

The media covers only a fraction of the humanities areas the NEH was established by the U.S. Congress to support.

As the U.S. government funding agency for the humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) oversees research and education in many subjects of humanistic expression. We found, though, that the media reports on fewer humanities subjects than those defined in the NEH mission. Studying our [Collection 1](#) of 82,324 articles from U.S. media mentioning “humanities” using a [topic model](#) of 250 topics, we found that only five out of eleven subjects in the NEH definition truly appear in media discourse about the humanities. The five are: *language*, *literature*, *history*, *philosophy*, and *the arts*.¹

These subjects receive robust and meaningful coverage and are portrayed as belonging to either a public or academic domain. For example, *literature* is discussed in ten topics whose themes range from reading and writing books (topic [196](#)) to formal academic literary studies ([42](#)). (See representative articles: [a](#), [b](#)).

Conversely, there is no significant media coverage of the humanities subject *linguistics*, though it appears as a keyword with low importance in topic [195](#) (see articles: [a](#), [b](#)). *Archaeology* appears in [topic 202](#), and *ethics* appears in [138](#), while *jurisprudence* and *comparative religion* are unrepresented.

¹ “Arts” is a highly frequent word in 35 topics, and “history” in 25 topics. Funding for *arts* and *history* are reported more than any other subjects. (See [KF-7-1](#)).

This raises important questions for the humanities: Why does the media focus on language, literature, history, philosophy and arts to the near exclusion of other humanities subjects? Does the NEH need to better publicize their support for all of these subjects, if they are indeed supported?

Definition of the Humanities for the NEH

"The term 'humanities' includes, but is not limited to, the study and interpretation of the following: *language*, both modern and classical; *linguistics*; *literature*; *history*; *jurisprudence*; *philosophy*; *archaeology*; *comparative religion*; *ethics*; the *history, criticism and theory of the arts*; those aspects of the *social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods*; and the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life."

--National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act, 1965, as amended (*italics added*)²

Document collection studied: [Collection1](#): U.S. News Media, c. 1989-2019 (WE1S core collection of articles mentioning humanities).

Topic model of this collection: [250 topics](#).

Interesting sample topics in the model: [#196](#), [#42](#), [#195](#), [#202](#).

Representative articles: [a](#), [b](#), [c](#).

Evidentiary documentation for this key finding: [Topic Model Interpretation Report](#)

² Quoted on the NEH site at [neh.gov/about](#).