

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED SOCIETIES



ACLS
Strategic Priorities
2020-2024

PROGRESS REPORT 2021







SUPPORT CONNECT AMPLIFY RENEW

ACLS strives for inclusive excellence in humanistic scholarship through the direct support of fellowships and grants, by convening groups that share insights and solve problems, by amplifying the outstanding work of scholars, societies, and administrators, and by renewing humanistic knowledge through disciplinary and institutional change.

In May 2020, ACLS published a set of ambitious [Strategic Priorities](#) (appearing below in purple) describing the work we believe will help us create and sustain a more socially responsive, diverse, and equitable academy for the 21st century. We identified priorities that would engage our own staff and the broader ACLS community of learned societies, established faculty, contingent faculty, independent scholars, newly minted PhDs, higher education and research library leaders, foundations, and donors – all who share the common cause of supporting the advancement of humanistic scholarship.

We are proud of what we've accomplished during the first year of this four-year plan, particularly given the difficult conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are pleased to share this progress report with you.

Sustaining our grant and fellowship programs remains a cornerstone of our work, and we continue to seek new ways to extend their reach and increase their impact. Our priorities were also shaped by the urgent need to address the challenging professional and institutional conditions under which many humanistic scholars now work. Our serve over the past year has been fueled by our commitment to strengthening the infrastructure of the humanities and interpretive social sciences. We have expanded our mission and operations, embarking on carefully chosen public activities and change-oriented policy work.

Articulating our Strategic Priorities has helped us move forward with confidence both in the strong academic values that have guided us through the past hundred years and in our ability to address the challenges of the current moment.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2020–24

MAY 2021 PROGRESS REPORT: YEAR ONE

I. Encourage scholars and scholarship responsive to the needs and interests of diverse audiences

1. Outstanding scholars in conditions of precarity are our top priority. We will consult with all our partners and funders on how best to support the people at greatest risk, including underrepresented minority scholars and first-generation scholars.

- We will expand programs directed toward PhDs lacking full-time employment, especially given the challenges brought by the 2020 pandemic, including programs that bridge universities with a variety of cultural, community-based, and policy organizations outside academia. These programs will support scholars navigating a difficult hiring environment and demonstrate the good that humanistic thinking does in the world outside academia.

PROGRESS

In late spring 2020, we designed and launched two new pandemic response programs for recent PhDs, the Luce- and now Mellon-funded Leading Edge Fellowship, which places PhDs in non-academic posts working on COVID-related projects and social justice initiatives, and the ACLS-funded Emerging Voices Fellowship, which places recent PhDs in year-long posts in our ACLS Research University Consortium member schools. We appointed 45 Emerging Voices Fellows, with another 45 to be awarded in summer 2021. The Leading Edge program yielded 17 Luce Leading Edge Fellows, with an additional 40 Mellon Leading Edge Fellows to be awarded in summer 2021.

We directed all Central fellowships awarded in the 2020-21 competition to emerging scholars without tenure. We anticipate doing the same in 2021-22. Fifty percent of the Fellows chosen in the 2020-21 competition do not hold tenure-track positions. We have awarded 60 fellowships in the 2020-21 competition cycle. We anticipate naming a cohort of a similar size in 2021-22.

We underscored the needs of scholars without tenure and PhDs who wish to work outside academia in International Programs as well: in April 2021, the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation approved our request to set up a competition in 2021-22 for a small number of post-doctoral Public Scholars advancing Buddhist studies in posts outside the academy, with a concentration on journals, museums, and art galleries.

We sought to emphasize the needs of scholars in precarious positions in our communications, including fundraising appeals and the new monthly newsletter.

Through The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-funded Intention Foundry (described in greater detail starting on page 6) below we made emerging scholars of color leaders in ACLS-led planning for collaborative action designed to make the disciplines and interdisciplinary areas we represent more just and equitable.

2. With the aim of anchoring scholars in visible roles of teaching and writing in the public eye, we will support scholarship that fosters broad understanding of the value of humanistic study. We will make support a priority for:

- Research-active faculty in teaching-intensive posts, who are successfully engaging the interests of undergraduates
- Faculty engaging members of the public by working on topics of public interest or by communicating in publicly accessible ways

PROGRESS

In fall 2020, we established an ad hoc ACLS Board Committee on Fellowships, which considered how best to reach the goal of making the programs more responsive and welcoming to outstanding scholars of color and faculty teaching at a wide range of institutions. We will continue soliciting advice in this area, drawing on expertise from schools in our Associate member network, minority serving institutions, regional comprehensive schools, and community colleges, with the goal of designing new approaches this coming year. We identify this priority as a major focus of work in 2021 and beyond, for both our ACLS Central Fellowships and our externally funded fellowships.

We are currently working on an application to the National Endowment for the Humanities in their American Rescue Plan program that will focus on supporting projects and people that bring the humanities into the public sphere. Supporting institutions and individuals who are doing this work remains a significant priority for the coming year.

3. We will expand the definition of scholarship and what counts as a scholarly audience by developing fellowship and grant programs that promote inclusive excellence and sustain innovative, accessible work. Among the areas for which we will seek and direct targeted support are:

- Scholarship on themes of urgent societal interest
- Collaborative work with the sciences and technology fields
- Scholarly knowledge translated to broad audiences
- Scholarship on historically underrepresented communities, languages, and histories in the United States and the areas of the world where ACLS has a long history: Asia, eastern Europe and Eurasia, and Africa

PROGRESS

We designed the Emerging Voices Fellowship with this priority firmly in mind. Our call for EVF nominations specified that “Nominators should take into account that this program seeks to sustain emerging scholars who are ‘both-and’: who are both outstanding scholars and effective communicators to diverse audiences inside and/or outside the classroom. Priority in the review process will be given to nominated applicants who:

- Show promise of making the humanities meaningful to non-specialist audiences
- Come from diverse backgrounds including historically underrepresented groups such as Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, American Indian, or Alaskan Native communities, and people with disabilities

- Have experience or show promise of leadership in institutional contexts or within their disciplines or interdisciplinary area of study.”

Andrzej Tymowski and Joy Connolly pursued discussions with potential collaborators in Italy and Bulgaria in fall 2020. Progress on International Programs—specifically, creating a strategic plan for international engagement—is in the works for 2021-22.

We discuss our policy and direction-setting initiative related to the expansion of the definition of scholarship below, particularly the Luce Design Workshop (described on page 7).



Susan N. Deily-Swearingen

“The ACLS Emerging Voices Fellowship has allowed me to work on my professional development and continuing scholarship while also connecting me with important scholars in my field and becoming involved in public history projects that help make historical issues more accessible for audiences of historians and non-historians alike...My forthcoming book deals at length with the issue of minority dissent in the American experience. It is a topic I have long wanted to explore in a broader historical context. The course I have created [for the Cornell undergraduates], “Dissent and American History,” allows me to engage students in conversation about dissent and the different modes of its expression...the events at the Capital and the continuing Black Lives Matter protests make this a topic of study critical to understanding the contemporary world and the role of individuals within it.”

Susan N. Deily-Swearingen F’20 (ACLS Emerging Voices Fellow)
Rural Humanities Initiative, Cornell University

II. Strengthen relationships and address challenges together

1. Collectively address challenges. We will convene groups from different sectors of the academy, including our established gatherings (i.e., Consortium deans and center directors, the Conference of Executive Officers, review panels, and fellowship-granting organizations) and new initiatives:

- We will build new networks of those who see humanistic scholarship at the core of a college education, starting with liberal arts colleges.

PROGRESS

The pandemic and the movement for racial justice that gained momentum with the protests following the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd shifted our focus from liberal arts colleges to Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic Serving Institutions. Mary Richter led the expansion of our Associate network starting in summer 2020. We are inviting minority-serving institutions, starting with HBCUs in fall 2020 and expanding to include HSIs in winter 2021, to join at no cost for five years; we also invited select teaching-intensive schools with research-active faculty to join at the regular fee.

Joy, James Shulman, Mary Richter, and John Paul Christy have all intensified their efforts to strengthen networks. James has pulled together dozens of scholars on the World Humanities Report and the Commission on digital social and racial justice project, and others. John Paul and Mary are working together on a regular calendar of fellowship outreach activities, starting in May 2021 with a panel designed to illuminate the fellowship process (involving partners at the SSRC, NEH, Newberry Library, and the National Humanities Center) directed to HBCU faculty.

- We will engage our Associate members in the process of forward-looking systemic change in academia, ensure that we are responsive to their needs, and continue to diversify the membership list.

PROGRESS

We invited deans of our Associate member schools to join in conversations about issues of interest to them in online small-group meetings, which were met with great enthusiasm by the participants. We will continue these sessions at least once a year. We also added Associate-specific events to our Annual Meeting, starting in April 2021 with a panel on successful, enrollment-building experiments in undergraduate humanities courses.

We drew on the Associate members to create the Luce Design Workshop (described on page 7), which is composed of 15 individuals and teams from six Associate schools.

In general, we sought to make ACLS convenings such as our Consortium deans' meeting, our annual gathering of fellowship-granting institutions, our Conference of Executive Officers, and our Annual meeting places of collective knowledge-sharing and problem-solving. Our Annual Meeting in 2021 featured the work done by the six working groups on the future of the learned societies over the previous six months—inviting other attendees to comment on (and when the time is right, help publicize) the initiatives proposed by the working groups.

- We will gather representatives from the learned societies, institutions of higher education, graduate students, scholars of color, and first-generation scholars in ACLS Summer Institutes funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to advance issues concerning the academy of the future, beginning with strategies to advance equitable and inclusive policies.

PROGRESS

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded ACLS \$2 million in December 2019 to support a three-year project advancing the societies' efforts to increase equity, diversity, and inclusion. We hired Jovonne Bickerstaff as a program officer in higher education initiatives in autumn 2020 (the first time ACLS has hired a program officer to work on academic policy and practice) to lead this work. Jovonne re-designed the initiative to fit the new conditions of the pandemic, and it is now known as the Intention Foundry or IF. The meetings of the first round began over Zoom in April 2021 and will conclude in June: over 30 society directors, over 50 emerging scholars and scholars of color, and a dozen college and university leaders will have joined in the work this year. The second round will be organized in the summer and early fall of 2021.

- We will encourage efforts to assess and improve practices and benchmarks of graduate training, because we see graduate education as an important linchpin of cultural transformation in the academy.

PROGRESS

The Design Workshop (described on page 7) is taking graduate education as one of its central areas of concentration. In addition, one of the working groups that emerged from the society directors' "futures" initiative is focused on aggregating lessons learned in graduate education reform and planning near term work by ACLS to fill gaps in our understanding of diverse career paths of recent PhDs within certain fields.

Thanks to a variety of fellowship programs, US Programs has a rich array of current and recent PhDs on whom to draw for insight as we seek to accelerate change in doctoral education. Program officer Desiree Barron-Callaci is coordinating the networking of past Mellon/ACLS Public Fellows and professional development for the Luce and Mellon Leading Edge Fellows. US Programs is also coordinating the Scholars and Society Fellows, faculty who have committed to bringing their fellowship year of work outside academia back into their doctoral programs. We identify analysis and publication of results as a major priority of the coming two years.

2. Strengthen the societies. We will:

- Increase the diversity of our member societies, focusing on those sustaining the study of voices, experiences, and populations central to humanistic knowledge in the twenty-first century. Knowing the value of these communities, we look to strengthen emerging societies in the United States and around the world.

PROGRESS

We are delighted to have welcomed the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) to ACLS, along with the Philosophy of Science

Association. We will continue to actively seek out societies whose members represent vibrant directions in the humanities and to whom we might be able to be helpful in supporting their organizations.

- Consult on societies' needs and provide support at the level of governance and the planning of new directions.

PROGRESS

ACLS established the Futures of the Societies Working Group, nine society directors plus ACLS staff, informally known as “the Futurists,” whose charge was to address the existential challenges facing societies during and after COVID-19. From that group emerged six groups in the fall, designed to meet regularly through March 2021: their work on “hacking a new society,” “evolving governance,” “graduate education reform,” “undergraduate education,” “advocacy,” and “professional development” provided the material for our discussion groups at the 2021 Annual Meeting. These groups, along with the Intention Foundry, will also seed future work for both ACLS and individual member societies.

James Shulman and Sandra Bradley have engaged Wellspring Consulting to undertake a project that supports societies work in clarifying and expanding the value propositions that shape their membership strategies. This five month project aims to document, analyze, and share the viability of new directions for societies and to provide them with tools for assessing how best to incorporate elements of these directions in their individual strategic planning efforts.

3. Lead efforts at understanding and improving the status of humanistic studies. Any support we provide to the most vulnerable must be informed by solid understanding of structural challenges to humanistic scholarship at the institutional level. With our own resources and external support, we will:

- Assess institutional projects on selected issues
- Efforts to reverse declining undergraduate enrollments
- Improved metrics for scholarly productivity and service in humanistic fields
- Impact of public engagement

PROGRESS

We secured funding from the Henry Luce Foundation to establish the Luce Design Workshop for a New Academy. The Design Workshop includes teams from six schools—UC Davis, UC Santa Cruz, the University of Pittsburgh, the College of William and Mary, Washington University in St. Louis, and Stony Brook University—and over a dozen individual participants, including designers of new initiatives in the humanities and social sciences, leaders of humanities centers, writers about change in academia, ACLS leadership, and Elizabeth Peaslee, a design thinking consultant who is helping plan and guide our meetings. All of us share concerns about the flourishing of the humanities and related social sciences in the United States and are committed to bringing about change in institutional and disciplinary vision and culture as well as in day-to-day practices in departments, divisions, and schools.

The Design Workshop operates on the two principles that change doesn't take place overnight and that many change-oriented projects have been attempted or are underway right now. On the topic of doctoral education reform alone, efforts to reduce time to degree and open up programs to embrace a public humanities curriculum or preparation for diverse careers have a decades-long history. One of the main obstacles to systemic change in academia is that successes at one school either are not studied by other institutions or are recognized but not replicated. Consequently, as well as concentrating on local changes, the Workshop will also address the challenge of dissemination. We have already identified several venues for the sharing of results over the coming 12 months, including the AAU and our 39-member ACLS Research University Consortium, whose representatives (deans for humanities, deans of arts and science, deans of graduate schools, and provosts) are set to meet this October.

The proposals for change from the six teams revolve around the faculty reward structure, the work it captures and the work it overlooks or excludes; the design of doctoral curricula, and the persistence of long-standing admissions and curricular requirements; how faculty and graduate students engage with administration and with the public; how knowledge is organized in the form of departments, programs, and centers and through various forms of certification. We want the Workshop to focus on practical change but we also believe practical change must be informed by an ambitious vision and eloquently articulated values. Our goal is to design and circulate blueprints for action that can be enacted at these six institutions and then serve as influential examples for other institutions of higher education.

Through our continuing relationship with the Humanities E-Book project (now managed by the University of Michigan Press), our anticipated Digital Justice Commission, and the topics raised in the World Humanities Report, we will continue to document how current practices in measurements of the work of humanistic scholars do—or do not—accurately convey the value and values of their contributions. This work—and the work of the Design Workshop—will continue to be a focus for ACLS as we explore how reward systems shape culture and behavior in both intended and unintended ways.

- We will establish a commission on the sustainability of digital resources and projects, including best practice standards for planning, financing, and operating models in university and research libraries.

PROGRESS

We secured funding from the NEH in early spring 2021 to commence research on this project. In consultation with the Mellon Foundation and in light of our increased focus on the role of humanistic scholarship in challenging existing systems of exclusion, the project now focuses on the institutional, trans-institutional, and emerging structures that support access to and stewardship of digital projects around racial and social justice. These projects are important not only because they represent new thinking and new methods; they provide the basis for career-building and field-building for scholars who are diversifying the faculty and the subjects considered worthy of study.

“How Do We Get There? Accelerating Diversity in Slow-To-Change Humanities Fields,” a virtual roundtable presented by ACLS On Thursday, December 17, 2020

“We know that with racial and ethnic diversity comes a variety of perspectives and those perspectives are needed and welcome. Oftentimes in my universities—I’ve been at Penn, Georgetown, University of Pittsburgh, [and] Carnegie Mellon full time, and at Harvard, Yale, Princeton, [and] in many other places across the world on visiting appointments—usually when people start asking for ‘viewpoint diversity,’ they’re actually asking, ‘Can we hear some conservative viewpoints?’ or ‘Can we hear about religious viewpoints?’ And I do think that conservative, libertarian, and even far right-wing perspectives have a place in a university, as do religious perspectives. But they’re not a substitute for or superior to the kind of viewpoint diversity that comes when you have a richly, ethnically, and racially diverse faculty.”

Anita L. Allen, Henry R. Silverman Professor of Law and professor of philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania, the first African American woman to hold both a PhD in philosophy and a law degree, and the first to be elected President of The American Philosophical Association’s Eastern Division



III. Lift the profile of humanistic knowledge

1. We will amplify ACLS's own visibility and effectiveness as an advocate by:

- Encouraging staff and ACLS fellows to write and speak about the value of the humanities and social sciences, and encouraging fellows to engage in structural reform in their home departments.
- Supporting advocacy at all levels, including to college and university leaders, on behalf of humanistic studies. We will keep graduate students, faculty, society directors, and administrators apprised of concrete strategies for supporting humanistic work, including new research initiatives, departmental planning, and fundraising.

PROGRESS

We have pledged to circulate the action plans composed in the Design Workshop broadly; this is a central goal of that project.

Our Communications Director Heather Mangrum has established a monthly Community Newsletter; she also encourages and arranges venues for public writing and advocacy for the humanities. Joy was commissioned to write an essay on academic freedom for the AAUP journal *Academe*, which appeared in [the spring 2020 issue](#). Heather and Joy wrote several public letters and statements, including a public statement on the value of the humanities and social sciences in August 2020 that garnered dozens of signatures from around the country (www.wearehumanistic.org).

2. We believe that scholars in the academy can enrich their work and amplify the value of humanistic study by speaking to and working with writers, thinkers, and readers outside the academy who pursue, have studied, or are otherwise devoted to the humanities and social sciences. We will encourage the integration of voices and perspectives from outside the academy in our own thinking. We will seek support to establish a public program for Humanistic Scholarship in the 21st Century that will amplify our conversations about academia with partners from museums, libraries, corporations, community centers, and more.

PROGRESS

Fall 2020 saw the first events of a year-long series on the experiences of Black and Brown scholars in the United States. Participants have included ACLS fellows, foundation leaders, current university presidents, faculty leaders, and a member of the ACLS board. Our event series has included:

September 2020: [A Discussion on Race and Racism](#)

December 2020: [How Do We Get There?: Accelerating Diversity in Slow to Change Humanities Fields](#)

March 2021: [Forward-Looking Philanthropy: A Virtual Conversation Among Funders and Black Scholars](#)

One silver lining of the shift to remote work has been increased attendance at virtual events. We plan to continue hosting events online even as we return to in-person gatherings and convenings.

IV. Empower ourselves to work responsibly and inclusively

1. We will enhance our stewardship of relationships that support our strategic initiatives. We are grateful to our Board of Directors and will work with them to increase their impact, including in existing convenings and a new program for Humanistic Scholarship in the 21st Century. We will:

- Deepen our relationships with current partners (Consortium members, donors, and foundations), build new relationships, and continue to foster our good relations with and accountability to our funders and donors.

PROGRESS

We secured the renewal of membership for five years from 27 of the 29 universities whose memberships expired this year.

We continue to maintain strong relationships with all our funders. Expansion of that group is a high priority for the remaining years of the plan.

- Complete the Centennial Campaign and establish a fundraising strategy to secure diverse funding resources to ensure our sustainability through our second century.

PROGRESS

We anticipate a successful completion of the Centennial Campaign; if current projections hold, we will not only meet but exceed our campaign goal of \$125 million.

- Build community among current and former ACLS fellows through regular communications and events.

PROGRESS

We established the monthly newsletter and the Humanistic Knowledge series, described above.

2. We will review our daily practices with the goal of nourishing an inclusive, creative, rewarding atmosphere. We will empower ourselves to act knowledgeably and with confidence by fostering a full understanding of our mission and goals across the entire organization.

PROGRESS

2020 saw significant internal re-organizing as well as a major anti-racism initiative. Early in 2020, Kelly Buttermore was promoted to chief of staff. Sandra Bradley became Director for Governance and Society Relations, allowing her to focus her efforts on the Board, the societies, and other organizations with which ACLS is connected. In 2019, we renamed Fellowships and Public Programs to “US Programs” and moved the reporting lines of the directors of US Programs and International Programs from the vice president’s to the president’s office. In 2020, we hired a Communications Director and a Communications Specialist,

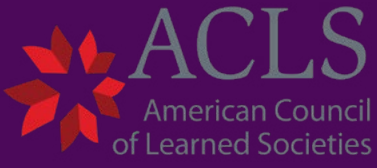
positions partly covered by a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Another Mellon grant contributed to hiring an Events Coordinator and a Program Coordinator in the President's Office. Simon Guzman became Chief Financial Officer and reorganized his team. Mary Richter became Chief Development Officer in recognition of her broadened scope of duties, now including the Associates network and research into foundation giving. HR Manager Tina Li led a successful effort to improve the annual evaluation process, and improved fairness and transparency by linking it to an updated merit process and salary review. We made promotions within US Programs and International Programs.

The staff has proved highly adaptable and hard-working throughout this challenging year of remote work, including the new staff who have never met colleagues in person. All staff and senior staff meet on a regular basis.

The Black Lives Matter protests in spring and summer 2020 made it clear that it was the right moment to devote significant energy to improving equity and inclusion and advancing anti-racist perspectives and habits in our daily work, hiring, public presentation, and general strategy. In fall 2020, we embarked on an anti-racism initiative with the assistance of the firm Hyphens and Spaces, including the establishment of an external Advisory Group and internal steering group. The project began by examining our internal culture, hiring processes, and review processes, and went on to examine our work with societies and with all aspects of our fellowship programs. We concluded this stage of the work by working across the organization to develop a shared vision for our anti-racist work, by establishing tangible goals and means of measuring progress, and assigning responsibility for those goals to particular individuals.

We are deeply grateful to our funders, donors, reviewers, participants in our activities, and all others who have offered us advice and support throughout the year. As always, we welcome your questions and comments at president@acsls.org.





633 3rd Ave
New York, NY 10017
acls.org

