

BE CURIOUS

The Liberal Arts  
at Stanford

Stanford | School of  
Humanities and Sciences



## Dean's message

What is college for? What do you value? What are you curious about—what do you wish to know?

These are important questions that Stanford poses for every undergraduate. And the journey to finding your own answers is undertaken through a liberal arts education—one that cultivates the broad knowledge and skills needed to create informed citizens, open minds, and critical thinkers.

The School of Humanities and Sciences (H&S) is the heart of the liberal arts at Stanford. H&S comprises the arts, humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences, and our faculty teach and conduct research on everything from AI to Zoroastrianism. Our classes will challenge your assumptions and shape and reshape your understanding of the world.

I encourage you to join us to grapple with meaningful questions about yourself and the world around you, to engage in conversations with others who hold different perspectives, and to decide what you value.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debra Satz". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Debra Satz  
Vernon R. and Lysbeth Warren Anderson Dean  
School of Humanities and Sciences  
Marta Sutton Weeks Professor of Ethics in Society and Professor of Philosophy

The [School of Humanities and Sciences](#) (H&S) is the foundation of a liberal arts education at Stanford. The school encompasses more than 45 departments and interdisciplinary programs. H&S is home to fundamental and applied research, where free, open, and critical inquiry is pursued across disciplines.

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# The Liberal Arts at Stanford

## What is a liberal arts education?

A liberal arts education is focused on the free pursuit of knowledge. It is a broad, wide-ranging education that prepares you to be a responsible steward of a shared planet.

The phrase *liberal arts* connects to the Latin word *liber*, or “free,” and for centuries, it has described an education that does not prepare you to do a specific job. (In this context, the word *liberal* has nothing to do with politics.)

Instead, a liberal arts education is intended to equip you with the tools to think critically about many distinct topics, define your values, engage in constructive dialogue, and live a life of curiosity. At Stanford, a liberal arts education is the cornerstone of every undergraduate degree.

## Stanford is a liberal arts school?!

No matter your major, you will engage with core academic disciplines—for example, history, biology, and economics—that will give you insight into the lives of others and help you appreciate the complexities of the natural world and human society.

At the same time, you will develop a set of intellectual skills to use throughout your time in college and beyond. This is the essence of the liberal arts at Stanford.

At the heart of this experience is the School of Humanities and Sciences. With world-class expertise in the arts, humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences, H&S faculty conduct the research, teaching, and scholarship that produce new knowledge and infuse vibrancy into your intellectual journey.

## What will I gain from a liberal arts education?

A liberal arts education opens your mind, helping you become a critical thinker who can express your ideas effectively and look at problems in new ways. Wherever life takes you after Stanford, you should be able to:

- Write and speak clearly and persuasively
- Engage in logical, evidence-based reasoning
- Weigh competing claims and make carefully considered, ethical decisions
- Operate from a strong quantitative foundation
- Assess real-world problems in a rigorous way
- Understand culture and social organization
- Listen to different perspectives and have civil, productive discussions

## How does Stanford facilitate a liberal arts education for everyone?

As an undergraduate, you are encouraged to spend the first two years exploring different academic areas before you declare a major. During that time, you should let curiosity guide you. Follow your current interests and discover new ones by taking classes in a variety of fields. There is a lot of freedom, but there's also some structure.

To start, you will participate in two quarters of the university's required first-year curriculum, [COLLEGE \(Civic, Liberal, and Global Education\)](#). COLLEGE courses give you a shared experience with your peers in small discussion-based seminars while catalyzing your individual path.

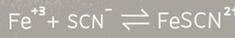
The fall quarter course, *Why College? Your Education and the Good Life*, guides you to reflect on your life goals. In winter quarter, *Citizenship in the 21st Century* prepares you to live in a society composed of people with different backgrounds and points of view. Spring quarter's *Global Perspectives* lets you choose one course from offerings that dive into a topic affecting people across the globe or illuminating an issue or idea across cultures.

In addition, a Stanford degree includes [11 Ways of Thinking/Ways of Doing courses](#). These courses come from 8 different areas, known as "Ways," that constitute the university's unique education breadth requirement. You have all four years to complete your Ways, and there are more than 3,000 Ways-designated courses across a broad range of subjects and disciplines.

### The 8 Ways include:

- Aesthetic and Interpretive Inquiry
- Applied Quantitative Reasoning
- Creative Expression
- Ethical Reasoning
- Exploring Difference and Power
- Formal Reasoning
- Scientific Method and Analysis
- Social Inquiry

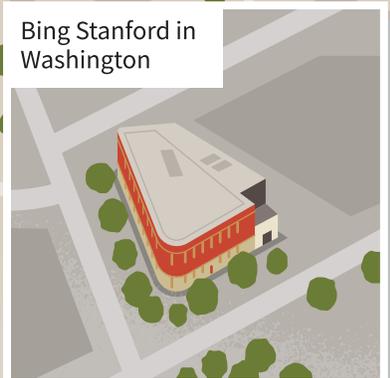
**Beyond a liberal arts foundation**  
The 45-plus departments and interdisciplinary programs in H&S underpin the coursework that grounds every undergraduate's education in the liberal arts. They also offer 52 majors if you want to go deeper into an area of the arts, humanities, natural sciences, or social sciences. Go to [p. 9](#) to start learning more about these opportunities.



Stanford's Main Quad is home to 20 H&S departments and programs.

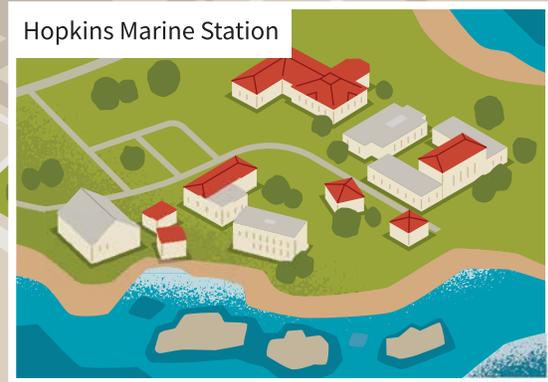


The classrooms and research spaces of the School of Humanities and Sciences and its affiliates physically represent the liberal arts at Stanford. With facilities centrally located on campus in and near the Main Quad, the university's historic center, as well as off campus at specialized sites, H&S fuels world-class research, teaching, and learning.

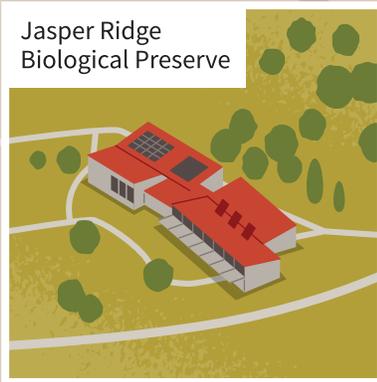




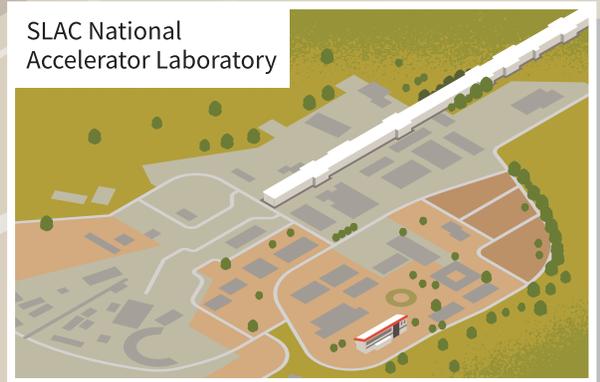
- 1 Anderson Collection
- 2 Bass Biology Research Building
- 3 Bing Concert Hall
- 4 Braun Music Center
- 5 Cantor Arts Center
- 6 Computing and Data Sciences (CoDa)
- 7 Dinkelspiel Memorial Auditorium
- 8 Encina Commons
- 9 Encina Hall
- 10 Frost Amphitheater
- 11 Gilbert Biological Sciences Building
- 12 Keck Science Building
- 13 Knight Building
- 14 Landau Economics Building
- 15 Littlefield Center
- 16 Lokey Laboratory
- 17 Main Quad
- 18 McMurtry Building for Art and Art History
- 19 Physics and Astrophysics Building
- 20 Roble Arts Gym
- 21 Sapp Center for Science Teaching and Learning
- 22 Sequoia Hall
- 23 Stanford Humanities Center
- 24 Stauffer Chemistry I and II
- 25 Tanner Fountain
- 26 The Claw
- 27 Varian Physics Building



Hopkins Marine Station



Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve



SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory

# HUMANITIES and ARTS

How do **OTHER CULTURES** help you understand your own?

What does it mean to be **HUMAN**?

Why do we **CARE** about fictional characters?

When is dancing a **POLITICAL** act?

How does art help us **UNDERSTAND** society?

How did the ancient world **SHAPE** our modern age?

How do we **ACQUIRE** language?

What does it mean to be **ETHICAL**?



Humanities and arts scholars produce new knowledge via reading and writing, and students learn to do the same in humanities and arts courses. These classes help you see the world from many perspectives, develop empathy for others, and reflect on meaning and purpose in your own life and the world at large. The ideas, texts, and works of art you study will stay with you and enrich your life forever.

## Humanities and Arts departments and programs with undergraduate majors

**IDP** indicates an interdisciplinary program. Learn more on page 15.

- [African and African American Studies](#), BA
- [American Studies](#), BA **IDP**
- [Art and Art History](#)
  - Art History, BA
  - Art Practice, BA
  - Film and Media Studies, BA
- [Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity](#)
  - Asian American Studies, BA **IDP**
  - Chicana/o - Latina/o Studies, BA **IDP**
  - Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity, BA **IDP**
  - Jewish Studies, BA **IDP**
  - Native American Studies, BA **IDP**
- [Classics](#), BA
- [Division of Literatures, Cultures, and Languages](#)
  - Comparative Literature, BA
  - French, BA
- German Studies, BA
- Iberian and Latin American Cultures, BA
- Italian, BA
- Slavic Languages and Literatures, BA
- Spanish, BA
- [East Asian Languages and Cultures](#)
  - East Asian Studies, BA
- [English](#), BA
- [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies](#), BA **IDP**
- [History](#), BA
- [Linguistics](#), BA
- [Music](#), BA
- [Philosophy](#)
  - Philosophy, BA
  - [Philosophy and Religious Studies](#), BA
- [Religious Studies](#), BA
- [Theater and Performance Studies](#), BA

## Dive deep into the liberal arts

You can participate in one of the following special programs\* for first-year students in place of the two required COLLEGE courses:

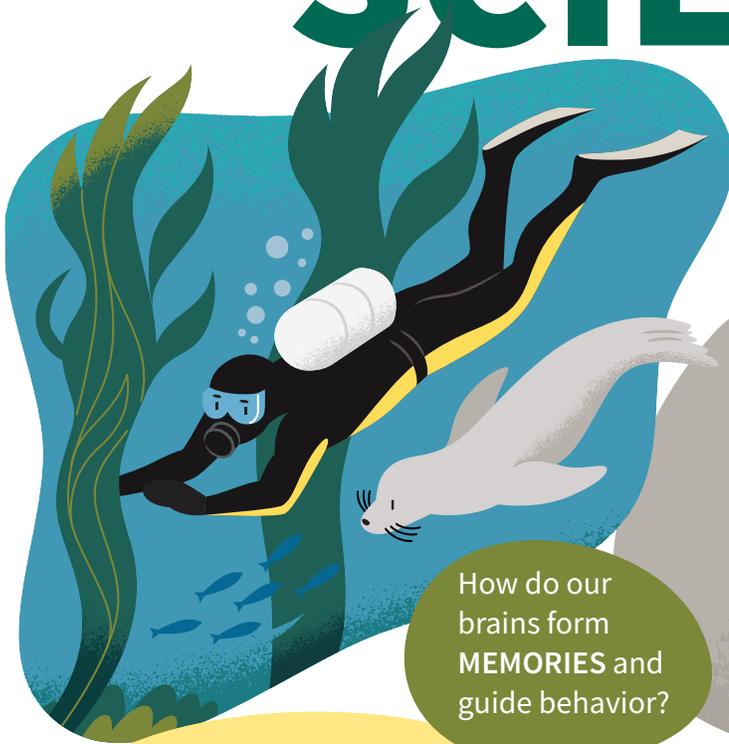
- [ESF](#) (Education as Self-Fashioning) **Fall quarter course**
- [ITALIC](#) (Immersion in the Arts: Living in Culture) **Yearlong residential program**
- [SLE](#) (Structured Liberal Education) **Yearlong residential program**

\*These programs also fulfill Stanford's writing requirements and count toward general education breadth requirements.

Learn more about the humanities and arts.



# NATURAL SCIENCES



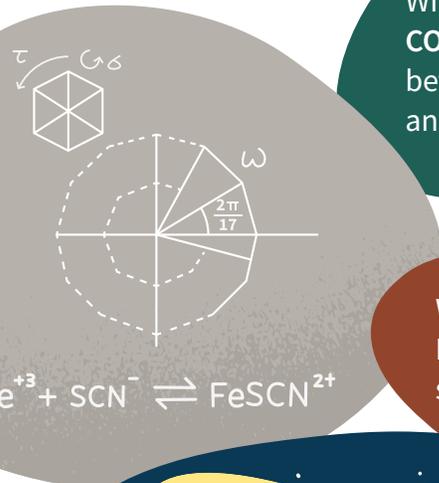
How do our brains form **MEMORIES** and guide behavior?

How can quantitative analysis be used to **UNDERSTAND** biological functions?

How can **ATOMS**, which are mostly empty space, make up solids you can sit on and liquids you can drink?

How do plants, animals, soils, and climate **INTERACT** to influence rainforest health?

What are the **PHYSICS** of stars and galaxies?



What are the **CONNECTIONS** between calculus and prime numbers?

What **POWERS** AI systems?



How can data be used to illuminate **INEQUALITY** in society?

When someone says “scientist,” who do you picture? Do you see a person in a white coat alone in a lab, microscope close at hand? This is one picture of a scientist, but there are countless others. You are a scientist when you:

- model greenhouse gas emissions using mathematical projections
- study river water and its impacts on people and ecosystems
- analyze educational data to identify instructional gaps in school systems
- interview community members about their experiences with health care
- gaze millions of light-years into the past with extraordinarily powerful telescopes
- experiment with chemistries of materials to find new properties

At Stanford, we believe a scientist is anyone who is relentlessly curious and systematic in investigating what fascinates them. Their creativity leads to new scientific theories and methods as well as to applications and solutions that benefit all aspects of society.

## Natural Science departments and programs with undergraduate majors

**IDP** indicates an interdisciplinary program. Learn more on page 15.

- [Biology](#), BS
- [Data Science](#), BA or BS **IDP**
- [Human Biology](#), BA or BS **IDP**
- [Mathematics](#), BS
- [Physics](#), BS
- [Science, Technology, and Society](#), BA or BS **IDP**
- [Symbolic Systems](#), BS **IDP**

## Learn from experts

Natural science professors are experts in their fields who also work across disciplines to create new knowledge and solve some of the world’s most complex problems. Many of them have won national and international awards, and they are members of renowned academic organizations, such as the National Academy of Sciences.

Learn more about the natural sciences.



# SOCIAL SCIENCES



**Social scientists wonder why, and they systematically explore how humans organize and understand** themselves and one another—as individuals, communities, and international systems—and how their actions influence economics, culture, and society. Their work holds the keys to better understanding and potential solutions for the biggest challenges facing humanity today.

To become a social scientist is to orchestrate a suite of analytical and qualitative tools—and to have the savviness to know the right approaches for a given question. Using both data-driven and human-centered approaches, social scientists are at the forefront of expanding our knowledge of the world and sparking change.

## Social Science departments and programs with undergraduate majors

**IDP** indicates an interdisciplinary program. Learn more on page 15.

- [Anthropology](#), BA
- [Archaeology](#), BA **IDP**
- [Communication](#), BA
- [Data Science](#), BA or BS **IDP**
- [Economics](#), BA or BS
- [Human Biology](#), BA or BS **IDP**
- [International Relations](#), BA **IDP**
- [Political Science](#), BA
- [Psychology](#), BA
- [Public Policy](#), BA **IDP**
- [Science, Technology, and Society](#), BA or BS **IDP**
- [Symbolic Systems](#), BS **IDP**
- [Urban Studies](#), BA **IDP**

## Connect with thinkers and doers

At Stanford, the social sciences are home to top-ranked departments and award-winning faculty members who are doing groundbreaking research and training students to be leaders at all levels of society. You will also have access to scholars who have worked at the top levels of government, business, and academia who are on campus as affiliates of the [Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies](#), the [Hoover Institution](#), and the [Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research](#), among other entities.

Learn more about the social sciences.



# INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS

How have understandings of gender, sex, and sexuality **CHANGED** over time?

How do **HEALTH** insurance policies and drug prices affect who gets treated?

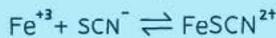
What are the **DATA-DRIVEN** methods for storing and accessing cultural records?

How do science, technology, and society **INTERACT**?

How can research and scholarship advance **SOCIAL JUSTICE**?

How does human **COGNITION** work?

**INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS**



How human-like can a **MACHINE** be?

What is **ETHNICITY**?

H&S offers many interdisciplinary programs of study that bridge knowledge and methods from multiple fields. Most programs are focused within a particular academic area, such as the social sciences or humanities, and then draw from other disciplines to ensure a comprehensive understanding of a topic.

For example, the Public Policy Program connects the tools of economics, political science, philosophy, psychology, and law with their real-world policy applications; the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity's programs foster research and learning about race and ethnicity through literature, art, music, psychology, religious studies, and sociology; and the Human Biology Program approaches understanding the human being from biological, behavioral, social, and cultural perspectives.

Interdisciplinary majors are some of the most popular at Stanford because of the flexibility to study across departments and merge expertise in creative ways.

## Interdisciplinary Programs with undergraduate majors

- [American Studies](#), BA
- [Archaeology](#), BA
- [Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity](#)
  - Asian American Studies, BA
  - Chicana/o-Latina/o Studies, BA
  - Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity, BA
  - Jewish Studies, BA
  - Native American Studies, BA
- [Data Science](#), BA or BS
- [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies](#), BA
- [Human Biology](#), BA or BS
- [International Relations](#), BA
- [Public Policy](#), BA
- [Science, Technology, and Society](#), BA or BS
- [Symbolic Systems](#), BS
- [Urban Studies](#), BA

## Interdisciplinary honors for all

In collaboration with Stanford schools such as H&S and campus centers such as the McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society, [interdisciplinary honors programs](#) allow advanced undergrads to do honors projects in certain fields regardless of major. Options include: Arts; Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity; Education; Ethics in Society; Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law; Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; International Security Studies; and Science, Technology, and Society.

Arts

Humanities

Natural Sciences

Social Sciences