

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Level: First Year License

Module: Foreign Language (English)

Lecturer: Mr. Mohamed BAALI

Course N°2: Overview on the Humanities

Meaning of the Humanities

- a. Humanus, Humanitas, Human, Humanity – it refers to the quality of being a human; “huma” (civilized, cultured).
- b. Branch of Learning – it refers to the study of the arts. As a study, its material object is “artwork” and its formal object is “creativity and appreciation.”
- c. Misconceptions on the term Humanities: It should not be confused with the terms:
 - Humanism – specific philosophical belief.
 - Humanitarianism – concern for charitable works.

Defining the Humanities

The Heart of the Matter (Report of the American Academy of Arts & Science’s Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences to the U. S. Congress in June 2013): “Since the nineteenth century the humanities have generally been defined as the disciplines that investigate the expressions of the human mind. Such expressions include language, music, art, literature, theatre, and poetry. Thus, philology, linguistics, musicology, art history, literary studies, and theatre studies all belong to the realm of the humanities.”

According to the British Academy for Humanities & Social Sciences, “The humanities are academic disciplines that study human culture. The humanities use methods that are primarily critical, or speculative, and have a significant historical element-as distinguished from the mainly empirical approaches of the natural sciences. The humanities include ancient and modern languages, literature, philosophy, religion, and visual and performing arts such as music and theatre. Areas that are sometimes regarded as social sciences and sometimes as humanities include history, archaeology, anthropology, area studies, communication studies, classical studies, law and linguistics.... The humanities and social sciences teach us how people have created their world, and how they in turn are created by it.”

History of the Humanities

The English word “humanities” derives from an educational program introduced in ancient Rome under the heading of “humanitas”. The ancient Greeks did not speak of humanities per se, but devices for dealing with the accomplishments of humans were developed in the dialogues of Plato; Aristotle’s treatises on logic, rhetoric, and poetics; and other writers’ pronouncements on grammar, music, and higher learning. The Romans gave us the Latin root of the word, the subject as a distinct object and body of content, and a framework of terms and distinctions for discussing related issues. Italian humanists, who were the first to actually be called humanists, aligned the subject with works of classical antiquity in the curriculum of the”

studia humanitatis". During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the discovery of new civilizations and rise of modern empirical science added to the general body of knowledge and, by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the scope of humanities was expanding with scholarly interest in English and other languages, the new fields of comparative philosophy and folklore, and recovery of the vernacular literatures of the Middle Ages.

As a result of this history, the word humanities carries many connotations. It stands for a tradition of knowledge and aesthetic expression that is vested in a canon of works and ideas. It invokes values of wisdom and normative qualities required for humane conduct, ethical decision-making, and civic responsibility. It designates skills of inquiry, communication, and reflection. It distinguishes particular objects, such as novels, paintings, musical compositions, philosophical and religious treatises, and historical documents. It labels specific subjects, especially literature, languages, the arts, music, philosophy, history, and religion. And, over the course of the twentieth century, it took on new meanings as disciplinary practices changed, new interdisciplinary fields arose, and the boundaries of humanities and social sciences were crossed.

Why Study Humanities?

1. Through Humanities, we can be connected to places we have not visited, understand the past or history which has significance to the present. It makes us encounter great minds and hearts of human history.
2. Through Humanities, we will be studying what humans have found valuable or good throughout the time.
3. Through Humanities, we experience connection between culture and community through different art exposures: museum visits, concerts, theatre performance, and support of local artists.
4. Through Humanities, we increase our respect for cultural and individual differences through knowledge of achievements and of world civilization.
5. Through Humanities, we gain a global perspective through the knowledge of world cultures.