When is the last time you picked up a book?

Was it because you were required to read it? Or was it purely out of interest?

If you were to be the average American, then it would be quite a while since the last time you read a book, if you had read a book at all in the past year.

I learned from an interview with educator David Mack, holding degrees from UT Austin and Princeton Seminary, that up to 27% of Americans who can read have not read a single book in the past year.

At the end of the day, this one statistic is symptomatic of a larger trend within America;

The importance of the humanities and social sciences has been diminishing at the postsecondary level.

This trend, if not addressed, poses a significant risk to the holistic growth of individuals and, by extension, the progress and resilience of our society

To address this, I propose that all American public universities should implement a stronger core curriculum that emphasizes the humanities and social sciences, specifically subjects like philosophy, psychology, and religious studies.

Lets first delve into how this current educational trend is affecting America.

First of all, the diminishing of the humanities and social sciences has created a culture where the “practical” is artificially and unnecessarily separated from the “philosophical”

In many peoples minds, the humanities and stem are diametrically opposed, and choosing one means not choosing the other.

Because of this, many people have given priority to stem, since it is what is most “practical” in todays world.

For example, many politicians have called to defund the humanities at the post secondary level.

According to a report by Times Higher Education, the state auditor of Mississippi recently released an eight-page report suggesting that the state should invest more in college degree programs that could “improve the value they provide to both taxpayers and graduates.”

From this we can see that people only really see the economic value of a college degree, and don’t see the personal value at all.

Thomas Gilmore of Ave Maria University said in an article for the Wall Street Journal that quote:

We need to revive the idea that education is a lifelong pursuit. The liberal arts should not be squashed by the monotony of servile work and office life, but rather they can be the gateway to joyful and meaningful lives in this restless and despairing society

Contrast this with what the Mississippi state auditor thinks about the humanities and social sciences, calling them “indoctrination factories” and “garbage fields”, also from Times Higher Education.

Now that we understand the problem, lets explore a viable solution.

Implementing a stronger core curriculum in American public universities that emphasize the humanities and social sciences would create more well-rounded graduates and better thinkers.

In lieu of this, I argue that the professional is personal and the personal is professional.

In an interview with educator David Mack, he says quote

consider that effort is what links personal motivation and professional success: the more we are personally invested in learning, the more we find theories that inspire us and problems that challenge us, the more we connect our life and our learning, the easier it will to be motivated—to put forward effort, and to ultimately succeed, both personally and professionally.

Not only do people make an artificial distinction between the personal and professional, people also sometimes have their priorities backward.

In the philosophical essay The Myth of Sisyphus, Albert Camus elucidates the most fundamental human issue of meaning, and shows that the most direct, and therefore practical, solution to this is the study of philosophy.

Ironically, the most practical for the spirit it not typically seen as the most practical for society.

Having seen the potential solution, lets look at a successful implementation.

We know what a better liberal arts education can do for society, and we can strive to make this even better as well as a reality for everyone.

Take a look at Columbia University’s core curriculum for example.

Columbia University’s well known core curriculum requires students to take courses in science, writing, music, art, and creative works.

These broad classes challenge and encourage students to engage deeper with academic questions and go beyond occupational preparation.

Finally, lets take a moment to reflect on the key insights from todays discussion.

Many people today believe that the humanities and stem are mutually exclusive, and you must sacrifice one to have the other.

However, this is false, and the value of a humanities education goes far beyond the personal.

As I come to a close, I want you to remember that the last book you read shouldn't just be a distant memory.

Let's embrace a future where education holistically nurtures our intellect, ethics, and cultural awareness, making us not just skilled professionals but also well-rounded individuals.

This is not just an educational reform; it's a step towards enriching our society and our lives.