizens who critically evaluate what is presented to them and rely on facts rather than misinformation and unfounded claims that are not based on scientific precedence or supported by well-researched and established principles” (Baker et al., 2021, 3).

Braund (2021) notes that the measures to control the pandemic brought together experts from different disciplines that do not necessarily collaborate otherwise. While scientists worked on the treatment of the pandemic, physicists explored the dynamics of air currents to understand the transmission of the virus. Engineers repurposed engineering plants to design personal protective equipment (PPE). In addition, they developed information systems to keep track of infections. On the other hand, psychologists and sociologists modelled and anticipated mental health and behaviour patterns while economists projected and planned to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic on regional and global economies.

He further argues for a new approach to STEM education where knowledge is used to engage with a shift to critical literacy instead of being accepted and indisputable. An interdisciplinary methodology is required to combine STEM and humanities knowledge to understand the social dimension better when dealing with crises like COVID-19. Critical STEM literacy will need to be complemented by the wisdom of history, philosophy and social context to understand the social practice of science. Thus, to revitalise the curriculum,

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we need to revitalise both STEM and humanities education so that we can engage with ideas and practices affecting us as human beings.

Burnard et al. (2021) promote similar collaboration between different disciplines where arts and sciences are combined to search for shared and sustainable futures. Instead of STEM or the arts, unite to construct new ways of knowing. Allowing arts and science to teach together can help bring together knowledge and skills from different disciplines to challenge established patterns. It can result in different capabilities to influence the environment, society, politics and the economy. “The integration of scientific and artistic perspectives brings forth analytical thinking and empathetic thinking, offering a range of different modalities for ‘dwelling’ with objects of attention, of thinking and being in the world” (Burnard et al., 2021, 117).

The United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, while launching a COVID-19 global humanitarian response plan in March 2020, stressed that “We must come to the aid of the ultra-vulnerable – millions upon millions of people who are least able to protect themselves. This is a matter of basic human solidarity. It is also crucial for combating the virus. This is the moment to step up for the vulnerable” (UN, 2020).

These words bear testimony to the fact that science alone is not sufficient to solve the problems of our world. Our humanity is under threat and these challenges require not just scientific information but also human understanding to be approached in the long term. We live in a deeply fractured and unequal society and one solution cannot save all. We need not just the knowledge of science; we need to address societal problems of poverty, hunger, inequality, exclusion, unemployment and protection through insights from both STEM and the humanities.

### 3.8 Revitalisation of the humanities

The humanities are essential for a healthy democracy. They are built on critical thinking, imagination and the knowledge of history and cultures. Le Ha (2021) argues that the irrelevance discourse surrounding the humanities is highly inappropriate because it disregards the holistic purpose of education, such as promoting compassion for human beings and serving the communities. Humanistic education is necessary for the well-being of people and the planet.

In order to avoid a “college bubble”, Fein (2014) proposes that higher education should focus on educating students to be competent professionals. Socialisation is vital for gaining the competence required of capable professionals. They need to be self-motivated to pursue, utilise and build on their talents.

Self-direction is another critical aspect of reliable professionals willing to take risks and then be accountable for their decisions. They are human and will not always make the right decisions. However, they need to be prepared to make mistakes and learn to form them. They can utilise their knowledge and experience to make the right choices.

Self-directed individuals can communicate well. If they cannot communicate what they have learned, their knowledge will have little impact.



Self-directed individuals are capable of independent thought and are life-long learners. They need to assess what is happening around them and organise and evaluate information based on their knowledge and experience of the world.

They need to take into account how their choices would affect others. For this purpose, they require practical social skills. If a leader does not communicate effectively with those they lead, it can result in demotivated team members. “People who do not understand themselves have difficulty understanding others. Those who cannot control their personal feelings are sure to alienate others because they do not appreciate—or care to appreciate—the effect these have on others. In a diverse world, democratic leaders who have not acquired the requisite social abilities generally find themselves unable to effectuate what they know and/or desire” (Fein, 2014, 204).

The above characteristics of competent professionals suggest that being competent and reliable is not only about technical knowledge. Much of what is expected of competent professionals involves emotional intelligence, critical thought, decision making and interpersonal relationships. All these aspects can be acquired through the humanities.

Altschuler and Dillon (2020) believe that scientific and technological practices require the humanities to be exercised ethically and responsibly. The humanities have proven essential for healthcare practitioners working on the frontline of the pandemic. “Intensive Care Units fill to capacity, and healthcare workers are asked to choose between protecting staff and patients because of inadequate supplies of Personal Protective Equipment. We need health ethics training both to ensure equitable care and to help healthcare practitioners forced to make brutal decisions” (Altschuler & Dillon, 2020, 838).

Xenophobia, racism and other biases resulted in stigmatising individuals, groups and even countries. Humanities perspectives are needed to make the lay and even educated public understand the nature of scientific phenomena.

As academics, we should all be troubled by the decline of the humanities and talk about the erosion of ethics and morality due to devaluation of the humanistic education. Parallel to this argument, we should emphasise the advantages of the humanities and provide a compelling rationale to the various stakeholders (Hearn & Belasco, 2015).

Klugman (2017) proposes incorporating humanities courses in STEM subjects to humanise the professions. These professionals work with other people in their workplaces. Knowledge of the humanities will improve their communication, enable them to establish better interpersonal relationships and serve the public better.

ASHE Report (2005, 75) recommends “dual master’s degrees that link the M.A. or M.Phil. in a humanistic discipline with a professional degree in business, journalism, library science, law or even medicine”.

### **3.9 Digital humanities**

Digital humanities is a new form of scholarship based on collaborative, transdisciplinary and digital education and research (Schnapp, 2013). It has expanded the conventional concepts of knowledge in the humanities, arts and social sciences. It draws on the opportunities afforded by the digital and the humanities. It has blurred the boundaries between the different disciplines by incorporating new ways of inquiry and reviving those

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that have been neglected. It has increased humanities research's scope, visibility, and social impact by complementing classroom-based learning with applied, project-based learning.

Digital humanities focus on how the knowledge and skills characteristic of the humanities can be reshaped in multimodal form. It helps the humanities establish their role in the networked world.

In order to reclaim their lost significance, the humanities have a unique opportunity to revitalise themselves through the ashes of the pandemic. The arts, humanities, social and physical sciences have the potential to contribute to the upliftment of humanity by exploring the issues of societal importance and collaborating with other disciplines to overcome them. The knowledge of these different disciplines should be utilised for the public good, but academics should also partner closely with the community members to understand their perspectives and incorporate them into their solutions (Richards et al., 2020).

The humanities provide us means to decode complex social problems and understand their historical context. They enable us to look further than the obvious and question the trust or mistrust in science. The pandemic has brought into focus our society's vulnerabilities and we can deal with these with a new vigour if we want our world to be a better and proportionate place for all (Elsner & Rampton, 2020).

### 4. Discussion

In general, higher education institutions and society are witnessing a decline in the value of the humanities. The growth of STEM subjects and concomitant automation of workplaces have threatened the future of human resources. At the same time, academia is under the burden of producing research and services to be financialised by the knowledge economy. Reduced public funding for the humanities and the parallel increase of funding for STEM is drawing students away from the humanities.

Academia is further concerned about the increasing bureaucratisation of higher education. Many academics feel that their prerogatives are being taken over by the increasing administrative regulations, which have harmed the spirit of authentic education. Unnecessary policies are leading to "intellectual stultification. Flexibility, creativity, and academic enthusiasm are eroded when those who teach are placed in a straightjacket by those no longer familiar with what takes place in the classroom" (Fein, 2014, 201).

Higher education is tasked with producing professionals and holistic human beings who are competent for their careers and responsible citizens of a country. Society depends on them for their expertise and good judgement. They need to be proficient and motivated to carry out the complex activities of their professions. One has to ask whether they have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their tasks and make the right decisions when faced with difficult situations. The same is true of members of society. Do our citizens have the necessary knowledge and abilities to understand their role in society? Are they able to assess situations and make sound judgements based on reasoning and understanding? Can they make the right choices and direct themselves and others towards their goals? Can they select the right leaders? Do they know their rights and respect the rights of others? Are they independent thinkers? Do they learn from their new experiences and situations? Are they lifelong learners? The answers to these questions can only be found when the technical or

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scientific knowledge is combined with the knowledge of humanities to develop accountable, autonomous and caring humans.

“A humanities approach is one in which such connections—drawn across time, geography, media, and competing paradigms—enable new perspectives and new possible futures to become visible, especially in a time of crisis” (Altschuler & Dillon, 2020, 839).

In our current context, science dominates the academic and social arenas. The public clings to any new scientific insight about the pandemic and the vaccines. The return to some form of normality has been possible due to the knowledge gained by the tests and trials conducted by the scientists.

As the crisis continues, science leads the focus of the governments and the public alike. However, science cannot provide all the answers to our planet's dilemma. Science can provide medicines to relieve the COVID-19 symptoms, but it cannot ensure that they will work or be distributed and administered ethically and humanely. Science cannot eliminate the hesitancy many people feel about the vaccines or fight the mental health challenges faced by the vulnerable during the lockdown. It can provide data about COVID-19's impact and the underlying social inequalities, but it cannot eradicate them.

The social problems brought to the front by the pandemic go beyond science. To address the systemic and deep-rooted injustices and inequalities, we require a union of science and the humanities (Skorton & Howley, 2021; Elsner & Rampton, 2020).

Digital humanities offer a new perspective to revitalise liberal arts tradition in the digital world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It draws on the strengths of different disciplines to produce research for the sustainable growth of informed communities.

Universities need to focus on developing socially, politically and environmentally conscious societies. By revitalising the humanities, we can promote critical thinking and understanding to deal with challenges impacting us and build sustainable, cohesive societies. In order to achieve this, we need to integrate knowledge from different subjects and form collaborative partnerships to share and learn from others (Nelson Mandela University, 2022).

Educational institutions need to realise that the future of the humanities depends on linking the concept of education to the public good. The humanities have to do with humanity itself and involve knowing about humans for the social good. Hence, the humanities are not about negotiating interests but encouraging an intellectual environment where students can engage with matters impacting society's welfare. This way, the humanities can resist the view of higher education as a space that exists to benefit the market (Lea, 2014, 280).

## 5. Conclusion

The humanities are not being evaluated on their potential for holistic and intellectual development but on the notion of their value in enabling their graduates' capacity to acquire wealth. This indicates that the humanities faculty must justify the existence of the humanities as vital to the public good (Lea 2014). Even if, at first, the stakeholders are not entirely persuaded, this argument must be made proactively so that the concept of academic

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entrepreneurism can be challenged and the humanities can reclaim their rightful place as the custodians of human rights.

The general perception about the humanities in our current context is that they are not relevant to resolving the calamity we face in the form of COVID-19. However, in a world overwhelmed with health, educational, financial, social and environmental challenges, the humanities graduates with their aptitude for creativity, critical thinking and communication are not only relevant but essential. Humanities education renders them resilient, versatile and open-minded to uncertainty and innovation (Goldsworthy, 2021).

The humanities provide us tools to reflect on the deeply entrenched inequalities and question whether we want to study and create knowledge for profit or the good of our society. Saving the humanities might also mean more humanities classes for STEM subjects to increase their understanding of the role of the humanities in their careers (Klugman, 2017).

Contemplating our response to the pandemic is as essential as treating the disease and the provision of vaccines. The pandemic has provided us with the rationale to question whether we are equipped to find solutions to our problems and whether science alone can help us correct all the social wrongs (Elsner & Rampton, 2020).

Many non-profit organisations serve as a bridge between the academy and the communities. Many academics are also connecting with the communities beyond the campus walls (Lewin, 2010). However, we need more discussions and engagement with our communities to establish the relevance of the humanities to our milieu and revitalise them.

Higher education is the gatekeeper to different occupations. Knowledge is power. However, knowledge without independent thinking is not likely to make a difference in anyone's life. Higher education institutions should nurture independent thought and self-direction if they want the students to understand themselves, others, the world and their place in the world. This can be accomplished by introducing the content to them from the humanities. Our world is experiencing unprecedented challenges that cannot be tackled only with technical or scientific means. These challenges require the humanities to play their role. If we want to revitalise the humanities, we as academics can rise to this challenge and inspire our students about what role they can play and how. We need to determine what it means to be human in today's world. In the social turmoil of the pandemic, would the machines solve our problems of deeply entrenched inequalities? Do we need more humans or robots among us?

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