

# Crisis of Humanities in Japan

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# A directive from MEXT

- On 8 June, 2015 the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) informed national universities that they should cut or change their teacher training colleges and departments that do not produce graduates with a teacher's license and departments associated with the humanities and social science (HSS) based on the decline in the population of 18-year-olds, the need for graduates in society, the maintenance of educational research levels, and their role as national universities.

# Responses to the directive

- Immediately criticized in many blogs and tweets by wide range people in Japan
- Statement of opposition by:
  - Science Council of Japan
    - Consists of most of major academic societies in Japan
  - Japan Federation of Employers' Associations
  - Council of faculty of humanities in National Universities
  - And others
- Reported in foreign countries (next slides)

# 2 Aug 2015

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### Japan Rethinks Higher Education in Skills Push

Liberal arts will be cut back in favor of business programs that emphasize research or vocational training





College students attend a job fair in Tokyo in March and search for information about employers. PHOTO: CHRIS MCGRATH/GETTY IMAGES

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### Humanities under attack

BY [TAKAMITSU SAWA](#)

**HIKONE, SHIGA PREFECTURE** – On June 8, all presidents of national universities received a notice from the education minister telling them to either abolish their undergraduate departments and graduate schools devoted to the humanities and social sciences or shift their curricula to fields with greater utilitarian values.

The bad tradition of evaluating academic learning and sciences in terms of their utility, with private-sector enterprises meddling in higher education, is still alive in Japan.

Indeed, policies related to higher education are under the control of the Council on Industrial Competitiveness, which is made up of nine Cabinet ministers, seven corporate managers and two scholars. One of the scholars is from the field of engineering while the other comes from economics.

A member of the education ministry's panel of learned persons even said that the humanities and social sciences departments should be allowed to remain as they are only at the seven former Imperial universities and Keio University, and that those at other universities should be transformed into vocational training schools.

This person even went so far as to assert that students majoring in the humanities and social sciences at schools other than those eight institutions

AUG 23, 2015

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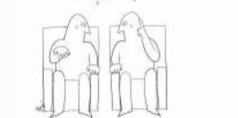
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## Social sciences and humanities faculties 'to close' in Japan after ministerial intervention

Universities to scale back liberal arts and social science courses

September 14, 2015

By [Jack Grove](#) Twitter: [@jgro\\_the](#)





Many social sciences and humanities faculties in Japan are to close after universities were ordered to “serve areas that better meet society’s needs”, it has been reported.

Of the 60 national universities that offer courses in these disciplines, 26 have confirmed that they will either close or scale back their relevant faculties at the behest of Japan’s government, according to a survey of university presidents by the *Yomiuri Shimbun*.

It follows a letter from education minister Hakubun Shimomura sent to all of Japan’s 86 national

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# Le gouvernement japonais demande aux universités de ne plus enseigner les sciences humaines

Repéré par **Claire Levenson** | Culture | Monde | 16.09.2015 - 10 h 46 | mis à jour le 16.09.2015 à 10 h 50



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### Le Japon va fermer 26 facs de sciences humaines et sociales, pas assez « utiles »

Le Monde.fr | 17.09.2015 à 10h58 • Mis à jour le 17.09.2015 à 12h28 | Par Matteo Maillard

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Vingt-six universités japonaises ont annoncé vouloir fermer leurs facultés de sciences humaines et sociales, ou du moins

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## Japon : jugées inutiles, 26 universités de sciences humaines et sociales vont fermer

Par Figaro Etudiant | Publié le 18/09/2015 à 12:03



L'Université de Tokyo a refusé de se plier aux nouvelles directives du ministère de l'Éducation nationale. (Université de Tokyo). ©FlicR Creative Common

# 25 Sep 2015

 [Le Japon va-t-il vraiment supprimer les sciences humaines à l'universi...](#) 

MERCI DE L'AVOIR POSÉE

## Le Japon va-t-il vraiment supprimer les sciences humaines à l'université ?

Par [Arnaud Vaulerin](#), Correspondant au Japon — 25 septembre 2015 à 11:38



Le ministre de l'Education, de la Culture et des Sports, Hakubun Shimomura, le 25 septembre 2015 à Tokyo.

Le ministre de l'Education, de la Culture et des Sports, Hakubun Shimomura, le 25 septembre 2015 à Tokyo. AFP  

Le monde académique critique une reprise en main de l'éducation par le pouvoir politique et un chantage au financement.

[Le Japon va-t-il vraiment supprimer les sciences humaines à l'université ?](#)

Depuis l'annonce en juin d'une réforme de l'enseignement à l'université, le gouvernement de Shinzo Abe fait face à de vives critiques. Le monde académique ainsi que le patronat fustigent un «anti-intellectualisme» selon les

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## Japan's humanities chop sends shivers down academic spines

Japanese universities are cutting humanities and social sciences in favour of 'practical' subjects, sparking global concern

# 5 Oct 2015

Neue Zürcher Zeitung

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**Angriff auf die Geisteswissenschaften**  
Eine Weisung des Bildungsministeriums, wonach Sozial- und Geisteswissenschaften reduziert werden sollen, sorgt in Japan für Unruhe. Doch eine Konsolidierung der Universitäten ist unumgänglich.

von Patrick Zoll, Tokio | 5.10.2015, 05:30 Uhr

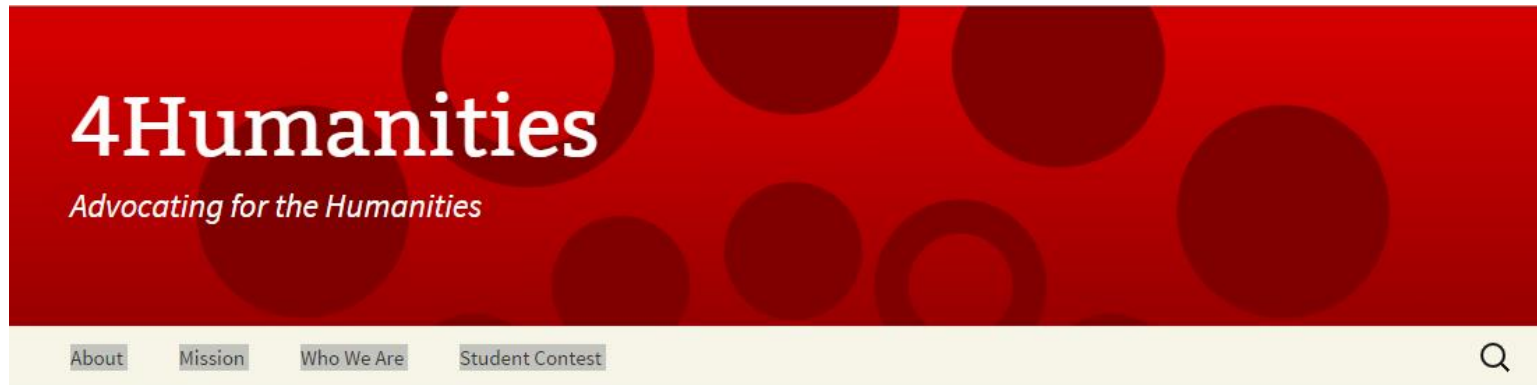
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Der Stolz japanischer Bildungspolitik ist geknickt: Das neuste weltweite [Universitäts-Ranking der «Times of Higher Education»](#) setzt das Flaggschiff der japanischen Hochschulbildung, die Universität Tokio (Todai), nur noch auf Platz 43. Schmerzlicher als die Rückstufung um 20 Plätze ist,

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# 25 Oct 2015



## On Starving the Humanities and Social Sciences of Students and Funding in Japan: 4Humanities' View

Posted by Geoffrey Rockwell

🕒 October 25, 2015 📁 Humanities News 🌐 Japan 👤 Geoffrey Rockwell

### *4Humanities Advocacy Projects*

"Shout Out For the Humanities" Contest  
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# An additional explanation from MEXT

MEXT said “It is just a misunderstanding, national universities should not cut HSS. Our true intent is...”

decrease of 18 year old population, acceptance of graduate in society, maintenance of level of education and research, and role as national universities.



# An additional explanation from MEXT

- National universities that they should **cut** or **change** **their teacher training colleges and departments that do not produce graduates with teacher's license** and **their departments associated with the humanities and social sciences (HSS)** based on the decrease in the population of 18-year-olds, the need for graduates in society, the maintenance of educational research levels, and their role as national universities

# An additional explanation from MEXT

MEXT said “It is just a misunderstanding, national universities should not cut HSS. Our true intent is...”

Professor Yoshimi pointed that the problematic sentence was quoted from a previous document in 2014 (by way of bureaucratic paper work).

# General trends of higher education and HSS in Japan

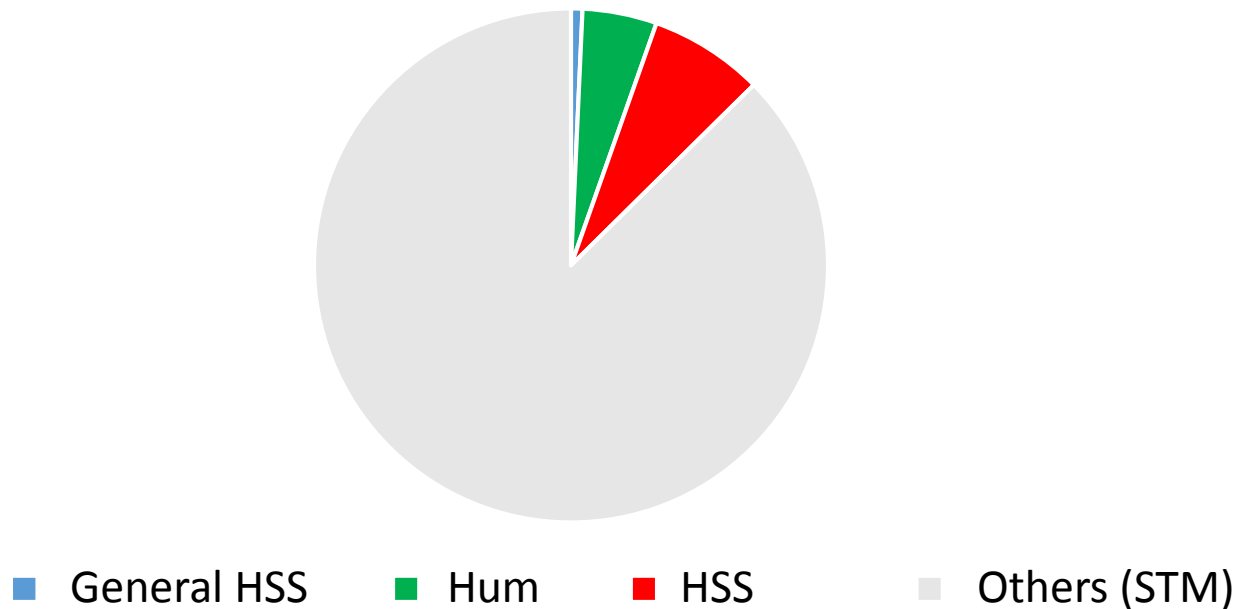
- Decrease in the population of 18-year-olds
- Tight fiscal policy of Japanese government
  - For innovation, rather than for pursuit of truth
  - Should produce greater utilitarian value
- HSS is also expected to contribute to innovation.
- The governmental funding agency (JSPS) provides grants to all fields including STM, humanities and social science like DFG in Germany.
  - Different from the US (NEH) and Canada (SSHRC)
  - There is no certain advocate of HSS in the largest funding agency in Japan

# General trends of higher education and HSS in Japan (2)

- All national universities must develop their own middle-term plan to get governmental subsidies
  - 2004-2009 / 2010-2015 / 2016-2021 / ...
  - After turning national universities into independent administrative entities in 2003
  - They became independent entities, but are strongly controlled by MEXT through the process of developing the plan.
  - The problematic sentence occurred during this process in August 2014.

# Budget for HSS in JSPS “KAKENHI”

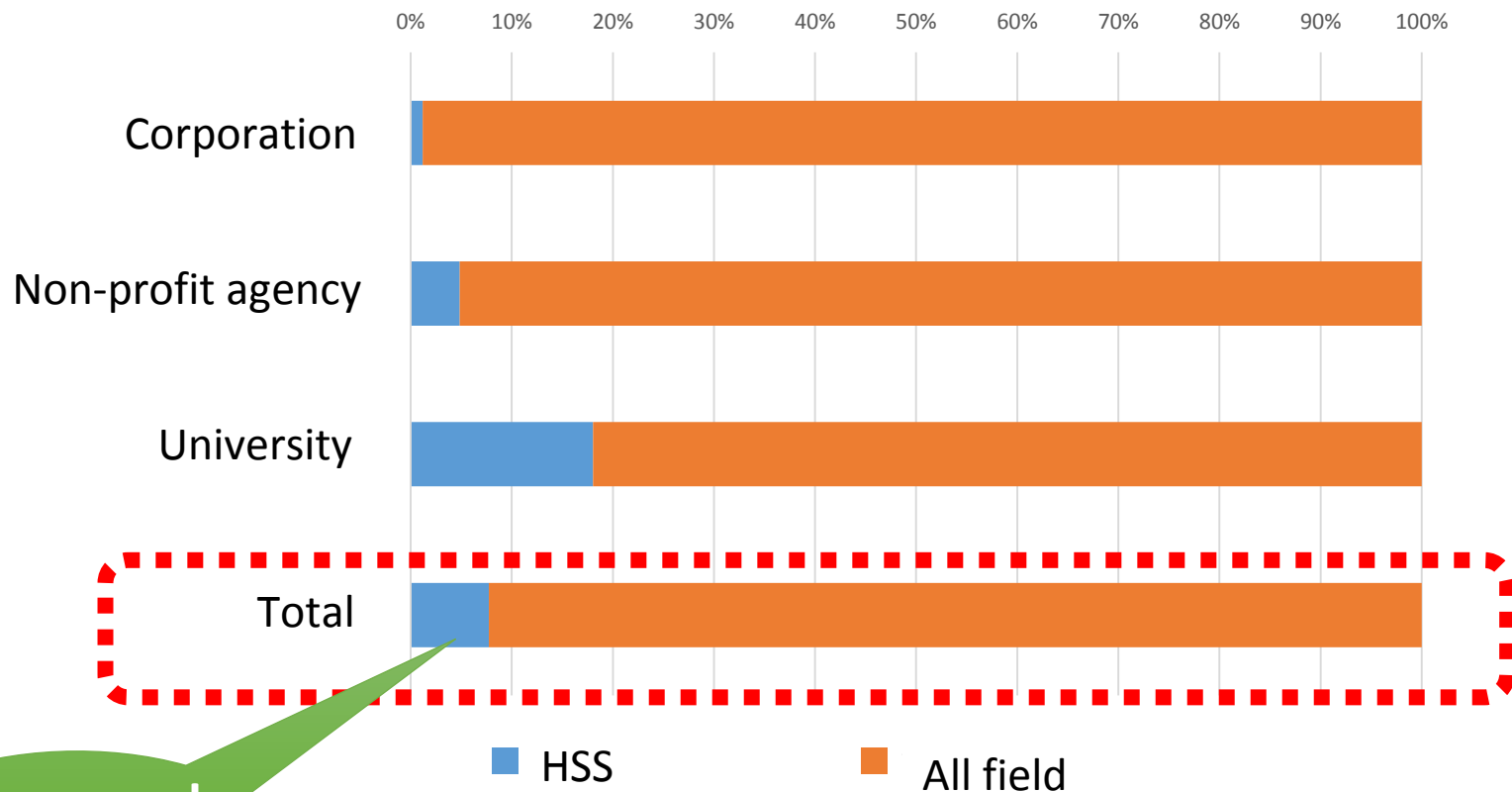
Proportion for HSS



18.1 trillion yen in total in 2013

# Proportion of researchers of HSS in Japan

Survey by Statistics Bureau in Japan

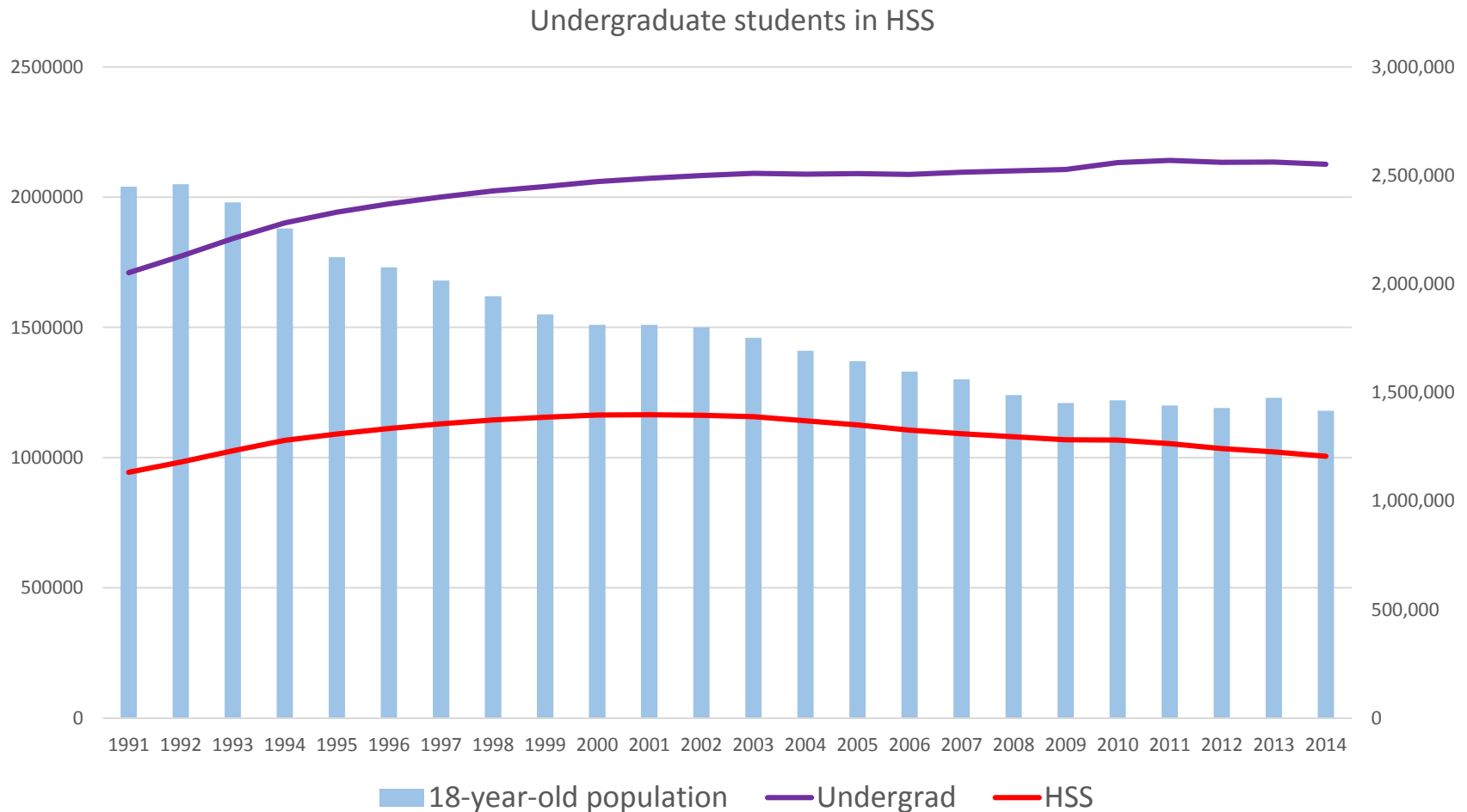


Around  
8.4%

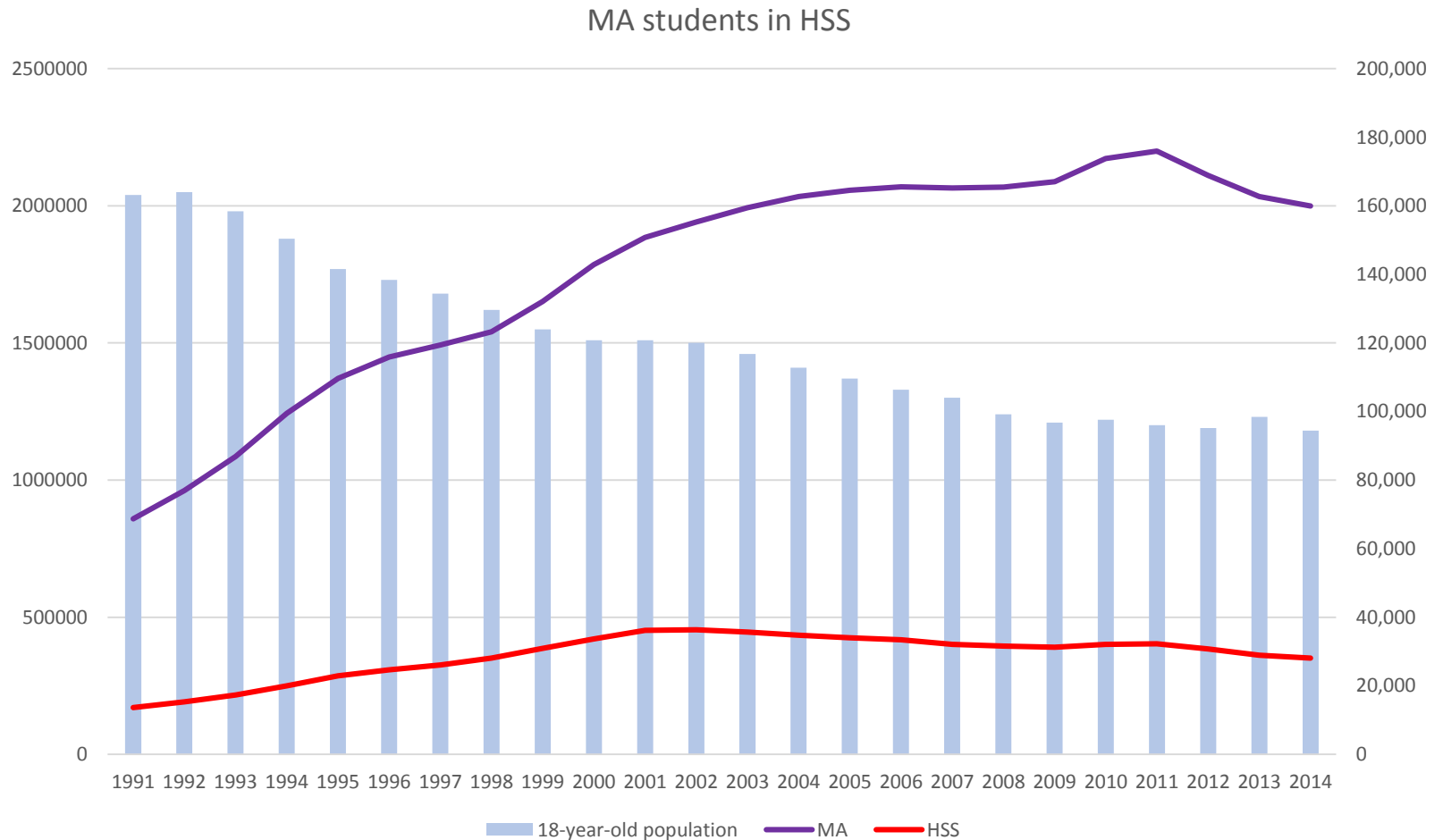
855,708 (All field) 71,825 (HSS)



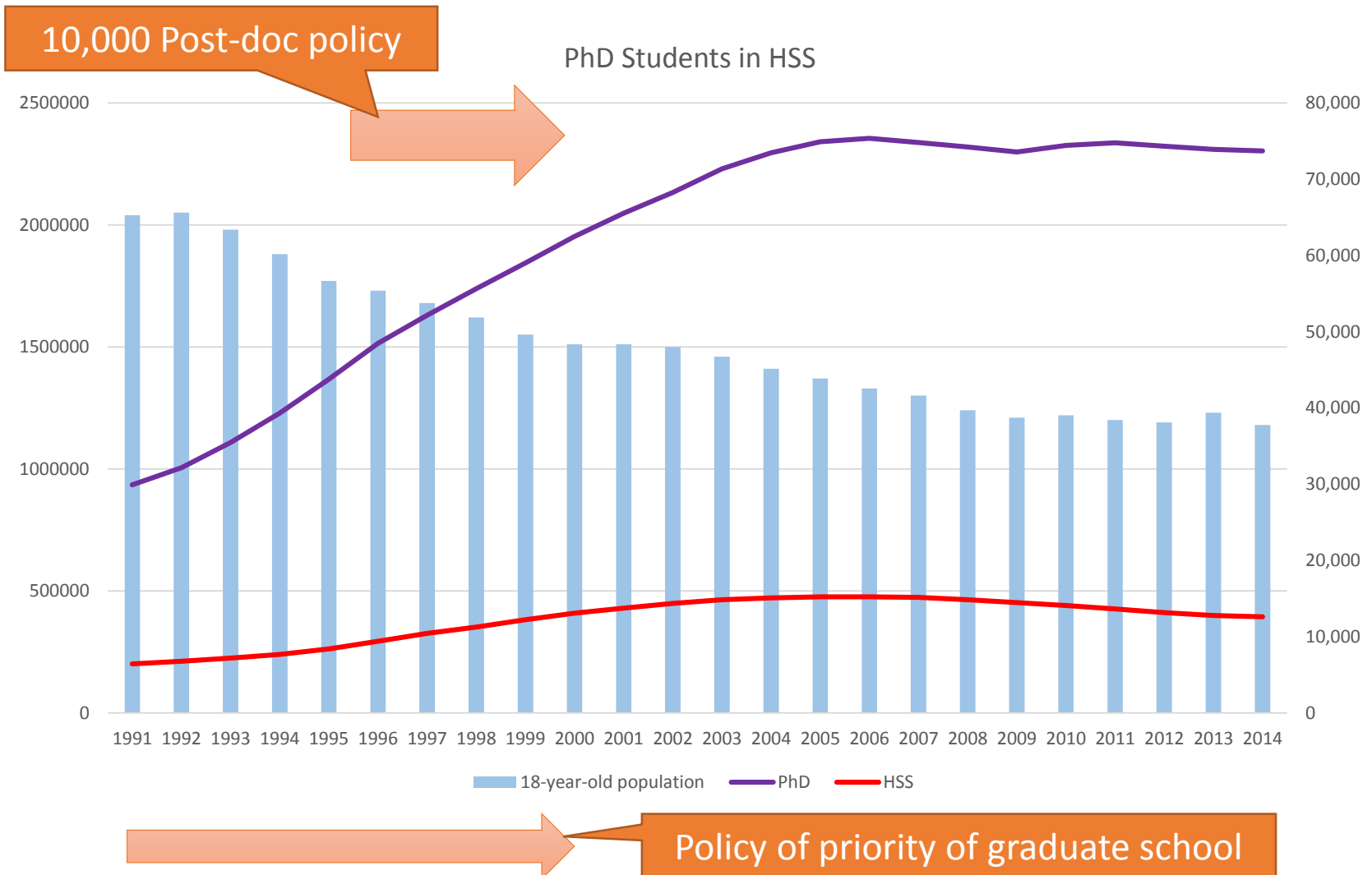
# Changes in the number of HSS students (Undergraduate)



# Changes in the number of HSS students (MA)



# Changes in the number of HSS students (PhD)



# Students of HSS

- In demand among undergraduate students
- Relatively small percentage of students are studying for an MA.
- Half of MA students of HSS are studying for a PhD
- STM PhD students increased by governmental policy, but this is not the case with HSS PhD students.

# Presenter's experiences

- Taught undergraduate students during 2001-2009 in a humanities-related faculty in Yamaguchi Prefectural University.
  - Information science and applied ethics for over 2,000 students in total.
- Has been teaching graduate students since 2012 in the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology in the University of Tokyo.
  - Digital Humanities for a small number of students from various fields such as western history, Japanese linguistics, Chinese linguistics, Russian literature, and Buddhist studies.

# “Unusefulness”: Criticism of HSS

- Its value seems not to be understood.
- Lack of accountability?
  - The ecosystem which consists of researchers, publishers and printing companies has not worked well for dissemination of HSS since the spread of the Internet.
    - Publishers promoted significance of HSS in their prime, but now...
    - As a result, most HSS researchers relatively decrease the power of accountability.
      - HSS researchers should leverage the Web more efficiently than ever before.



# “Unusefulness”: Criticism on HSS

- Failure of past education?
  - Most of governmental officers and politicians were students of humanities and social science!
  - Unfortunately, in the period of current key persons' student days (mostly several decades in the late 20C), many universities seemed not to provide enough education.
    - Many students could graduate from universities without serious study at that time.
    - This could be a reason why many people in the generation now in power regard HSS education as nonsense.

# What could we do?

- Keep as it is?
  - No need to be useful for society
    - It might be a kind of East Asian tradition like “無用の用”
    - Mainly insisted by elder professors
    - But...
- Should re-evaluate their value
  - Long-term benefits even in economic expediency
- Can be studies outside of universities and institutions?
  - It may be a solution, but difficult to sustain

# What should HSS researchers do?

- Promotion of Interdisciplinary research and education with STM
  - Over 20 national universities except traditional large ones plan to reform their faculties associated with HSS.
- Reformation of traditional methodology
  - Digital humanities (or digital scholarship) will be useful in this case as a method
- Promotion of public engagement
  - Has been already addressed, but it should be widened.
- Addressing open strategy
  - Open access, open data, and so on
  - Boosted by trend of open science and public humanities
  - Japanese government is engaged in open science now.
    - Open access repositories are prepared in several ways.

# Reference



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