

**HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT
HANDBOOK
2026–2027**

HUMANITIES DEPARTMENT HANDBOOK

The Reign of Literature & the Arts Commences!

Blessed are those who are found studious of

Literature & Humane & polite accomplishments.

Such have their lamps burning & such shall shine as the stars.

William Blake

(1757–1827)

INTRODUCTION

Welcome! This handbook offers an overview of the study of Humanities at Manhattan School of Music. Humanities, all told, along with the study of Music History and Music Theory, constitutes the School's academic core. Humanities provides the historical and cultural contexts for the music and theatre we study, perform, and create each year. Through a study of poetry, plays, novels, film, opera, languages, paintings, music, philosophy, maps, documents, essays, fragments, letters, sculpture, their creators and cultures, the study of the humanities seeks to cultivate a sense of wonder and curiosity about others and the world. To have a desire to know, to learn, to engage with tough problems, to discuss, to challenge, to honour the past, to reflect, to analyse, and, yes, to celebrate moments of triumph in the face of our shared human condition form the foundation of our studies.

Courses in Humanities offer room for creative and critical reflection and expression. In seminar-style classes, students and professors engage in conversations about foundational works of world literature. Through reading and writing, discussion and reflection, projects, presentations, and independent studies, study in Humanities abounds with opportunities for students to broaden their intellectual and imaginative range. With courses spanning Antiquity to modern poetry, Humanities at Manhattan School of Music offers a portal to global cultures of the past, the present, a place for students to cultivate their future selves.

CULTURAL INCLUSION

In concert with MSM's cultural inclusion policy, the Humanities department has always upheld the belief that meaningful interpretations of and conversations about art and culture require as many viewpoints as possible. Towards this end, all Humanities classes include underrepresented creators. Indeed, inclusion resides at the core of the study of the humanities, from *humanitas*, a word created by the Roman orator Cicero (106 BCE - 43 BCE) to denote the study of human nature, civility, and kindness. The Humanities program at MSM, through a thoughtful study of writers, artists, and intellectuals, from Classical antiquity to the contemporary moment, seeks to cultivate within students a sense of curiosity about the contemporary world. By considering, for example, the ancient epics of Homer within the context of Harlem Renaissance visual art as well as within formal matters of ancient Greek prosody and philosophy, the study of humanities seeks to cultivate a sense of wonder and curiosity informed by such matters as history, tradition, context, and community.

The works of underrepresented creators are included in the Humanities curriculum in the following ways:

- Student-centered discussions and classroom conversations
- Prepared talking points / formal oral presentations
- Analytical and creative writing
- Student projects
- Quizzes
- Midterm and Final Examinations
- Seminar papers
- Independent Study

THE HUMANITIES CORE SEMINARS

Along with music history and music theory, study in the humanities seeks to broaden the intellectual and imaginative scope of conservatory students. Composing reflections on the beautiful and the sublime in art and nature, reading and discussing Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies, researching the visual art of Cindy Sherman, finding joy in a well-rendered phrase, having one's independent study require visits to art museums and studio archives offer a glimpse into what study in the humanities offers students.

A distinguishing feature of the undergraduate course of study is the four-semester humanities core seminars, the only place in the conservatory where students from all departments study together in the academic classroom. The multiple viewpoints of core seminars encourage nuanced interpretations of stories by building intellectual and cultural contexts.

Surveying works of inestimable cultural import, humanities core seminars proceed chronologically with an emphasis on literary and visual art. Core seminars are seminars, not lectures—student-centered discussions founded on close reading and inquiry-based questions. This inquiry-based approach reminds each of us that for the attentive reader discoveries abound.

Over the course of four semesters, students conclude their studies with a capstone essay, and a blueprint for further study.

HUMANITIES ELECTIVES

For conservatory students having completed all four core seminars, humanities electives bring together student interest and faculty expertise in dynamic classes that consider topics in the humanities with depth and nuance. Humanities electives are taught by professors recognised for their expertise and contributions to the study of art history, U.S. history, film, poetry, philosophy, Shakespeare, world languages, the Harlem Renaissance, the cultural history of New York, and psychology.

Building upon their study in core seminars, students in humanities electives are designed to offer students insight into creativity, narrative, and craft. Students gain self-knowledge and confidence by communicating original ideas with clarity, participating in thought-provoking discussions, collaborating on presentations, and continuing to develop their own notions of personal success.

Conservatory students may also earn credit for humanities electives by completing one of a list of courses offered at Barnard College or by creating an independent study.

INDEPENDENT STUDY

Under special circumstances students may need or wish to pursue a Humanities project on a one-to-one basis with a professor who has agreed to supervise the student's work, the student may petition the Office of the Registrar and the Dean of Academic Affairs for approval of the project. Independent projects offer students the opportunity to create and complete an original research project on topics germane to the study of humanities. If the prospect of an independent study proves fascinating, begin a conversation with a humanities professor whom might serve as an advisor or guide to your research, craft, and refining of ideas. Students may take one such independent study project per degree.

Transfer students who wish to receive Humanities credit for college courses they have taken elsewhere should make an appointment to discuss their situation with both the Registrar and the Chair of the Humanities Department. Please bring a transcript, along with a course description, for each course you seek to transfer to facilitate the evaluation of your coursework at other institutions. For additional details, please refer to the Transfer Credit Policy available in the Academic Catalog.

PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC HONESTY

Plagiarism—the presentation of someone else’s ideas or words as if they were your own—is a serious offense in academic culture and public life. The establishment of the Internet as an information resource has made it particularly tempting for students to cheat on papers by plagiarizing, presenting passages or even whole papers that have been written by someone else as if this writing were their own work.

Plagiarism is a conspicuous violation of academic honesty that compromises your personal integrity, undermines your relationship with your professor, and discredits your reputation in the School community. In some cases, plagiarism can lead to loss of scholarship—even expulsion.

Please resist the temptation to plagiarize that may seem appealing in a moment of fatigue or panic, as paper deadlines and exams culminate—the consequences of such actions are considerably severe and most definitely not worth the risk. If you can stay focused on one of the primary goals of Humanities and the educational mission of the School—to support you in the development of a voice, a perspective, a system of values—you will understand that such a goal can be achieved only if you are willing to work diligently and honestly at meeting the challenges before you.

The rewards of such an endeavor are indeed immensely valuable, and your professors are available to assist you in your pursuits every step of the way. Trust your relationship with your professor, resist the impulse to cheat, to misrepresent yourself, and your progress will be assured.

If you are at all unclear about plagiarism, speak with your professor or the Department Chair to clarify your understanding of this serious violation of academic honesty.

OFFICE HOURS / CONFERENCES / VOICE AND EMAIL

The Humanities office is located in Room 227. Please feel free to stop by whenever you wish to discuss any aspect of your course of study. Visit your humanities professors during their office hours if you have questions about your progress.

You can reach Dr. Copprue, Chair of Humanities, by voicemail (x4459) or by email (dcopprue@msmnyc.edu) to initiate discussion of an issue or to arrange an appointment. The best way to contact Dr. Copprue is by email, or on the sixth floor of the Main building during academic classes.

Dr. Copprue holds office hours 1230-1330 Mondays and Wednesdays (Humanities office), Fridays 0930-1130 (by appointment, over Zoom). He can be found in Humanities office most mornings before the start of academic classes.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Humanities department handbook is offered as a general overview for Manhattan School of Music students.

In the humanities, the texts we read and the questions we address require student and professor alike to adopt the mindset of seeker, to persist in seeing the difficulty of things.

We study cultures past and present. Through inquiry-based conversations, students gain insight into themselves, others, and the world around them. Through writings, projects, and independent studies, students find room to develop their own voice and vision, for wisdom isn't taught but discovered.

We look forward to sharing the classroom with you.

Dr. Delano R. Copprue, Chair
Manhattan School of Music
Humanities

"Find the beginning."
—Homer, *Odyssey*