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Campus Profile

Senior Allison Hawkins of Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., is majoring in French and minoring in studio art and art history, and hopes to combine them in a career in the contemporary art world. She spent a semester in Paris with additional time in Morocco, and highly recommends the lessons that come with living and studying abroad—lessons, she notes, “that cannot be learned in any other way.” She appreciates how the college’s language program helped prepare her.

“The classes that the French department offers are interdisciplinary in nature—French literature, art, music, poetry, etc., are all studied within the context of French history; classes are conducted entirely in French, preparing students to be confident and secure in their language competency. The program is also ingeniously designed—once a student has taken their first 300-level course, they should be ready to study abroad.”

Dive into the meaning of the expression “liberal arts,” and the role of the humanities division at Hope reveals itself readily.

A liberal arts education is about intellectual development, with students educated holistically, learning that knowledge exists not in isolation but in relationship, informing and informed by the perspectives and experiences of multiple disciplines. It’s an idea that grew out of the earliest days of the academy in the Middle Ages but is even more relevant in the present as the boundaries between subjects continue to blur and technology brings the peoples of the globe into closer community than ever before.

And it all hinges on the humanities with their emphasis on context. As a collection of disciplines, the humanities—at Hope, it’s English, history, modern and classical languages, philosophy, and religion—explore the human experience. They offer the lessons and ideas of the past as a way of understanding the present and future, and by stressing thinking about and articulating how those concepts relate they prepare students to navigate the world’s complexities.

“Courses in the humanities examine perennial human situations and issues—problems of identity, purpose, relationship, meaning, and the roles of faith and religion in individual lives and the larger society,” said Dr. William Reynolds, who is dean for the arts and humanities and a professor of English. “In addition, they foster problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and openness to new and complicated ideas.”

“Lives of Leadership and Service”

The lessons are for all of the college’s students—yes, those who major in one of the five humanities and who intend to make their career in the discipline, but also those whose academic and career focus lies elsewhere, whether business, government service, medicine, ministry, teaching or any other field imaginable.

“In general, philosophy is about training people to think deeply and clearly about everything and apply reason to humanity’s problems,” said Dr. Andrew Dell’Olio, professor of philosophy and chairperson of the department.

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“From the beginning, Plato gives us this great story of the cave in The Republic, where the cave represents the darkness of our existence and philosophy is about how to break free of the chains that keep us in the cave,” he said. “Philosophers go back into the cave and serve society. What this does for our students is that it gives them not only an ability to help solve problems, but a conscience and a sense that they are responsible to help the world become a better place.”

The humanities present thousands of years’ worth of human experience as a resource for students as they make sense of the world in which they find themselves—not only during their college years, but beyond.

“Students are grasping the great literature; they’re coming into essential conversation with the human being and human life, the understanding of faith and nature, of what it means to love, what it means to lose, to suffer,” said Dr. David Kloster, professor of English and chairperson of the department. “These are the conversations that we’re having in our classrooms—the kinds of conversations that most of us would agree are essential to the liberal arts.

“If you want to study why to study history, just look at the headlines,” said Dr. Albert Bell (history) was honored by the Australasian Journal of Philosophy—his most recent work selected for publication ranging from The Writer’s Chronicle to the Australian Journal of Philosophy—his major specialties include African-American and Latin American literature, as well as administration specialties include African-American and Latin American literature, as well as administration specialties include African-American and Latin American literature. The honors are internal as well—students have chosen members of the religion department to receive the Hope Outstanding Professor Award. Members of the faculty have received prestigious fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities (English, French, philosophy and religion) and the National Endowment for the Arts (English), and Fullbright fellowships awarded nationwide for students to study, conduct research or teach abroad. Students regularly highlight their work that is professionally defined in the classroom. Dr. Gibbs noted that the results are measurable measures. This past spring, for example, graduates with majors in the division earned thirds of the approximately 3,500

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Senior Leticia Parker of Holland, Mich., is planning on a career in law focused on civil litigation. She is a sociology major and English minor who would have majored in both, if she could have fit it in, finding the two disciplines complementary. “Sociology ties hand-in-hand with some of the material we read in English,” she said. She has appointed the availability of her professors. “The professors in the English department are really nice,” she said. “They are always accessible even after office hours.”

She has also valued the opportunity to hear from authors directly through the colloquium lectures, like Cioran. The Seductive Pessimist. The Writer’s Chronicle. “This is really interesting to me to hear students doing the work that is professionally defined in the classroom,” Dr. de Haan said.

“I think that most of us feel that there’s a serious need in the church and in the academy for committed Christians who believe that thinking intellectually responsible are not mutually

Throughout the college, departments provide opportunities for students to consider how a mature faith can inform their lives with a sense of calling and all of their choices and priorities. It’s an emphasis that fits especially naturally with the humanities.

“Almost all of our courses deal with issues of faith and reason, whether it’s the History of Philosophy courses or even specific courses in the theory of knowledge,” Dr. Dell’Olio said. “So many of our courses are set within the context of the tension between reason and faith, and also the integration of faith and learning. I sound like a savior, but it’s true.”

In the department of history, Christianity weaves naturally into a variety of courses. There are some periods in which the resulting portrait is more flattering than others (examples, after all, can range from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to the Spanish Inquisition), but Dr. Gibbs noted that the results are interesting. Students, she said, often comment to the effect that “What I learned here is that I learned to question, and as a result of the questioning my faith gets stronger.” She noted, “It’s really interesting to me to hear students independently of each other come into exist through figuring this thing out.”

It happens that the college’s approach to exploring faith issues winds up being very foreign students. It is a result, more effective and less controversial. At either secular or faith-based institutions, certain terms might be off the table. “I think that most of us feel that there’s more freedom in the classroom to talk about what comes up,” Dr. Kloster said.

“To be a serious scholar, you have to be doing the work that is professionally defined and recognized,” he said. “But then there are some things that allow us to go beyond where they might go.”

“The question can be investigated here. It’s open territory,” he said. “It’s bigger here. There’s more freedom, not less.”

Junior Jeffery Scott of Flint, Mich., intends to pursue a master’s and doctorate in dramatic, theological and fiction. For Hope, he appreciates Hope’s blend of faith and scholarship. “When I entered Hope I was not planning on studying religion, but reading books and talking with people on my own convinced me that studying theology is where God was leading me. I have come to believe that there is a serious need in the church and in the academy for committed Christians who believe that thinking intellectually responsible are not mutually

In addition to being committed to a serious need in the church and in the academy for committed Christians who believe that thinking intellectually responsible are not mutually exclusive. Studying religion at Hope, among other things, introduced me to a larger conversation in which one can be a world-class scholar and remain a faithful Christian.”

Junior James Richardson of Ann Arbor, Mich., intends to teach history at the college level. He has appreciated the opportunity he has been able to explore in faculty research—and has even had a related project of his own selected for presentation during the meeting of the Michigan Academy of Arts, Letters and Letters next semester. “The most interesting aspect beyond the conversation in which one can be a world-class scholar and remain a faithful Christian.”

It’s particularly important that the department of religion isn’t the only place where students and faculty engage with faith.