



Humanities

Kristen Small khsmall@wpi.edu

Course Content: This course uses a variety of literary, historical, and cultural readings in combination with essay writing, group projects, and class discussions to answer the essential question: “**What does it mean to be human?**” We pay particular attention to how the definitions and understandings of “humanity” have changed over time.

A TERM: How do humans use beliefs and language to describe and document their experiences?

B TERM: How do human experiences and understandings affect actions?

C TERM: How do humans handle conflict? What and how do humans create?

D TERM: Where is humanity headed?

By the end of the course, students will demonstrate an understanding of:

- The connections between history, literature, philosophy, art, and music
- The role that the humanities have played and continue to play in history
- The human search for meaning and values over time and across cultures

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Analyze and interpret ideas from a variety of perspectives
- Articulate and defend their own thoughtful assessment of these ideas
- Reflect critically on their own conceptions of meaning and value
- Develop, articulate, and defend personal responses to texts
- Effectively present ideas.
- Communicate effectively through writing

Assessment:

Student Assessments (grades) are based on successful completion of weekly/bi-weekly HUM journals, essays, individual and group projects, and participation in class discussions (online and in person). Essays are assessed with the Mass Academy Essay Writing Rubric.

Writing Assessment:

This is a writing-intensive course. The writing process for each essay will include the development of a working thesis, an outline, teacher and peer conferencing, multiple drafts, and peer review. During A and B term, students are encouraged to ask for teacher feedback during the writing process; however, by C and/or D term, students should be writing more independently.

Sample Texts

“A Modest Proposal,” Jonathan Swift

Arcadia, Tom Stoppard

Conversations in American Literature: Language, Rhetoric, and Culture

Iliad, Homer

Sapiens: Yuval Noah Harari

The Tell-Tale Heart: A Neuroscientist’s Quest for What Makes Us Human, V.S. Ramachandran

Twilight Los Angeles, Anna Deveare Smith

Women of Troy, Euripides

Walden, Henry David Thoreau

Whistling Vivaldi, Claude M. Steele

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is humanities?

Humanities are academic disciplines that study different aspects of human society and culture, including, but not limited to: literature, history, psychology, sociology, music, art, linguistics, and philosophy. At Mass Academy, the humanities course examines the question of what it means to be human through readings from and study of a number of these disciplines.

Are students in humanities leveled?

No, all Mass Academy juniors take the same humanities course. Writing assignments and projects may be differentiated based on students’ learning styles, prior knowledge, and interests.

Does the humanities curriculum align with any AP history or English language/literature courses?

No, the humanities curriculum is not designed to align with any AP course.

What type of work is typically done in humanities at Mass Academy?

Students typically read works from the different disciplines listed above, write eight or nine essays a year, write weekly or biweekly reflective journals, write informal responses to readings, participate in in-person and online debates and discussions, engage in a number of group projects, and give formal and informal presentations.