

Students imagine a bleak future without the humanities.

(Survey results complementing WE1S big-data research)

According to students across majors, a world without the humanities would be uninteresting, unkind, and disconnected. This is the picture that emerges from survey data collected as part of WE1S's human subjects research at UC Santa Barbara in Spring 2019. Of the 124 UCSB undergraduates who took the survey, 70 provided text-based responses to the question *"How do you think the world would be different without the humanities?"*. The vast majority of responses describe a distinctly negative future.

For some students, the scenario is unimaginable. It would be "impossible for humans to have a world without humanities"; "humans and humanities [...] go together intrinsically [...] there can be no absence of humanities unless people just stop existing." "Dystopia," "chaotic," "collapse into anarchy," and not "able to function" are all phrases included in student predictions. For others, "the world would be uneducated and ignorant"; "we would [...] understand less about ourselves." Many students portray a world without the humanities as meaner than our own; respondents use phrases such as "less empathetic," "less human," "less heart," "lack of passion," "colder," "crueler," "careless," "calculated," "very mechanic," "more vicious," "more robotic," and "no ethics." Students imagine a world without the humanities as a world without history, culture, art, poets, performers, philosophy, music, literature, film, and entertainment. Several students identify a concern that "there would be a disconnect between people and between the past and the present." "The world would seem less interconnected. We would not have the opportunity to learn about other cultures and history." With the glue of the humanities gone,

there would be "less understanding of people around you." The humanities, teaching "empathy, tolerance, and open-mindedness," and "encourag[ing] different analyses and interpretations of big themes like justice and love," are "essential to understand history and our connections to one another."

At the very least, such a world would be less exciting. "Bland and sterile," "boring," "less creative," "more detached," "no fun," "ridiculously less interesting," "much more terrible," "very plain," "impoverished," "too rigid," "less pleasure," "less leisure," "no relaxing," and "unhappy" all appear in student descriptions. "We would appreciate life less," and "we wouldn't get to enjoy our lives to the fullest potential." Students therefore seem invested in ensuring that our future includes the humanities.

"Science makes life possible through technology, humanities make life worth living through art."

"Without humanities, the world would misunderstand the ways humans interact with one another. Humanities has proven time and time again the importance of human decency."

"What is there without the humanities?"

"I don't think there could be a world without the humanities. Ever since we could think, humans have been asking the question, 'why are things the way they are.' The humanities seek to answer that question."

~UCSB survey respondents

Population Studied: [C-HS-1](#) (UCSB undergrads)

Evidentiary Documentation: [To come]

Related Materials:

- [WE1S Human Subjects page](#)