

Reconfiguring the UCF Undergraduate Humanities Program

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As with previous papers, this is simply my attempt to make sense out of the existing conditions of the program. This is meant to start discussion about where we might go. Other models are possible, and I am open to other solutions to the issues I raise below, and issues I may not have yet included.

The Existing Program

The program as it stands now seems to have evolved over the years, pieced together by the strengths of existing faculty. There is a logic to it - there are three types of categories, or three organizing structures, which the students must fulfil:

1. **Humanities Foundations:** This takes a periodization approach. It should be said that dividing a discipline into historical periods has been going out of favour, to some extent. There are critical questions as to why we should organize things historically rather than in some other manner. In particular, it is difficult to include the vast number of narrative strands in each period. It is also difficult to include non-Western cultures. There is currently a large gap, between the end of the mediaeval humanities course and the beginning of the modern humanities course. Even though Modern Humanities is supposed to cover the period from approximately 1450-1950, most people actually focus on the 19th and early 20th century. This leaves a gap which, if we continue offering periodized courses, should be filled.

2. **Humanistic/Religious Traditions:** This takes a cultural/geographical approach. This has a clearer internal logic to it, although it still tries to bring an enormous amount of material together in a short period of time.

3. **Applications:** This takes a topical approach.

There are some problems with this way of organizing the program, though, which have emerged not because the existing structure was flawed but because new conditions have emerged to change the needs of the program:

1. **A new cultural studies/humanities stream at Cocoa.** I regard this as an opportunity, and those on the main campus need to work with Shelley and Tino on figuring out how to support their initiative. I think their initiative could be seen as a stream of humanities (see below). As we discussed in the November faculty meeting, it could also be used on the main campus.

2. **New people in the program.** Programs are a balance between institutionalized decisions and people's interests. Too much in either direction is a problem - institutionalizing everything can make people feel like they are just filling program needs and not doing what they are actually interested in, while working solely from the strengths of existing people can kill a program if

someone leaves, and it can make a program erratic or “patchy”. New people will necessarily introduce new courses, and those have to be included in the existing program. On the other hand, hiring decisions are much easier if there is a program plan, and a sense of what the gaps in the program are. Having a job ad that is too broad usually signifies that a program doesn’t have a clear identity (it was certainly a question I had when I saw the ad for my position, which had no less than 8 possible areas of expertise listed).

3. The need to attract majors. This of course is not a new concern. However, rethinking the structure of the program, and finding ways to argue for its practicality and applicability, continue to be a need. The program is seen as small, and we need to make it a first choice program, rather than one that students enter if they can’t make it in another program. Of course, many of our students will not be aware of what we do until they experience it (unlike some other disciplines). We need to attract students not only by giving them a good experience in humanities, but also by giving them clear, understandable choices within the program, and a clear sense of where they can go with this. We can do some of this by promotion, such as providing links on the program website to professional applications of humanities degrees. However, the clearer we are about what that degree involves, the clearer the students will be about where they might go with it. We will never attract majors by guaranteeing professional career paths, as they think they have when they enter law or engineering, but we could do better.

4. The desire to construct a humanities graduate program. We will only be able to make a cogent case for a graduate program if we have a clear rationale for and identity in the undergraduate program. This means finding an internal coherence or logic to the program, rather than simply assuming that covering the three existing categories gives enough breadth.

5. The desire to clarify the nature of the program to students, to other faculty, and to the administration. Humanities, more than other disciplines, suffers due to the fact that its purpose and nature are generally misunderstood by students and other faculty (and sometimes, even by its own faculty). It does not seem to easily fit into what has emerged as the two major purposes of the university - to produce knowledge, and to produce individuals able to apply that knowledge in professional settings. The humanities does not seem (to some people) to be able to support a unique research agenda, even if those involved actually do have their own research agendas. It does not seem to those in more traditional disciplines that the humanities could train students in a unique research agenda or a set of skills, which are not simply reducible to those of another existing discipline.

In itself, this might not be a problem, if a department can be shown to train students to work in a profession. Departments of law and medicine, for example, do not necessarily train people to generate new knowledge (although of course some do), but rather they train people to become members of a profession. However, humanities doesn’t obviously do that, either.

What is left, then, is “general education”, the sort of thing everyone gives lip service to, but no one takes all that seriously. And, general education certainly doesn’t warrant advanced hirings, nor does it support graduate work.

So, in redesigning the program, we have to deal with these realities. I believe we can address both of these requirements. That is, I believe we can design a program that clearly and uniquely supports research, and also one which supports entry into a profession. See #8 below

for more on this.

6. The desire to produce students that have a clear, measurable body of knowledge (as measured by the exit exam, but measured or marked also in other ways). As mentioned in a previous paper, our methods of assessing our students for accumulated knowledge and skill are inadequate. It is not clear whether the tools do not get at what we want them to, or whether the students just don't know the material. If we could assess students within the streams, and then also put into place a 4th year course that helped them integrate the material and methods, I think the exit exams would show better results, and more importantly, the students would feel more like they have something tangible.

7. The need to inculcate a clear set of skills. This is not, of course, a new need. Our exit exams have tended to focus on the knowledge of specific content, as well as the ability to analyze cultural objects. We might think more broadly, though, of skills that we would like to see in humanities students, and then make sure that they have to practice these skills at some point during the program. Off the top of my head, I can think of a few skills we might want to include:

- a. critical thinking ability - this can be defined in a variety of ways. We need to figure out exactly what this means for us.
- b. reading ability - especially the ability to read hard books, and work that is unfamiliar.
- c. speaking ability
- d. computer skills - this is already a requirement of the university, but we don't do much about it right now (the portfolio requirement fulfills it).
- e. the ability to understand and analyze visual experience
- f. the ability to think cross-culturally
- g. the ability to work interdisciplinarily

Valencia has a four part core competency structure that permeates the curriculum. Harry incorporates it into all his syllabi. It is another way of approaching competency that we might want to use as a partial model. http://valenciacc.edu/studentsuccess/core_competencies.htm

8. The need to produce a humanities program that looks like a university research program, rather than a general education program. Most humanities programs are seen as either general education programs or exist because a university can't support separate disciplines. In the second case, humanities is a provisional "discipline", phased out when the resources exist to establish traditional disciplines.

In our case, we have to see ourselves as offering something unique to the university and to scholarship. I believe that unique contribution is a deliberate approach to interdisciplinarity. However, if we are to offer that, we have to be deliberate about it. It means, for example, that we need to do more than simply draw upon various existing disciplines in our own teaching. There are ways to do this:

- institute a course in which the students deliberately think about what it means to be interdisciplinary. This could be a senior course. It could be linked to the portfolio. For more on this, see below.

- we could consciously promote interdisciplinary work within the courses. By this, I mean try to get more team-taught courses, both among members of the humanities program and between those members and people from other departments.

Reviewing Existing Courses

Part of clarifying the program involves looking at existing courses to determine whether they fit into a new, more coherent structure, and if not, how they can be changed to do so. Given the model I propose below, I think everything we currently offer could be included in one stream or another. Leslie has provided me with enrollment information in the humanities courses over the last five years. There are no courses which leap out as problematic (that is, chronically undersubscribed), although more reflection on the numbers will be needed. There are some courses (such as Asian Humanities) which have not been offered in a few years, but in most cases, there are obvious reasons for that. I would like to know the fate of some courses (did the “Romantic Ideal” get dropped, for instance?)

It would be worth finding out (and I’m not sure how) whether there are courses that students want but cannot get. I do know that students have wished for greater variety in upper level offerings. That doesn’t tell us about specifics, though, and perhaps they aren’t really in a position to know what they want.

For another view on humanities courses, see Arizona State’s Interdisciplinary Humanities Program: <http://www.asu.edu/clas/humanities/curriculum.html>

Clarifying the streams, as I suggest below, could make it more obvious as to what we might develop in humanities, or who we might look for in future hirings.

Model for a new program

This model is by no means the only possible one. However, it seems worthwhile to start with something concrete like this, and have our philosophical discussions about who we are and what we want to do in the context of actually developing something, rather than doing the abstract work first and trying to develop a model later.

This is a kind of hybrid model. It brings together two ideas - first, that we provide streams within humanities that can more clearly be defined and defended, and second, that we move from emphasis on one version of humanities in a student's early years, to another version in the later years. Specifically, we move from a greater emphasis on classical humanities in the early years (and help ensure this by making the HUM Traditions I and II courses mandatory for our majors, which they aren't now), and emphasize more critical and cultural humanities perspectives in upper years. This would allow students to develop the tools of interdisciplinary research as they progress. We would also allow the option of continuing the classical humanities/history of ideas approach, particularly for those who want to go on to teach courses like these, or for those who simply enjoy that approach to humanities. It makes sense to emphasize this in the earlier years, as it gives students a basis in cultural knowledge to be able to raise critical questions later.

Majors:

It would make sense to have specific people in charge of these streams, although B. Janz can organize the overall program. I've made suggestions below:

One way to think about the humanities program is as moving from classical humanities toward a set of streams, of the student's choice. These streams could be:

A. Classical Humanities/History of Ideas (Doug Evans, organizer)- this stream could be taken by someone who is interested in a general education. It could also be taken by someone who is thinking about teaching humanities at university, community college, or secondary school level. It would lead to a master's course, either here or somewhere like FSU, which would prepare students to teach the broad, survey sorts of courses. Given that UCF has no classics department, any classics courses that our department might propose would fit in this category.

B. Critical Humanities (Suzanne Jaeger or Bruce Janz, organizer)- basically contemporary cultural studies. This comes close to what Shelley and Tino are proposing at Cocoa ("Philosophy, Religion, and Popular Culture"), although I have included that as a separate stream below. Like their stream, this would emphasize interdisciplinary research skills and critical perspectives on contemporary issues. I have kept the streams separate because administratively it makes more sense, given that the bases of these programs would be on different campuses. It is certainly possible, though to see the streams as similar enough to bring them under a single heading.

C. Cultural Humanities (Organizer TBA, or B. Janz) - This stream would encompass humanistic traditions courses, but would also include critical perspectives on inter- and multi-cultural experience. Some courses would need to be added in this stream, such as postcolonial studies. This stream would also explicitly develop research and interpretive skills.

D. Religious Studies (Claudia Schippert, organizer)- Claudia's current plan for religious studies would fit as a stream with no problem. Of course, it is also more than a stream, as we offer a major and a minor. So, one option is to bring Religious Studies out from under the umbrella of Humanities and regard it as completely separate. Given the existing course structure, and the close tie between the programs, though, I would think this makes more sense for now. It has the virtue of institutionalizing the program, by which I mean that it becomes the property of the institution and not simply identified with its (current) director. If the current director would not be able to fulfil that role for any reason, the program would continue to have departmental identity. In other words, it would be the humanities director's job to keep the program going, and not simply the job of the chair of the philosophy department.

E. Philosophy, Religion, and Popular Culture (Shelley Park or Tino DiBernardo, organizer)- If we can't find a way to bring this stream under the "Critical Humanities" heading (and as you can see from my earlier comments, I lean toward separating the streams), then it could easily exist as a stream of its own.

Despite the fact that we have these streams, I would think that very few courses would be limited only to a single stream. The problem with having multiple streams like this, is that we have to make sure we can support them in any particular year, and over the career of a student. If we have courses doing multiple duty, then it will be easier to administer the programs. The purpose here is to give what we do some shape, but not to make it so unwieldy that we can't offer it, and students can't understand it.

I also think that, despite the fact that we have streams, that students should have at least a little from the other streams. Given that we currently only have 30 credit hours to work with, it might be difficult to do it all.

It would also be worthwhile to have a suggested list of courses for students that they take from their non-disciplinary core. For example, we want them to take a language, I would guess. I don't know if there is a way around taking a language, but a humanities student shouldn't avoid it. Exposure to another language is important for broadening one's perspective on the world and making a new range of experiences possible.

1st Year

1. Require the HUM Traditions courses of all the students. Currently they are not necessarily required (as far as I can tell, at least), although various courses require them as prerequisites.
2. We could also consider adding another introductory level course, in something like "Methods

of the Humanities” or “Encountering the Humanities”. Other universities have a course like this, apart from the general historical overview courses that we have. This would obviously have to be very basic, but it might get students thinking about the humanities as an activity in its own right rather than simply the intersection of different disciplines. We could include introductions to methods and material in all the streams.

2nd and 3rd year

Students choose one of the following streams:

A. Classical Humanities/History of Ideas

Humanities Foundations (9 hours)

HUM 3431 Ancient Humanities

HUM 3435 Mediaeval Humanities

HUM 3255 Modern Humanities

HUM 3251 Contemporary Humanities

Some of:

HUM 4301 The Classical Ideal

HUM 4302 The Romantic Ideal (does it still exist?)

HUM 4303 The Spiritual Ideal

Mythology (Evans)

Western Mysticism (Janz) - proposal has been submitted already

Cultural Humanities courses

Critical Humanities courses

Religious Studies courses

Courses from other programs (I am not suggesting having specifically required courses from other departments, which likely would be difficult to negotiate. I have in mind a fairly broad menu of specific options that students would choose from. In other words, not just any history course would do - we would make up a list):

History courses

Art history courses

Music history courses

Film & Theatre history courses

History of philosophy courses

Courses to develop in this stream (suggestions):

A course that fills the gap between Mediaeval and Modern Humanities

A way of cooperating with the Education department, to train people to teach humanities.

B. Critical Humanities

Humanities Foundations (9 hours)

HUM 3431 Ancient Humanities
HUM 3435 Mediaeval Humanities
HUM 3255 Modern Humanities
HUM 3251 Contemporary Humanities

Some of...

Cultural Humanities courses (number to be determined)
Classical Humanities courses
Religious Studies courses
Philosophy Courses: Critical Theory, Modernity as a Philosophical Problem, Feminism,
Queer Theory
Representations of Place and Space

Courses to develop in this stream (suggestions):

Hermeneutics
Postmodernism
Critical Race Theory
Science & Technology Studies

C. Cultural Humanities

Humanities Foundations (9 hours)

HUM 3431 Ancient Humanities
HUM 3435 Mediaeval Humanities
HUM 3255 Modern Humanities
HUM 3251 Contemporary Humanities

Some of...

MUN 3320 Contemporary Multicultural Studies
HUM 3930 Latin American Humanities
HUM 3401 Asian Humanities
HUM 3417 Hindu Thought and Culture
HUM 3419 Islamic Thought and Culture
HUM 3553 Moses Jesus and Mohammed
ANT 3311 Indians of the Southeastern US
JST 3401 The Jewish People I
other cultural courses from other disciplines
Classical Humanities
Critical Humanities
Religious Studies
Literature of non-Western or non-English speaking or diaspora cultures

Anthropology courses

Courses to develop in this stream (suggestions):

Postcolonial Studies
Critical Race Theory
Humanism and its Critics

D. Religious Studies

As Claudia and people involved in RS envision it.

E. Philosophy, Religion, and Popular Culture

As Shelley and Tino envision it.

4th Year

1. Upper division restricted electives. These could be rotating 4th year courses in a stream, that give students a way of bringing various strands of humanities research together. These courses could serve as a bridge to graduate work, for those who are planning on going in that direction. They could also be directed studies courses, or service learning courses, or something in which a student has to apply the skills and knowledge from his or her education. I believe that the term “upper division restricted elective” currently refers to some applications courses that I have already listed as 2nd or 3rd year courses. So, I am redefining the term to refer to the sorts of opportunities we might want to make available to 4th year students.

2. Portfolio/seminar course (Pro seminar?). This could perhaps be a 3 credit course instead of 1 credit, in which students think about their past work, but also think about what it means to work at the edges of disciplines. It could be a kind of senior seminar. We could even include philosophy students, and conceivably think of a way to include honours students as well (even though they don’t do the portfolio). This course could be facilitated by one person, and draw on the rest of humanities faculty to do specific modules. It could also model interdisciplinary discussion between the faculty, and show students that scholarship doesn’t mean imparting “the truth” about the world, but rather that scholars have different perspectives.

Honours in the Major

1. One of the streams
2. Honours thesis & directed reading
3. 3.5 GPA

Minors

Roughly like we have now.

Transfers from other institutions

We will continue to receive transfer students from community colleges. These students come with 2 years of humanities. We will need to make it possible for them to enter into one of these streams after they get here. Likely most will go into the classical humanities stream, since that is most like what they would have had elsewhere. We will have to decide on a course by course basis whether we will accept courses done elsewhere as equivalents to what we are doing here. This is no different than what we are already doing.

We would likely have to return to the question of transfer, however. There is a discrepancy between semester and quarter courses, and students do not always obtain transfer credit into the program. Likely this is mandated by the state (in other words, I'm not sure whether we have control over transfer credits), but we should at least have an idea of what the points of tension are in transfers. Don likely knows this better than anyone else.

Questions about this model

1. Could we do this with existing faculty?

I believe we could. Most of what I am suggesting really just amounts to repackaging what we already have. If we develop new restricted upper-level electives, this might require extra courses being added. Existing faculty certainly could develop these courses, but the real issue is the time involved, or more specifically, the other courses a faculty member might be taken away from. I would like to see more cooperation with other disciplines so that we could offer a team-taught upper level course. Ultimately this may require finding support of the sort that the honors college provides. This is where a humanities center could integrate its mission with the curricular goals of the program.

2. Could we do this with the existing budget, especially given the present tight circumstances?

Same answer as above - I think we could, since this mostly amounts to reconfiguring what we already have. However, I would like to see a program that has future budgetary requirements, that we could use to go to the dean for more support. We will not get extra money if we don't have a clear sense of what we might do with it. This kind of program at least makes the needs clear.

3. Could I still propose course X, that I was thinking about?

I don't see why not. But I think that, if a model like this is adopted, we would have to

have a humanities curriculum committee that oversaw the development of the curriculum. I would like to see people propose whatever they want, but I would want to see that we make the proposal part of a coherent whole. Currently new course proposals are usually just added as another “application”. Under this model, we would want to fit the new course into one of the streams.

4. What if Religious Studies becomes very popular, and eventually warranted a higher profile than simply being part of the humanities program?

No problem. This isn’t set in stone, and I would hope that a structure like this adds more support to Religious Studies’ success. In fact, I could imagine other disciplines (such as Classics) being given a home here.

5. Won’t we get flack from department Y about this?

Maybe. But I don’t think there’s anything intrinsic in what we’re proposing that should raise questions. If, for example, someone doesn’t like “Cultural Humanities” as a title, we might think of something else (although I like that name). I see this as an opportunity to cooperate with other departments, and I’d like to believe that there is some will to do that among our colleagues elsewhere, especially if it doesn’t cost them anything and there’s no clear turf being taken.

Where to from here?

There are two initiatives that I think become possible if we clarify the undergraduate program. The first is a graduate degree, and the second is a humanities centre.

Graduate Degree

I will not outline what a graduate degree looks like at this point, except to say that it should have a clear research base for those who intend to continue on as graduate students, and it should clearly prepare others to teach humanities in universities, community colleges, or other institutions (including our own), if they choose that path. It should also be consciously interdisciplinary, and train students in what that means.

Humanities Centre

While clarifying the program in itself shouldn’t be necessary to argue for a humanities centre, it would help in solidifying the program of the centre by identifying the kinds of people we would want to attract as speakers, and it would give a rationale for specific programs of the centre. And, as mentioned earlier, a humanities centre could be seen as supporting the curriculum in various ways, including supporting our own interdisciplinary teaching efforts.

Dreaming...

First-rate programs are built on more than just good courses. The best students are drawn to unique opportunities. There are some things that I would love to have in a program, and perhaps we can work toward them:

1. A travel/study abroad component. A breadth of understanding requires a breadth of experience, particularly of experience outside of one's own cultural context. I would love to make this mandatory, in fact, although I know that could never be done. There are various ways we could do this: a) run our own courses abroad; b) find exchange or study abroad opportunities for students; c) allow students to do directed studies at a distance.
2. I'd like to see much more cooperation with other disciplines and professions. In fact, if we could support courses with the general form of "Humanities and ..." (e.g., "Humanities and Medicine", "Humanities and Law", "Humanities and Journalism", "Humanities and the Sciences"), I think we'd be able to make a much clearer case to the students of the applicability of their humanities degree, and we'd also have a stronger case for a graduate program.
3. The option of work terms for credit with government, NGOs, businesses, lobby groups, or other organizations, on humanities or interdisciplinary projects. Or, students could be hired by the humanities centre to put on conferences, stage exhibitions, or work on other events. This could have a component of coursework connected with it. We could also work with the service learning department to develop credit programs for students.
4. A relationship with performing disciplines, so that students could combine humanities with art, theatre, dance, film, or music. The point would be to both give students a broader experience than they might get from their discipline alone, and also to give humanities students outlets for creative expression. Having a relationship to the proposed gallery in the library extension is a good start on this.
5. Special, very current interdisciplinary humanities courses, offered as team taught, once a year. For example, in the year that the Iraq invasion happened, a course on representations of war would have been good.
6. Summer institute in the humanities - see the University of Washington's Simpson Humanities Center's program: <http://www.washington.edu/research/urp/sinst/>