What are student sentiments about the humanities?
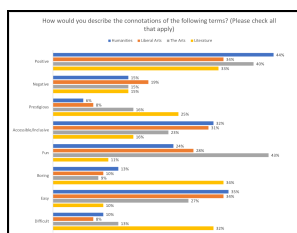## (Survey results complementing WE1S big-data research)

Though the four terms *humanities, liberal arts, the arts*, and *literature* might seem closely related, each has a different resonance for students.[1] A survey of 124 undergraduates at UC Santa Barbara, conducted as part of the WE1S project's human subjects research in spring quarter 2019, asked students to describe the connotations of each term by selecting from the following options: *Positive, Negative, Prestigious, Accessible/Inclusive, Fun, Boring, Easy,* or *Difficult*.[2]

The results show that students rank all four terms more positively than negatively. *Humanities* received 54 votes for *Positive* and 18 for *Negative*. For *the arts* and *literature*, the ratios were 50:18 and 41:18, while the gap was narrower for *liberal arts* at 42:24. *Literature* is by far the most *Prestigious*, receiving 31 votes. *The arts*, *liberal arts*, and *humanities* follow with 20, 10, and 7 votes.

However, rankings for *Accessible/Inclusive* are the exact inverse. Here *humanities* ranks first with 40 responses, followed by *liberal arts* (38), *the arts* (29), and *literature* (20). In regard to *Fun* and *Boring*, *the arts* are clearly the most *fun*, receiving 53 votes, high above *liberal arts* (35), *humanities* (30), and *literature* (14). By contrast, *literature* wins the race for *boring* with

42 votes. Trailing far behind in boredom are *humanities* (16), *liberal arts* (13), and *the arts*. In addition, *literature* is *Difficult* according to 40 students. Much less so are *the arts* (16), *humanities* (12), and *liberal arts* (10). Inversely, *humanities* ranks as most *Easy* with 44 votes. *Liberal arts* is a close second at 42, with *the arts* trailing at 34 and *literature* at 13.

Rankings of connotations for terms
(click on image for larger version)

These results indicate that the *humanities* and *liberal arts* are similar in the student imagination. Both are *Easy* and *Accessible/Inclusive. The arts* differentiate themselves as much more *Fun* but less *Accessible/ Inclusive. Literature* is the greatest outlier, manifesting as the most *Difficult*, *Boring*, and *Prestigious* among the four terms we report on here.

These direct, if small-scale, results gathered from students can be placed in conversation with WE1S's study of large-scale (but "distantly read") collections of public discourse because *humanities, liberal arts, the arts* and *literature* were all used by WE1S as search keywords to build its collections.

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[1] In a U.S context, *the arts* means the creative and performing arts, not the more capacious sense of the humanities and social sciences in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth nations. (See WE1S study of cross-national usage of *humanities* vs. *the arts*.)

[2] Students could check as many answers as applied, and not all participants responded. A follow-up question allowed participants to explain their answers narratively. Some students explained that they responded with socially prevalent views (sometimes in comparison to views of the sciences) that were not necessarily their own. Others commented on the vocabulary our survey used, emphasized the importance of context, or cited personal experiences.

Population Studied: C-HS-1 (UCSB undergrads)
Evidentiary Documentation: [To come]
Related Materials:
- WE1S Human Subjects page
- Raymond Steding, "A Digital Humanities Study of Reddit Student Discourse about the Humanities"
- [Cards to come]

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