



HUMANITIES

What are the Humanities?

The humanities are the stories, the ideas, and the words that help us understand our lives and our world. They introduce us to people we

have never met, places we have never visited, and ideas that may never have crossed our minds. By showing how others have lived and thought about life, the humanities help us decide what is important and what we can do to make our own lives and the lives of others better. By connecting us with other people, the humanities point the way to answers about what is ethical and what is true to our diverse heritage, traditions, and history. They help us address the challenges we face together as families, communities, and nations. As fields of study, the humanities emphasize analysis and exchange of ideas and may be interdisciplinary.

- History and Art History study human, social, political, and cultural developments, as well as aspects of the Social Sciences that use historical or philosophical approaches.
- Literature, Languages, and Linguistics, as well as certain approaches to Journalism and Communication Studies, that explore how we communicate with each other, and how our ideas and thoughts on the human experience are expressed and interpreted.
- Philosophy, Ethics, and Comparative Religion, which consider ideas about the meaning of life and the reasons for our thoughts and actions.
- Jurisprudence, which examines the values and principles which inform our laws.
- Critical and theoretical approaches to and practices of the Arts that explore historical or philosophical questions and reflect upon the creative process.

The humanities should not be confused with “humanism,” a specific philosophical belief, nor with “humanitarianism,” the concern for charitable works and social reform.

What Is "Humanities" Exactly?

The humanities entail the study of the human world and society from a critical perspective. This field includes popular majors like English, history, and philosophy. In these disciplines, students investigate humanity itself (hence the name), applying critical methods to help them understand literature, art, and the past, as well as human morality, culture, and values.

Each humanities discipline relies on unique interpretation methods. Historians use the historical method, which can be further divided into branches like cultural history, quantitative history, and oral history.

Meanwhile, English and foreign languages use textual criticism to interpret sources, and philosophy applies conceptual analysis and experimental approaches.

How Do Colleges Define Humanities?

Most universities break down the humanities into different majors and group them together in a humanities division within a College of Arts and Sciences.

Here are some examples of humanities majors you could pursue:

- Area/ethnic studies

- Art history
- Classics
- Comparative literature
- Drama and music
- English
- Foreign languages
- Gender studies
- History
- Linguistics
- Philosophy
- Religious studies

Some colleges combine artistic majors with the humanities, meaning visual and performing arts majors like music, painting, and dance would fall under the "arts and humanities" umbrella.

Certain humanities disciplines may even straddle the boundary between humanities and social sciences. For example, many universities consider history and linguistics social sciences rather than humanities subjects. But how exactly do these two fields differ?

Humanities vs. Social Science: How Do They Differ?

The humanities and social sciences are two components that make up the liberal arts (along with the arts and natural sciences). Although both disciplines investigate the human world and society, each relies on different methods and poses different types of questions.

Whereas English and philosophy majors critically analyze literature and ethics, economics and anthropology majors study society using more quantitative approaches. Unlike social science majors, humanities majors rarely use mathematical or statistical data in their analyses. Rather, they make interpretive and theoretical arguments about their subjects.

That said, some fields blur the line between the humanities and social sciences. History, for example, is a core humanities discipline that often relies on quantitative research and methods normally used in sociology and political science.

The humanities also boast a longer history than the social sciences. While social science disciplines date back to the 19th century, the humanities were studied long before then by the ancient Greeks and other classical-era scholars.

During the Renaissance, the *studia humanitatis* ("studies of humanity") became an integral part of the European education system. With a focus on classics, philosophy, history, and rhetoric, the humanities aimed to transform students into educated citizens.

What Are the Most Popular Humanities Majors?

Well over 100,000 students earn a bachelor's degree in a humanities subject each year.

Popular humanities majors include English, history, religious studies, philosophy, and art history.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, more than 40,000 English language and literature majors graduated in 2018. That same year, 17,000 students majored in a foreign language, and just under 10,000 students earned a degree in philosophy and religious studies. General liberal arts and humanities degrees accounted for another 44,000 majors.

Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce ranks all majors by their popularity. After business and education, humanities and the liberal arts make up the third most popular area of specialization for college students.

Within the humanities, most students major in English, history, religious studies, art history, philosophy, a foreign language, or area/ethnic studies. Many also pursue a general humanities or liberal arts major.

The Role of the Humanities in Higher Education

The liberal arts consist of the humanities, arts, social sciences, and natural sciences. The humanities focus on critically interpreting culture and humanity and teach valuable skills, making them a central component of most colleges' general education requirements.

Humanities Classes as General Education Requirements

Colleges require general education courses in part thanks to Renaissance-era humanists who promoted the humanities. These people argued for a well-rounded, balanced curriculum that fostered critical thinking and other key intellectual skills.

Today, colleges use gen ed requirements to introduce students to a variety of disciplines and strengthen their analytical and problem-solving skills.

Most U.S. universities require multiple humanities courses in their gen ed curriculum. UCLA's gen ed requirements include classes in literary and cultural analysis, philosophical and linguistic analysis, and historical analysis.

In comparison, Williams College requires at least three courses each in the humanities, social sciences, and science/math, as well as two writing-intensive courses that often come from the humanities.

The 5 Essential Skills Gained From Humanities Courses

Humanities courses teach students about far more than just the French Revolution and William Shakespeare's plays. Students gain valuable skills from humanities courses, such as the ability to communicate effectively, work independently and in teams, and interpret information.

The following transferable skills have been shown to aid humanities majors on the job market:

Writing Skills

Humanities majors write a lot of essays, which helps them learn how to form evidence-based arguments, communicate clearly to their audience, and write persuasively. With research papers, students must thoroughly evaluate the information and present it logically and concisely.

Research Abilities

Research and writing go hand in hand. Humanities students learn to identify relevant details, analyze sources, and draw useful information from their research; they must also present logical and cogent conclusions. Students work with a variety of sources, including primary sources, analytical texts, surveys, and images.

Analysis

Literature and history majors examine texts, whereas foreign language and English majors analyze grammatical constructions and rhetorical techniques. A humanities degree can help students develop strong analytical skills, as they must think critically about sources and build logical arguments based on their analyses. While the social sciences and

natural sciences rely more on quantitative sources, critical analysis in the humanities primarily uses qualitative sources.

Creativity

Humanities classes promote creativity, teaching students to think in complex, nuanced ways and set aside assumptions. Being able to propose innovative solutions or come up with new ways for communicating ideas can help professionals in all types of fields, including business and STEM, which heavily emphasize creative problem-solving.

Critical Thinking

The humanities are known for their focus on building critical thinking skills. Coursework that asks students to analyze numerous sources, synthesize the material, and construct a persuasive argument trains them to approach information with a critical eye. Students also learn to identify bias and use logical reasoning.

Median Humanities Salaries

- Technical Writers: \$72,850
- Historians: \$63,680
- Writers and Authors: \$63,200
- Human Resources Specialists: \$61,920
- High School Teachers: \$61,660
- Editors: \$61,370
- Public Relations Specialists: \$61,150

- Interpreters and Translators: \$51,830
- Archivists, Curators, and Museum Workers: \$49,850
- Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Additional Career Paths for Humanities Degree-Holders

The versatility of a humanities degree prepares graduates to work in a number of fields, such as education, business, government, library science, and law.

One popular career for humanities majors is teaching, as several secondary school subjects draw directly from the humanities. For example, English majors may work as language arts and literature teachers, whereas history majors can teach social studies, world history, or civics. Note that you'll likely need to complete additional educational requirements to obtain a teaching license.

Public relations, advertising, and communications are also common paths for humanities majors since these fields require strong persuasive, analytical, and communication skills. What's more, several of these fields offer six-figure salaries at the managerial level. Advertising managers and public relations managers can each earn over \$115,000 a year.