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Neubauer Collegium Launches Initiative to Explore the Future of Humanistic Scholarship and Teaching

The Future of the Humanities project, supported by the MacArthur Foundation, will convene diverse perspectives to articulate the value of the humanities in higher education and society.

CHICAGO—The Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society has received a \$500,000 grant from The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to launch an initiative that will assess the current state of humanistic teaching and research in higher education and explore its future prospects. The Future of the Humanities project will convene a series of meetings at which diverse groups will seek to articulate some of the defining principles and core qualities of humanistic inquiry.

The interdisciplinary collaboration will begin at the Neubauer Collegium in January 2026 and will continue for two years. Participants will include, among others, scholars in the humanities and other disciplines based at public and private universities and colleges, along with representatives from research and cultural institutions, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies.

The initiative's core research group will consider strategies for adapting to recent shifts in political discourse, public perception, and the research landscape. In partnership with researchers at NORC at the University of Chicago who study the value and outcomes of engagement with the humanities, arts, and culture, the group will consider a range of data to understand the role of the humanities in higher education and its value to society. At the conclusion of the project, the group will produce a set of recommendations to inform those engaging with the humanities in higher education and public life (e.g., scholars, educators, civic leaders, cultural producers, and others).

“At a time when sustained, exploratory conversations across disciplines and institutions have become increasingly precious, it is thrilling to convene this multi-year conversation at the Neubauer Collegium, an institution that has gained visibility over the past decade as a forum for rigorous, collaborative work that addresses complex and pressing problems,” said David J. Levin, Interim Director of the Neubauer Collegium for the 2025–2026 academic year.

The Neubauer Collegium, an interdisciplinary research incubator at the University of Chicago, is uniquely equipped to lead this project. Now entering its second decade, the Collegium has supported nearly 150 research collaborations in the humanities and humanistic social sciences. Collegium projects integrate disparate perspectives and methodologies, convening unlikely partners from around the world to work on questions too complex for any single discipline to address. These projects thrive in a research environment shaped by the University of Chicago’s longstanding commitment to interdisciplinary thinking, inventive scholarship, and freedom of expression.

Distinct among research centers and institutes, the Collegium incorporates the visual and performing arts into larger research inquiry and regularly engages communities outside the academy as research partners. The Collegium’s approach to fostering rigorous and impartial dialogue among academics, practitioners, policymakers, and members of the public will be essential to the success of the Future of the Humanities project.

At the initiative’s first convening, participants will begin developing a shared understanding of the current landscape and identifying metrics that will assist them in their deliberations. The group will also determine the timeline and thematic focus for subsequent gatherings.

“I’m deeply gratified that we will have an opportunity to convene such a critical conversation at the Neubauer Collegium, and I am hopeful about our ability to imagine forward-thinking ideas for the future of the humanities,” said Neubauer Collegium Roman Family Director Tara Zahra.

Photo of the Neubauer Collegium by Tom Rossiter.

MEDIA INQUIRIES

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GENERAL INFORMATION

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