

WHAT ARE THE HUMANITIES?

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Office Hours:

According to the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts (NEH), the term HUMANITIES includes, but is not limited to, “the study and interpretation of the following: language, both modern and classical; linguistics; literature; history; jurisprudence; philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics; the history, criticism and theory of the arts...” (National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act, 1965, as amended)

This course will survey the subjects mentioned by the NEH, but will also explore the humanities as a lens (or lenses), as a method, an approach to the analysis of *any* subject matter. The humanities train us to read/view/hear the entire world around us analytically and critically, to ask “why?” not just “what?” and to identify the inevitable manipulation we experience from the words and images that constantly bombard us. We will ask why the humanities so easily attach themselves to other areas of inquiry: Environmental Humanities, Medical Humanities, Digital Humanities, Humanities and the Arts, Humanities and Religion, Humanities and Democracy, even the Post-Human. And we will raise questions such as: “How are the humanities like or unlike the social sciences? The ‘hard’ sciences? The arts?” “How did the university develop as it did?” “Shouldn’t mathematics be a humanities topic?” “Do I need to care about philology or rhetoric?” “What are narratives and why do humans make them?” “How were humanities crucial for many of the ‘breakthroughs’ in human history from democracy to the discovery of vaccines for viruses?” and “Who am I?” (The course promises no answer to the latter question.)

The course will be a combination of lecture and short breakout sessions in pairs or small groups, to practice seeing through and testing the lenses that we discover throughout the semester. Readings or viewings for class will include a collection of theoretical articles and several short stories, narrative poems, novellas, films, a TV show, and even a children’s picture book and memes from social media.

Assessment¹:

10%: Short quizzes and other informal assignments in classes.

15%: Short essay assignment

15%: Midterm take-home exam

¹ Please note that if distance learning is required, the assessment procedure, modes of assessment and weightings may be changed.

15%: Active participation in discussions and breakout sessions.

45%: Final take-home exam

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. Students are permitted a maximum of three absences without penalty. Any additional absences will affect the final grade and may result in failure of the course.

Academic conduct:

Plagiarism is taken extremely seriously. Any instance of academic misconduct which includes: submitting someone else's work as your own; failure to accurately cite sources; taking words from another source without using quotation marks; submission of work for which you have previously received credit; working in a group for individual assignments; using unauthorized materials in an exam and sharing your work with other students, will result in failure of the assignment and will likely lead to further disciplinary measures.

Additional requirements:

Although you are encouraged to utilize electronics in class, browsing the web and texting alienate you from the learning experience and distract the students sitting around you, not to mention the lecturer in front of you (who, yes, *can* see what you are doing). In fact, you are strongly encouraged to take notes by hand. Numerous studies indicate that computer note-taking leads to less comprehension and less recollection than the hand-brain connection established with pen and paper. Finally, this is an inclusive class. Insensitivity toward other students or lecturers, no matter how different from you, has no part in the humanities, or anywhere. We are all in this together. That is part of what it means to be human.