

Your Program at a Glance (September 2017)

Welcome to the Bachelor of Humanities Program! During the next four years in the College of the Humanities you will receive a comprehensive education in the Liberal Arts.

The aim of the program is to produce cultured and literate citizens and to prepare you for a variety of rewarding career paths. Upon graduation, the grounding which you will have in art, history, literature, philosophy and religion will allow you to form your own reasoned judgments about the state of our country and our world. You will become a different person, confident in your own understanding of things and able to express your ideas to others.

This confidence will come about through reading the Great Books. The Bachelor of Humanities is a reading intensive program. At every point you will be required to come to your own understanding of the works of the greatest thinkers. By reading the works of Plato, Confucius, Shakespeare, or Nietzsche, or by listening to Beethoven's symphonies, you will train your mind and your sensibilities and you will become familiar with the great works and ideas which have shaped our civilization. But more importantly, you will develop the ability to do what these great figures themselves have done— to understand, to judge, to discern good from bad, and to give reasons why one thing rather than another is worth pursuing. In conversation with what others have thought before you, you will be able to think freely for yourself.

This program requires a great deal of work on your part. You will be reading some of the most difficult books ever written, and your papers will be judged according to high standards of scholarship. More than in most other arts programs, you will have to think about how what you learn in one course is related to what you learn in your others.

The backbone of your education will be the yearly Core-Seminars. In each seminar, one per year, you will read the pivotal texts of a particular historical era, focused in one humanities discipline. You may choose to combine your Humanities degree with another discipline offered in the university. This choice will typically be made after your first year of studies. For your first year, three of your five credits are required courses taken by all HUMS students, and you will decide which language to begin studying. Note that students enrolled in the Bachelor of Humanities and Biology take two required science courses, and students enrolled in the Bachelor of Journalism and Humanities students take a required journalism course and a history option, in their first year. During your first year you should schedule a meeting with the Humanities Undergraduate Advisor to discuss your degree options, such as whether to do a combined honours degree or to participate in our popular third-year abroad programs.

What follows is a brief outline of the program.

- **First Year:** The first year Core-Seminar, “Myth and Symbol,” presents myth and symbol through texts which embody the religious consciousness of humanity. Our earliest and perennial mode of explaining the universe is to tell ourselves stories about the origin and shape of all things. You will encounter some sacred stories of the First Peoples indigenous to this land. You will read a great part of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), as well as ancient Near-Eastern, Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian texts. This is complemented by a study of Greek myth, and of contemporary anthropological approaches to human culture. It is through these great stories that human beings first came to understand their own nature and their place in the cosmos.

- Second Year:** The second year Core-Seminar, “Reason and Revelation,” presents the origin of Greek Philosophy and its adoption into Medieval Christian Theology. It has often been said that the foundations of Western culture are Athens and Jerusalem. In the period from 500 B.C. to A.D. 1300 a new consciousness develops, confident in the power of human reason to go beyond mere storytelling. The universe is conceived of as following a rational order, open to human understanding. This new conception is embodied not only in political institutions such as Greek democracy, but in the confidence of Medieval Christian, Islamic and Jewish thinkers that their revealed religious texts can and must be interpreted through the power of human reason. Moreover, what reason tells us is that the order of things is good, because it was made by a good God. The Core-Seminar in this year is complemented by a course on the origins of the three great Abrahamic religions. In the second year students also begin the study of the history of Western Art.
- Third Year:** The third year Core-Seminar, “Culture and Imagination,” presents the great upheavals of the Modern period. The Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the discovery of America, the rise of print culture, the emergence of early capitalism and the romantic reaction to it, all transformed Europe in ways hardly imaginable to our Medieval forebears. In this year, students will look especially at literary works which reflect these upheavals. The invention of the printing press made possible a new class of educated citizens, who took part in public debates in ways not possible earlier. A course on continental literature complements the Core-Seminar and students also study the history of Western Music. The third year ends where the fourth year begins, with the two great Enlightenment revolutions, in America and in France.
- Fourth Year:** The culmination of the program is the final Core-Seminar, “Politics, Modernity and the Common Good.” The revolutionary philosophical and political movements of the late 18th century ended the dominance of an overarching meaning and a divine-centered order. Half of the course concentrates on the modern thinkers’ attempts to re-envision the West in light of this revolutionary change. For example, Hegel proposed a return to the well-springs of historical tradition, religious faith and classical thought and Marx ushered in a futuristic utopia of collective bliss. It also presents, with Nietzsche and Heidegger, the abandoning of the Greek confidence that human reason shows us a universe ordered towards the good. The other half of the course presents a portrait of the civilization that grew from this human-based order and meaning. Arendt, Taylor, and Bull define this order as an autonomous, dis-embedded and transformed condition while Gandhi, Said and Foucault examine its disoriented order. Research seminars, a course on intellectual history and a course on science for the humanities complement this Core-Seminar.

The four years of the program are designed as an integrated whole, each year building on what has been learned before. Having uncovered the origins as well as the critiques of the human condition, students arrive back in our own modern world with a keener sense of the stakes that face us in our own informed choices as citizens. In this way, the program aims to foster the intellectual, ethical and aesthetic development of its students.

Over the summer you should rest. You have worked hard in secondary school and in the fall you will begin one of the most challenging programs in Canada. Our only suggestion is that you spend the summer reading, for pleasure. The most fundamental prerequisite for undertaking this program is a love of reading, a love of books and ideas, and an eagerness to discuss those ideas.