

Humanities Statement

In October of 2020 the Humanities Program faculty were informed by CLAS Interim Dean John Columbo and Associate Dean Holly Storkel of their recommendation to KBOR to discontinue the Humanities Program. This initiative was presented as a *fait accompli* with no alternatives or opportunity for Program redesign or possible merger with other units. The decision was based solely on numbers of majors, which have been historically small with individualized curriculum planning and advising for students in the various tracks of the major. Moreover, the high SCH production of the Program and of individual faculty along with outreach to other University schools and departments was disregarded in the decision to discontinue. Notification of this decision came shortly before the scheduled Program review which originally was intended as an opportunity for constructive planning and forward thinking about the future of Humanities at KU.

The last few months have highlighted the enormous value of the arts and humanities as they inform and inspire people across the United States and around the globe. The pandemic has shown that humanistic thinking is absolutely essential because it provides us with wisdom, perspective, and context. In these trying times we need to formulate collaborative responses that transcend disciplinary boundaries and offer new approaches to disturbing issues. KU's Humanities Program offers precisely these responses.

Our interdisciplinary courses focus on what it means to be human and the responsibilities that entails. These courses explore cultural traditions, historical events, and pressing political problems. They foster big picture thinking and encourage students and faculty alike to draw on insights from multiple humanities disciplines. Among our Program's strengths are classes that ask students to consider questions related to identity, diversity, and equity, such as "Western Civilization/Foundations of Citizenship" I & II; "Pregnancy in Modern Literature," "Foodways: Native North America," "Kansas Today," "Sex in History," "Being Human in the Workplace," "World Literature I & II," and "Literature of Human Rights." We also teach the capstone course for LA&S degrees, a dedicated honors course offered every semester, and we contribute regularly to the First Year Seminar.

Other courses have especially been designed to attract STEM students and deal with questions related to the ethics and morality of technology and medicine. These courses include "Aviation in American Culture," "Technology and the Individual," and "Introduction to Medical Humanities." Affordable, short-term, experience-based study abroad options that will fit in any student's sequence, are integrated in our curriculum. I invite you to look at the attached brochure, the result of an extensive exercise in course mapping.

Faculty in the Humanities Program are a well-functioning team of highly productive and internationally renowned scholars. They are regularly being interviewed by prominent news outlets and magazines, bringing international attention to KU. Humanities faculty are also

dedicated to and recognized for their teaching. With numerous teaching awards among us and consistently high teaching evaluations across the board, we offer thoughtfully designed courses that are available in multiple formats. Humanities degree programs provide a high degree of curriculum flexibility and an advising intensive experience for students marking our unique position in the University. Our courses are especially valued by students in KU's Honors Program.

What the Hall Center for the Humanities does for KU faculty and graduate students – providing space for cross-disciplinary scholarship, a forum for presentations on a wide variety of humanistic topics, and a home for learning how to approach the big questions about the human condition from a variety of angles – the Humanities Program does for KU's undergraduate population.

For the past 73 years, KU's Humanities Program has cultivated civic and moral engagement among KU students and is now in a unique position to help students face the challenges brought on and exposed by the pandemic. We ask you that instead of discontinuing this program you consider helping us promote it among students, colleagues, and the wider university. KU's students need and deserve it, now more than ever.