



THE HUMANITIES AND THE LIBERAL ARTS

The humanities are elastic, dynamic, and indispensable. Many fields and disciplines are included in the idea of the humanities; some overlap with other areas such as the arts and social sciences. Some aspects of areas such as the sciences can plausibly be included in the humanities.

Reviewing a range of definitions for “the humanities” from across the United States, many center on understanding the human experience through reflection and questioning, on both collective and individual levels. In our definition, we have tried to balance an openness to the wide range of possible fields and disciplines with some examples to provide a sense of composite elements. We would like to model an open attitude towards individuals and organizations who are interested in fostering diversity, equity and inclusion throughout the humanities in the Berkshires: “The humanities provide tools and methods to make sense of the human experience through the study of fields such as art, economics, history, language, literature, philosophy, and religion.”

Connecting the humanities and the liberal arts

The humanities form an essential element in the liberal arts and in liberal education. The liberal arts comprise a variety of disciplines that have traditionally been considered important elements in a broad education; these elements include the humanities but also additional areas such as the arts, mathematics, and natural science. Interdisciplinary exchanges and collaborations are natural and integral to the humanities in a liberal arts setting. Through their exposure to a varied body of knowledge and many perspectives on learning, students develop a more complete and more nuanced understanding of the world around them and their place in it.

The humanities form part of the prism through which students can view and understand the world; drawing on the tremendous diversity of thought, insight, and expression gathered and sifted over thousands of years, from across the globe. In the course of this learning process, students develop skills that are invaluable in finding a satisfying career and a full life as an individual and citizen. These skills include capabilities such as finding and assessing information; thinking clearly and rationally; analyzing ideas and evidence; and perhaps most importantly, communicating.

