What Are the Humanities?

**The Humanities are the disciplines which study human beings and their cultural products.**

These disciplines include anthropology, history, language and literature, philosophy and political science, to name just a few. The Humanities are about connecting the past with the present and invite us to think about the truth of what it means to be human, whether that human truth is discovered and critically examined through the stories of an ancient Greek writer such as Homer or a present day thinker like Douglas Copeland. This thinking counteracts the intellectual impoverishment of our often violent and cynical public culture. Humanities students develop a tolerant and open self identity and find themselves connected to the past and empowered to change the future no matter what career path they decide to pursue.

The Needs of the Community

**Humanities and the College**

The mission of the Cegep system is to provide an excellent well rounded education that reflects the cultural and ethnic diversity of Quebec and the world, fosters personal and social development and leads to meaningful employment and further academic study. At Dawson, students enjoy an international community of scholarship reflected in the curriculum, and in the diversity of the student population, faculty and staff.

This mission of excellence in diversity is reflected in the Humanities Department. It is in the humanities that students will connect almost every field of specialized study that they have mastered thus far and see the important connections across the disciplines of their programs at the College. It is this interdisciplinary approach that makes the humanities the heart of general education. Quebecers have realized, along with the rest of the global community, that an overspecialized, compartmentalized education will create a society of narrow minded, isolated and intolerant individuals who have trouble seeing themselves as part of a global human community.

Since our very survival is dependent upon an ability to work together in a thoughtful, critical and tolerant manner, we are trying to rehabilitate education as the cultivation of humanistic values that are so sadly lacking in our cynical and often violent global community.

Besides emphasizing the connections between various subject matters, the hallmark of the humanities is their emphasis on the human being behind the body of knowledge. In the humanities, students are not passive recipients of a lifeless mass of facts, rather, they are active participants in the discovery and reconstruction of the knowledge they acquire. The process of discovery is as significant and exciting as the final product of the knowledge acquired.

Humanities courses do more than result in understanding. They actually empower and provoke students to think independently and critically about the status quo and to make positive changes in their communities and in the world. The Cegep system mirrors the vision of humanistic scholars, namely, to build a responsible, inclusive, cooperative and engaged society.

Drawing on a wide variety of teaching material – scientific, literary and philosophical texts, cultural artifacts, films, theater and music – each Humanities course category teaches a particular set of skills that remains the same regardless of the subject matter.

*These can be found in greater detail on the next page.*
First Step • Knowledge

In the Knowledge class the students begin to learn how knowledge is constructed and how to critically evaluate knowledge claims. Students learn to analyze the arguments of others and to construct their own thoughtful arguments in response.

- Critical Thinking
- Darwin’s Tea Party
- Media Knowledge
- Reading the Past
- The Big Questions in Philosophy
- The Evolution of Human Rights
- Ways of Knowing
- Introduction to Ancient Philosophy

Second Step • World Views

In the World Views class students learn what defines a worldview. Tradition, education, religion, political structure, economics, gender and historical context all contribute to the construction of an outlook on the world. Moreover, they learn that a world view is a human creation and therefore that we are not hapless victims of the world we find ourselves in, but rather that we give shape to our world.

A Sample of Some World View Courses

- Educating Young Children
- Green Living
- Indigenous People
- The Scientific World View
- Plato’s World
- Social Themes in European Art
- War, Peace and World Views
- World Views in Science, Myth and Religion

Third Step • Applied Ethics

In the Applied Ethics class, students consolidate their critical power of argument and realization of their ability to effect change in an exploration of their responsibilities to do so. They will study ethical theories, identify conflicts in values, analyze ethical issues pertinent to their program and formulate solutions to ethical problems. Here the humanistic values of thoughtful reasoning, tolerance and open mindedness are once again applied to practical issues and problems.

- (Dis) Information
- Ethical Issues in Poverty and the Law
- Ethics of War
- Medical Ethics
- The Sorcerer’s Feast: Ethical Issues in Globalization
- Plato’s Republic
- Morality and the Renaissance
- Ethical Issues and the Mass Media

For more information, contact the Humanities/Philosophy secretary Catherine Alleyne at 931-8731 ext.1595
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