

A Major Gap in the Study of Philanthropy and Civil Society



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The academic study of the philanthropic sector and civil society has grown rapidly in the last quarter of a century. What was once a sparsely populated and disconnected field now boasts university departments, peer-reviewed journals, and scholarly associations. ARNOVA, ERNOP, ISTR, and others showcase and spur on a good deal of research on the sector. Articles and monographs abound in the domains of social science, psychology, public policy, managerial science, etc. Yet the field has seen a decline in publications from several key areas. Ethics, philosophy, literature, religious studies, and even history are among the disciplines whose research is infrequently published in the field. Certainly, this narrowing of intellectual inquiry is not unique to philanthropic studies. As many universities adjust to declining enrollments, public skepticism, and reduced budgets pressure exists to shift curricula more toward vocational preparation. In addition, the ethos of empiricism creates doubt about the utility of research that is neither “objective” nor easily quantifiable.

Our literature review shows the contours of this problem in philanthropic studies. Journals in this field publish few articles from humanistic disciplines. This trend also holds true in a broader search for scholarly literature using major academic search engines. In addition, the high-quality research that does exist at the intersection of philanthropy and the humanities is mostly disconnected and thus not in conversation. As such, we are on the cusp of publishing a new journal, *Philanthropia*, that creates space for scholars to engage in the humanistic study of philanthropy and civil society.

Biography:

Andrew L. Williams is director of the Institute for Philanthropy and assistant professor of international relations and development at LCC International University in Lithuania. Prior to pursuing a PhD at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, Dr. Williams spent several decades as a nonprofit practitioner, including economic development in the Dominican Republic and Rwanda. He also holds graduate degrees from Harvard Divinity School and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. His research interests include religion and philanthropy, the intellectual history of human rights, and nonprofit management.