



# Liberal Arts

## Interdisciplinary Research

### Your guide to being interdisciplinary

In Liberal Arts we focus on interdisciplinary analysis and work with you to develop knowledge, skills and confidence to be the next generation of leaders, learners and innovators. To do this, we make connections across subject areas because we believe that the most creative, inventive and the most valuable insights can be built through this process.

You have spent your time in school and college having a broad education, studying different subjects and we want to continue and expand that at university. To be knowledgeable of the approaches and ideas from a range of disciplines can give you an ability to see the world from multiple perspectives and to understand the complexity of our social, political, cultural and economic environment. **We do this by being interdisciplinary.**



When you begin Liberal Arts at the University of Nottingham, we study ways in which we can apply interdisciplinary thinking to solve problems. For example, to understand issues concerning society's attitudes to global issues such as climate change, we need to assess the traditions present within social life, the relationship between people and governments, attitudes towards consumerism and the values we place on the environment. In effect, that's history, sociology, politics and philosophy.

**We need to combine different approaches to gain unique and innovate perspectives.**



## Think interdisciplinary!

To be interdisciplinary is to think and analyse with a range of tools and perspectives to create an enhanced understanding of situation or issue. It is to understand a range of approaches from the arts, humanities and social sciences, and the ways in which they interlink. As interdisciplinary scholars, we develop our knowledge of how disciplines like history, sociology, psychology, mathematics and geography work and how their methods are used. However, we then look at ways in which we can combine these elements together to solve problems. Throughout the Liberal Arts degree programme, we work with the following structure:

- We **develop** our knowledge of disciplines
- We **synthesise** these ideas to create our own perspective
- We **apply** this approach

## Applying an interdisciplinary approach

Over the summer, before you arrive at university, consider going to a museum or gallery, visiting a landmark or an area of natural beauty, observing a piece of architecture, attending a concert, meeting or debate and asking the following questions:

1. What role does this object, place or event perform? What does it do?
2. How has this role or function been established? Why does it have value?
3. What else could this object, place or event do? What other roles could it possess?



Through this approach, you think about past, present and future, you consider ideas about values, purpose and utility, and you assess issues beyond disciplinary boundaries. Too often we can go to a museum or gallery and think about history or art; we might visit the countryside and consider nature and the environment; or, we see an event or performance and we think about the immediate impact on us.



## Developing Knowledge

To develop insight into the approaches and methods within arts, humanities and social sciences as well as a grounding in mathematics and the natural sciences, there are a range of sources that you can use before arriving at university. These can be used to obtain knowledge about the work of scholars in a range of fields and can act as a source of inspiration for your own interdisciplinary work.

As interdisciplinary scholars we read, read and read some more! This includes newspapers, magazines, blogs and periodicals. It's important to keep updated with the latest developments in politics, arts, literature and science across a range of areas. You may consider some of the following sources useful:

- The Economist
- The New Yorker
- Scientific American
- The Telegraph
- The Independent

Academic work is not just confined to books and articles, you can find out more about the work of interdisciplinary scholarship through a range of accessible sources:

**The Smithsonian** – this is periodical published by the national educational facility in the United States and it provides information on science, history, art, popular culture and innovation

**The Conversation** – this is non-profit media source that publishes articles by the academic and research community in Australia, Britain, Europe and the United States

**Daily JSTOR** – this site uses scholarship to provide insight into current issues across the humanities, arts, social sciences and natural sciences





Reading aside, **podcasts** are a very useful form in which to engage a wide audience with academic scholarship. There are a number of really useful podcasts for interdisciplinary scholarship that are freely available across the BBC:

In Our Time	Past and present events are compared and contrasted to develop new insights on contemporary issues
The Long View	Past and present events are compared and contrasted to develop new insights on contemporary issues
Front Row	The latest art, literature, music, film and television
The Essay	Leading writers in the arts, humanities and the sciences discuss their work
The Inquiry	Explores the trends that are shaping the world
Free Thinking	Discussing arts and ideas from a huge range of perspectives
More or Less	A podcast on the use and misuse of quantitative data
Thinking Allowed	Exploring sociology and politics

Other podcasts that might be useful are:

This American Life	A weekly radio show that explores issues across the world
New Yorker Fiction Podcast	Authors discuss their work and give readings
The Allusionist	Language, etymology and discourse are explored in this highly popular show



## Reading List

The following texts have been selected as examples of classics in their field and innovative explorations of interdisciplinary study.

- Berger, J. 1972. *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC / Penguin.
- Cox, B. and Cohen, A. 2015. *Human Universe*. London: Collins.
- Grief, M. 2017. *Against Everything: On Dishonest Times*. New York: Doubleday.
- Kahneman, D. 2012. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. London: Penguin.
- Klein, N. 2018. *No Is Not Enough: Defeating the New Shock Politics*. London: Penguin.
- MacGregor, N. 2012. *A History of the World in 100 Objects*. London: Penguin.
- Oreskes, N. and Conway, E. 2014. *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Pinker, S. 2015. *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language*. London: Penguin.
- Sontag, S. 1966. *Against Interpretation*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Williams, R. 1976. *Keywords*. London: Croom Helm



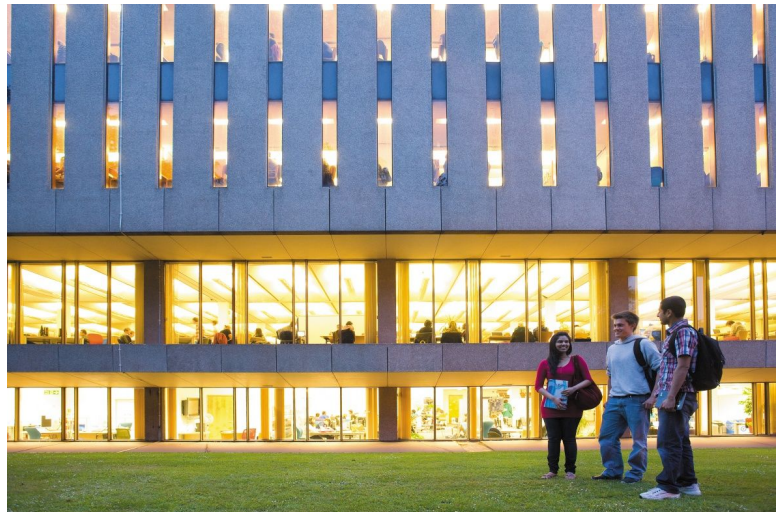
These will provide a background to some of the issues we encounter and can serve as reference points throughout your programme.



## Researching

You can begin to explore some of the areas of research you find interesting with online archives and repositories that allow you to access information and consider the wider scholarship around a subject area:

- **Academia.edu** - A networking site where scholars and students upload and share papers from their research
- **Research Gate** - An academic site where users can access papers and articles, share information and discuss research
- **Humanities Commons** - A non-profit sharing site where people working in the humanities share scholarship
- **JSTOR** - a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary sources
- **Google Arts and Culture** - A platform that hosts millions of artefacts and pieces of art, ranging from prehistory to the contemporary, shared by museums across the world
- **Archive of the Now** - Digital collection of contemporary poetry
- **HathiTrust** - Housing millions of digitised texts from recent works to those written several hundred years ago





## Building your approach

Working across disciplines can be challenging, exciting and dynamic. But it can also be bewildering. Finding huge amounts of data and working with various methods and approaches does present us with a range of issues.

However, bear in mind that being a Liberal Arts scholar is not about knowing everything. No-one can hold in their head every single theory, every piece of information, or, every disciplinary practice. Even if we could, it would not be helpful as all we could do is recount knowledge. Instead, we research and we apply ideas.

Our ability to think across disciplines is only important if we can make use of it to generate insight, develop new approaches and enrich our understanding of the world.

- Don't try to learn everything
- Develop your own approach
- Focus on the application of knowledge
- Explore and see what works
- Enjoy your studies!



“Liberal arts students learn to think laterally and become life-long learners, who are able to navigate with ease the rapid pace of change in the world today.”

**Dr Uditi Sen, Assistant Professor, Liberal Arts**