

6:00am on October 21, 2026

Contact: media@academysciencesletters.org

Humanities Doctorates Down 49% since 2015 amid Shift from Beauty & Tradition to Power & Identity, Unprecedented Study Finds

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Examining the full text, not just titles and abstracts, of almost half a million dissertations during 1960-2025, an unprecedented new study finds:

- **A 49% drop in the number of humanities dissertations** since 2015, compared with a drop of under 5% in the social sciences
- This drop in humanities dissertations **does not track with widely cited external factors** such as funding cuts or the rise of STEM
- Contrary to claims that the humanities have been taken over by “relativism,” **there has been no overall decrease in truth-seeking language** since 1960; there has even been a modest increase
- Interest in beauty has declined, while interest in identity and power have risen sharply; **discussion of identity has roughly doubled each decade since 1960**
- **Attitudes toward inherited cultural traditions have reversed**, from appreciative to critical; positive appraisals of “western,” “European” and “American” cultural inheritance is down by about one-third since 1960

The study, *Humanities in Crisis: A Study of 65 Years of Humanities Dissertation Trends*, documents these and other important trends using rigorous methods of natural language processing and text analysis. It is being published by the American Academy of Sciences and Letters, a learned society dedicated to excellence in the liberal arts and learned professions.

The report can be downloaded [here](#). (A longer version with full technical details is available [here](#).) To facilitate interviews with the study author and members of the advisory committee, please contact media@academysciencesletters.org.

The authors write:

Perhaps the most theoretically consequential finding is the separation between the stability of *Truth* sentiment and the decline of heritage-term sentiment. These two outcomes are sometimes conflated in debates about the academy....**Truth-oriented vocabulary and its positive associations have been maintained across all fields and all decades. Sentiment toward heritage terms, by contrast, has shifted systematically and durably.** This separation implies that the changes documented in this corpus are better described as a reorientation of cultural valuation than as an abandonment of intellectual standards.

The study authors are Josiah Ober of Stanford University, Rachel George of Stanford University, and Kirill Kalinin of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. The study was overseen by an advisory committee chaired by Carlos Eire of Yale University and including Steven Justice (UC-Berkeley), Jon Levenson (Harvard), and Noël Valis (Yale).

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