

NOVEMBER 30, 2013, 2:29 PM

## The Real Humanities Crisis

By **GARY GUTTING**

“Crisis” and “decline” are the words of the day in discussions of the humanities. A primary stimulus for the concern is a startling factoid: only 8 percent of undergraduates major in humanities. But this figure is misleading. It does not include majors in closely related fields such as history, journalism and some of the social sciences. Nor does it take account of the many required and elective humanities courses students take outside their majors. Most important, the 8 percent includes only those with a serious academic interest in literature, music and art, not those devoted to producing the artistic works that humanists study.

Once we recognize that deeply caring about the humanities (including the arts) does not require majoring in philosophy, English or foreign languages, it’s not at all obvious that there is a crisis of interest in the humanities, at least in our universities.

Is the crisis rather one of harsh economic reality? Humanities majors on average start earning \$31,000 per year and move to an average of \$50,000 in their middle years. (The figures for writers and performing artists are much lower.) By contrast, business majors start with salaries 26 percent higher than humanities majors and move to salaries 51 percent higher.

But this data does not show that business majors earn more because they majored in business. Business majors may well be more interested in earning money and so accept jobs that pay well even if they are not otherwise fulfilling, whereas people interested in the humanities and the arts may be willing to take more fulfilling but lower-paying jobs. College professors, for example, often know that they could have made far more if they had gone to law school or gotten an M.B.A., but are willing to accept significantly lower pay to teach a subject they love.

This talk of “a subject they love” brings us to the real crisis, which is both economic and cultural (or even moral). The point of work should not be just to provide the material goods we need to survive. Since work typically takes the largest part of our time, it should also be an important part of what gives our life meaning. Our economic system works well for those who find meaning in economic competition and the material rewards it brings. To a lesser but still significant extent, our system provides meaningful work in service professions (like health and social work) for those fulfilled by helping people in great need. But for those with humanistic and artistic life interests, our economic system has almost nothing to offer.

Or rather, it has a great deal to offer but only for a privileged elite (the cultural parallel to our economic upper class) who have had the ability and luck to reach the highest levels of humanistic achievement. If you have (in Pierre Bourdieu's useful term) the "cultural capital" to gain a tenured professorship at a university, play regularly in a major symphony orchestra or write mega best sellers, you can earn an excellent living doing what you love. Short of that, you must pursue your passion on the side.

Teaching should be an obvious solution for many humanities majors. But secure and well-paying tenure-track jobs are disappearing, with [at least half of college teachers](#) now part-time adjuncts, many of whom, even when they combine several academic jobs, fail to make a living wage. As for non-college teaching, the sad state of so many of our K-12 schools — with their unprepared and undisciplined students, overcrowding, lack of funding and obtuse, test-obsessed bureaucracies — make teaching there a path to frustration and burnout.

The situation is even worse for those who want to produce the literary, musical and artistic works that sustain our humanistic culture. Even highly gifted and relatively successful writers, artists and musicians generally are not able to earn a living from their talents. The very few who become superstars are very well rewarded. But almost all the others — poets, novelists, actors, singers, artists — must either have a partner whose income supports them or a "day job" to pay the bills. Even writers who are regularly published by major houses or win major prizes cannot always live on their earnings.

We are rightly concerned about the plight of the economic middle class, which finds it harder and harder to find good jobs, as wealth shifts to the upper class. But we have paid scant attention to the cultural middle class, those with strong humanist interests and abilities who can't reach the very highest levels, which provide almost all the cultural rewards of meaningful work. I'd like to offer some specific suggestions for improving the situation.

We could open up a large number of fulfilling jobs for humanists if (as I've [previously suggested](#)) we developed an elite, professional faculty in our K-12 schools. Provide good salaries and good working conditions, and many humanists would find teaching immensely rewarding. Meeting the needs of this part of the cultural middle class could, in fact, be the key to saving our schools. At the same time, colleges should rethink their dependence on adjuncts, who often differ from regular faculty members more in their poor pay and work conditions than in academic quality. If adjuncts don't meet the standards to be part of the regular faculty, they shouldn't be hired. If they do, they should be treated the same.


Fair treatment for writers and artists is an even more difficult matter, which will ultimately require a major change in how we think about support for the arts. Fortunately, however, we already have an excellent model, in our support of athletics. Despite our general preference for capitalism, our support for sports is essentially socialist, with local and state governments providing enormous support for professional teams. To cite just one striking example, the Minnesota State Legislature recently appropriated over \$500 million to help build the Vikings a new stadium. At the same time, [the Minnesota Orchestra](#) is close to financial

disaster because it can't erase a \$6 million deficit. If the Legislature had diverted only 10 percent of its support for football, it would have covered that deficit for the next eight years.

Over all, taxpayer money provides more than a billion dollars annually in tax exemptions and stadium subsidies for N.F.L. teams. (See Gregg Easterbrook's recent [article in The Atlantic](#) and his book "The King of Sports" for much more on this topic.) Other sports also receive generous support. Even major universities subsidize professional sports through their (mostly money-losing) athletic programs, which provide a continuing influx of professional players. Universities could reduce their efforts to field teams playing at near-professional levels and direct the money saved to artistic activities much closer to their core mission. The federal government could make a significant contribution simply by making sure that writers and artists have [good affordable health insurance](#).

These may seem utopian suggestions, but without drastic actions, we will continue ignoring the needs of our cultural middle class. That's the real crisis in the humanities.


*Gary Gutting is a professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, and an editor of Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews. He is the author of, most recently, "Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy since 1960," and writes regularly for The Stone.*



**Harold Grey** Utah Mr. Gutting, you hit the head on the nail with this comment: "Even major universities subsidize professional sports through their (mostly money-losing) athletic programs, which provide a continuing influx of professional players. Universities could reduce their efforts to field teams playing at near-professional levels and direct the money saved to artistic activities much closer to their core mission."


Why do universities subsidize sports? I don't see any academic reason for their support of football and basketball particularly. All the hype that goes into college rivalries seems to me a pathetic waste of emotion and resources. A college is an educational institution. When the football coach is paid more than the university president, what are we teaching?

Nov. 30, 2013 at 9:57 p.m. RECOMMENDED 1



**brooklynbridge** Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia The humanities departments of most universities no longer teach critical thinking and clear expression. They teach dogmatic post structuralism and inane jargon. No wonder the humanities have lost their influence, not only in the job market but in society as a whole. The current generation of academics stopped communicating to all but their fellow theorists (at one conference after another) a long time ago. They publish indecipherable articles and unreadable books. They expect students to parrot cant, not confront the human condition.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 9:51 p.m.



**Albert Hew** Malaysia In the country where I am living, there is little emphasis on the teaching of humanities. University education has been by and large emphasizing about technical skills. The consequence is that we have generations of youth lacking the desire to quest new insights of everything from poetry and paintings to business models and politics. They lost the very basic ability to learn how to think creatively and critically, to reason, and to ask questions about things happened in their lives.

Over years of my tenure in my present company, I've observed many young engineers lack the conscious to develop ability to gain insights of things occurred in their daily life, the need to understand the world and to bring clarity to the future. Their minds are regressive when confronting about ethical questions. Some even reject ideas to promote learning another language which might help them to gain an appreciation for the similarities in different cultures.

That's probably explained why so many can hardly move up in the value chain of job market. On the other hand, jobs which are intellectually demanding and require intensive innovation are scant.

In the context of where I live, the crisis of humanities is even deeper. To reverse the general perception on the nature and value of humanistic knowledge, it is going to be long long way and I am sure it is going to be costly too. I hope other part of the world would not slip into the similar dilemma.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 9:41 p.m.



**Patrice Ayme** Unverified California The "elite, professional faculty in our K-12 schools. Provide good salaries and good working conditions, and many humanists would find teaching immensely rewarding. Meeting the needs of this part of the cultural middle class could, in fact, be the key to saving our schools."

This is exactly how it works in the French Republic.

Specialized programs at the master level in French universities enable students to reach a proficiency level that, in turn, allows them to spend a year, or more, of intense specific preparation to the CAPES (Certificate of Aptitude for Professor in Secondary Education). Or the similar, but harder, more prestigious and better financially rewarded "Agregation".

Humanities are viewed as most fundamental in France.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 9:21 p.m. RECOMMENDED 1



**CraigieBob** Wesley Chapel, FL "The situation is even worse for those who want to produce the literary, musical and artistic works that sustain our humanistic culture...."

Prof. Gutting, I can't recall ever having seen this problem summarized as concisely as you have managed in your eighth paragraph. It seems almost criminal that, often after incurring substantial debt in pursuit of their degrees, students in the arts can be left at the mercy of "market discipline."

I doubt it 's much of an exaggeration to suggest that one or two percent of actors, musicians, and fine artists earn about 98 or 99 percent of the money available to practitioners of their various specialties.

Even worse, sometimes it seems that we in the U.S. discourage -- Read "starve out of existence" -- more of these forms of talent in one year than traditional artistic centers of Europe, i.e., France, Germany, or Italy, produce in a century. As you rightly point out, the problem isn't that those who 'fail' are insufficiently talented to succeed, but simply unable to attain sufficient stature in their specialties quickly enough to achieve self-supporting status.

Those fortunate enough to establish alternative careers can be reluctant to jeopardize reliable livelihoods for the meager opportunities available to "part-timers."

The net result, artistically and economically, is a deplorable waste of talent and treasure. But, still, the institutions cash the tuition checks, while even working artists fare little better than "The Help."

Nov. 30, 2013 at 9:05 p.m. RECOMMENDED 2



**Eugene** Los Angeles You mention the value offered by the humanities. The one you didn't mention is wisdom.

We've been great at building a technocratic society, and we all enjoy the benefits. But without the humanities, how is one supposed to put in context and assess wisely what one should do with the technological

capabilities developed?


You also didn't mention the problem of the modern research university which emphasizes discrete disciplines rather than a humanistic whole.

Even the discipline of philosophy itself has become just that -- one discipline among others -- and has given up the task of offering wisdom.

The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said something once about a civilization being in full decay without a sense of adventure. Adventure is something we only can understand by way of a humanistic context.


Without a strong, lived sense of the humanities, we may have economic growth and productivity, but I doubt that we'll experience anything like an intense sense of adventure -- because adventure is not just a matter of striking out in one direction or another but of somehow moving forward, and forward is a notion that has to be grounded one way or another in the wisdom of the humanities.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 9:02 p.m. RECOMMENDED 2




**Spoite** Columbus, Ohio An additional argument in favor of the Humanities in a large sense (including History, Social Sciences, and Foreign Languages, etc.) is that, according to business leaders, Humanities graduates generally have a more attractive profile for business employers than Business graduates. They are more open-minded, creative, and better educated. Most of all, they are globally aware and culturally literate (they may know a foreign language), something sorely missing in the US business culture and mostly absent from our generally mediocre Business schools, which, apart from the usual elite places, don't seem to understand that global awareness is probably the most important asset one can have today.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 8:22 p.m. RECOMMENDED 4



**stevemerlan** Redwood City CA A generation or more ago some of the university humanities departments, particularly English and literature departments, created a lot of ill will by adopting the idea of "theory" as their highest intellectual goal and attacking traditional attitudes toward the purpose and esthetics of the arts as reactionary oldthink. It didn't escape notice that these activists developed an ugly writing style, distinguished for its opacity, and were quick to seize opportunities to aggrandize themselves. Many people concluded that supporting humanities departments was simply supporting enemies of real art. This hasn't altogether changed, and a literature department can scarcely expect good will or support when it seems to make a fetish of being confrontational and "transgressive." Whatever theory maintains, the classics of our civilization are and will continue to be fundamental in forming our lives, and people who seem to resent this fact shouldn't be surprised when they find themselves mistrusted.


Nov. 30, 2013 at 8:08 p.m. RECOMMENDED 3



**poomakmak** tent You say: "We could open up a large number of fulfilling jobs for humanists if we developed an elite, professional faculty in our K-12 schools." Well, do you recognize that what goes with an "elite professional faculty" is precisely what we have in the "best" institutions: half of all UC profs don't write a book for at least ten years after tenure,

but they control publication on the journal and editorial boards and dominate the search process--so many adjuncts to choose from! Lindsay Waters at Harvard U. Press says a Harvard sells 175-600 copies, most to libraries--what is that about? A university big show takes 2-6 years to put on: it's dead before it opens. I love Dante, but I don't think a student doing an elective in Italian medieval literature is getting more than table-talk; why don't the masses find Dante on their own is a question worth asking, no? In any case, most of the crises of the humanities are self-inflicted, from the top down. The American system of "thought control" is effective, since it frequently stems from progressive humanists, like that former Harvard President who wanted to turn Africa into a toxic waste dump.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 7:32 p.m.




**Che Beauchard** Manhattan Given that Gary Cutting is a professor at a major university must know, those who succeed in obtaining jobs as tenured professors are those who have put together a sufficient track record in terms of scholarship and/or research, and increasingly universities are demanding that the track record also shows success in obtaining grant funding. No such demands are made of part-time adjunct teachers.

Now Mr. Cutting is right that society has a moral obligation to provide its adjuncts proper wages and other conditions of decent employment, which surely isn't the case now. But Mr. Cutting's suggestion that adjuncts either be fired or given the same as the tenured professor's overlooks the very different responsibilities of the two groups.

Mr. Cutting spends little space on a more difficult issue: the appalling treatment of our people generally, apart from those at the very top who do quite well. I suppose one article necessary addresses only bits and pieces of a problem. The shoddy treatment of adjuncts is only one example of what has happened to workers, be they automobile workers, retail workers, custodians, maids, or fast food workers, workers are now an oppressed class in America, and this is a something that will bring America as we have known it to an end if we allow it to continue.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 7:21 p.m. RECOMMENDED 1



**RS** Columbus, Ohio This commentary says students who major in humanities find it particularly difficult to find good work, and then says one reason is the lack of teaching opportunities.

But both issues apply to more than just students who major in the humanities.

In particular, education in both K-12 and college level are not looking for people who are both experts in their field and good teachers. They may have some who are both experts and good teachers, but that is not the criteria for employment.

In K-12 they are mostly looking for people with majors in education who can survive the teaching gauntlet. In college they are looking for experts who can produce research (and more "experts").

Presently the philosophy of education in the US is a mess. And it will not

provide jobs for experts who are good teachers until that philosophy is fixed.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 7:17 p.m. RECOMMENDED 9



**Scott Cole** Ashland, OR "Why should teachers -- or MTA conductors for that matter, the nearest competitor--feel that life-time job security is their entitlement?"

Tenure is not an entitlement--it's a non-monetary form of compensation which helps to make up for low pay. In my field, music, one can spend years in school to obtain a doctorate, but then full-time positions average only in the mid-\$40,000s. Due to the extremely low pay considering the education and opportunity costs, tenure can be the benefit that keeps teachers teaching. Schools, at least at the college level, should be careful not to end the practice without serious thought to the flight of talent that may ensue.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 6:52 p.m. RECOMMENDED 7



**Mark** Cheboyagen, MI We need to provide baseline financial support for the arts and humanities by providing support for the small institutions and companies that exist on the bottom of the artistic food chain. If we do that, this country might once again find its soul.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 6:38 p.m. RECOMMENDED 5



**Michael Cassady** 2412 Atherton Street, Berkeley, CA 94704 The "Humanities", moving into the networking and Information Age, is an odd-duck suffering identity fallen-arches and a chill quite similar to advanced rigor mortis. But, systemic incoherence, though frustrating, is part of any growth "happening" (I almost said the stupid word "process," which growth is not since growth must be able to escape its own faith-based, regenerative assumptions). As a graduate in philosophy at UC Berkeley, in CA, I'm satisfied down to the ground with my training in critical intelligence and medicinal irony.

As the 'queen of the humanities' philosophy requires active integration of both synthetic and analytic thinking. If public life is gravitating, as it appears to be, toward an information rich consensus culture, we the masses of practicing ordinary people will find it satisfyingly empowering to invest in an adequate working brain rather than a MacMansion deep in the forest burn zone.

Synthetic thinking (the human in 'humanities') and building reasoning skills with a sense of the present as history is valuable work for timed-life. Letters departments, stressed by the false birthing pains of anal retention, still seem to be offering skills training for off-white Civilization's Onward Englishing missionaries for schools of children from the whole rainbow world of language, and cultivation of tea lips and languor for young dandies wanting to build a Henry James sensibility, or what? Enter Alan Bloom in hushpuppy shoes for an encore.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 6:36 p.m. RECOMMENDED 1



**LongView** San Francisco Bay Area The author would do well to study and contemplate the reality that the number of humans is far greater than the capacity of Earth to provide long-term sustenance to H. sapiens. This reality may be a major driver of the human conundrum.



Nov. 30, 2013 at 6:26 p.m.



**gsk** Jackson Heights I understand the argument(s) right up and until we get to the emphasis on tenure.

Why should teachers -- or MTA conductors for that matter, the nearest competitor--feel that life-time job security is their entitlement? The concept of tenure -- public sector union members used to call it life-time job security in their contract stipulations -- is a bizarre entitlement claim.

I've heard that teachers need to be free to teach without political interference; indeed the public grade school teachers around the corner from me in Jackson Heights, Queens make the same claim and are granted tenure. Is Ms. Davis, teaching second graders around the corner, under such crushing political pressure?

Are 7-year-old minds at such danger that their teachers' performance shouldn't be assessed in a similar manner to other people working other jobs? My doctor or lawyer doesn't have tenure; my pastor doesn't make a lot of money but she's not clamoring for tenure.

And no, this is not an argument incognito for let-the-market-decide, and I am no fan of those who buy into the illusions of an efficient free market. But it is madness to give a \*tiny\* percentage of American workers this job-for-life entitlement while the rest of us worry about economic ups and downs and depleted 401Ks.

Teaching can indeed be a noble profession. It's not \*that\* noble.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 6:12 p.m.



**Dale Merrell** Boise, Idaho gsk, you ask:

"Is Ms. Davis, teaching second graders around the corner, under such crushing political pressure?" (as to need tenure)

Probably she is, but in my view tenure is more about protecting the integrity of our educational system than protecting individual teachers. Without tenure, teachers (and thus schools) serve at the whim of parents or others who often have their own personal agenda. That "agenda" may include inflating the academic record of a child, teaching or not teaching a controversial subject in accordance with current standards (think Texas), or just a personal vendetta that may stem from who knows what. Teachers are exposed to all of these kinds of pressure---and more. When educators are subject to outside demands in order to maintain their jobs, our educational system as a whole is compromised. Rather than having benchmarks against which we design curriculum or measure achievement, it becomes something malleable to the inclinations of influential individuals.

Contrary to common assumptions, "bad teachers" can be fired.

The due process required does slow the procedure, but it does not prevent it. Teaching is not the cushy job you may imagine. A large percentage of teachers quit teaching before they ever attain tenure.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 8:41 p.m. RECOMMENDED 4



**KHL** Pfafftown, NC Gary Gutting, you are singing my song. As an artist who worked and showed in NYC for over a decade, I've held down dozens of part-time jobs over the years to support my work. After years of struggling, then losing my studio to a developer, I finally bagged the city, taking a nice teaching job in a southern college. I now find myself volunteer teaching art to elementary school kids in an under-performing public school in a minority neighborhood. Some might lament this fate as some pathetic final scene in "Spinal Tap", but for the first time in ages, I feel as if my talents are really deeply needed, not just appreciated for their aesthetic or intellectual appeal. The children love what we do together and learn about a breadth of ideas introduced through the practice of art. It is a privilege to work with them.

Not everyone can afford to volunteer their talents, including myself. We really need more people working with children in the public schools, particularly in the arts and humanities. If we did, think of how much we could save on prisons.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 5:42 p.m. RECOMMENDED 16



**Rima Regas** Mission Viejo, CA The crisis we are currently undergoing is a crisis of humanity, one that I see as a direct result of the de-emphasizing of the humanities in curricula in primary, secondary, and post-secondary education. We are increasingly culture-poor and dogmatic. We are less knowledgeable about the very subjects you teach. We, therefore, do not apply the most basic principles of social ethics in our everyday lives at home, in the work place, and out in the public arena. Our governance is on a downward path of institutional rot. So are our politics, business, sports, and just about every area of life you can think of.

We need more humanities in our education and in our lives. Philosophy, ethics, social and physical anthropology, history, art history and comparative religion should be required at a much earlier stage of learning than it is now in our public and private school curricula. In our colleges, more should be required, with no substitutions.

As for private industry, it could use doing some pitching in by substituting MBA's with ethicists, even in businesses that don't usually employ them. It would be to their benefit and all of ours. It would also place a premium on the humanities professions and raise demand and their value in the marketplace.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 5:16 p.m. RECOMMENDED 16



**Rima Regas** Mission Viejo, CA As for the arts, I am raising a teen and she's in her final year at community college. Her major is fine arts. When she transfers to a four-year institution next year, it will be to pursue a BFA in animation. California's


economy supports her choice, between the movie and gaming industries.

In our homeschool, I made sure to teach her philosophy. When she began her college education full-time, I made sure she took philosophy, ethics, and logic, even though she wasn't required to take either or all three. Those courses have opened her horizons and enhanced her appreciation in many other areas. She took physical anthropology for her science requirement. She liked it so much that she elected to fulfill her social sciences requirement by taking social anthropology.

She knows, from reading articles and doing her own research, that her chosen profession may not pay much. I haven't discouraged her from pursuing her dream. If she wanted, she could pursue a degree in virtually any other field, given her academic grades. I have faith she will find a way to earn a living doing what she loves.

She attends two sister community colleges in our area. The fine arts classes are full of young people. They've all read the research and articles in the popular press about what awaits them once they start their careers. It's encouraging to see how they're all pursuing their interests, and not money.


Nov. 30, 2013 at 5:56 p.m. RECOMMENDED 6



**A Reader** Ohio I agree with Prof. Gutting. If we could make teaching in our public schools a financially rewarding career, establish as many full-time and tenure-track positions in higher education as possible, and give the arts and humanities just 10% of what we give sports, we would benefit immensely.

Where will the money come from? Not from typical U.S. taxpayers or their representatives, I'm afraid. However, individual liberal-minded cities, counties, or states might be able to take these steps and show others the way forward.


Nov. 30, 2013 at 4:46 p.m. RECOMMENDED 7



**Catharine** Philadelphia Mit has some good points: why do universities prioritize sports (although I'm a sports fan myself) and why do we as a country prioritize prisons and outdated laws, such as the "war on drugs?"

However, this article is overly pessimistic. I take ceramics classes and have met artists who are financially successful. They make a decision to seek commercial success so they have a combination of revenue sources - teaching, approaching galleries, submitting proposals for commissioned works and more. They've been willing to step outside their comfort zone to learn marketing, sales, photography and more. And they are very talented.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 4:35 p.m. RECOMMENDED 5



**sd** ct the nation needs well educated, thoughtful, talented humanists in our schools. So go do it! What a snob, to say that if only the students were smarter and better behaved, the pay greater, and the environment

more refined, maybe a truly talented person would actually consider education as a profession. that's as offensive as the business majors who assume that the only real measure of worth is salary.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 4:21 p.m. RECOMMENDED 1

**Sal Anthony** Queens, NY Dear Professor Gutting,

You are speaking directly to my situation and yet I could not possibly disagree more.

I am fifty-one, have always been artistically inclined, I've had to work since I was thirteen, have never, ever received a single dollar from the government, and, more importantly, I do not want one. I have, in my spare time, written three novels, a book on the stock market, a father-and-son mountain climbing memoir, numerous short stories and essays and travel journals, and have been taking singing lessons for the last couple of years.

I've published a few things, self-published a couple of books, regularly perform at concerts, and despite making pitifully little money from any of this could not possibly care less. Why? Because these are things that I love, and I have been driven to do them in spite of every conceivable obstacle, and just maybe, precisely BECAUSE of those very obstacles.

The artistic impulse can certainly be encouraged, but subsidizing it, trying to make things fair, etc., is not simply utopian or wrong-headed. It is a decent, well-meaning thing to do, and there is certainly money available in this culture to indulge such a venture. The issue is that it is utterly unnecessary.

The opportunists (let's call them the "culture vultures") are the ones who will invariably benefit, and the serious artists will pursue their art no matter what.

Cordially,.

S.A. Traina

Nov. 30, 2013 at 2:33 p.m. RECOMMENDED 7

**Mit** Stanford, CA I'm an English major at Stanford University and I've been involved with theater on campus for all four years of my undergrad. Most shows I've done had budgets under \$5,000. This may seem like a significant amount of money, but when performance spaces on campus charges groups often thousands of dollars in use fees, money disappears fast. Moreover, most groups must rent lights from off-campus providers, further shriveling budgets. To save money, many groups forgo performing in traditional theaters and perform in repurposed dorm lounges, dining halls, and, outside in courtyards or on lawns (thanks, California). For the last show I was in, having used all our budget on lights, we acquired all our set pieces for free on Craigslist. To some extent, I appreciate these difficulties; I've learned how to be scrappy and resourceful. And there certainly is some money out there, but already stressed students have to wade through a mess of bureaucracy and paperwork to get it. Still, I find it lamentable that Stanford prioritizes athletic funding so much higher than the arts. It sends the wrong message. All athletic events on campus are free, while

struggling theater groups are faced with the difficulty: charge, and make money, but have smaller audiences, or do the show on a tighter budget but for free. With such wide appeal, and strong benefits to the community, it's a shame a financially fortunate institution like Stanford can't set an example by providing better funding for the arts.

Nov. 30, 2013 at 2:16 p.m. RECOMMENDED 29