

# State of the Humanities Report at Middlebury College July 2020

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**Axinn Center  
for the Humanities**  
*at Middlebury*



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## History

The original Humanities Steering Committee, convened by James Davis (Religion) in 2012–13, was drawn from a volunteer group that represented a range of Humanities programs and departments on Middlebury’s campus. The Committee was joined by Dean of Faculty Research and Development Jim Ralph and continued to meet and arrange “lunch-exchange” discussions on a range of relevant topics until 2019.

Between 2017 and 2019, the Committee invited to campus directors from several Humanities Centers (Dartmouth, Colby, and Yale) to gather information about effective strategies for supporting the Humanities. As a result of these meetings, as well as the Committee’s own research, the Committee decided to recommend the appointment of a Director and the eventual establishment of a dedicated Center for the Humanities. President Laurie Patton enthusiastically welcomed and supported this proposal, as did other members of the senior leadership. After a process of nomination among Humanities faculty, Febe Armanios (History) and Marion Wells (English and American Literatures) accepted the inaugural position of co-Directors of Humanities at Middlebury for the period 2019–23. In 2019–20, a Humanities Steering Committee, made up of eight faculty members, supported and advised the co-Directors on implementing the Center’s projects and vision. In 2020–21, a similar faculty Committee will be convened but will also be joined by an ex officio staff member from the College Library.



Axinn Center at Starr Library. *Photo courtesy of the Middlebury Office for Communications and Marketing.*

During a LACSU conference (a network for Liberal Arts Colleges and Small Universities focused on Humanities, including Amherst, Wesleyan, Colby, Haverford, and Pomona) in early Fall 2019, attended by the co-Directors, it became apparent how central the function of a Humanities Center was to community-building among Humanities faculty and students on the campuses of our peer institutions. The creation of a Humanities Center had long been part of the Steering Committee’s planning for the future and was in fact included in the document submitted to the College’s

Envisioning Middlebury Survey in 2017.<sup>1</sup> After speaking with fellow Humanities directors, the co-Directors decided to accelerate the effort to establish a Center for the Humanities at Middlebury. Since Donald Axinn's original intention for the Axinn building was to create a space in which Humanities departments and programs could be housed together, with space for collaborative events, renaming the building the Axinn Center for the Humanities at Middlebury seemed a natural step. The College Administration approved this new usage in late Fall 2019, and the co-Directors obtained permission for priority use of the Abernethy Room for Humanities events. There are also currently plans in the works to set up offices specifically for the use of the Center in the Starr-Axinn building.



Left: Spanish Professor Rose Martin gives a lecture in the Abernethy Room, 1945. *Photo courtesy of Middlebury Special Collections.* Right: Lama Tenzin Dhoden leads a meditation session in the Abernethy Room, 2011. *Photo courtesy of the Middlebury Office for Communications and Marketing.*

Throughout Fall 2019, the co-Directors worked with Humanities Fellows Molly Burnett '22 and Laura Friedrich '20.5, and with staff at the College's Office for Communications and Marketing, to help design a new website for the Center, which was launched in January 2020. Until this work was undertaken, the College's website had no virtual home for the Humanities, even though it had long housed sites for the Arts, the Sciences, Environmental Studies, and International and Global Studies, among other centers and programs. The co-Directors and the Humanities Steering Committee argued that a website for the Humanities was critical for putting Middlebury on a par with other academic institutions, particularly liberal arts colleges, whose Humanities Centers had been long established. For prospective and admitted students, the new website offers a holistic guide to Middlebury's strengths in the Humanities and will help them make informed decisions about suitable paths of academic study. Beginning in Fall 2020, the co-Directors will be working with the Office for Communications and Marketing to transition to a new website platform that will be adopted, in the coming months, across the College.

Like comparable Centers at peer liberal arts colleges, the Axinn Center for the Humanities aims to support student and faculty research in a variety of ways. Although COVID-19 cut short plans for a

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<sup>1</sup> In February 2017, the Humanities Steering Committee produced a document of recommendations titled "A Vision for the Humanities." These recommendations included the establishment of "the Axinn Center as a Humanities Center" and "creating a Director of the Humanities." Different iterations of the Humanities Steering Committee in 2017–18 and 2018–19 worked closely with the College Administration to outline the practical implementation of these recommendations.



student reception celebrating senior work in the Humanities in Spring 2020, plans for a faculty Research Seminar are going ahead for 2020–21. This annual Research Seminar will extend throughout the academic year and will include a Seminar leader and up to six participants, who will be paid a stipend from the Center’s budget. The 2020–21 theme is “Crisis, Catastrophe, and Recovery.”

In upcoming years, the Center also plans to roll out yearlong themes (e.g., “What Is Human?,” “Borders,” or “Past and Present”) that will promote a useful consolidation of talks, workshops, and other events on campus within a distinct but capacious theme, and will also encourage cross-disciplinary interaction between faculty and their classes to highlight complementary approaches to the theme. The Center also hopes to continue a tradition of having one notable lecture each year to speak about broader issues relevant to the Humanities. On March 5, 2020, the inaugural speaker for the Axinn Center for the Humanities was Emily Bernard, the Julian Lindsay Green and Gold Professor of English at the University of Vermont. Her talk was titled “Black Is the Body: Writing about Race in America.”<sup>2</sup>



Emily Bernard, from the University of Vermont, delivers the Axinn Center for the Humanities’ inaugural lecture in McCullough Student Center. March 5, 2020. *Photo by Chris Spencer, courtesy of the Middlebury Office for Communications and Marketing.*

The Center aims to respond creatively and robustly to the shifts in enrollments and majors in Humanities fields across the country by supporting Middlebury Humanities in a variety of ways: creating greater visibility for Humanities on campus; offering robust support for faculty and student research in the Humanities; creating opportunities for humanists to gather on campus to discuss matters of common concern, including areas of research; promoting exciting curricular innovations within Humanities fields and between Humanities and STEM fields;<sup>3</sup> and combating negative narratives about the usefulness and relevance of humanistic study. At the broadest institutional level, the Center aims actively to underscore the centrality of humanistic study and teaching to the College’s core liberal arts mission, as represented in the learning goals developed by its faculty. Many of these goals specifically reflect core humanistic skills, including critical thinking; careful reading

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<sup>2</sup> Emily Bernard, “Black Is the Body: Writing about Race in America,” Inaugural Lecture for the Axinn Center for the Humanities at Middlebury College, March 5, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/middmedia/review/396927792/83f96c7c66>.

<sup>3</sup> Below, in Section III, we define what Humanities and STEM mean in the Middlebury context, particularly with reference to the discussion of Middlebury-specific data on majors and enrollments. In general, however, the acronym “STEM” refers to “Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.”

and listening; skillful oral and written expression; understanding differences and commonalities within and across cultures and societies; acquiring knowledge to solve emerging problems; engaging in independent research; and cultivating ethical integrity and the capacity for global citizenship.<sup>4</sup>

## Articulating a Mission

As this Report will show, the Center's vision for Humanities at Middlebury is both ambitious and broadly inclusive. We have included within its reach Bread Loaf's School of English, the Bread Loaf Conferences, the C. V. Starr Schools Abroad, CMRS-Oxford, and the summer Language Schools, in addition to the extensive array of departments and programs on the Vermont campus, some or all of whose faculty identify as humanists (see below for details).

What do these diverse programs, departments, and affiliated off-campus programs have in common? The Center's core mission statement sums up many of the broad tools and skills that humanists share across disciplines: "Humanistic analysis addresses vital contemporary concerns from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, but it does so in the context of careful interpretation of stories, experiences, cultures, and artifacts from the past. Because humanistic study centrally involves imaginative engagement with other peoples, places, and times, it builds the capacity to participate in empathetic and inclusive dialogue as well as honing core academic skills of critical thinking, confident oral presentation, and effective writing."<sup>5</sup> We believe the scope of Middlebury's humanistic resources, especially when organized by the kind of guiding vision that the Center hopes to facilitate, positions the College not only to offer outstanding education in Humanities fields (both at the undergraduate and in some cases the graduate level), but also to offer students the kind of focused training in writing, speaking, and critical analysis that will equip them to respond resourcefully to the complex and urgent problems in our modern world.

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<sup>4</sup> These learning goals were endorsed by Middlebury College faculty in January 2014 as a core set of goals to "enhance teaching and learning at Middlebury College."

<sup>5</sup> Axinn Center for the Humanities, "About Us," <http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/humanities/about-us> (accessed June 15, 2020).



Students in a discussion with inaugural Humanities speaker Emily Bernard in a Creative Writing workshop in the Axinn Center, March 5, 2020. *Photo by Chris Spencer, courtesy of the Middlebury Office for Communications and Marketing.*

## Crisis in the Humanities: The Big Picture

Before discussing the state of the Humanities at Middlebury in particular, we offer a brief synopsis of the widely discussed national “crisis” in the Humanities. Many Humanities departments and programs at Middlebury have experienced a drop in enrollments and (especially) a drop in major numbers. How do these declines compare to the data from institutions of higher education across the country, and across time?

Over the last seventy-five years, the number of undergraduate degrees completed nationally in Humanities as a percentage of all degrees has declined rapidly—from a high of 17.9% in 1967 to 5.4% in 2015, a percentage that amounts to less than a third of that of the sciences.<sup>6</sup> Studies from IPEDS (the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) and the Humanities Indicators Project run by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences provide the hard data to support an analysis of the collapse of Humanities numbers nationwide. Benjamin Schmidt’s analysis of the data for a 2018 *Atlantic* article shows how catastrophic the slide has been in every numerical measure of the status of the Humanities on campuses since 2008, especially for core Humanities departments, such as Languages, English, Philosophy, and History (see figure 1).

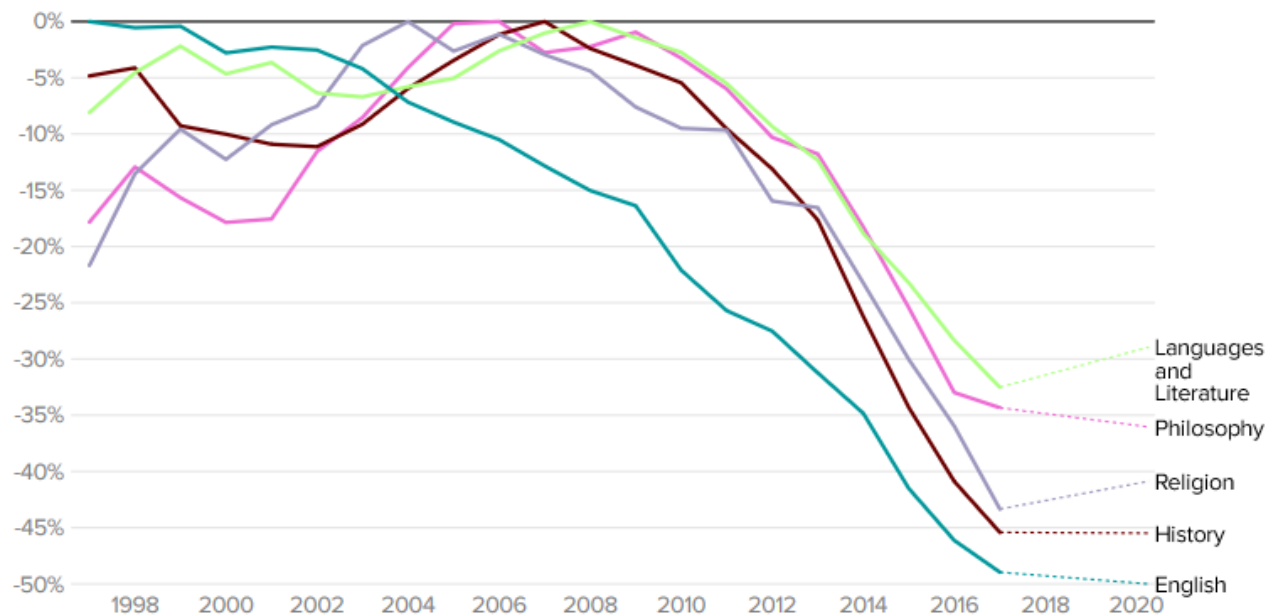
After a steep drop in these disciplines in the 1970s, numbers of majors held steady (except for English) through the 1990s and early 2000s. Following the 2008 financial crisis, however, numbers of majors dropped precipitously. The numbers of students majoring in Languages and Literature (excluding English) dropped 33% from 2008 to 2017; History dropped 45%; English dropped 49%; and Philosophy dropped 34%. English is an outlier in this group in that its numbers had already been dropping continuously since 1999. And while the share of Humanities degrees has been falling at all types of institutions of higher education, the decline has been steepest at elite research

<sup>6</sup> American Academy of Arts & Sciences, “Bachelor’s Degrees in Humanities,” <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/higher-education/bachelors-degrees-humanities> (accessed June 15, 2020).



universities and elite liberal arts colleges—steepest of all at the latter. In 1998 the share of Humanities degrees across elite liberal arts colleges was 32%, compared with 18% at elite research universities. By 2008 this percentage had declined to 30%, and between 2008 and 2017 the percentage fell to 21% (compared with a slightly less steep decline from 18% to 11% at elite research universities). In the data section of this Report, we will analyze our own declining numbers in the context of these national trends.<sup>7</sup>

## Change in Share of Humanities Majors in All BAs at U.S. Institutions, Relative to Peak



Source: [IPEDS, preliminary for 2017](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Embed](#)

*The Atlantic*

Figure 1: Change in share of Humanities majors from 1998 to 2020. Source: Benjamin Schmidt, “The Humanities Are in Crisis,” *The Atlantic*, August 23, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Schmidt, “The Humanities Are in Crisis,” *The Atlantic*, August 23, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/08/the-humanities-face-a-crisis-of-confidence/567565/>.

## Purpose of This Report

In early Fall 2019, at the start of the Axinn Center for the Humanities’ inaugural year of operations, the Center’s co-Directors decided to undertake this “State of the Humanities Report at Middlebury College.” The purposes were threefold: (1) to discuss the broad history of the Humanities at the College; (2) to consider the challenges in majors and enrollments that have faced the Humanities in recent years, specifically in relation to STEM, as a quite general “crisis in the Humanities” has unfolded nationwide; and (3) to suggest a plan for securing the long-term future of the humanistic pursuits that are a core part of the College’s liberal arts mission. The 2019–20 academic year was spent gathering information and data from various colleagues, and the Report was written during the months of lockdown triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This Report outlines a comprehensive vision of the Humanities at the College, primarily through a focus on the resources available to undergraduate students in the Humanities at our Vermont campus. From discussing the histories of different programs and centers, to exploring what the Humanities add to the College’s academic mission, the Report hopes to serve as a reference point for understanding the work that faculty, staff, students, alumni, and the entire Middlebury community put into building Humanities majors, departments, and programs. Accordingly, the Report invites readers to think about the expansiveness of the Humanities at the College and to reflect on Middlebury’s distinct and unrivaled offerings. It will also explore varied data that show a pattern of decline of Humanities majors and, to some extent, enrollments at Middlebury College, one that was primarily exacerbated by the 2008 financial crisis. Finally, the Report will suggest alternative strategies for reinvigorating the Humanities, attracting new Humanities majors, and financially securing—through a permanent endowment—the future of the Axinn Center for the Humanities, its affiliate departments and programs, and its various initiatives.







## Middlebury: Main Campus in Vermont

Middlebury College has a long-standing reputation as preeminent in Humanities fields among its peer institutions. Its strength in foreign language pedagogy is well-known and is attested by the range and number of foreign languages offered at Middlebury, including through the renowned summer Language Schools as well as the relatively unusual existence on an undergraduate campus of a program in Comparative Literature. In addition, the College's direct ties with prominent writers' conferences and a distinguished literary review also help to ensure the prominence of its literary and Creative Writing programs. More recently, exciting new foci have emerged, such as the Food Studies minor, the Black Studies major, and the Science, Medicine, and Technology major track within the History Department. All told, the Axinn Center for the Humanities counts the following departments and programs as affiliate members: American Studies; Anthropology; Arabic; Black Studies; Chinese; Classics; Comparative Literature; English and American Literature; Environmental Studies; Film and Media Culture; Food Studies; French; Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies; German; History; History of Art and Architecture; Italian; Japanese; Jewish Studies; Literary Studies; Lusophone Studies; Philosophy; Religion; Russian; and Writing and Rhetoric.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, Middlebury is fortunate to have extensive libraries, including the dynamic Special Collections Library, which oversees Rare Books and Manuscripts, the Abernethy Collection, the Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection, the College Archives, and Digital Special Collections. Special Collections staff provide invaluable Humanities resources for interested faculty by creating or cocreating archival workshops and presentations that can be used in quite varied classroom settings.

## Middlebury College and Bread Loaf

The Bread Loaf School of English and the Bread Loaf Writers' Conferences are highly distinctive features of Middlebury's Humanities landscape. The very fact that Middlebury operates a renowned graduate program in English (including the MLitt program) that draws both faculty and students from around the country and abroad already sets it apart from any other liberal arts college in the country. The Bread Loaf Writers' Conference was the first Writers' Conference in the country and, together with the newer Conferences, helps to make Middlebury a true hub for literary teaching, learning, and production.

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<sup>8</sup> Please note that this Report distinguishes between the capacious number of departments and programs affiliated with the Axinn Center versus how "Humanities" are defined in Section III below, with reference to Middlebury Humanities majors and other data. Also, we consider departments within the newly dubbed "Languages, Cultures, and Literatures" division as a central element of Middlebury's Humanities offerings, not least because most faculty in these departments specialize and teach in a humanistic field such as literature, history, philosophy, among many others. Also, foreign language departments are considered as "Humanities" in nearly all evaluative national studies.



Left: Barn Classroom: Most Bread Loaf courses are discussion-based, giving students ample time to dissect texts and ask big questions. *Photo courtesy of Bread Loaf School of English.* Right: Bread Loaf's iconic Adirondack chairs are a locus for both quiet reading and animated discussion. *Photo courtesy of Bread Loaf School of English.*

## The Bread Loaf School of English

The Bread Loaf School of English has offered graduate-level programs at its Ripton, Vermont, campus since 1920, housing on average about 250 students per summer. Bread Loaf also operates two other campuses: one at Lincoln College, Oxford, UK, housing around 75 students; and the other at St. John's College, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, housing around 65 students. The Bread Loaf School of English brings together leaders in the subdisciplines of English from universities around the country—many of whom elect to return every summer.

Students at Bread Loaf's campuses either earn their master's degree over a number of intensive summers (typically in four or five summers, but students can take up to ten years) or pursue continuing education in targeted areas. Master's degree candidates follow a robust curriculum, with required courses in four areas: British Literature (pre-seventeenth century); British Literature (eighteenth century to present); American Literature; and World Literature. Students may also select additional electives in all these topics, as well as from additional classes in "Writing, Pedagogy and Literacy," and "Theater Arts."



Students dig into a text to prepare for a group presentation. *Photo courtesy of Bread Loaf School of English.*

If students successfully complete the master's program, they are eligible for Bread Loaf's Master of Letters degree (MLitt), which allows students to design their own course of study in a specialized concentration within the fields of literature, pedagogy, and/or the creative arts. As with the MA program, students have up to ten years to complete their course of study, but most finish within four or five years. As table 1 shows, enrollment at Bread Loaf has remained quite steady, particularly at the Vermont campus, with fluctuations in numbers over the years mainly due to the closures of two campuses (Alaska in 2007 and North Carolina in 2014).

Table 1: Enrollment and Graduation History, Bread Loaf Campuses, 1999–2019

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Enrollment</b>																					
Enrollment - Total	425	478	466	473	455	526	515	487	488	496	477	473	452	425	414	404	412	399	382	371	356
Enrollment - Alaska (AK)	58	74	75	65	47	59	71	42	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enrollment - Mexico (MX)	0	0	0	0	0	52	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enrollment - New Mexico (NM)	70	74	81	74	79	83	91	64	88	83	49	65	68	50	71	78	77	68	42	57	56
Enrollment - North Carolina (NC)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	53	82	85	104	68	54	53	42	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enrollment - Oxford (OX)	67	93	80	90	82	87	94	90	61	71	70	79	78	65	53	87	68	69	85	62	57
Enrollment - Vermont (VT)	230	237	230	244	247	245	259	238	257	257	254	261	252	257	248	239	267	262	255	252	243
<b>Enrollment - Midd Undergrad</b>																					
Enrollment - Midd UG Total	3	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	3	1	2	1	0	3	3	2	2	1	0	3	4
Enrollment - Midd UG - AK	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enrollment - Midd UG - MX	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enrollment - Midd UG - NM	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Enrollment - Midd UG - NC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enrollment - Midd UG - OX	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enrollment - Midd UG - VT	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	2	2	1	0	2	3
<b>Graduating Students (Seniors)</b>																					
Master of Arts Degree	59	62	59	75	77	88	72	84	88	73	87	97	89	93	86	86	70	85	65	75	74
Master of Letters Degree	1	3	3	4	3	4	3	1	3	4	2	3	3	3	1	0	3	1	4	2	4
Middlebury Bachelor of Arts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Seniors - Alaska</b>																					
Seniors AK - Master of Arts	2	0	3	2	2	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Seniors AK - Master of Letters	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Seniors - Mexico</b>																					
Seniors MX - Master of Arts	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Seniors MX - Master of Letters	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Seniors - New Mexico</b>																					
Seniors NM - Master of Arts	12	8	4	11	6	12	10	11	12	10	4	11	10	5	23	15	15	13	3	7	8
Seniors NM - Master of Letters	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1
<b>Seniors - North Carolina</b>																					
Seniors NC - Master of Arts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	12	10	13	9	7	8	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Seniors NC - Master of Letters	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Seniors - Oxford</b>																					
Seniors OX - Master of Arts	12	26	21	22	21	26	26	37	18	24	19	21	31	20	16	24	16	22	15	16	18
Seniors OX - Master of Letters	11	25	20	19	21	26	26	36	18	23	18	21	30	20	16	24	16	22	15	16	17
Seniors OX - Master of Letters	1	1	1	3	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Seniors - Vermont</b>																					
Seniors VT - Master of Arts	34	27	33	44	51	49	38	30	49	31	51	58	45	63	42*	47	42	51	51	54	53
Seniors VT - Master of Letters	34	26	32	43	48	45	35	30	46	30	51	56	43	60	40	47	40	50	47	54	51
Seniors VT - Master of Letters	0	1	1	1	3	4	3	0	2	1	2	2	1	3	1	0	2	1	4	0	2
*1 MC B.A.																					

Source: Courtesy of Elaine Lathrop, Bread Loaf School of English, via correspondence, June 16, 2020.



The Bread Loaf campus also boasts a unique form of pedagogy involving an equity actor ensemble that comes to campus every summer. Aside from staging a major theatrical production, along with staged readings and events, the ensemble has also pioneered the use of an innovative form of pedagogy that, in Director Emily Bartels’s words, “puts texts on their feet.” Actors collaborate with faculty members to find creative ways for the ensemble to come into classrooms and experiment with different ways of analyzing or interpreting a text.<sup>9</sup>

In a recent innovation that showcases the rich possibilities for collaboration between the Bread Loaf School of English and the main Middlebury College campus, a version of the Acting Ensemble has reassembled on the main campus, led by Craig Maravich and Middlebury Town Hall Education Director Lindsay Pontius. Drawing on the skills of professional artists in the local area, this initiative—now called Beyond the Page—collaborates with faculty to offer inventive enactment of scenes in theater classes or critical reimaginations of texts in other contexts.



Left: Students in Tara Affolter’s Models of Inclusive Education course (Spring 2020) participating in “Basketball Models of Inclusive Education,” organized by the Beyond the Page acting ensemble. *Photo courtesy of Craig Maravich.* Right: Bread Loafers in Vermont explore the art of printing and the graphics of type in the letterpress cabin. *Photo courtesy of Bread Loaf School of English.*

Another new and productive collaboration between Bread Loaf and the main campus centered on the recovery and reoperationalizing of letterpresses that had long lain dormant in the Printer’s Cabin on the Bread Loaf campus. In 2017, Bread Loaf faculty member Claudia Johnson teamed up with local master printers Heather Hale (’77) and John Vincent, as well as the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference and Director of Special Collections Rebekah Irwin, to create the Letterpress Initiative. That year, workshops using the letterpress at Bread Loaf printed two original poems by faculty member Gwyneth Lewis. Inspired by this BLSE initiative, Rebekah Irwin also developed a series of book arts workshops—renamed *writing labs*—for Bread Loaf that she now teaches on the undergraduate campus as part of First-Year Seminars and other Humanities courses. These projects provide rich exemplars for further collaboration between the tremendous resources at the Bread Loaf campus and undergraduate teaching on the main campus.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Information in this section drawn from the Bread Loaf School of English website, <https://www.middlebury.edu/school-english/> (accessed June 19, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> The information on the letterpress project and book arts workshops comes from correspondence with Rebekah Irwin, May 15, 2020.

## Bread Loaf Writers' Conferences

Each summer since 1926, the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference has offered an intensive ten-day program of lectures, readings, and workshops to a diverse group of writers, matching emerging writers with its notable faculty members, including MacArthur Fellows and recipients of other major awards. Conference participants attend topic-based lectures and craft workshops each day. Faculty from the College attend the conferences regularly. As table 2 shows, the number of applications to the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference has nearly doubled just since 2001, creating an increasingly selective admission process.



Novelist and essayist Toni Morrison, a Nobel laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner, at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, Middlebury College, August 19, 1977.  
*Photo courtesy of Middlebury Special Collections.*

The weeklong Bread Loaf Environmental Writers' Conference was established in 2013 on the model of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. In similar fashion, the Bread Loaf Translators' Conference was established in 2014 following the same Writers' Conference model.



Left: During the Bread Loaf Environmental Writers' Conference, participant Vicki Vertiz (left) meets with faculty member Amber Flora Thomas (right); in addition to the small-group workshops, students meet individually with their faculty workshop leader. *Photo by Todd Balfour, courtesy of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conferences.*

The Bread Loaf Writers' Conferences encourage applications from Middlebury students and offer Contributor awards to cover the cost of Conference attendance for admitted students. Several undergraduate writers attend all of these conferences each year (except Bread Loaf in Sicily); an average of around nine Middlebury undergraduates per year attend the main Bread Loaf Writers' Conference.<sup>11</sup>



Participants Emily Luan, Dujie Tahat, and James Moore meet following the morning lecture in the Little Theater, where lectures and readings are held throughout the session. *Photo by Todd Balfour, courtesy of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conferences.*

Table 2: Application and Admission to Bread Loaf Writers' Conferences, 2001 to Present

Bread Loaf Writers' Conferences												
year	BL Writers' applications	percentage accepted	number Midd	BL Sicily applications	percentage accepted	number Midd	BL Env. applications	percentage accepted	number Midd	BL Trans. applications	percentage accepted	number Midd
2001	1136	20%	9									
2002	1281	17%	11									
2003	1466	15%	9									
2004	1555	14%	9									
2005	1633	14%	9									
2006	1550	14%	14									
2007	1513	15%	15									
2008	2191	10%	15									
2009	1824	12%	12									
2010	1736	13%	11									
2011	1691	13%	9	68	35%	n/a						
2012	1786	12%	9	77	35%	n/a						
2013	2256	10%	9	75	43%	n/a						
2014	1951	11%	8	53	58%	n/a	128	53%	3			
2015	1973	11%	7	61	52%	n/a	120	70%	1	83	60%	2
2016	2152	10%	6	53	60%	n/a	112	71%	2	74	68%	1
2017	2188	10%	5	59	54%	n/a	138	54%	2	78	65%	1
2018	2074	11%	5	63	51%	n/a	131	57%	2	113	45%	1
2019	2009	11%	5	63	51%	n/a	173	44%	4	113	47%	2
2020	1847	<i>in process</i>	<i>in process</i>	<i>in process</i>	<i>in process</i>	n/a	172	48%	4	123	<i>process interrupted</i>	2

Source: Courtesy of Bread Loaf Writers' Conference through email correspondence with Noreen Cargill, June 8, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Information in this section drawn from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conferences website, <http://www.middlebury.edu/bread-loaf-conferences> (accessed June 15, 2020).



## New England Young Writers' Conference

The New England Young Writers' Conference (NEYWC) was founded in 1985 under the direction of Robert Pack, then a member of the Middlebury Creative Writing faculty. Since then, around two hundred high school students from the New England area have gathered annually at the Bread Loaf campus for a long weekend of craft workshops, readings, and other literary activities. In addition to offering high-level workshops to students interested in writing, the Conference also introduces large numbers of high school students every year to Middlebury College and to the long tradition of writing associated with both the main Middlebury campus and the Bread Loaf campus. A generous gift from an alumnus has allowed the NEYWC to provide full conference tuition for five students and a teacher-chaperone. This gift has helped the Conference pursue its goal of increasing the diversity of both its staff and its student body.

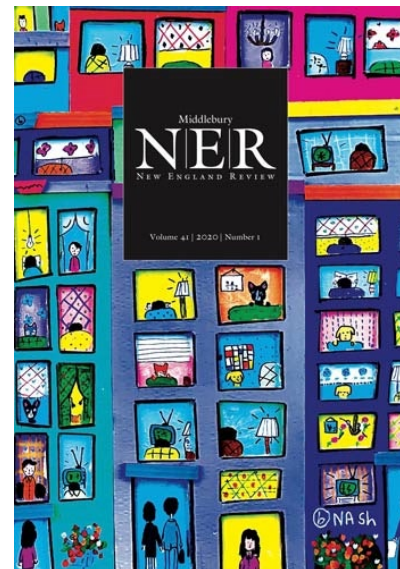
In an effort to increase the interface between this event and Creative Writing classes on the main campus, the current Conference Director, Karin Gottshall, appoints three student interns who help with the clerical work associated with the Conference and also create, write, and edit the NEYWC version of *The Crumb*, the daily newsletter associated with all of the Bread Loaf Conferences. In addition, particularly talented undergraduate writers are sometimes invited to create and teach their own seventy-five-minute craft workshop specifically for the Conference.<sup>12</sup>

## New England Review

The *New England Review* (NER) constitutes another highly valued and distinctive feature of the “big picture” of Humanities at Middlebury. An internationally recognized literary journal, *NER* publishes an influential sample of contemporary writing, in a multitude of styles and forms. The journal was founded independently by poets Sydney Lea and Jay Parini in 1978. After a period of affiliation with the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the magazine came under the sponsorship of Middlebury College in 1987, where it continues to operate as a department of the College.

The *New England Review* has a distinguished history of publishing important writers who, at the time of publication in *NER*, were not well-known, including Mark Doty, Louise Erdrich, and Jorie Graham and, more recently, Ocean Vuong, Lisa Taddeo, and Ethan Chatagnier. In addition to publishing a quarterly journal in print and ebook formats, *NER*'s website features excerpts from each issue along with news, audio, interviews, and original writing for the website. Works published in the magazine are chosen every year for prize anthologies, including Pushcart, O. Henry, Best New Poets, and the Best American Anthologies.

*NER* connects with Middlebury undergraduates in a variety of ways. The *Review* offers internships to students each semester, including Winter Term, as well as during the summers. Interns gain experience screening submissions, proofreading and fact-checking, organizing readings, participating in podcast production, and working on the website and social media,



<sup>12</sup> Email correspondence with the current NEYWC Director, Karin Gottshall, May 28, 2020.

among other hands-on tasks. *NER* also invites current students to apply to participate in a submissions discussion group where students read and discuss submissions alongside *NER* staff members, gaining valuable insight into the editorial process. If, as a recent report argued, one of the most important aspects of undergraduate preparation for the workforce is the opportunity for students to apply and use their knowledge and skills, *NER* offers a remarkable onsite opportunity for Humanities students to participate in every stage of the process by which artistic works make their way onto the page of one of the country's most highly regarded literary journals.<sup>13</sup>

*NER* also hosts a podcast, “*NER Out Loud*,” which began in 2018 as a spin-off to the live annual event featuring student actors reading selections from *NER*. It has grown to include a Vermont Writers Series, in which local *NER* authors read their own work, as well as episodes that feature authors reading selections from recent issues of the magazine. With support from the Vermont Book Shop, the magazine also sponsors the Vermont Reading Series, which has introduced more than a hundred writers to Vermont audiences since 2011.<sup>14</sup>

## Middlebury CMRS Oxford-Humanities Program

Like the Bread Loaf School of English, the Middlebury CMRS Oxford-Humanities Program expands Middlebury's Humanities offerings well beyond the confines of the undergraduate campus in Vermont. Since Middlebury's acquisition of the program in 2014, the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (CMRS) has—while not abandoning its early focus on those premodern periods—expanded its reach into a more robust Humanities curriculum, attracting increasing numbers of Middlebury students each year, including non-Humanities majors.

The original CMRS (Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies) program was established in 1975 by John and Sandy Feneley in St Michael's Hall in central Oxford. The Feneley library, housing over 16,000 volumes related to the Centre's original focus on medieval and early modern studies, is still an integral part of the St Michael's building and is used in many classes and workshops. Early on, the program developed an affiliation with Keble College which it has maintained to this day, as reflected in the dual appointment of faculty at CMRS and Keble, and the associate rights at Keble granted to Middlebury students participating in the program. Middlebury-CMRS is one of only five accredited year-round academic programs in Oxford run by US colleges or universities.

In 2014, Middlebury College took over the administration of CMRS from St. Mary's College of Maryland. Guy Perry was appointed director of CMRS in 2018 and has overseen the renaming of the Center to reflect its mission to offer students a wide-ranging Humanities-based curriculum. While the curriculum has broadened well beyond its original focus on medieval and early modern studies, for their required research paper all students must focus on a medieval or early modern topic from a literary, historical, or religious studies perspective. In addition to the Research Course, students select two tutorials in subjects of their choosing and participate in a ten-week seminar, which also culminates in a long research paper on a relevant topic.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Association of American Colleges & Universities, “It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success,” 2013, <https://www.aacu.org/leap/presidentstrust/compact/2013SurveySummary> (accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> Email correspondence with *NER* editor Carolyn Kuebler, who kindly wrote up a description of *NER*'s history and current activities, which we draw heavily on for this section of the Report, June 5, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Middlebury-CMRS Oxford-Humanities website, <http://www.cmrs.org.uk> (accessed June 15, 2020).

Perry and the previous Middlebury-based director, Paul Monod (History), have worked hard to ensure that the program maintain rigorous standards. In fact, the program has become more rigorous and demanding since Middlebury took over. Accepted students must generally have a GPA of 3.4 or above. While some of the colleges who sent students to CMRS dropped out of the program when the standards of admission were raised, M-CMRS successfully recruited a new pool of colleges and universities whose students now apply, including Wesleyan, Wellesley, Amherst, UVA, and UNH. The number of Middlebury students attending the program has also increased considerably, from a small handful in 2014 to around twenty in recent years. In addition to positive anecdotal feedback from returning students, the number of alumni applying for advanced degrees in Humanities after graduating from CMRS—the directors estimate around five or six per year—also attests to the success of the program.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike “in-house” Oxford programs, the CMRS program integrates well with the US academic structure, offering fourteen-week semesters in the fall and spring; the first ten weeks coincide with the Oxford terms, and the final four are devoted to work on the required research paper.

The opportunities offered by Middlebury’s incorporation of CMRS into the Schools Abroad network for our undergraduates are evident in the unusual access (to world-class research libraries and exciting lectures, events, and workshops) the program offers. In addition, we suggest there is scope for greater integration of some of these resources within the main campus in other areas as well, including supporting faculty research in certain fields. For instance, in Summer 2016 CMRS



Students on an excursion to Stratford-upon-Avon, birthplace of Shakespeare. *Photo courtesy of Middlebury Schools Abroad.*

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<sup>16</sup> Email correspondence with former CMRS Director Paul Monod, May 26, 2020.

sponsored and hosted a workshop on paleography, led by longtime CMRS tutor Ralph Hanna and offered to a group that included both faculty and library staff. Workshops like this one offer some Humanities faculty at Middlebury access to the unparalleled resources in the Oxford libraries, as well as expertise in targeted areas for those wishing to expand their own knowledge and skills.

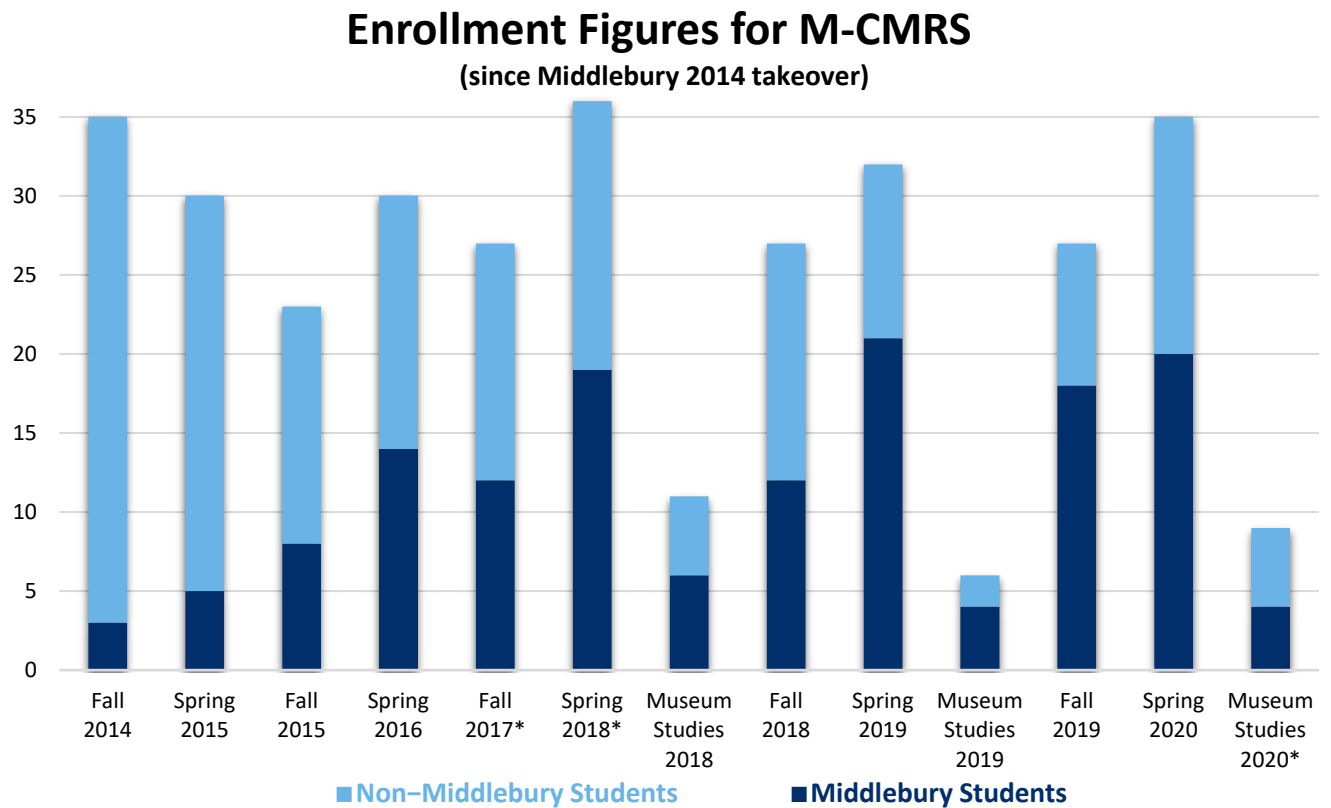


Figure 2: Enrollment figures for M-CMRS since 2014. Data courtesy of Guy Perry, Principal, Middlebury-CMRS Oxford Humanities Program, May 28, 2020.



## Middlebury-Lincoln Oxford Program

In addition to sending students to Oxford via the CMRS program, Middlebury also sends a few especially capable Humanities students each year to Lincoln College, Oxford, with which the College has had a robust affiliation since 2003. These students are matriculated into the University for the full academic year. They benefit greatly from the opportunity to experience Oxford's rigorous tutorial system and to engage in challenging and focused research in their chosen fields. Many return to Middlebury with reports of life-changing academic experiences and elect to apply for postgraduate programs after completing their undergraduate degrees.<sup>17</sup>

Table 3: Enrollment Figures for Middlebury-Lincoln Program, 2003–2019

Year	No.	Year	No.	Year	No.
2019–20	1	2013–14	3	2007–08	1
2018–19	2	2012–13	4	2006–07	4
2017–18	2	2011–12	3	2005–06	3
2016–17	2	2010–11	4	2004–05	4
2015–16	2	2009–10	3	2003–04	2
2014–15	4	2008–09	2		

Source: Data from email correspondence with Stacey Thebodo, Office of International Programs and Off-Campus Study, June 2, 2020.

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<sup>17</sup> Data are from Stacey Thebodo, Office of International Programs and Off-Campus Study, June 2, 2020.

## Middlebury Language Schools

Middlebury's commitment to teaching the Humanities during the summertime to a significant cohort of its own undergraduates, alumni, and other learners has made it distinct among liberal arts colleges across the country. In addition to the Bread Loaf School of English graduate program, the College also operates its nationally recognized summer Language Schools, offering, all told, nearly twelve continuous months of Humanities learning and instruction in different languages and within varying disciplines.



Students practicing French in a phonetic lab with “Professor Marty,” 1953. *Photo courtesy of Middlebury Special Collections.*

The Middlebury Language Schools were established in 1915 by Lilian Stroebe, a Professor of German at Vassar College in collaboration with then Middlebury President John M. Thomas, with the goal of providing intensive teaching of German language, literature, and culture each summer. The idea was to develop a fully immersive experience (later encapsulated in the Middlebury Language Pledge®) where students and faculty would communicate exclusively in the foreign language whether in the classroom, over shared meals, or in casual conversations. Importantly, one clear intention of the Schools' founder was for the learning of foreign languages to also serve as a gateway to humanistic study. In fact, Stroebe envisioned the summers as being filled not only with expert-taught grammar and speaking exercises but also with “illustrated lectures on German life and art, dramatics, readings of modern German poetry, music, etc.”<sup>18</sup>

Middlebury's dedication to enhancing the Language Schools' curricula, with attention to diverse modalities of instructions that include humanistic pedagogy, would become even richer as new languages were added. Today these include Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. In Summer 2020, the School of Abenaki will be open.

For the first five decades, the programs offered through the Language Schools focused entirely on advanced language studies, literary studies, and linguistics. With the establishment of the School of

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Geisler, “Language Boot Camp”: 100 Years of Middlebury Language Schools,” *Foreign Language Education in America: Perspectives from K–12, University, Government, and International Learning*, ed. Steven Berbeco (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 152.

Chinese, the Language Schools began accepting novice learners.<sup>19</sup> Since the late 1920s, the Middlebury Language Schools have conferred not only MA degrees but also Middlebury's only doctoral degree, the Doctor of Modern Languages (DML), which offers specializations in literary studies, cultural studies, linguistics, and language pedagogy. Between 1990 and 2018, 112 DML dissertations were completed and defended. This body of graduates contributes to Middlebury's reputation as a producer of humanistic knowledge at a time when Humanities graduate programs at research universities are dramatically shrinking. The presence of graduate programs has also had a positive influence on undergraduate students. Living and learning side by side with master's and doctoral students as well as their teachers not only "intellectualizes" the language curriculum; it also provides opportunities for undergraduate students to explore and discuss issues that relate to the Humanities in their classes, during cocurricular activities, and during lunch hours.<sup>20</sup>

During the 1970s, the focus of the Language Schools shifted more toward intensive language summer programs for beginning, intermediate, and advanced learners. During this phase, Middlebury developed a global reputation as a center for language and culture education. Various studies confirm that students enrolled in a Middlebury Language Schools program outperform their peers who spent an equal amount of classroom contact hours either in conventional semester-long programs or in a study abroad program, specifically in terms of vocabulary range, fluency, and morphosyntactic accuracy.<sup>21</sup>

In recent years, the Language Schools enrolled about 1,500 students each summer. Around 10% of the nondegree students are also enrolled as Middlebury undergraduates throughout the year. In addition, the Middlebury Language Schools have an engaged living alumni and faculty network of close to 46,000 individuals. Between 2009 and 2019, demand for Language Schools had grown so large that instruction was offered both at Middlebury and at Mills College in Oakland, California. As of 2019, plans were set in place to bring all students back to Vermont, to either the Middlebury campus or Bennington College. The COVID-19 pandemic created a challenge for the Middlebury Language Schools because of their quintessentially place-based learning experience, as amplified through the Language Pledge. Staff at the Dean of Language Schools office as well as the College's DLINQ (Digital Learning and Inquiry Office) have worked to support the twelve programs logistically, pedagogically, and technologically, designing attractive and effective learning spaces that use a modified Language Pledge and aim at replicating the learning communities that students

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<sup>19</sup> See in general Stephen A. Freeman, *The Middlebury College Foreign Language Schools, 1915–1970: The Story of a Unique Idea* (Middlebury: Middlebury College Press, 1975), <https://archive.org/details/FreemanMCForeignLanguageSchools/page/n3/mode/2up> (accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>20</sup> We are grateful to Per Urlaub, Associate Dean of the Language Schools at Middlebury College, for his extensive contributions to this paragraph, through email correspondence, June 15, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Barbara F. Freed, Norman Segalowitz, and Dan P. Dewey, "Context of Learning and Second Language Fluency in French: Comparing Regular Classroom, Study Abroad, and Intensive Domestic Immersion Programs," *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 26 (2004): 275–301; Dan P. Dewey, "A Comparison of Reading Development by Learners of Japanese in Intensive Domestic Immersion and Study Abroad Contexts," *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 26 (2004): 303–27; Dan P. Dewey, "Japanese Vocabulary Acquisition by Learners in Three Contexts," *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* 15 (2007): 127–48; Makiko Fukuda, "Dynamic Processes of Speech Development by Seven Adult Learners of Japanese in a Domestic Immersion Context," *Foreign Language Annals* 47, no. 4 (2017): 729–45; Christina Isabelli-García and Manel Lacorte, "Language Learners' Characteristics, Target Language Use, and Linguistic Development in a Domestic Immersion Context," *Foreign Language Annals* 49, no. 3 (2016): 544–56; and Judith E. Liskin-Gasparro, "Linguistic Development in an Immersion Context: How Advanced Learners of Spanish Perceive SLA," *Modern Language Journal* 82, no. 2 (1998): 159–75. We are grateful to Per Urlaub, Associate Dean of the Language Schools at Middlebury College, for these references and for his contributions to this paragraph.

experience every summer in Vermont. As of this writing, in Summer 2020 the College will be offering online language instruction to roughly 1,000 students.



Left: Arabic School Calligraphy Club at the MLS Summer Language Program at Mills College, Oakland, California, on July 5, 2011. *Photo by Max MacDonald, courtesy of the Middlebury Office for Communications and Marketing.* Right: Spanish Language School students perform in a Latin dance exhibition, Summer 2013. *Photo by Max MacDonald, courtesy of the Middlebury Office for Communications and Marketing.*

Middlebury's current Dean of Language Schools is Stephen Snyder, Kawashima Professor of Japanese Studies, a globally renowned translator of Japanese literature and a 2019 National Book Award Finalist. Each summer more than two hundred faculty are hired from across the country and international institutions, including literary scholars, linguists, historians, and writers, among other subjects. In these ways, the leadership and faculty at the Language Schools embody the program's enduring strengths in language pedagogy *and* in the Humanities. In their curricula, too, the Language Schools have emphasized the core and critical skills of humanistic learning. Over the years, French courses have ranged in focus from history, literature, and cinema to writing workshops taught by notable Francophone writers. Japanese classes introduce students to historic storytelling traditions (*Rakugo*), tea ceremonies, and the art of calligraphy, while Spanish artists teach studio art or tango lessons. The philosophy of the Schools has been to give students the ability not only to acquire critical linguistic and expressive skills leading to near-native proficiency but also to gain knowledge in the humanistic traditions, cultures, literatures, and histories of the regions whose languages they study.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For more information about the Language Schools, see Geisler, "Language Boot Camp"; and Freeman, *The Middlebury College Foreign Language Schools, 1915–1970*.



## Middlebury C. V. Starr Schools Abroad

As of Spring 2020, Middlebury offered instruction in ten languages at its Schools Abroad in thirty-eight sites in sixteen countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Cameroon, Chile, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Morocco, Russia, Spain, United Kingdom, and Uruguay. On average, roughly 525 undergraduate students enroll at these schools each year, an approximately 45% of them come from Middlebury College.<sup>23</sup> The earliest School Abroad (a graduate program) opened in Paris in 1949; undergraduate offerings were launched in the 1970s (see table 4 below). Since that time, the study of languages abroad for a semester or an academic term, during junior year, became an integral part of the Middlebury College experience, with the goals of providing students with an opportunity to improve their foreign language learning as well as acquiring a diverse array of intercultural experiences within their host countries. Nowadays, about 50% of Middlebury's junior class studies abroad, and approximately 55% of those students attend one of the C. V. Starr Schools Abroad.<sup>24</sup>



A Chinese painting class in Hangzhou, China. *Photo courtesy of Middlebury Schools Abroad.*

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<sup>23</sup> Email correspondence with Liz Ross, Associate Dean of International Programs, Middlebury C. V. Starr Schools Abroad, June 1, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> "Middlebury Schools Abroad," <http://schoolsabroadhandbooks.middcreate.net/guidelines/types-of-programs/middlebury-schools-abroad/> (accessed June 15, 2020).

Table 4: Middlebury Schools Abroad History

1949	Paris, France
1951	Madrid, Spain
1959	Mainz, Germany
1960	Florence, Italy
1977	Moscow, Russia
1996	Voronezh, Russia ( <i>suspended in 2003</i> ) Yaroslavl, Russia
1998	Getafe, Spain Logroño, Spain Segovia, Spain ( <i>suspended in 2007</i> ) Irkutsk, Russia
2001	Ferrara, Italy Poitiers, France
2002	Berlin, Germany Buenos Aires, Argentina Montevideo, Uruguay
2004	Belo Horizonte, Brazil Niterói, Brazil Hangzhou, China Guadalajara, Mexico ( <i>suspended in 2012</i> )
2005	Tucumán, Argentina ( <i>suspended in 2013</i> ) Xalapa, Mexico ( <i>suspended in 2013</i> )
2006	Concepción, Chile La Serena, Chile ( <i>suspended in 2020</i> ) Santiago, Chile Temuco, Chile Valdivia, Chile Valparaíso, Chile Córdoba, Spain
2007	Alexandria, Egypt ( <i>suspended in 2013</i> ) Bordeaux, France Florianópolis, Brazil
2009	Beijing, China Rome, Italy
2010	Kunming, China Tokyo, Japan
2011	Amman, Jordan
2012	Yaoundé, Cameroon Córdoba, Argentina ( <i>suspended in 2020</i> ) Beer Sheva, Israel ( <i>suspended in 2018</i> )
2014	Delhi, India Oxford, UK
2016	Rabat, Morocco
2017	Potsdam, Germany
2020	Villarrica, Chile

Source: Courtesy of the Middlebury Schools Abroad Office through email correspondence with Liz Ross, Associate Dean of International Programs, May 26, 2020.

To help students gain deeper immersion in their host country, Middlebury has promoted different forms of experiential pedagogy that are embedded in the Middlebury Language Pledge®. While students can readily study (depending on their skill sets and language acquisition levels) a variety of subjects, including STEM, political science, and environmental studies, the C. V. Starr Schools Abroad have been particularly well-suited for the study of the Humanities and offer an abundance of in-class and out-of-class experiences in humanistic study for undergraduate learners. At Middlebury's Schools Abroad, students can pursue their interests in anthropology, religion, art history, classics, history, music, literature, and philosophy, among other subjects, and can take advantage of opportunities to participate in organized field trips with local experts and to visit renowned historic sites and museums. Internships allow students to connect with surrounding communities, explore local traditions and cultures, gain professional experience, and improve their language proficiency.<sup>25</sup> Several internships have also focused on the area of Public Humanities, with students interning at museums and galleries, theater companies, publishing outlets, media and entertainment, education, and varied community organizations. In these ways, the C. V. Starr Schools Abroad offer continuity and novel exploration for Humanities students and for other learners, and they show that the pursuit of humanistic inquiry at Middlebury has been conceptualized as a coherent and connected experience.

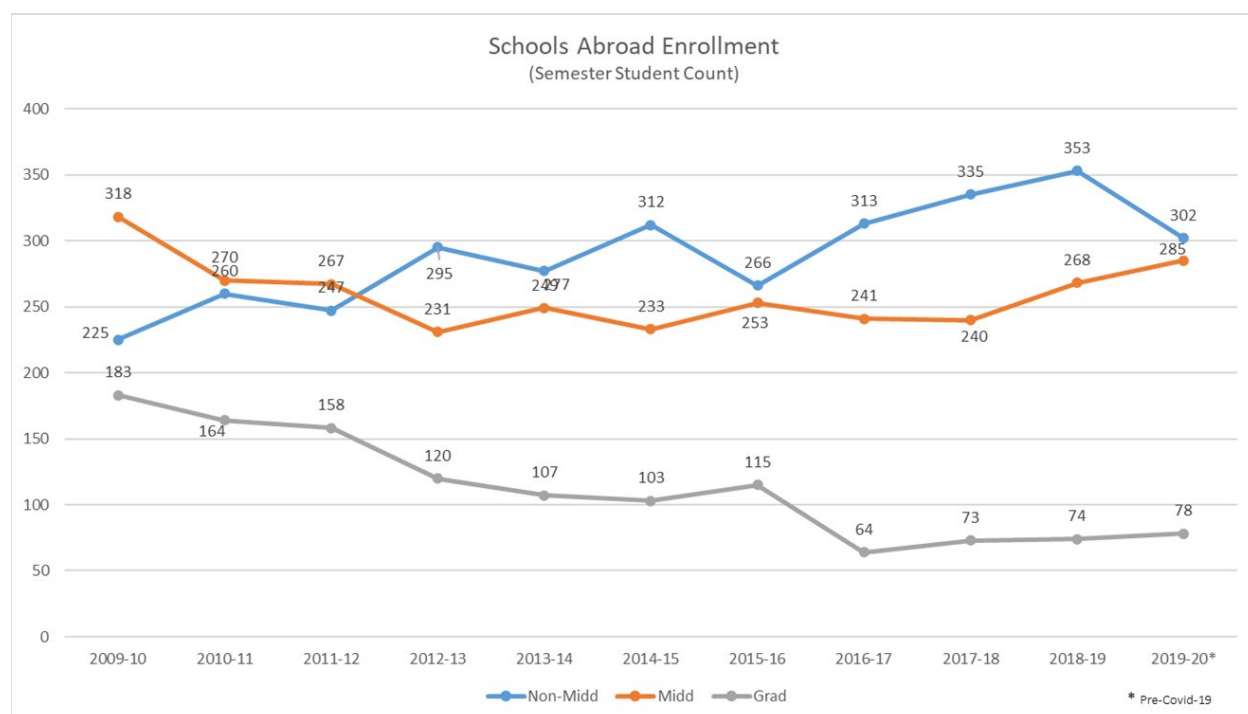


Figure 3: C. V. Starr Schools Abroad enrollment, 2009–10 to 2019–20. Note: The numbers reflect “semester student count”—that is, full-year students are counted twice (once in the fall, once in the spring). Source: Courtesy of the Middlebury Study Abroad Office through email correspondence with Liz Ross, Associate Dean of International Programs, Middlebury C. V. Starr Schools Abroad, June 1, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Middlebury Schools Abroad Office, “Middlebury C.V. Starr Schools Abroad 2020–21,” [https://www.middlebury.edu/schools-abroad/sites/www.middlebury.edu.schools-abroad/files/2020-02/2020-21\\_1.pdf?fv=Em8wITVh](https://www.middlebury.edu/schools-abroad/sites/www.middlebury.edu.schools-abroad/files/2020-02/2020-21_1.pdf?fv=Em8wITVh) (accessed June 15, 2020).

## Translation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey

The MIIS (Middlebury Institute of International Studies) campus at Monterey hosts a historically significant center for Translation Studies, at the graduate level, which is relevant to our discussion of foreign language study at the undergraduate College. MIIS offers three different MA degrees in Translation, Translation and Interpretation, and Conference Interpretation. The MA programs are focused on building a strong set of professional skills and are taught by faculty with diverse academic and professional expertise, ranging from work at the United Nations, the World Economic Forum, and the Olympics, among many others. To hone their translation skills, students are expected to become highly proficient in writing, both in their native languages and in their targeted language of study. They must also master technical skills in, for example, computer-assisted translation tools and terminology management. The languages currently offered are Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Russian, and Spanish.

## Digital Humanities

While often billed as trendy or even faddish, the broader history of “Digital Humanities” is deeply intertwined with the development of modern computing technologies. An early example of collaboration between computational tools and humanistic approaches was dubbed “Humanities Computing,” a distinct field that was launched after 1949 when the Italian Jesuit Father Roberto Busa, with the support of IBM, used punched-card technology to compile Saint Thomas Aquinas’s writings.<sup>26</sup> In 1964, the University of Cambridge established its Literary and Linguistic Computing Centre, devoted to using extant technologies to compile and categorize historical texts.<sup>27</sup> Many other innovations took place in the 1970s and ’80s, focused on “text coding” and the machine readability of different textual sources. Since the 1990s, the prevalence of new online sharing tools and scanning technologies have facilitated the creation of large-scale archives of digital texts for use by a wide array of humanists and eventually the public at large.<sup>28</sup>

In 2004 the term “Digital Humanities” was used by Blackwell Publishing to promote a special volume on the topic,<sup>29</sup> a move that sparked the term’s subsequent wide usage. However, since then there has been a sort of “definitional warfare”<sup>30</sup> over the term’s precise meanings. Many scholars argue that “Digital Humanities” is quite distinct from “Quantitative” or “Computational Humanities,” though all three terms are often collapsed into the Digital Humanities framework. But understanding the nuances and variations within these terms is critical to fostering more productive conversations across disciplines and would be instructive for thinking about the place of Digital Humanities at Middlebury College.

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<sup>26</sup> University of Southern California Libraries, “The Digital Humanities: What Are ‘the Digital Humanities?’,” <https://libguides.usc.edu/c.php?g=235247&p=2220309>; Roberto Bonzia, “Father Busa, Pioneer of Computing in Humanities with Index Thomisticus, Dies at 98,” *Forbes*, August 11, 2011, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertobonzio/2011/08/11/father-busa-pioneer-of-computing-in-humanities-dies-at-98/#499259e6445c>.

<sup>27</sup> Cambridge Digital Humanities, “Defining Digital Humanities,” <https://www.cdh.cam.ac.uk/cdh/what-is-dh> (accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Leah Henrickson, “Humanities Computing, Digital Humanities, and Computational Humanities: What’s in a Name,” *3:AM Magazine*, October 24, 2019, <https://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/humanities-computing-digital-humanities-and-computational-humanities-whats-in-a-name/>.



In general, Digital Humanities tend to be more interested in enabling access to information through the digitization of texts, the visualization of data, the creation of audio and visual media projects, and the curation of public archives, among other endeavors; Computational Humanities might rely on tools or methodologies from computer science or mathematics to “automate repetitive tasks” or “scale-down” mass data in order to create new knowledge. It is important to note, ultimately, that Digital Humanities and Computational Humanities overlap but are also distinct.<sup>31</sup> The Axinn Center for the Humanities understands Digital Humanities as equally encompassing both areas, and we plan to work with Middlebury’s Office of Digital Learning and Inquiry (DLINQ). and any new Digital entities currently in the planning stage, as well as with other faculty and staff to promote novel interrogations of digital, computational, and data-oriented media within pedagogical and research pursuits.

The field of Digital Humanities, quite broadly defined, has expanded over the last fifteen years or so, with its own academic journals, conferences, associations, and designated teaching, technology, museum, and library staff. Middlebury College’s own engagement with Digital Humanities began two decades ago. Since 2000, expert staff at the Library’s Special Collections have worked to digitize the College’s rich archives of historical texts, manuscripts, and photographs, both for community access and public usage.<sup>32</sup> The digitization project began primarily with Vermont-based maps, postcards, and early colonial College history, and by 2005 the Library had a full-fledged, full-text, searchable digital archive with photographs, maps, and historical texts.<sup>33</sup> It is important to be attentive to this rich history of work and to recognize the critical contributions that our Library staff have made in pioneering this work at our undergraduate campus.

In 2014, Middlebury received a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support the “Galvanizing [of] Digital Liberal Arts.” What emerged was an office called the “Digital Liberal Arts” (DLA) based at the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Research (CTLR). The \$800,000 grant was used to support projects to integrate more digital tools in the classroom as well as the creation of archives tied to faculty or faculty-student research.<sup>34</sup>

We anticipate that what Christa Williford and Charles Henry call a “digital ecology of data” could encourage more rigorous collaborative approaches across disciplines that showcase both the distinct research purposes of each discipline and the rich ecotonal overlap between them.<sup>35</sup> There are compelling and current examples of such crossover research that help to inspire our own visions. For instance, the Viral Texts Project, sponsored by Northeastern University, “seeks to develop theoretical models that will help scholars better understand what qualities—both textual and thematic—helped particular news stories, short fiction, and poetry ‘go viral’ in nineteenth-century newspapers and magazines.” This fascinating humanistic scholarship is made possible, as the project director writes, precisely by “employing and developing computational linguistics tools to analyze the large textual databases of nineteenth-century newspapers newly available to scholars.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See Middlebury Special Collections, <https://archive.org/details/middleburycollege> (accessed June 15, 2020).

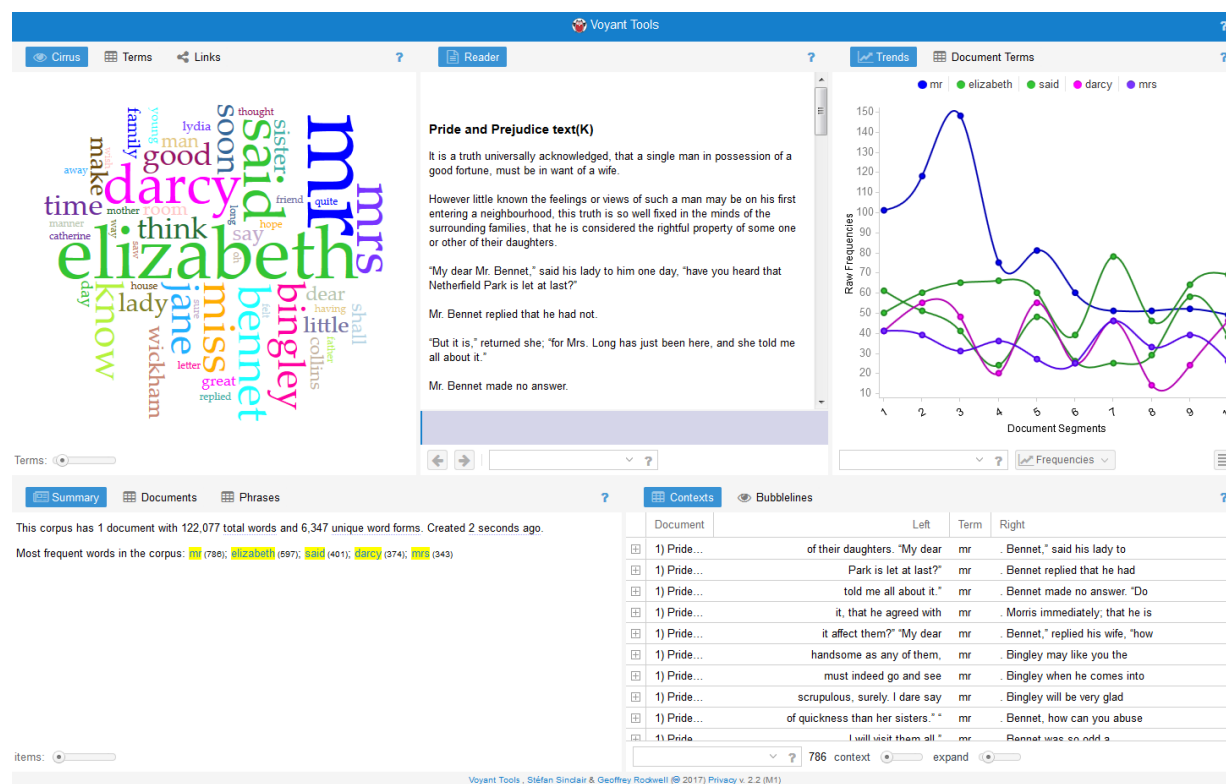
<sup>33</sup> Email correspondence with Rebekah Irwin, Director and Curator, Special Collections & Archives, June 1, 2020.

<sup>34</sup> “Middlebury Awarded \$800,000 Mellon Grant for Digital Scholarship,” *Middlebury Campus*, March 31, 2014, <http://www.middlebury.edu/newsroom/node/472205>.

<sup>35</sup> Christa Williford and Charles Henry, “One Culture: A Report on the Experiences of First Respondents to the Digging into Data Challenge,” Council on Library Information Resources, Washington, DC, June 2012, <https://www.clir.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/pub151.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> “The Viral Texts Project: Mapping Networks of Reprinting in 19th-Century Newspapers and Magazines,” <https://viraltexts.org/index> (accessed June 15, 2020).

As Middlebury continues to improve and update its organization of digital tools and methodologies, the College has an opportunity to parse out more clearly the functional and theoretical differences among what can seem an overwhelmingly broad range of topics and foci within the “digital” framework. We suggest that in our own use of “Digital Humanities,” we consider meaningfully distinct methodologies on a spectrum of related enterprises that share a concern with the relationship between humanistic work and technological tools and platforms. Clarifying those differences will help foster faculty scholarship and student research in these areas by nurturing more explicit interdisciplinary connections between STEM (especially computer science and mathematics) and Humanities research projects.



Stéfan Sinclair and Geoffrey Rockwell, “Text of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in textual analysis program Voyant Tools.” Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pride\\_and\\_Prejudice\\_in\\_Voyant\\_Tools.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pride_and_Prejudice_in_Voyant_Tools.png), copyright CC BY 4.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.



The data below draw on statistics obtained from different offices across Middlebury College, primarily the Office of Assessment and Institutional Research and the Office of the Dean of Faculty. Consequently, there are slight inconsistencies in what time spans and metrics are available. The Middlebury graphs offer broad trends about the changes affecting Humanities majors and enrollments in recent years. We consider them here, when relevant, in relation (if not always in direct comparison) to national statistics, which often rely on different metrics.

Much of Middlebury's data deals with how Humanities majors and enrollments have fared in comparison to STEM. We chose STEM as the benchmark of comparison and mostly excluded (for instance) the Social Sciences and the Arts, based on national trends indicating that after the financial crisis of 2008, Humanities majors and enrollments eroded across the country in correlation with a rise of interest in STEM and a misperception (discussed further below) of the lower utility of the Humanities. Overall, with some notable exceptions, Middlebury's trajectories resemble those across the nation, tracing a serious overall decline in Humanities majors.

With reference to Middlebury's data, the **Humanities** include majors in American Studies, Classics, Comparative Literature, English and American Literatures, Film and Media Culture, Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies, History of Art and Architecture, History, Literary Studies, Philosophy, Religion, and all Foreign Language departments. **STEM** majors include Biochemistry, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Geology, Mathematics, Molecular Biology & Biochemistry, Neuroscience, Physics, Psychology, and all Environmental Studies tracks. We should note that this categorization is specific to the statistics used here and is not indicative of how Middlebury College has historically defined its different Academic Affairs structures. It should also be distinguished from the Axinn Center's more inclusive approach to the Humanities (p. 12), which comprises of the above departments as well as Humanities programs with no majors but with minors. For comparison, we rely on graphs drawn from different national organizations, and definitions of the Humanities often vary across these groups.<sup>37</sup>

Below, Middlebury's STEM statistics exclude Economics majors. In January 2020 the Economics Department was recognized as part of STEM (rather than the Social Sciences),<sup>38</sup> primarily due to new federal guidelines but also to the more quantitatively oriented pedagogical leanings in that department. It is likely that the graphs below would be far more skewed toward STEM were Economics majors included. Given that this identification is quite new, however, we suggest that the data be revisited, in the future, to capture possible variations between these disciplinary areas.

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<sup>37</sup> In the graphs used below from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (figures 6, 14, and 17), "Humanities" includes the academic study of the Arts; Music; American Studies & Area Studies; Archaeology; Communication; Cultural, Ethnic, & Gender Studies; English Language and Literature; History; Languages & Literatures Other Than English; Jurisprudence; Philosophy; Religion; and selected Interdisciplinary Studies. For much more detail, see <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/scope-of-humanities>. In the data drawn from the 2018 *Atlantic* article, as collated from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Humanities" refers to Philosophy, English, History, Languages, Religion, and the Arts, as well as some miscellaneous fields. See Schmidt, "The Humanities Are in Crisis."

<sup>38</sup> Nicole Pollack, "Economics Major Is Reclassified as STEM," *Middlebury Campus*, January 23, 2020, <https://middleburycampus.com/47967/news/economics-major-is-reclassified-as-stem/>.



### III.A

In the first set of graphs, figure 4 shows the fluctuations in degrees awarded to Humanities versus STEM majors at Middlebury between 2002 and 2020. In that period, the number of Humanities degrees awarded decreased by 33.9%, while the number of STEM degrees increased by 40.7%. If expressed in terms of the proportions of degrees awarded, the decline in Humanities degrees is 14% and the increase in STEM degrees is 11% (see figure 5). The decline of Humanities majors at the College appears to correspond with growths in STEM and Social Sciences (including Economics, pre-2020) majors. These trends are consistent with the changes in the national data (figure 6).

Importantly, Middlebury's decline in Humanities degrees awarded stands out in being steeper than the national numbers. Data that we collected for this Report, for instance, revealed that in 2002, 38.8% of all degree awarded at Middlebury were in the Humanities (see figure 5), compared to 14.7% nationally (figure 6). This number reflects Middlebury's historic strengths in the humanistic fields as well as its core identity as a liberal arts institution of higher learning.

In 2011, however, we begin to see some of the decline that followed the 2008 financial crisis: 32.4% of all degrees awarded were in the Humanities, compared with 13.9% nationally (as reported by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences). In 2015, the last year for which we have similarly available comparative national data, the Humanities at Middlebury stood at 25.2% of degrees awarded, versus 11.9% for the national statistics. That is, between 2002 and 2015, Middlebury Humanities degrees have fallen at about three times the national rate.

There have been some indications that the decline at the College has flattened (figure 5): since 2015, Middlebury's Humanities degrees have hovered at around 25% of total degrees awarded (although some programs are struggling more than others; see below). Still, it is important to consider how the economic challenges precipitated by COVID-19, along with any new curricular directions or investments by the College, might affect Humanities majors over the next decade.

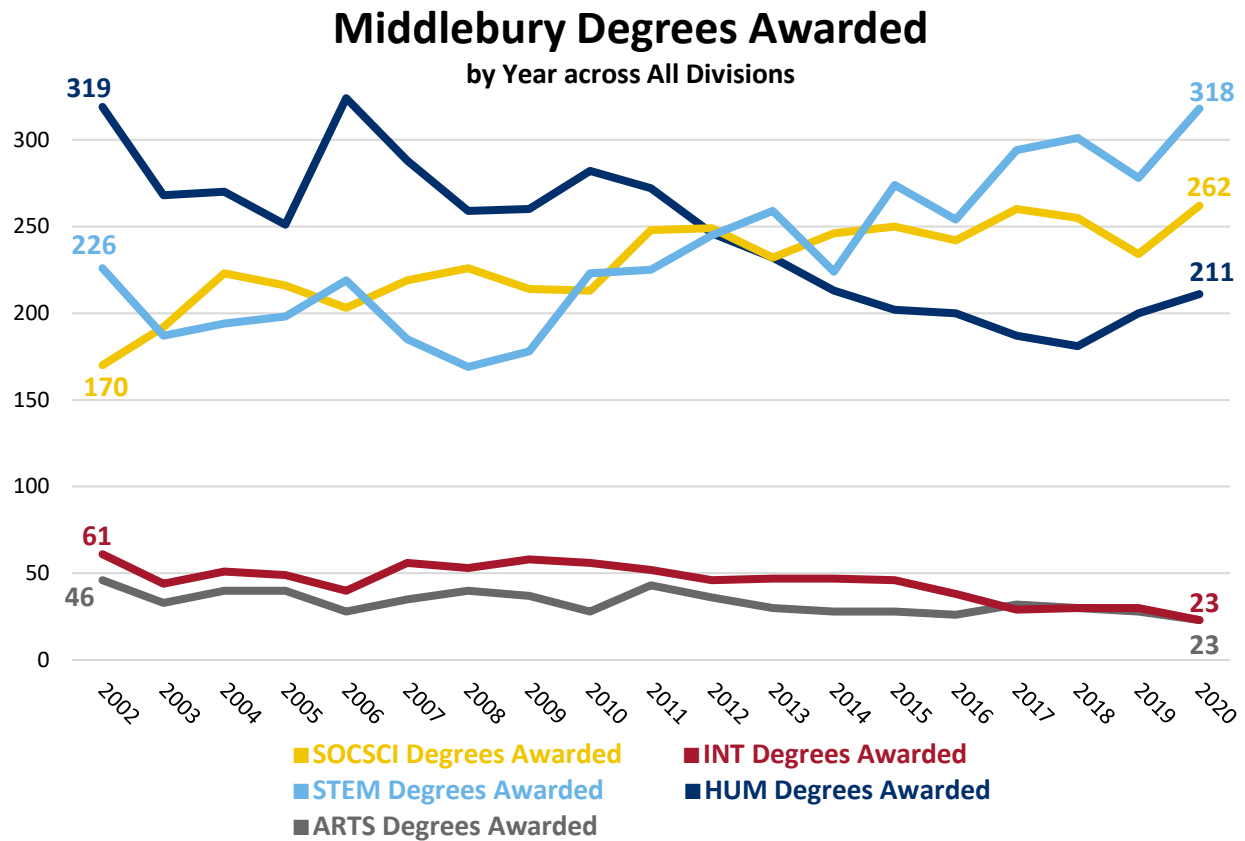


Figure 4: Degrees awarded by division at Middlebury College, between 2002 and 2020. Note: “INT” refers to interdisciplinary majors that we excluded from other categories (e.g. from HUM or SOCSCI). Data courtesy of the Middlebury Office of Assessment & Institutional Research.

## Degrees Awarded by Year at Middlebury in Humanities & STEM as a Percentage of Total Degrees Awarded at Middlebury

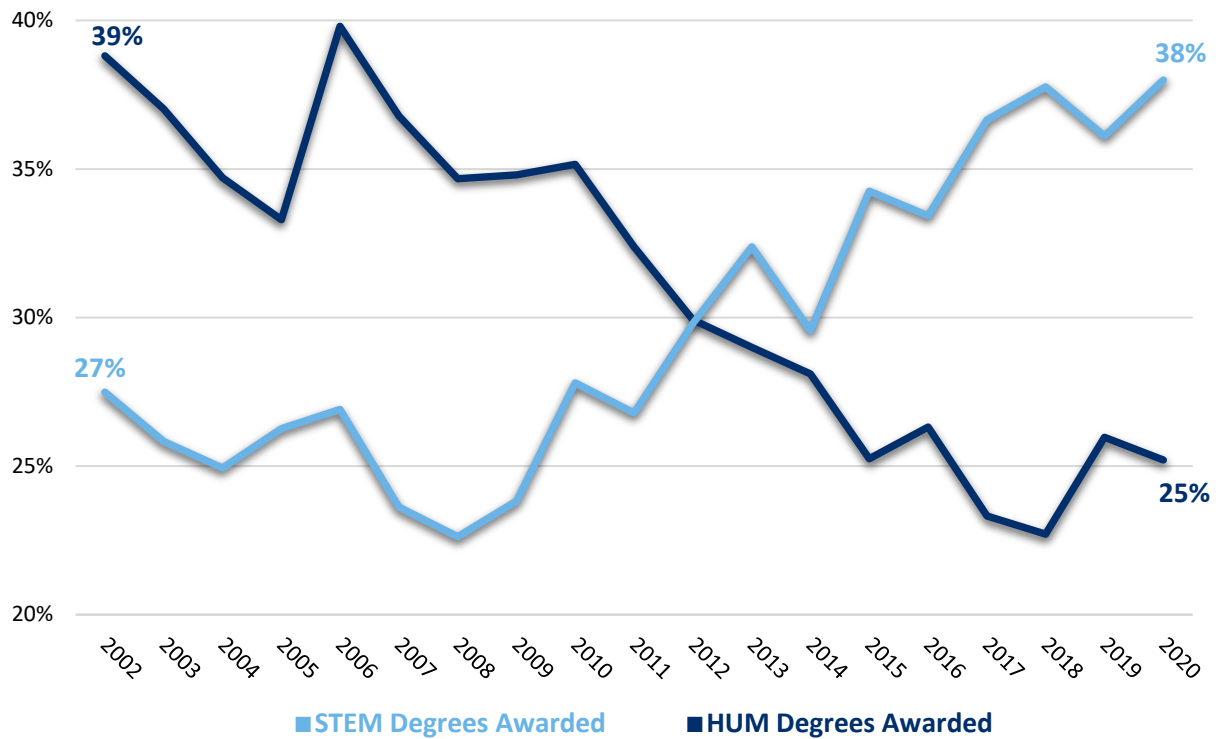
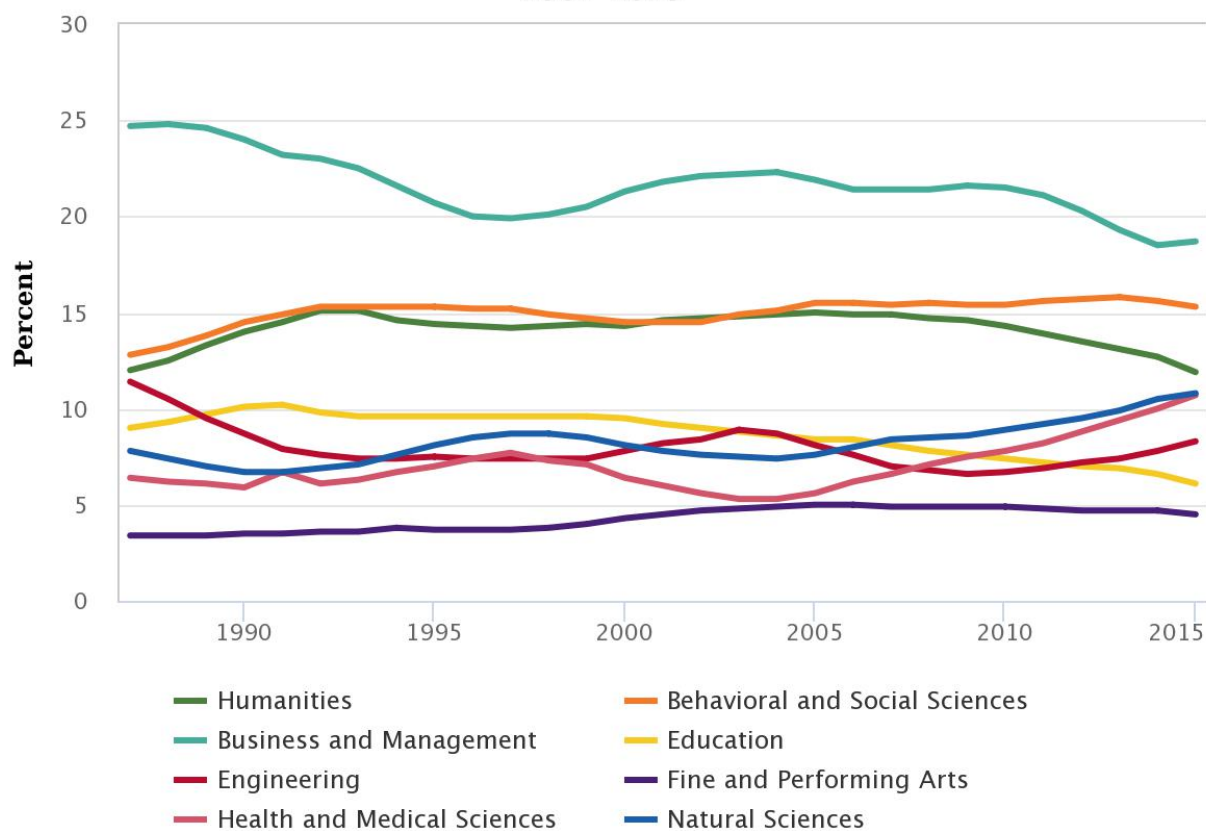


Figure 5: Percentage of degrees awarded to Humanities vs. STEM majors at Middlebury College from 2002 to 2020. Data courtesy of the Middlebury Office of Assessment & Institutional Research.

## II-03c: Shares of All Bachelor's Degrees Awarded in Selected Academic Fields

1987-2015



Humanities Indicators, 2019 | American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Figure 6: Shares of all bachelor's degrees awarded in selected academic fields, 1987–2015. Note: The original graph has an interactive function that allows users to move their cursor along the colored lines to see the exact percentages of degrees awarded. Source: From the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, Humanities Indicators, 2019, <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/higher-education/bachelors-degrees-humanities#31602>.



## III.B

The next set of graphs delves into the breakdown of specific majors across Humanities departments and programs at Middlebury, with data drawn from 2000 to 2019. Figure 7 excludes the language departments, and figure 8 focuses only on them. At Middlebury, the starkest decline in Humanities majors appears to be in the English and American Literatures Department, which decreased by 54.5%. American Studies had a similarly steep fall, as did Literary Studies. In some cases, the drop in certain Humanities majors correlates with national trends. Based on data gathered from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and reproduced in *The Atlantic* (figure 9), for instance, nationally English degrees fell by 33% from 2008 to 2017.

But some Middlebury statistics contradict national figures. For example, whereas across the country, History majors have fallen by roughly 45% since 2007 and Philosophy dropped by 34% between 2008 and 2017,<sup>39</sup> at Middlebury, between 2000 and 2019 History declined by about 13%, and Philosophy has stayed relatively steady, with perhaps a slight positive slope (figure 7). At the College, too, there were Humanities majors that experienced considerable growth during this period. The positive trends are particularly visible in Film and Media Culture, which saw its majors doubling between 2003 and 2019, and Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies (GSFS), where majors tripled between 2000 and 2019.

As to why these majors might have performed better than others, we might point out that both tend to draw students because of their interdisciplinary focus, as each combines humanistic methodologies with those from social sciences and/or technology. But their rise can also be situated within broader national trends. The narrative within higher education became more career-oriented after the 2008 financial crisis, and a Film and Media Culture major might be perceived as more easily leading to a professional career (e.g., filmmaking, podcasting, or journalism) compared to traditional Humanities majors, which were increasingly miscast as “impractical.” The growth in GSFS parallels trends across the country, which saw a boom in that discipline over the last two decades.<sup>40</sup> At Middlebury, it could also be a consequence of the College’s decision to hire more GSFS faculty and offer a more flexible curriculum, in addition to broader political developments following the 2016 presidential election. Middlebury’s Feminists’ Resource Center at Chellis House, run by Karin Hanta since 2003, has also energized student interest in these topics with its innovative programming, lunch-time lecture series, and book discussions.

When examining Middlebury’s majors in the languages (figure 8), we see a significant decline between 2000 and 2019. This correlates with national trends but is particularly striking in light of Middlebury’s history and reputation in foreign language pedagogy.<sup>41</sup> Specifically, while majors in Chinese, Russian, and Arabic have mostly either remained steady or risen slightly, French, Spanish, Italian, and German saw a downturn over those two decades: French fell by 68.6%, Spanish by 52.3%, Italian by 73.7%, and German by 68.4%.

The introduction of new languages, such as Portuguese in 1995 and Arabic in 2003, may have slightly affected majors in other languages; Arabic has drawn six to ten majors each year since its

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<sup>39</sup> Schmidt, “The Humanities Are in Crisis.”

<sup>40</sup> See Alia E. Dastagir, “What Our Reaction to Miley Cyrus Says about the Future of Gender,” *USA Today*, October 20, 2016, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/10/20/future-gender-may-not-what-you-think/92470428/>.

<sup>41</sup> Colleen Flaherty, “L’œuf ou la poule?” *Inside Higher Ed*, March 19, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/03/19/mla-data-enrollments-show-foreign-language-study-decline>.

establishment as a major in 2011. The major in Comparative Literature, also introduced in 2011, requires foreign language proficiency and may have attracted a few students traditionally drawn to language majors. Perhaps a more important factor for the lowered majors is the establishment of the International Studies or, today, the International and Global Studies (IGS) major in 1996 and of the International Politics and Economics (IP&E) major, also in 1996. Those interdisciplinary majors, which rely on faculty course offerings from different Humanities and/or Social Sciences departments, have required students to attain a specific proficiency in foreign languages. Anecdotaly, even though language majors have declined over the past two decades, foreign language courses continue to be well enrolled; they appeal to those fulfilling Distribution Requirements but also to those seeking language minors or sufficient proficiency to study abroad, in addition to the above interdisciplinary majors. Future iterations of this Report might explore specific departmental majors and enrollment figures in the languages, as well as query their relation to various interdisciplinary majors at the College over the past few decades.

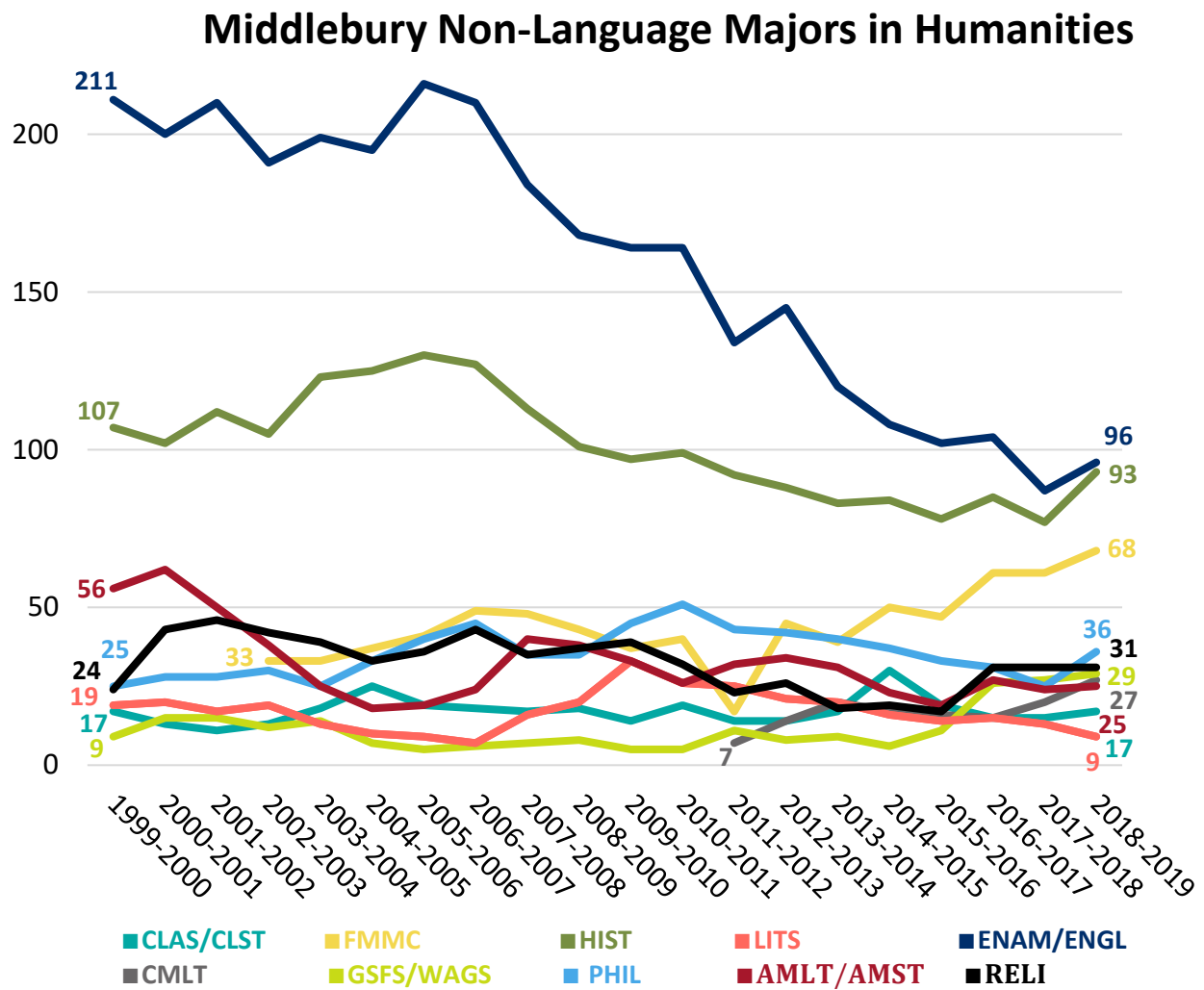


Figure 7: Variations in non-language Humanities majors at Middlebury College from 2000 to 2019. Data courtesy of the Middlebury Office of the Dean of Faculty.

## Middlebury Language Majors

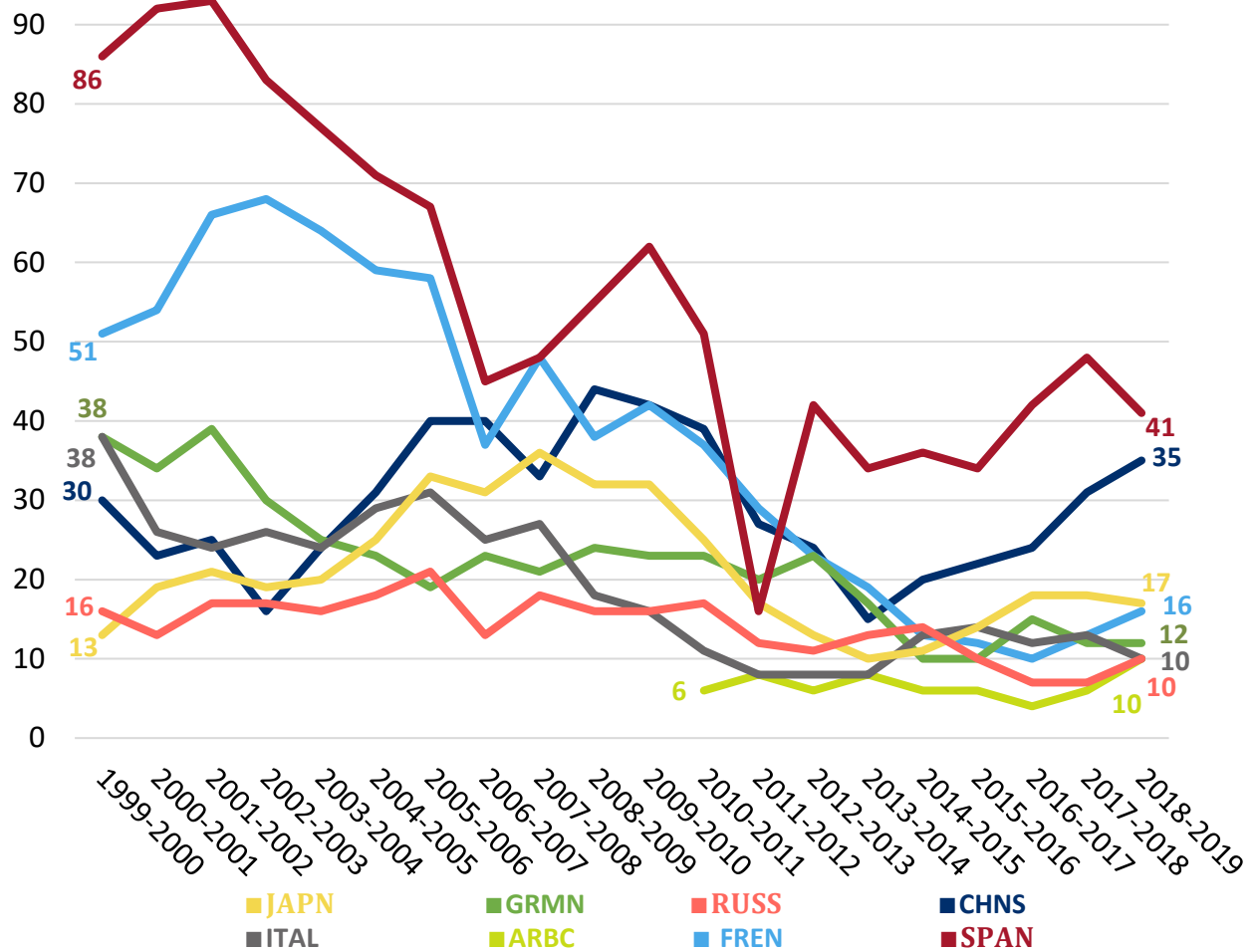
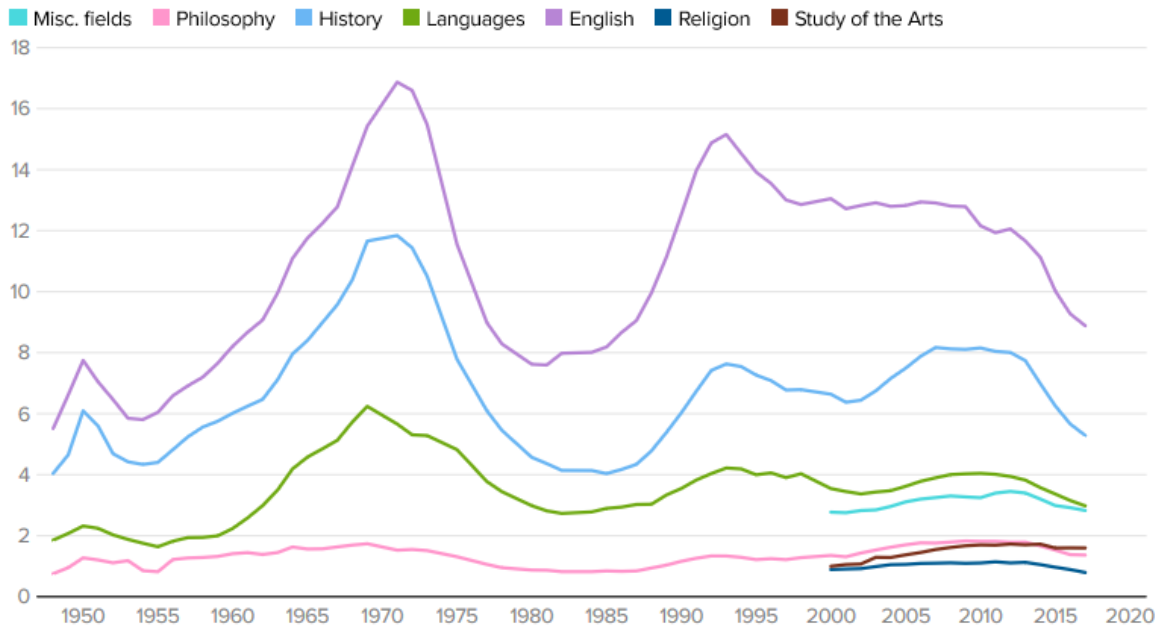


Figure 8: Variations in language majors at Middlebury College from 2000 to 2019. Data courtesy of the Middlebury Office of the Dean of Faculty.



## Humanities Degrees Per 1,000 23-Year-Olds in the United States



Source: [IPEDS](#); taxonomy from American Academy • [Get the data](#) • [Embed](#)

*The Atlantic*

Figure 9: Humanities degrees per 1,000 twenty-three-year-olds in the United States. Source: Created based on data drawn from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, in Benjamin Schmidt, “The Humanities Are in Crisis,” *The Atlantic*, August 23, 2018.

### III.C

Figure 10, which shows general enrollments in Humanities and STEM courses—as distinct from the graphs mapping numbers of students declaring particular majors (figures 4–7)—tells an important story. While the raw numbers appear to show an increase in Humanities enrollments by approximately 12% over this twenty-year period, that increase is due to a general expansion in enrollment across the college: total enrollments across all courses increased from 17,316 in 1999–2000 to 21,697 in 2018–19, an increase of 25%.<sup>42</sup> In 1999–2000, Humanities enrollments comprised 44% of the total enrollment, as compared with STEM’s 23%. By 2018–19, even though the raw numbers have risen, the percentage of enrollment in Humanities classes has dropped to 38%, while STEM’s has risen to 27%. Social Science enrollments, not shown on this graph, stayed steady at 28% across this period, even as numbers of students majoring in Social Sciences rose. So while enrollments in all Humanities courses have not dropped as precipitously as major numbers, there is still a significant decline of 6%, which appears to map closely onto the increase in STEM enrollments (given the steadiness of Social Sciences numbers).

There appears to be a trend in the student body away from majoring in Humanities fields toward selecting particular Humanities courses, whether to fulfill Distribution Requirements or to satisfy nonmajor interest. The danger, then, is that Humanities departments will increasingly become service departments, a shift which in turn will dramatically affect the kinds of courses they can offer.<sup>43</sup> If students are primarily taking Humanities classes to fulfill Distribution Requirements or satisfy nonspecialist interest, there will be much less demand for the breadth and depth of offerings that constitute major specialization. In this scenario, a vicious cycle in which majors become less robust and attractive, and numbers hence continue to drop, would be difficult to forestall.

At the same time, Humanities departments and programs continue to support the campus-wide First-Year Seminar program at a higher rate than STEM departments, as figure 11 illustrates. While most Humanities departments or programs regularly contribute one or two seminars per year, some departments, such as History and English and American Literatures, contribute considerably more (four to nine per year). These seminars create a crucial on-ramp for first-year students navigating the beginning of their college careers, focusing as they do on core skills that will serve them through their four years and that Humanities faculty are particularly well-placed to teach: cogent written argumentation; confident oral presentation; and competency in undertaking original research. The First-Year Seminar program provides one particularly clear example of the central importance of Humanities teaching at the College that falls outside the purview of individual departments: these skills not only support students in all disciplines but are also highly sought after by employers after graduation.

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<sup>42</sup> This rise in enrollment numbers is correlated with the College’s expansion of its undergraduate body in the early 2000s, coinciding with the opening of the Atwater dormitory in 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Christopher Newfield, “The Humanities as Service Departments: Facing the Budget Logic,” *Profession*, December 2015, <https://profession.mla.org/the-humanities-as-service-departments-facing-the-budget-logic/>.

## Enrollments in Humanities & STEM Courses at Middlebury as a Percentage of Middlebury's Total Enrollment

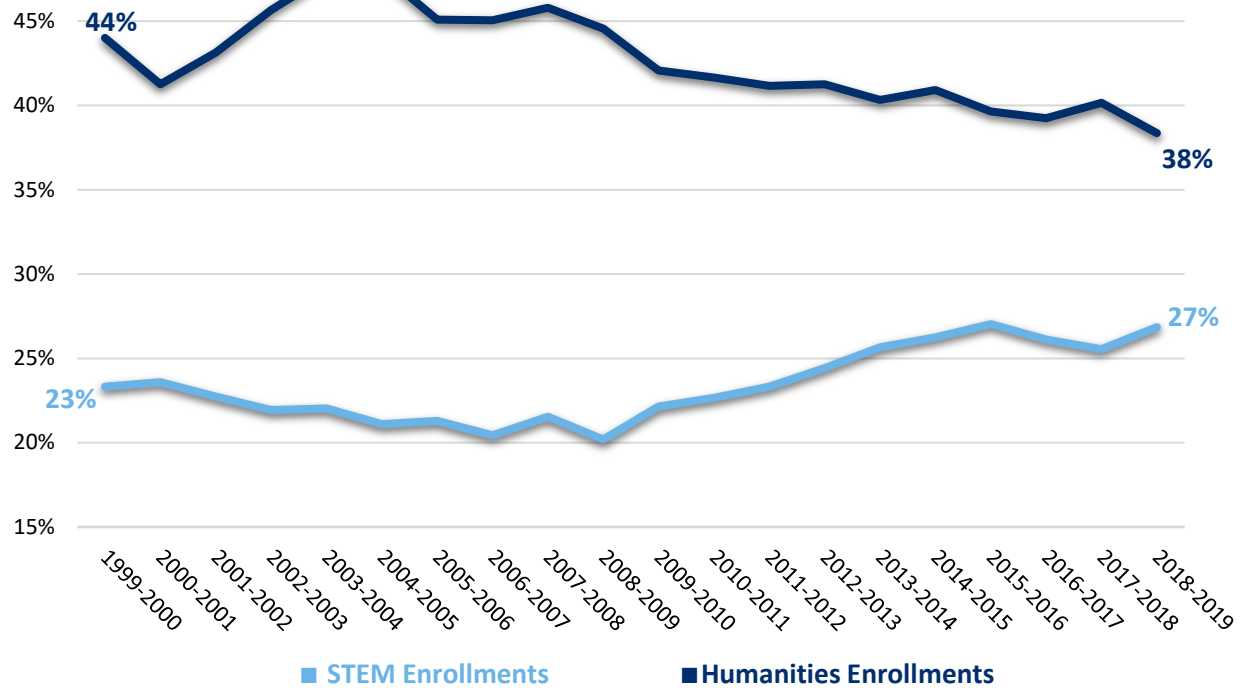


Figure 10: Middlebury enrollments in Humanities and STEM courses as a percentage of total enrollments, 2000–2019. Data courtesy of the Middlebury Office of the Dean of Faculty.

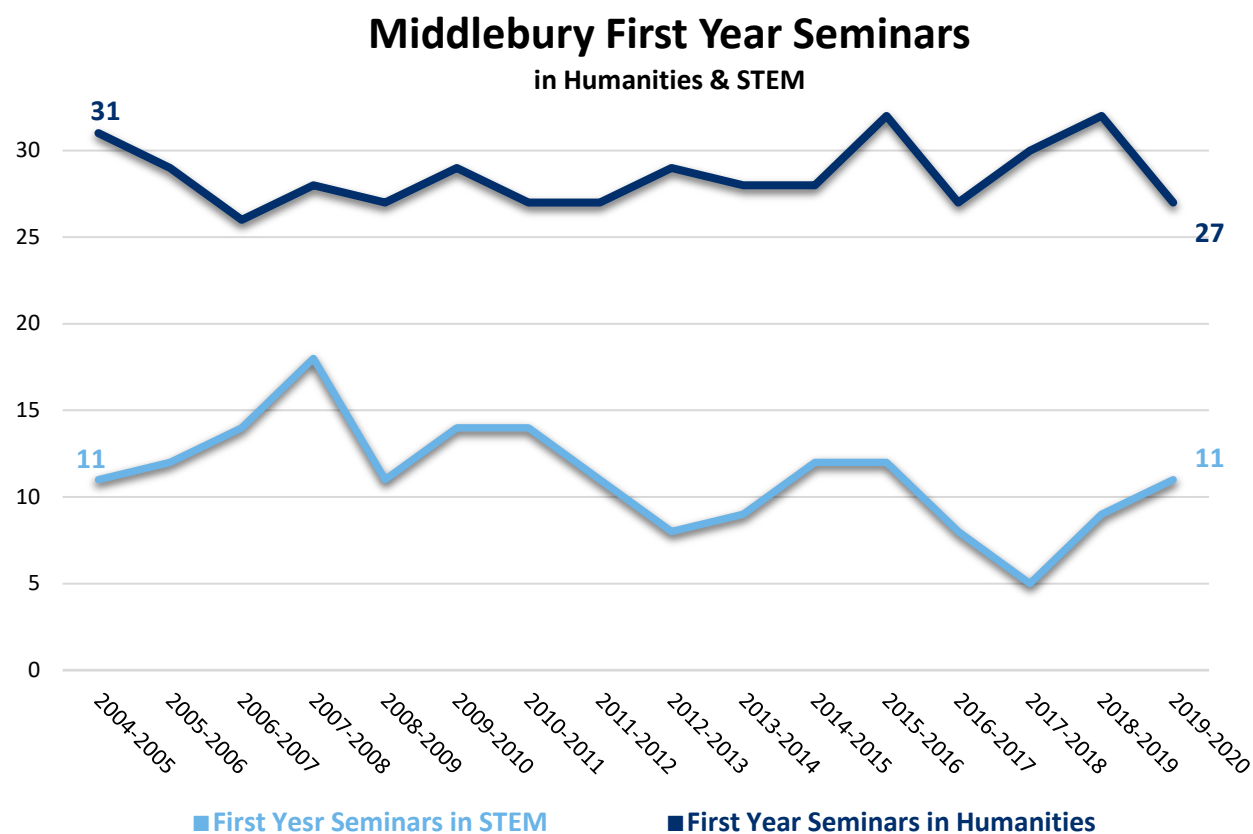


Figure 11: Numbers of First-Year Seminars at Middlebury in Humanities and STEM, 2005–20. Data courtesy of the Middlebury Office of the Dean of Faculty.



### III.D

Figures 12 and 13 help break down the data behind figure 4, which shows the overall decline in Humanities degrees awarded at Middlebury. We specifically look at first-generation and non-first-generation students, as well as female-identifying vs. male-identifying students, to gain a better understanding of how Middlebury compares to other US institutions. National studies often highlight these metrics when exploring recent changes in Humanities majors. Note that the available data for figures 12–13 cover “declared majors” between 2011 and 2019, rather than “degrees awarded” (figure 4) between 2002 and 2020, but we can still infer relevant comparisons so long as we maintain a rough sense of the retention rates for those who declared a Humanities major versus those who were awarded a Humanities degree. In 2014 and 2015, that retention rate was approximately 90%.

As figure 12 shows, the decline in first-generation students declaring Humanities majors is steeper and more continuous than the decline in non-first-generation Humanities majors. The percentage of first-generation students majoring in Humanities fields declined by about 50% from 2010 to 2019, while the percentage of non-first-generation students choosing a Humanities major declined sharply from 2011 to 2014, then leveled out around 2014 at 7 percentage points below its 2011 levels. Those numbers stay steady moving toward projected values in 2020, while the first-generation numbers continue to decline at a slightly steeper rate. The rise in first-generation declared STEM majors around 2017 may slightly correlate with the College’s laudable efforts to offer full-tuition scholarships to ten Posse STEM Scholars who matriculated at Middlebury in Fall 2015.<sup>44</sup> The success of this initiative argues for a similar strategy to encourage first-generation students from diverse backgrounds to study Humanities at Middlebury.

The National Center for Education Statistics notes that first-generation students may be faced with exigent economic pressures that incline them against Humanities majors, based on the perception that Humanities-related jobs will be scarcer or less remunerative.<sup>45</sup> Table 5 below is from a 2016 article analyzing data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth concerning trends in major choice among first-generation students compared with non-first-generation students. The data suggests that across the nation, as at Middlebury, first-generation students are selecting Humanities majors at a considerably lower rate (–5.44%) than non-first-generation students are.<sup>46</sup> This would clearly seem to be one place where the College could work hard to change the narrative, specifically concerning pathways from Humanities fields to the workforce (see our Recommendation #11 below for more detail).

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<sup>44</sup> “Middlebury to Expand Posse Partnership with STEM Scholars,” January 16, 2014, <http://www.middlebury.edu/newsroom/node/468082>.

<sup>45</sup> Xianglei Chen and C. Dennis Carroll, “First-Generation Students in Postsecondary Education,” National Center for Education Statistics, US Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences NCES 2005-171, July 2005, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005171.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> Sam Trejo, “An Econometric Analysis of the Major Choice of First-Generation College Students,” *Developing Economist* 3, no. 1 (2016), <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1407/first-generation-college-students-college-major-choices>.

Table 5: Analysis of Major Choice of First-Generation Students

MAJOR_GROUP	FG_COLLEGE	Not FG_COLLEGE	Difference (FG_COLLEGE - Not FG_COLLEGE)
Arts	2.63%	5.49%	-2.86%
Biology & Life Science	5.26%	7.14%	-1.88%
Business	18.13%	20.74%	-2.61%
Communication	3.6%	6.71%	-2.91%
Computer Science & Math	5.56%	5.19%	0.37%
Education	13.45%	9.03%	4.42%
Engineering	6.43%	6.47%	-0.04%
Health	9.65%	7.87%	1.78%
Humanities & Liberal Arts	5.85%	11.29%	-5.44%
Psychology & Social Work	11.11%	7.02%	4.09%
Social Science	18.13%	13%	5.07%

Source: Sam Trejo, "An Econometric Analysis of the Major Choice of First-Generation College Students," *Developing Economist* 3, no. 1 (2016), <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1407/first-generation-college-students-college-major-choices>. Data are derived from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth.

# Middlebury Declared Majors in Humanities & STEM

First Generation versus Non-First Generation Students

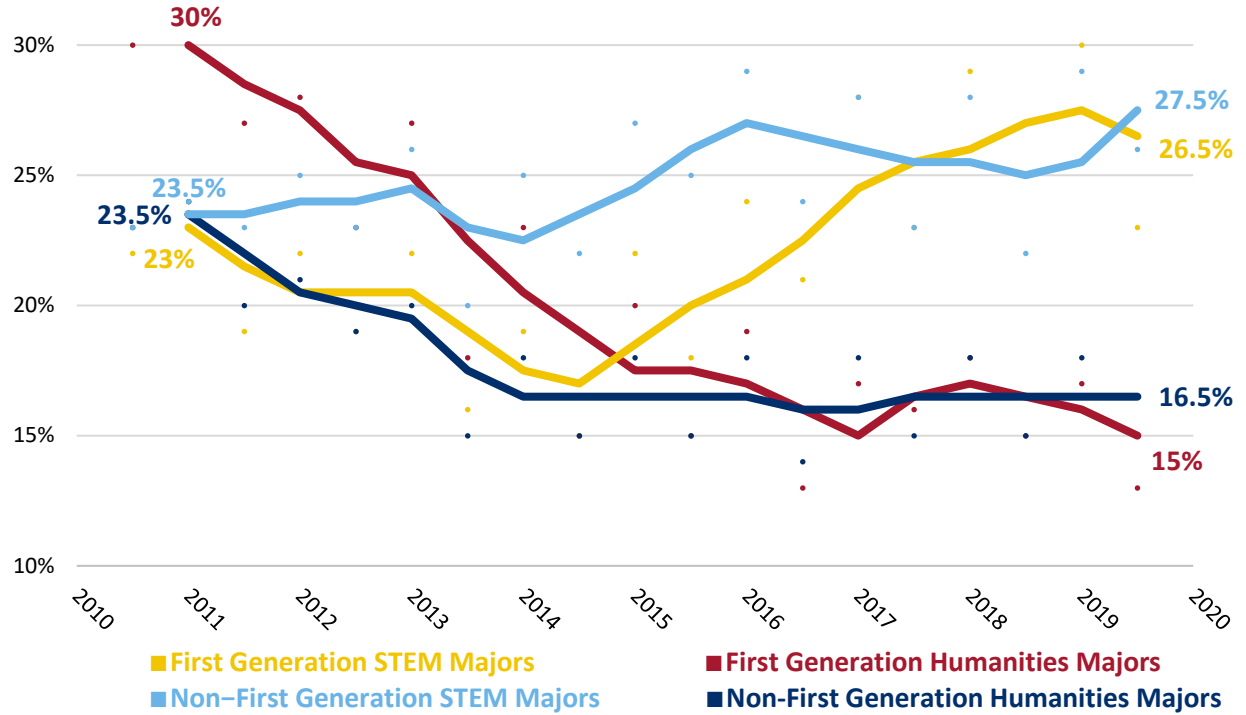


Figure 12: Declared majors in Humanities and STEM, comparing first-generation and non-first-generation students at Middlebury College, 2011–19. Note: This graph uses a moving average of two data points. Data courtesy of the Middlebury Office of Assessment & Institutional Research.

### III.E

Recent commentators have drawn attention to how women's shift away from Humanities majors has affected the overall downward trend in majors.<sup>47</sup> Data from the Humanities Indicators Project (as shown in figure 14) allow us to put specific numbers to that shift. The percentage of female degree earners who majored in any Humanities field declined from 16% in 2009 to 13% in 2015. The percentage of women earning degrees in what this project calls the "historical categories" of the Humanities suffers an even sharper decline, with the percentage falling from 22% in 1966 to 6% in 2015.<sup>48</sup> Heidi Tworek points out that men's choice of Humanities majors has historically been steadier, with roughly the same percentage of men (7%) majoring in Humanities in 2013 (the date of her article) as in the 1950s.<sup>49</sup> But Benjamin Schmidt shows five years later that the economic crisis of 2008 put an end to that steady rate, precipitating declines in Humanities majors "among men and women, across racial groups, and in a wide variety of universities."<sup>50</sup>

Although we don't have access to the same kind of long-term data at Middlebury as we do in the national statistics seen in figure 14, we can see that the numbers of both male and female students majoring in Humanities fields have significantly declined in the last ten years, by 8.5% among women, and 8% among men. While the numbers of male students studying Humanities and those studying STEM were even (at 22.5%) in 2010, a gap of 11.5% had opened up by 2019. The percentage of female students majoring in Humanities fields was 1.5% below the number of female STEM students in 2010, but by 2019 a gap favoring STEM had grown to 12%. While the big picture suggests a noteworthy gradual departure of female students from Humanities majors over the last few decades, it seems more difficult now to argue that the problem is still significantly gendered.

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<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, Heidi Tworek, "The Real Reason the Humanities Are in Crisis," *The Atlantic*, December 18, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/12/the-real-reason-the-humanities-are-in-crisis/282441/>.

<sup>48</sup> American Academy of Arts & Sciences, "Gender Distribution of Bachelor's Degrees in the Humanities," 2017 Update, <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/higher-education/gender-distribution-bachelors-degrees-humanities> (accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>49</sup> Tworek, "The Real Reason the Humanities Are in Crisis."

<sup>50</sup> Schmidt, "The Humanities Are in Crisis."



## Middlebury Declared Majors in Humanities & STEM

Male-Identifying versus Female-Identifying Students

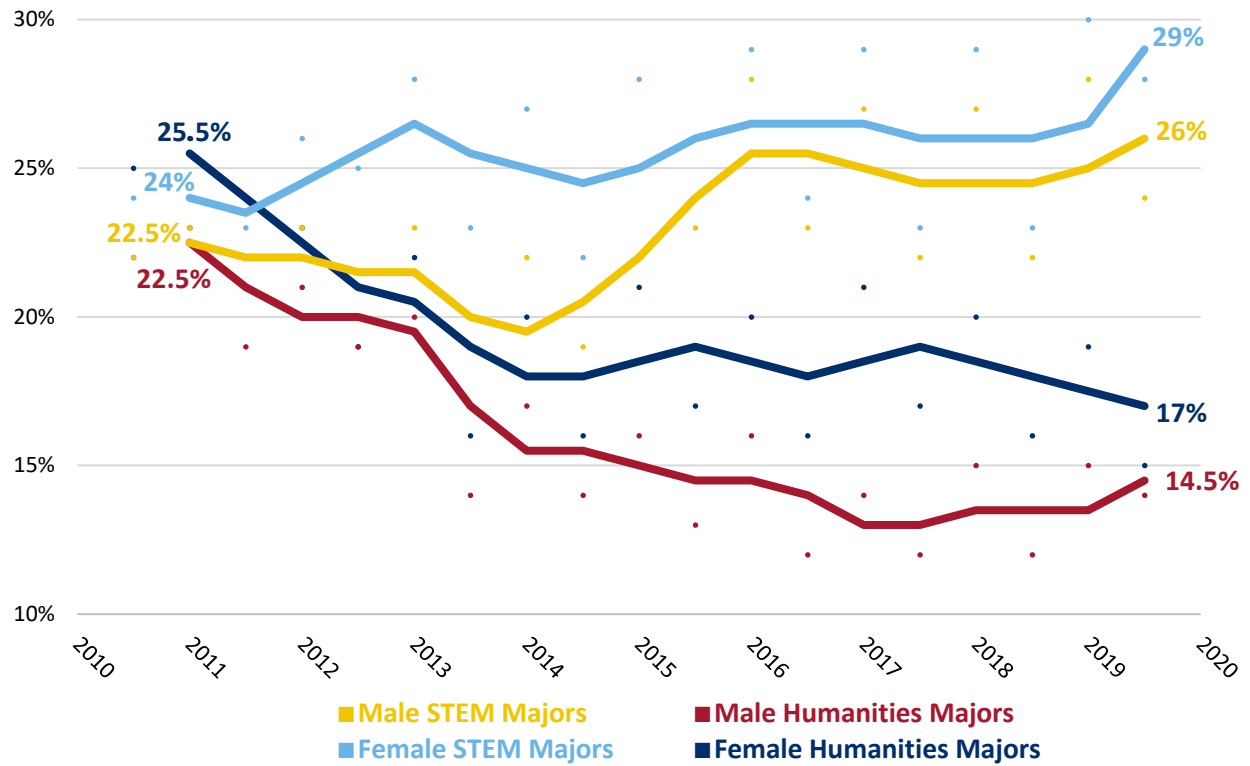


Figure 13: Declared majors in Humanities and STEM, comparing male- and female-identifying Middlebury College students, 2011–19. Note: This graph uses a moving average of two data points. Data courtesy of the Middlebury Office of Assessment & Institutional Research.

## Percentage of Female Degree Earners in Humanities Fields Nationwide, 1966–2015

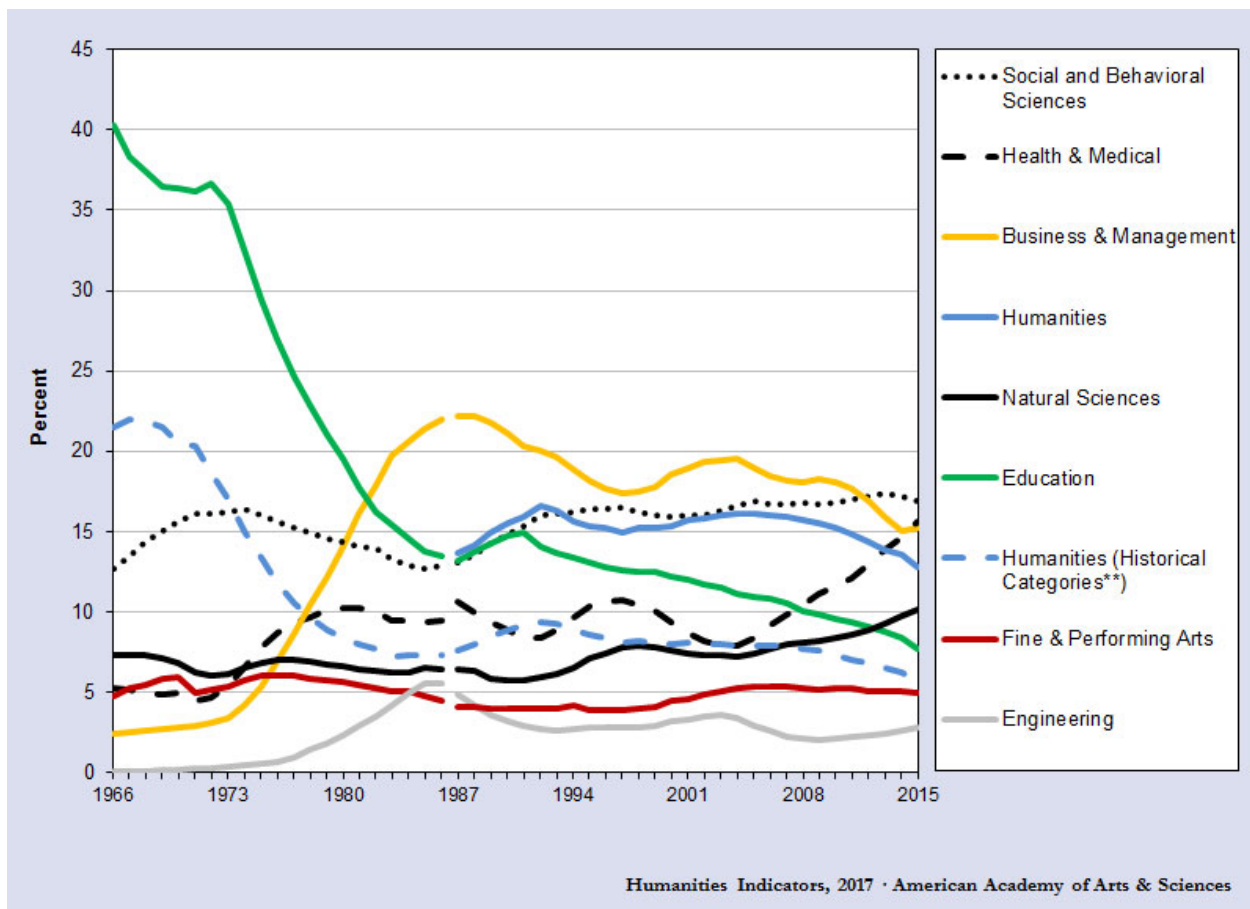


Figure 14: Percentage of female degree earners in Humanities fields nationwide, 1966–2015. Note: In this graph, Humanities designated as “Historical Categories” consist of English language and literature, history, languages and literatures other than English, linguistics, classical studies, and philosophy. Source: American Academy of Arts & Sciences, <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/higher-education/gender-distribution-bachelors-degrees-humanities>.



## Continuing Importance of Humanities Education at Middlebury and Beyond

As students at Middlebury College negotiate their pathways through the undergraduate degree, they are increasingly concerned with questions about how their liberal arts education will inform and support their career choices after graduation. At the same time, faculty in Humanities departments at Middlebury, as elsewhere, have been facing steeply declining enrollments in both majors and classes. Our task as Humanities educators is to clarify anew the value of humanistic learning, both in terms of the knowledge base within particular disciplines (history, philosophy, literature, languages, etc.), and in terms of the skills consistently taught in classes across these disciplines: cogent writing, clear and persuasive oral presentation, interpretive skills, critical thinking, and meaning-making of all kinds.



Middlebury students from the FoodWorks program get academic and hands-on experience with food systems. Washington, DC, Summer 2015. *Photo by Eli Meir Kaplan, courtesy of the Middlebury Office for Communications and Marketing.*

Employers still rightly recognize the enormous value of these skills in the workplace. A major 2013 report by the American Association of Colleges and Universities noted that nearly all of the employers it surveyed (93%) said that “a demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than [a candidate’s] undergraduate major.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Association of American Colleges & Universities, “It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success,” 2013, <https://www.aacu.org/leap/presidentstrust/compact/2013SurveySummary> (accessed June 15, 2020).

The same report cites 75% of employers wanting to see more emphasis in undergraduate preparation on “critical thinking, complex problem-solving, and written and oral communication,” among other skills. These skills also underlie the ability to generate innovative ideas and solutions to problems—the single most valued skill listed by employers in this survey. Speaking directly to the issue of innovation, Tony Golsby-Smith argues in the *Harvard Business Review* that Humanities graduates are precisely the people businesses should hire if they are seeking innovative problem-solvers: “People trained in the Humanities . . . have learned to play with big concepts, and to apply new ways of thinking to difficult problems that can’t be analyzed in conventional ways.”<sup>52</sup> As we show in our Center’s mission statement, these skills of argument, articulation, and presentation are at the heart of the Humanities disciplines. Thus, even as enrollments in Computer Science soar in line with the rapid expansion of the technology industries, the campus as a whole risks, as Kalev Leetaru argues in a recent article, “losing the ground that the Humanities provide in helping [computer science students] understand their role in society and the impact their creations have in shaping and being shaped by that society.”<sup>53</sup> A further important task for Humanities educators, then, is to clarify for students the very real value of their Humanities majors in the workplace.

The Humanities disciplines help students become transnationally competent interpreters, critics, and translators of all kinds of cultural information, past and present. In this respect, the Humanities are essential for helping to produce responsible, well-informed, and intellectually resourceful global citizens. They provide crucial contexts and ethical models for understanding and combating racism, classism, ableism, and many other social ills embedded in our histories and cultural practices. As shown in figure 15, the discipline-specific knowledge taught in Humanities classes or majors translates fluidly into a “mindset” that is open to diverse, global perspectives, as well as supporting skills that allow individuals to exercise that mindset in concrete and practical contexts. Noting the marginalization of Humanities fields in the current American university, William Deresiewicz argues in his influential book *Excellent Sheep* (2014) that the turn away from Humanities is essentially a turn away from the skills that are fundamental for tackling the most challenging ethical questions facing our society: “If the liberal arts turn certainties into questions, the humanities do that, in particular with ethical and existential certainties: our convictions about how we should act and whom we should be. Stories, says the writer Andrei Codrescu, are engines of reflection.”<sup>54</sup>

Quite aside from their value in the workplace and in social organizations at large, the Humanities have long been recognized for their value in helping students achieve long-term satisfaction and happiness (for more recent reflections, see, e.g., works by Helen Small, Martha Nussbaum, and Mark Edmundson).<sup>55</sup> The humanistic disciplines’ investment in generating and evaluating meaning—whether in the context of analyzing current events or creating or interpreting a work of art—helps individuals respond resourcefully and creatively to challenging events throughout their lives. In the face of these nationally (and internationally) shrinking Humanities enrollments, it is more important than ever that we continue to show students how they can translate core humanistic skills into essential resources for both living well and advancing their future career goals. Our Center for the

<sup>52</sup> Tony Golsby-Smith, “Want Innovative Thinking? Hire from the Humanities,” *Harvard Business Review*, March 31, 2011, <https://hbr.org/2011/03/want-innovative-thinking-hire>.

<sup>53</sup> Kalev Leetaru, “Why Computer Science Needs the Humanities,” *Forbes*, August 6, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kalevleetaru/2019/08/06/why-computer-science-needs-the-humanities/#42346c877f45>.

<sup>54</sup> William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* (New York: Free Press, 2014), 162.

<sup>55</sup> Helen H. Small, *The Value of the Humanities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Mark Edmundson, *Self and Soul: A Defense of Ideals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).



Humanities was created with precisely these challenges and goals in mind: with the aim of promoting curricular innovations that would reposition the Humanities at Middlebury within the heart of critical conversations about public engagement, civic responsibility, and the role of higher education in shaping students' working lives.

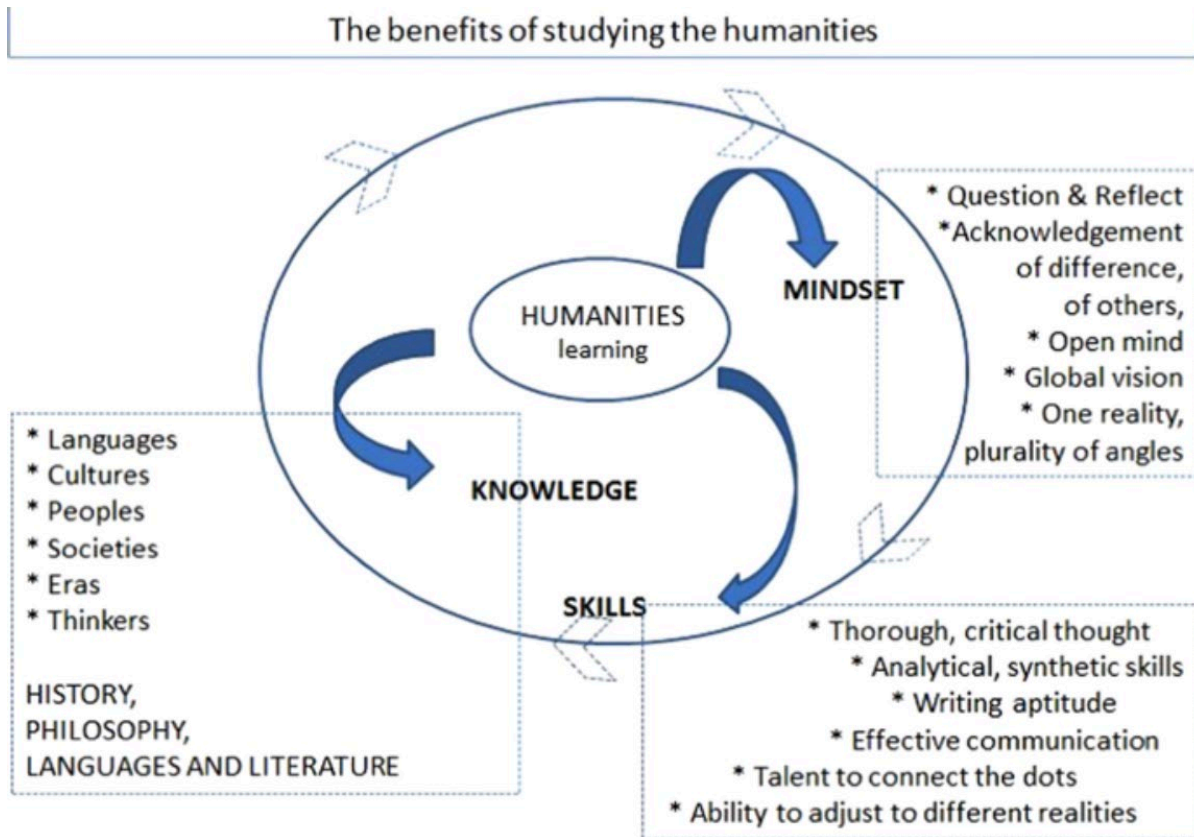


Figure 15: Benefits of studying the Humanities. Source: Rosário Couto Costa, "The Place of the Humanities in Today's Knowledge Society," *Palgrave Communications* 5, no. 38 (2019), <http://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0245-6>, as adapted from Rosário Couto Costa, "Novas políticas de ensino superior para a quarta Revolução Industrial: Um lugar para as Humanidades," in *XVII Encontro Nacional de SIOT* (Lisbon: APSIOT, 2017).

## Recommendations

Our Humanities graduates and alumni have led and continue to lead successful careers in a variety of fields including health care, policy studies, publishing, education, journalism and media, the arts, finance, among many others. Yet with diminished enrollments and majors, coinciding with national trends that grew particularly clear after the financial crisis of 2008 and may arise again in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, Middlebury must consider its long-term vision for the Humanities and their future. After the 2008 crisis, many academic institutions across the country cut their Humanities departments, eliminating courses in literature, history, foreign languages, and the arts.<sup>56</sup> Middlebury has mostly eschewed these trends and, as this Report has shown, throughout the College's history the Humanities have been a core strength. From rich majors to varied summer programs and international offerings, the aggregate paths of humanistic study at the College can position Middlebury, with sustainable long-term financial and institutional support, as a preeminent leader in this field.



Students study in the historic Starr Library wing in the Starr-Axinn building, home (as of 2019) of the Axinn Center for the Humanities. *Photo courtesy of the Middlebury Office for Communications and Marketing.*

In many ways, however, our strengths in the Humanities have been often overlooked or even taken for granted; and there is now a real concern, particularly in light of the COVID-19 crisis and accompanying budgetary challenges, that the Humanities will take a back seat to other institutional and fundraising priorities deemed more relevant. Without preemptive planning and intervention, the current situation could potentially create more challenges than those which emerged after 2008. Ultimately, there is immense benefit to students when all parts of the College can fulfill their intended goals of providing innovative teaching, facilitating excellent student learning experiences, and promoting faculty and student research.

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<sup>56</sup> See Steven Johnson, "Colleges Lose a 'Stunning' 651 Foreign-Language Programs in 3 Years," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Lose-a-Stunning-/245526>; Mitch Smith, "Students in Rural America Ask, 'What Is a University without a History Major?,'" *New York Times*, January 12, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/12/us/rural-colleges-money-students-leaving.html>; and Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt, "Academic Prioritization or Killing the Liberal Arts?," *Inside Higher Ed*, March 1, 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2019/03/01/shrinking-liberal-arts-programs-raise-alarm-bells-among-faculty>.

For these reasons, a multipronged approach toward securing the future of the Humanities is needed, one that would be managed through ongoing collaboration and dialogue between Humanities faculty, departments and programs, multiple College administrative offices, and the Axinn Center for the Humanities.

## 1. Sustain Faculty Lines in Humanities Departments and Programs

As student demand for STEM courses increased in recent years (reflected in both majors and enrollments, as discussed above), there is growing concern that certain faculty positions in the Humanities may permanently disappear, whether through the nonreplacement of retirees or of unplanned vacancies. Figure 16 indicates that STEM tenure-track faculty positions have grown more rapidly—by 33% between 2005 and 2020, versus by roughly 12% for Humanities positions. These trends, if unchecked, might spell major challenges for Humanities departments and programs. That is, with a fixed pool of resources and faculty positions, along with the potential hiring freeze that has emerged due to the COVID-19 crisis, tenure-track positions in the Humanities might further erode in the coming years. If departments are not able to hire faculty in new and developing areas in their fields, those majors will struggle to seem relevant and attractive to students.

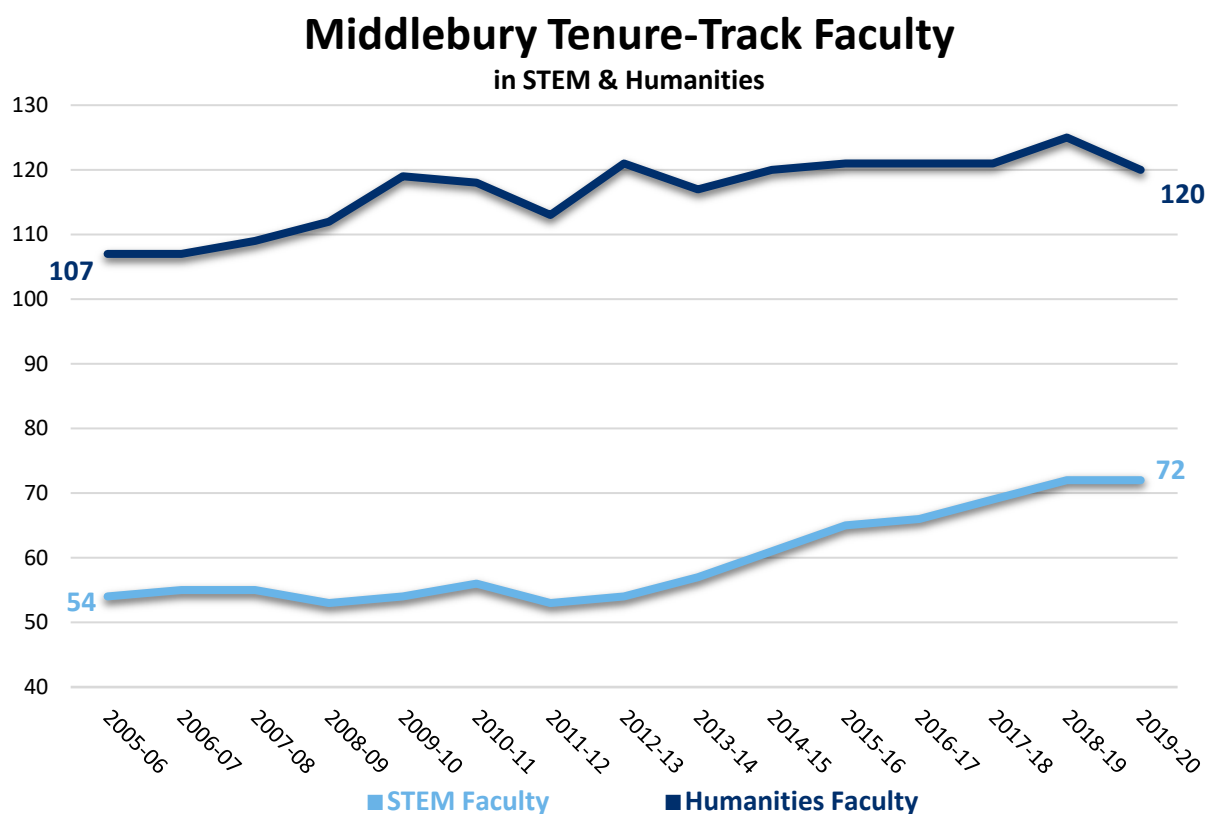


Figure 16: Number of tenure-track positions in STEM and Humanities at Middlebury College, 2006–20. Data courtesy of the Middlebury Office of the Dean of Faculty.

The need for this commitment cannot be overstated. Today the Humanities have become essential in helping us consider the historical, ethical, and moral implications of the current COVID-19 global crisis as well as the burgeoning movement in the United States, and elsewhere, calling for social justice and racial equity. Over the coming years, students will be hungry to discover, document, and analyze recent events with the help of religious, historical, literary, linguistic, and other humanistic tools. These academic experiences will no doubt shape their futures, as fluency in comprehending the pandemic's meanings and the roots of pervasive racial and socioeconomic inequalities will be required among college graduates. The Humanities help elucidate the bases of historical injustices, both in the United States and globally, and encourage productive forms of dialogue, empathy, and resolution for these growing challenges. Sustaining faculty lines and promoting the hiring of new and diverse faculty, scholars who work on cutting-edge scholarship that engages with questions of race and ethnicity, gender studies, Health and Medical Humanities, classics, literary studies, ethics, and many other fields, will ensure that our Humanities offerings continue to be responsive to student interests and needs, as well as to the demands of a particularly complex historical moment.

Importantly, too, many Humanities departments and programs at Middlebury have shown “fight” and resilience, even against national and Middlebury-specific downturns. In some cases, the erosion of certain Humanities majors—particularly in foreign languages—might be partially related to the rise of interdisciplinary majors. We hope that when hiring decisions are made, College committees and administrators recognize that numerous courses taught by humanists not only serve their home departments but also several programs that have grown prominent over the past two decades.



Michael Sheridan (Anthropology) holds his office hours outdoors with a student, Fall 2018. *Photo by Bob Handelman, courtesy of the Middlebury Office for Communications and Marketing.*



## 2. Encourage and Recruit Majors by Updating Curricula and Promoting New Interdisciplinary Bridges

Looking ahead, and particularly in light of current economic and global challenges, faculty in Humanities departments and programs, with the support of the Axinn Center for the Humanities, should work more closely to consider ways to recruit a greater number of Humanities majors, to emphasize the strengths of traditional humanistic fields, like literature, history, religion, and languages, and to chart new paths of interdisciplinarity within our Humanities course offerings.

Many models exist both on our campus and at other academic institutions for reenergizing humanistic fields of study in creative and intellectually vibrant ways. Some academic institutions, like the University of Texas at Austin, have promoted the Study of Core Texts and Ideas—a competitive certificate-based program that has proven to be quite popular among undergraduate students. That program offers a “serious study of the great books [where] students . . . engage in a direct, respectful, but probing and critical study of major creative and theoretical works that have shaped human thought and history.”<sup>57</sup> Harvard’s “Humanities Frameworks” classes, “The Art of Reading,” “The Art of Looking,” and “The Art of Listening” offer students innovative introductions to core texts and ideas in the Humanities and have proved popular among students across the disciplines.<sup>58</sup> Some programs, incidentally, like one at Clemson University, are awarding students specialized scholarships to critically study classical readings and texts, in intensive small courses or in a tutorial model with individual faculty advisers.<sup>59</sup> Implementing similar programs, of course, would involve a new and critical understanding of “great books” or “classical literature,” one that must draw on works authored by people of color as well as underrepresented minorities and gender groups, and writers from the Global South.

Throughout the country too, popular interdisciplinary majors have emerged that combine humanistic pursuits with scientific curiosity. For instance, since its launch in 2015, a major in Medicine, Science, and the Humanities has become one of most popular at the Arts and Sciences undergraduate college at Johns Hopkins University. Middlebury has already begun to chart similar paths with its limited course offerings in the Digital Humanities and a brand-new track, to be launched in Fall 2020 and housed in the History Department, focusing on the History of Science, Medicine, and Technology.<sup>60</sup> But much more can be done with institutional support and with more targeted conversations and collaborations across disciplines, as facilitated by the Axinn Center for the Humanities and colleagues in STEM.

At the same time, before embarking on new creative endeavors, we also urge the College and different departments and programs to study the potential future effects of new programs and majors on *existing* majors and departments in the Humanities. Plans to energize the Humanities through interdisciplinarity, that is, must simultaneously consider ways to strengthen of existing Humanities departments and majors and not be party to their erosion.

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<sup>57</sup> University of Texas at Austin, “Thomas Jefferson Center for the Study of Core Texts & Ideas,” <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/coretexts/> (accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>58</sup> “Harvard Initiative for Learning and Teaching,” <https://hilt.harvard.edu/funding-opportunities/previously-awarded-projects/projects/framework-courses-in-arts-and-humanities/> (accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>59</sup> See David Steiner and Mark Bauerlein, “A Future for the Humanities,” *Inside Higher Ed*, April 2, 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/04/02/important-ways-revitalize-humanities-opinion>.

<sup>60</sup> Edyth Moldow, “History Dept. Debuts History of Science, Medicine and Technology Track,” *Middlebury Campus*, April 30, 2020, <https://middleburycampus.com/50623/arts-academics/the-future-of-the-history-of-science-medicine-and-technology-hsmt/>.



### 3. Encourage “Humanities+STEM” Joint or Double Majors

One strategy that could augment and strengthen existing Humanities majors and has proven successful at other institutions is to encourage first-year advisees to pursue a Humanities major alongside one in STEM. “The Humanities,” notes Tyrus Miller, Dean of the School of the Humanities at the University of California in Irvine, are “a necessary partner to STEM,” as they help “uncover and analyze the underlying beliefs and motives that may prevent even irrefutable scientific evidence.”<sup>61</sup>



Ellery Foutch’s 2018 J-Term course made a replica of a historic chair.  
*Photo courtesy of the Middlebury Office for Communications and Marketing.*

In this spirit, we suggest a more unified model of advising at Middlebury, a more deliberate effort on the part of faculty advisers—across the College—to encourage students to take advantage of the best of the liberal arts, to study across disciplines, to be exposed to different skill sets and methodologies, and to truly expand their horizons.<sup>62</sup> This “Humanities+STEM” approach might create generative partnerships between Music and Math, Religion and Neuroscience, English and Economics, Spanish and Biology, among many others. As a small liberal arts college that naturally lends itself to close working relationships between and among faculty, Middlebury would be well suited for promoting this approach among its undergraduates, one that would place all College departments, programs, and disciplines on a level playing field. The Axinn Center for the Humanities, in collaboration with the College Administration, should support targeted faculty seminars and workshops that plan new ways of advising first- and second-year students. The goal of these endeavors would be to show how “Humanities+STEM” joint or double majors allow students to maximize their learning, amplify their skills, and learn from our exceptional faculty across the College.

<sup>61</sup> Tyrus Miller, “4 Reasons the Future Will Rely on Humanities Majors,” University of California, March 1, 2019, <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/4-reasons-future-will-rely-humanities-majors>.

<sup>62</sup> For more on real-world success stories of “infusing” Humanities and STEM, see Dominica Dipio, “The Making of a Humanities Scholar: Beyond STEM in Africa,” Carnegie Corporation, April 22, 2020, <https://www.carnegie.org/topics/topic-articles/african-academics/infusing-stem-humanities-values-and-ethics-africa/>.

## 4. Focus on First-Year Seminars to Recruit Humanities Majors

In addition to our third recommendation above, the Center also recommends that Humanities faculty use the First-Year Seminar program more vigorously and intentionally as an opportunity to spark student interest in majoring, double-majoring, or joint-majoring in a Humanities field. The First-Year Seminar emphasizes learning goals that are central to Humanities disciplines, including developing “skills in widely accessible yet scholarly presentation (written and oral), involving observation, analysis, argumentation, research, and the use of sources.”<sup>63</sup> As we noted in section III.C, Humanities faculty teach a majority of these seminars each year and are well-positioned to offer focused instruction on these fundamental skills—critical thinking, written and oral presentation, original research—that are not only essential to a successful pathway through the liberal arts setting but also highly valued by employers.<sup>64</sup> Humanities faculty teaching a First-Year Seminar also have the opportunity to share aspects of their research with students at the very beginning of their college careers in ways that will inspire enthusiasm not just for the particular field but for the humanistic enterprise as a whole. Students are ready and eager at this stage to encounter challenging questions about meaning and purpose in their lives, and the freshman seminar is an ideal context in which to showcase the importance of humanistic skills and resources in responding to precisely those questions.



Left: Mara Strich '22 completes a geometry activity in Cynthia Packert's Art History First-Year Seminar, Fall 2018. Photo by Bob Handelman, courtesy of the Middlebury Office for Communications and Marketing.

## 5. Development of Public Humanities Initiative

Over the next several years, the Axinn Center for the Humanities will be dedicated to developing a robust Public Humanities initiative or “arm” that will help faculty and students produce public-facing and/or community-curated projects that address social and cultural issues of urgent importance. With institutional support and hopes for targeted external funding, we plan to integrate Public Humanities into the Center's activities and the curriculum more broadly, in conjunction with Humanities departments and faculty. Our goal is to bring Humanities skills and expertise—involving narrative, oral history, interpretation, historical analysis, Digital Humanities, ethical inquiry, and many other areas of knowledge—into generative partnerships with various stakeholders within our

<sup>63</sup> First-Year Seminar website, <http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/fys> (accessed June 26, 2020).

<sup>64</sup> See discussion of the 2014 report by the Association of American Colleges and Universities at the beginning of section IV.

rural community and beyond. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, many of these projects will take place, at least initially, in the public digital sphere.



A student plays bingo with residents of a local nursing home, Fall 2015. Photo by Brett Simpson, courtesy of the Middlebury Office for Communications and Marketing.

The Axinn Center sees this initiative as two-pronged. First, in the coming years, the Center will encourage different forms of public scholarship designed to translate intellectual output to a broader community beyond the classroom, whether local or national. As practitioners of public scholarship, students will learn to combine serious intellectual rigor with commitment to civic awareness and responsibility. Second, and in collaboration with other programs and centers at the College (including the Center for Community Engagement and a new Project-Based Learning initiative), the Axinn Center will promote new partnerships and synergies between Humanities faculty and student and our Vermont community. Whether a project involves mining Library Special Collections to create an exhibit and workshop about local history, collecting oral histories about immigration to Vermont, documenting the experiences of migrant farm laborers in our state, learning from journalists how to craft op-eds on issues of local and national importance, helping to facilitate community conversations on topics of local concern, or translating from foreign languages at the local Open Door clinic, among other projects, students will engage in work of tangible importance to their own intellectual development. In so doing, they will experience the ethical and practical importance of humanistic inquiry, as a way of not only acquiring essential linguistic and other culturally valuable skills but also building capacity for inclusive and productive dialogue with diverse groups of people.

To accomplish these tasks, the Public Humanities initiative will also encourage faculty to create a Humanities “Laboratory” component: a dedicated section of their courses in which the students and faculty will bring the class materials and methodologies to bear on a project with a “public face.” This approach could be developed in two main ways: by developing an entire class and laboratory component with a community collaborator; or by targeting particular experts who can teach students skills in the public production of knowledge—for instance, curating an art exhibit, or digital storytelling—that would allow them to share their intellectual work beyond the classroom. Innovations like these have already been on the books for many years at Middlebury, particularly in the History of Art and Architecture, American Studies, and Anthropology Departments, among

others. With more institutional support and commitment, students enrolled in classes with Public Humanities Laboratory sections would see firsthand how the skills they are developing in class can be mobilized in productive new ways outside the classroom. Drawing on the interests and experience of Middlebury's faculty members, Public Humanities initiatives will help further efforts that already exist in our community addressing prison education, Health Humanities, food and hunger, oral history, and privilege and poverty, among many others.

## 6. Reaching Prospective Students through Admissions

As the scope of this Report clearly shows, Middlebury is uniquely positioned as a leader in undergraduate Humanities education. When and where possible, we suggest that the Admissions Office emphasize for prospective students (especially those interested in Humanities, but ideally all students) the big picture of just how unusual and rich Middlebury's Humanities offerings are. Not only do we have strong departments and programs on the main campus, but we also host a renowned graduate program in English every summer, to which undergraduates may apply, at our nearby Bread Loaf campus (as well as campuses in Santa Fe and Oxford, UK). There are also opportunities for undergraduates associated with the Bread Loaf Writers' Conferences and the New England Young Writers' Conference. For students interested in hands-on experience at the publication end of the literary trajectory, there are rewarding internships available at the *New England Review*. In addition, Middlebury operates a Humanities-centered study abroad program (CMRS) in Oxford, England, in addition to making available several spots every year at Lincoln College for students focusing on the Humanities. These students are matriculated into the University and study there for the full academic year. Finally, Middlebury is justly recognized both nationally and internationally for its long history of outstanding and extensive foreign language teaching. Middlebury's commitment to foreign language pedagogy is apparent in its renowned network of C. V. Starr Schools Abroad—in sixteen countries at thirty-six locations, including Europe, Asia, North Africa, and South America—for students wishing to pursue greater fluency and cultural competency in their chosen languages.

Taken as a whole, this range of opportunity for students to explore the Humanities disciplines both on campus and at affiliate institutions abroad is unparalleled among small liberal arts colleges and could effectively be presented much more holistically to incoming and prospective students. While elite colleges are always looking for ways to distinguish themselves from their very similar peers, this "big picture" Humanities is in fact a distinguishing (and distinguished) feature of Middlebury's profile.

## 7. Work with Advancement to Endow and Fund the Humanities

Funding for the Humanities at Middlebury and elsewhere is on the decline. Several colleges and universities have tried to reverse these trends, however, and many of the most successful Humanities Centers across the country, particularly but not exclusively at liberal arts colleges, are funded through permanent endowment structures that ensure their long-term viability and vibrancy. This model already exists at Middlebury, of course: two good examples are the Rohatyn Center for International Affairs and the Franklin Environmental Center at Hillcrest, both of which have access to substantial endowment funds supporting lectures, workshops, and faculty or student-led initiatives. Direct gifts



are also regularly received to support specific departments, endowed chairs, the College Museum, and the Mahaney Center for the Arts.

The new Axinn Center for the Humanities at Middlebury, however, lacks a permanent structure of financial support. Looking ahead, we recommend that Middlebury set up a fundraising arm in its Office of Advancement devoted to creating a permanent endowment that would support the annual operating costs of the Axinn Center as well as supporting various Humanities departments and programs across the College. Specialized endowed funds can also sustain a Humanities Lecture Series, the annual Humanities Faculty Research Seminar, a Humanities Student Research Fund, and collaborative pedagogical initiatives across the College between the Humanities and STEM, or the Humanities and Athletics, among many others.



Cynthia Packert discusses an Islamic artifact in the Middlebury Museum of Art with a student in her Art History First-Year Seminar, Fall 2018. *Photo by Bob Handelman, courtesy of the Middlebury Office for Communications and Marketing.*

Middlebury's Humanities alumni have deep attachments to the College and are, across the board, quite gratified by the quality of their educational experience, their close and lifelong relationships with professors, and their enduring ties to Vermont.<sup>65</sup> We therefore propose more targeted outreach to Humanities alumni that solicits both smaller and larger gifts. Many of Middlebury's Humanities graduates have pursued careers in finance, medicine, banking, and business, as well as successful roles in the arts and literature. These devoted and impassioned alumni would no doubt be keen to help protect the future of the Humanities at the College.

Large and small gifts have been sought and utilized, in recent years, to build Humanities Centers all over the country, as well as to fund lectures, seminars, and events, and to forge novel curricular innovations.<sup>66</sup> Alumni donations have recently supported new arts and Humanities projects at Indiana University.<sup>67</sup> The University of Maine's Clement and Linda McGillicuddy Humanities Center promotes direct-to-center donations on its website, reminding potential funders that "gifts of

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<sup>65</sup> In May 2020, the co-Directors of the Axinn Center for the Humanities organized a social media campaign that invited several Middlebury alumni who graduated with Humanities degrees to speak about how the Humanities are helping them cope with the COVID-19 lockdown. The alumni response to that campaign was swift, enthusiastic, and overwhelmingly positive and supportive. See the "Humanities" story highlights on the College's Instagram page, <https://www.instagram.com/middleburycollege/> (accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>66</sup> "Humanities," Inside Philanthropy, <https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/campus-cash/humanities> (accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>67</sup> "Alumna's Donation Will Support IU's New Center for Public Arts and Humanities," National Endowment for the Humanities, January 3, 2020, <https://www.neh.gov/news/alumnas-donation-will-support-ius-new-center-public-arts-and-humanities>.



all sizes contribute to our goal to build a permanent resource for the humanities.”<sup>68</sup> Middlebury College already has established models for this direct call for gifts to support a Middlebury department or program. For example, each year, with the help of the College’s Advancement Office, Middlebury’s Department of Athletics leads fundraising campaigns—nowadays especially on its social media accounts or via email—and these campaigns can raise tens of thousands of dollars in a matter of days. A similar fundraising model would work well to secure the future of Humanities departments and programs, as well as the Axinn Center for the Humanities. Indeed, we gratefully acknowledge the Kellogg Fellowship, established in 2014, as a notable example of a targeted gift to support Humanities research at the College. Supporting highly motivated students who are undertaking senior independent work in a Humanities field, the Kellogg Fellowship has proved highly successful in encouraging undergraduate research in Humanities and in raising the profile of their work.

One example of the use of a targeted gift to support the Humanities in a quite visible way could be to create a Humanities Teaching Prize. While the Perkins Prize currently exists to reward particularly successful teaching in Mathematics and the Natural Sciences, there are no such prizes for Humanities faculty. This creates an unfortunate gap in opportunity between STEM and Humanities faculty at the College, alongside the inadvertent implication that excellent teaching in STEM fields is more highly valued here than excellent teaching in the Humanities.

The Axinn Center for the Humanities leadership has also been working with the Office of Grants and Sponsored Programs to secure external grants to support some of its programming. In January 2020, the co-Directors crafted a Public Humanities grant proposal to be submitted to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, but this application has been put on hold due to the COVID-19 crisis. The Center also has plans to seek grants that support curricular and pedagogical innovations in Health and Medical Humanities. Although there are currently positive signs that some foundations are reaffirming their commitments to the arts and Humanities,<sup>69</sup> securing grants may become more competitive as private philanthropic foundations shift funding priorities and donation structures to deal with economic challenges and pressing social needs. For this reason, we believe Middlebury must also pursue its own long-term strategy of fundraising for the Humanities, a strategy that would help preserve its core liberal arts education model.

## 8. Importance of Establishing Humanities Networks and Neighborhoods

Middlebury College is located in a small, rural town in Vermont. While there are many obvious delights and strengths associated with this location, one potential difficulty it poses is intellectual isolation from others doing similar work. Humanities scholarship, while often undertaken in solitude, also benefits greatly from the enriching and rewarding context of colleagues and collaborators in similar subfields.

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<sup>68</sup> “Endowment and Giving,” Clement and Linda McGillicuddy Humanities Center, University of Maine, <https://umaine.edu/mhc/endowment-giving/> (accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>69</sup> “Mellon Foundation Announces Additional \$200 Million Grantmaking Commitment to Arts and Humanities Nonprofits Devastated by Global Pandemic,” June 11, 2020, [https://mellon.org/news-blog/articles/mellon-foundation-announces-additional-200-million-grantmaking-commitment-arts-and-humanities-nonprofits-devastated-global-pandemic/?ref=mailchimp&fbclid=IwAR0q4WFRG0hB8s3QOAzaD5y4CT1uQFf001JClbzv0BXf73jvhvW72bMF\\_0](https://mellon.org/news-blog/articles/mellon-foundation-announces-additional-200-million-grantmaking-commitment-arts-and-humanities-nonprofits-devastated-global-pandemic/?ref=mailchimp&fbclid=IwAR0q4WFRG0hB8s3QOAzaD5y4CT1uQFf001JClbzv0BXf73jvhvW72bMF_0).

We benefit as individual scholars from community, but we also benefit collectively if our Humanities representatives—in the Center and co-Directors—are connected with other Centers and leaders in our region. Until very recently, Middlebury simply was not on the radar of the various consortia involving Humanities Centers and Directors. There was no website presence, no Center, and nobody to contact with Humanities-specific material or opportunities. The importance of this became apparent when the co-Directors, early in their tenure, attended a LACSU meeting (a network of Liberal Arts Colleges and Small Universities focused on Humanities Centers). These Humanities Center directors at peer institutions (including Colby, Amherst, Wesleyan, Pomona, Carleton, Grinnell, Haverford, and several others) had been meeting for years to discuss topics in Humanities and to pool ideas. Middlebury was coming late to the table, but it was clear how important these connections would be as our Center for the Humanities becomes more central to our campus conversations.

By the same token, Middlebury stands to gain from nurturing collaborations with its nearer neighbors in New England. Luis Vivanco, Director of the Humanities Center at the University of Vermont, approached Middlebury's co-Directors with an invitation to join the well-established NEHC, New England Humanities Consortium.<sup>70</sup> Its mission, to “promote intellectual collaboration, interdisciplinary exchange, and innovative educational programming for faculty, students, and the regional, national and global communities they serve,” aligns closely with Middlebury's, and the seed money available for start-up collaborative projects should prove advantageous for our faculty.<sup>71</sup>

More locally still, the Vermont Humanities Council is an important partner for Middlebury's new Center for the Humanities. Meetings with this group have established several important points of connection, especially with regard to our nascent programming in Public Humanities. We look forward to making collaboration with VHC a routine part of our process.

Finally, the Center must connect with Humanities organizations at a national level. Middlebury is a member institution of the National Humanities Alliance, which does vital advocacy work on behalf of the Humanities. Plans to attend the NHA conference in March and to begin establishing important connections were disrupted by COVID-19. Thanks to the support of Middlebury President Laurie Patton, we have been able to join these important Humanities networks at the national and local level, and it is essential that we maintain our commitment to building these connections going forward.

## 9. More Robust Integration of Summer/Abroad Programs

As the foregoing makes clear, Middlebury has unusual Humanities-related resources at its disposal. We argue that greater integration of some of these programs and opportunities into a coherent vision of “Humanities at Middlebury” could provide significant mutual benefit for all these entities—but especially for Middlebury students. Although some undergraduates are aware of the opportunities at Bread Loaf, for example, the number applying to enroll remains relatively low (specify). Integrating Bread Loaf summer classes more vigorously into the regular offerings at the College could be immensely attractive for our most capable students, who would gain access to

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<sup>70</sup> Founded in 2018 by Mellon funds, the Consortium includes Amherst College, Colby College, Dartmouth College, Northeastern University, Tufts University, University of Connecticut, University of New Hampshire, University of Rhode Island, University of Vermont, Wellesley College and Wheaton College. The Axinn Center for the Humanities joined this Consortium in June 2020.

<sup>71</sup> New England Humanities Consortium website, <https://nehc.uconn.edu> (accessed June 17, 2020).

graduate level seminars with advanced students. Similarly, finding creative ways to develop or expand existing pathways between the main campus and CMRS, as well as our C. V. Starr Schools Abroad, would also benefit both students and faculty. CMRS is ideally positioned to host workshops on varied areas of humanistic research with which Middlebury faculty are either already engaged, or about which they would like to learn more. For instance, the paleography workshop with CMRS faculty member Ralph Hanna in 2016 offers a successful model for potential future collaborations. In addition, we believe faculty could work with colleagues at the Language Schools and the C. V. Starr Schools Abroad to find effective ways to integrate undergraduate students into these varied learning and research opportunities.



The opening rubric of a ninth-century manuscript (Bodleian Laud Misc. 410) of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, one of the texts that Angus Warren '20 (History) consulted while studying abroad at CMRS and while writing his senior thesis. Photo courtesy of Angus Warren.

## 10. Supporting Research Collaborations between Humanities Faculty and Undergraduate Students

Involving undergraduates in STEM faculty research has long been viewed as a necessary part of science pedagogy, and students report great satisfaction in being able to participate firsthand in original research and discovery. Yet there are far more federal resources available to fund science research, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, than there are for the Humanities, which must rely much more on limited and highly competitive resources through nonprofit foundations or on institutional support.

According to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, in 2017, federal “expenditures for academic humanities RD [research and development] were dwarfed by those for research in the STEM fields. . . . At the extreme, expenditures for health sciences research in 2017 were 48 times greater than funding for research in the humanities. Further, 2017 spending for humanities research equaled 0.7% of the amount dedicated to science and engineering RD.”<sup>72</sup> (See figure 17 below.) Moreover, even though both STEM and the Humanities experienced overall declining federal support between 2007 and 2017, “the phenomenon was more pronounced in the humanities than in STEM fields.”<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> American Academy of Arts & Sciences, “Research and Development Expenditures at Colleges and Universities,” Humanities Indicators 2019, [www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/funding-and-research/research-and-development-expenditures-colleges-and](http://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/funding-and-research/research-and-development-expenditures-colleges-and) (accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

## Expenditures for Academic Research and Development in the Humanities and Other Selected Fields, Fiscal Years 2007–2017 (Adjusted for Inflation)

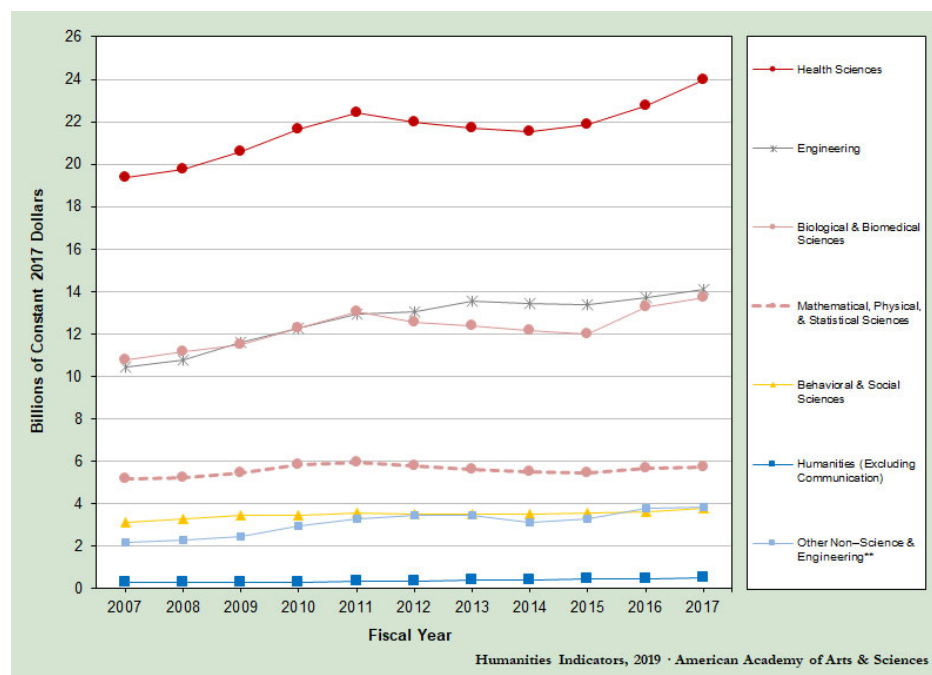


Figure 17: Expenditures for academic research and development in the Humanities and other selected fields, fiscal years 2007–17 (adjusted for inflation). Source: American Academy of Arts & Sciences, *Humanities Indicators*, 2019, [www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/funding-and-research/research-and-development-expenditures-colleges-and](http://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/funding-and-research/research-and-development-expenditures-colleges-and).

In 2013, to offset some of those cuts in federal funding, Middlebury College administrators promised to provide more robust internal funding for STEM student research assistants and to undertake targeted fundraising, through the College’s Advancement office, to support these collaborations. At least one assessment indicated that most Middlebury students working on campus in the summers, up to 70%, were employed by faculty in the natural sciences.<sup>74</sup>

At Middlebury, most faculty, across disciplines, can apply to have student research support during the academic year and in the summer. But involving Humanities students in faculty research in a systematic way has proved challenging. The Council on Undergraduate Research has usefully explored the ways in which involving undergraduate students in Humanities research poses particular problems, including, but not limited to, what might seem the “prohibitively long apprenticeships . . . necessary for Humanities students [to participate in Humanities research], particularly in the realms of language expertise and other highly specialized fields of knowledge.”<sup>75</sup> The Council recommends that institutions of higher learning—and particularly liberal arts colleges—prioritize student-faculty research projects by offering robust administrative support for them, including stipends, summer research grants, and pedagogy workshops specifically targeting the development of faculty-student research models.

We believe that the College Administration, along with the Axinn Center for the Humanities, can build this sort of infrastructure and support that would help faculty make traditional Humanities scholarship both more collaborative and more accessible for student research partners. This

<sup>74</sup> Emily Singer, “Science Research Grants Dwindle,” *Middlebury Campus*, March 20, 2013, <https://middleburycampus.com/19932/news/science-research-grants-dwindle/>.

<sup>75</sup> Mark Schantz, “Undergraduate Research in the Humanities: Challenges and Prospect,” *CUR Focus* 29, no. 2 (2008), <https://www.cur.org/assets/1/7/winter08schantz.pdf>.

approach could offer students the same kind of mentorship in real-world research available to them in the STEM fields. Many fields easily lend themselves to these collaborations, which could range from the creation of oral history archives and coauthorship of academic articles, to the translation of documents or films from foreign languages, among many others. Opportunities available in Digital Humanities may be particularly suitable for such projects.

At the same time, to effectively incorporate students into the work of Humanities scholars and faculty, more awareness is needed about the discrepancies in existing funding structures for faculty research. Faculty doing research in STEM and STEM-related fields can apply to a wider and larger pool of national funding resources to support their research and their sabbatical leaves. Granted, STEM research and teaching carry greater costs due to expensive equipment, laboratories, and other line items. But Humanities research can bear its own high expenditures, too, especially today, when travel, accommodations, books, equipment and specialized media purchases, the desire to credential oneself in new computer skills or in foreign languages, and so on, can quickly add up. Some faculty are forced to rely on personal funds to support their research, but many cannot afford to do so, particularly as it has been long recognized that across the country, “STEM faculty salaries are a lot higher than humanities faculty salaries.”<sup>76</sup>

Ultimately, innovative Humanities research and its resultant pedagogy require robust financial support, particularly as private foundations largely curtailed their funding for the Humanities after the 2008 financial crisis and may do so again in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>77</sup> Importantly, at an undergraduate and teaching-focused liberal arts college like Middlebury, more sustained funding for Humanities faculty research will ultimately yield opportunities for *all* undergraduate students—across disciplines—as Humanities majors (like their STEM correlates) will have greater exposure to the latest fields of study and to distinct disciplinary content and will become more deliberately integrated within faculty research projects.

Recognizing the need to provide more funding for Humanities faculty research and concomitantly to offer Humanities students challenging, inspiring, hands-on research opportunities, the Axinn Center for the Humanities will prioritize the support of such projects within the constraints of its budget. The Center will also follow the precedent set up by STEM, Environmental Studies, and the Arts, to work with the College Advancement Office and the Administration to develop an infrastructure of financial support that ensures the permanence of Humanities funding.

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<sup>76</sup> Dick Starts, “How Many Humanities Ph.D.s Should Universities Produce?,” Brookings Institution, October 24, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2018/10/24/how-many-humanities-ph-d-s-should-universities-produce/>. As one article points out, “It’s easy to argue that the humanities don’t need as much funding as the sciences. Literary close reading, for instance, doesn’t require as many gadgets and gizmos as computer programming, or open-heart surgery; but scholars need money to live on just as much as scientists do.” See Nora Caplan-Bricker, “New Evidence: There Is No Science-Education Crisis,” *New Republic*, September 4, 2013, <https://newrepublic.com/article/114608/stem-funding-dwarfs-humanities-only-one-crisis>.

<sup>77</sup> “Humanities Funding Still in Recovery from Recession,” National Endowment for the Humanities, June 19, 2014, <https://www.neh.gov/news/humanities-funding-still-in-recovery-recession>.



## 11. Changing the Narrative

As the authors of a 2018 piece published in *Perspectives on History* (the news magazine of the American Historical Association) put it, “The humanities are relevant. What we face, however, is the challenge of compellingly articulating and demonstrating that relevance to a broader range of publics.”<sup>78</sup> This is precisely our challenge at Middlebury, whether we are addressing the concerns and priorities of students, their parents, or the broader academic community. Our task may be particularly acute as Humanities faculty at an elite liberal arts college. As Benjamin Schmidt argues in *The Atlantic* (2018), such colleges have traditionally been “some of the only places where the humanities were central to the mission of higher education,” and where, accordingly, equal weight was accorded to the Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities.<sup>79</sup> But in the past decade “humanities majors [at such colleges] have fallen from a third to well under a quarter of all degrees.” Like the authors of the *Perspectives* piece, Schmidt notes that students are not fleeing their Humanities majors on the basis of solid evidence; rather, “they’re fleeing humanities and related fields specifically because they *think* they have poor job prospects.”<sup>80</sup>

It is precisely this gap between perception and reality that the Humanities narrative needs to address. For while the data on employment outcomes is mixed, initial small differences between incomes for Science versus Humanities graduates tend to trail off over time (except for engineering graduates). And as Schmidt mentions, “The Humanities Indicators analysis (2019) found that humanities majors under the age of 35 are actually *less* likely to be unemployed than life-science or social-science majors.”<sup>81</sup> Other major indicators concur with Schmidt’s conclusions. A 2018 survey conducted on behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (*Fulfilling the American Dream: Liberal Education and the Future of Work*) showed in stark terms both how necessary humanistic skills are to employers, and how colleges and universities are increasingly producing graduates without those skills at the appropriate level. For instance, 78% of employers surveyed thought that critical reasoning skills were “very important,” yet only 34% of employers thought their recent graduate hires were well prepared in this area. Similarly, 76% of these employers felt that effective communication in writing was very important; 33% believed their graduates met their standards in this area. Finally, fully 80% of employers valued effective oral communication very highly, while only 40% believed their graduates were well prepared in this area.<sup>82</sup> One important task for the Axinn Center as it works to change the narrative about Humanities will be to continue to work closely with the Center for Careers and Internships to clarify for students just how flexible, valued, and sought-after the skills associated with Humanities majors and disciplines are among employers nationwide.

While these statistics are, of course, by no means the only metric of the value of Humanities education, they do seem to speak to the current concerns that drive students away from Humanities majors. As Humanities educators, we urgently need to change the dominant narrative concerning the economic factors driving students’ choice of major. Humanities fields are *precisely* those fields that help students gain competence in the areas that employers are actively seeking, including, but not

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<sup>78</sup> Sarah Jones Weicksel, “Changing the Narrative: ‘The State and Future of the Humanities in the United States,’” *Perspectives on History*, January 2018, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2018/changing-the-narrative-the-state-and-future-of-the-humanities-in-the-united-states> (accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>79</sup> Schmidt, “The Humanities Are in Crisis.”

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Association of American Colleges and Universities, “Fulfilling the American Dream: Liberal Education and the Future of Work,” July 2018, [www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2018EmployerResearchReport.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2018EmployerResearchReport.pdf).

limited to, critical reasoning skills and skills in written and oral communication. These data points do not even attempt to incorporate the value of what Schmidt calls the “developing a philosophy of life” argument in support of Humanities study.<sup>83</sup> But in terms of general life satisfaction, this aspect of the Humanities is also crucial and is arguably more likely, over the long term, to ensure individuals’ adaptability and resilience in a challenging job market and an ever-changing world.



Students in Yumna Siddiqi's  
Postcolonial Literature class, Fall 2018.  
*Photo by Bob Handelman, courtesy of the  
Middlebury Office for Communications and  
Marketing.*

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<sup>83</sup> Schmidt, “The Humanities Are in Crisis.”



As a coda to this Report, we point to the urgency of ensuring the continuation of robust Humanities education at Middlebury in the midst of the catastrophe wrought by COVID-19 pandemic and in the context of mounting calls for socioeconomic justice and for legal and racial equality. As the previous sections make clear, the Humanities provide crucial resources for generating innovative responses to ethical and social problems in society, the workplace, and individual lives.

Reports already show that the illness has disproportionately affected communities of color, thus exacerbating problems already present in those communities because of systemic racism. There is every reason to expect, therefore, that in the wake of COVID-19, the skills associated with Humanities departments and programs will be more vitally important than ever. Indeed, at public health programs throughout the country, experts are increasingly teaching humanistic texts and methodologies because healthcare practitioners and epidemiologists must “learn how to construct meaningful narratives that link human behavior to data about disease.”<sup>84</sup> Humanistic questions and methods of inquiry have a critical bearing, today, on how public health crises are assessed and tackled, lending key perspectives on contagion and its history, its effects on individuals, communities, ethno-racial groups, and even the economy.<sup>85</sup> As David Brooks writes in a *New York Times* op-ed, “Right now, science and the humanities should be in lock step: science producing vaccines, with the humanities stocking leaders and citizens with the capacities of resilience, care and collaboration until they come. But, instead, the humanities are in crisis at the exact moment history is revealing how vital moral formation really is.”<sup>86</sup>

The Axinn Center for the Humanities at Middlebury can contribute to the effort of making meaning out of the chaos of COVID-19. We hope to work closely with the Library’s Director of Special Collections, Rebekah Irwin, on the Middlebury COVID-19 Archive, to produce a record of stories from this time and to help transform this archive into widely available visual, audio, and/or textual media. Similar projects are being widely implemented elsewhere: King’s College, London, for example, has funded a project called *Worldmaking in the Time of Covid-19*, which “seeks, through studying key terms in several languages, to contribute to the understanding of the cultural and geopolitical significance of Coronavirus.”<sup>87</sup> Yale University’s School of Public Health has also aggregated “a multidisciplinary archive of the human experiences that comprise public health and community wellness in this moment in history,” an archive that collates photos, artwork, videos, images, music, and personal stories.<sup>88</sup> Given the expertise of our staff and faculty, and the enthusiasm and skill sets of our talented students from a variety of disciplines and languages, we believe similar projects at Middlebury could yield powerful and enduring resources for our broader community in Vermont.

The Axinn Center for the Humanities is also dedicated to working with other groups on campus, particularly the Center for the Comparative Study of Race and Ethnicity, the Anderson Freeman Center, and their affiliates, as well as with collaborators in the Alexander Twilight Project, to tackle pressing questions of racism, discrimination, inequality, and injustice. Engaging in these conversations and working to address such questions is at the core of humanistic pursuits and their

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<sup>84</sup> Kirsten Ostherr, “Humanities as Essential Services,” *Inside Higher Ed*, May 21, 2020, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/05/21/how-humanities-can-be-part-front-line-response-pandemic-opinion>.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> David Brooks, “If We Had a Real Leader,” *New York Times*, May 28, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/28/opinion/coronavirus-trump.html>.

<sup>87</sup> Language Acts and Worldmaking website, King’s College London, <https://languageacts.org/news/worldmaking-time-covid-19/>.

<sup>88</sup> Yale School of Public Health, “The Pandemic Archive,” <https://publichealth.yale.edu/practice/students/happy/archive/> (accessed June 15, 2020).

pedagogical mission. As some observers recently pointed out, “If the goal is educating and equipping students to live and work in our current diverse and divided society, understanding racial dynamics is a key component of a college education.”<sup>89</sup> Faculty at Middlebury College have long been committed to tackling these questions in their classrooms and within their research, but in the long term, continued institutional support for diversity in teaching and in hiring, across the Humanities and at the College, will be critical. It follows, too, that if one of the major goals of a liberal arts education is to consider ways to build a more just society—a more just world—and to help eliminate racial and socioeconomic disparities, then humanists must lead these conversations, alongside economists, sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, and others, in an effort to effect meaningful and real change, in our community and beyond.



In 2016–17, Twilight artist-in-residence Will Kasso painted a mural of Mary Annette Anderson, the first African American woman to graduate from Middlebury, and Martin Henry Freeman, the first African American man to become a college or university president in the United States, in the main lounge of the Anderson Freeman Center. *Photo courtesy of the Middlebury Office for Communications and Marketing.*

In sum, then, the Humanities are crucial both to understanding the current crises—whether arising from the pandemic or from long-standing racial injustices—and to rebuilding in their wake. They are crucial because in numerous ways—through historical knowledge, ethical practices, interpretive skills, and so on—they undertake the work of empathy and imagination. In a recent *New Yorker* article, Agnes Callard writes movingly of Jean Améry, a Viennese Jew tortured by the Gestapo in World War II, who manages through the humanistic learning informing his essays to “convey an experience that borders on the incommunicable.” She writes: “His words sail across the gulf of time and space and culture—and the deepest gulf of all, between the one who has been tortured and the one who has not—to address the reader in the native language of her own mind.”<sup>90</sup> In the period

<sup>89</sup> MarYam Hamedani, Hazel Rose Markus, and Paula Moya, “Pushing Back against Racism and Xenophobia on Campuses,” *Inside Higher Ed*, May 14, 2020, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/05/14/five-ways-college-educators-can-have-more-effective-conversations-about-race>.

<sup>90</sup> Agnes Callard, “What Do the Humanities Do in a Crisis?,” *New Yorker*, April 11, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/what-do-the-humanities-do-in-a-crisis>.



following World War II, on experiencing violent deracination from his homeland as instigated by colonialist policies of dispossession in Israel-Palestine, the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish penned eloquent stanzas and prose, in classical Arabic, that captured his years of exile and trauma but also conveyed “feelings of inclusivity” and humanism.<sup>91</sup> He reminded the world that “poetry and beauty are always making peace. When you read something beautiful you find coexistence; it breaks walls down.”<sup>92</sup>

In today’s historic moment, many (in the United States and throughout the world) have joined the call and movement for racial justice: Black Lives Matter. Along with taking to the streets to protest, they have been seeking solace and knowledge in the poetry, artistry, and literary contributions of generations of Black writers and intellectuals. There are now robust collective efforts to undo centuries of their suppression and erasure, despite obstacles that often seem insurmountable. The Axinn Center for the Humanities at Middlebury supports and promises to uphold this work, to support Black Lives Matter in collaboration with other partners on campus and in our broader community. Specifically, the Center plans to prioritize inviting people of color to campus to give talks and workshops; to seek collaborative partnerships with entities on campus engaged in antiracist work; to encourage programming that specifically targets crucial curricular revisions; and to create topics for its Research Seminar and future themes with these urgent issues in mind. Whatever the gulfs between the experiences of individuals, groups, and countries during these historically difficult times, humanistic learning can bring us to shared understandings of the grievous impacts of challenges ranging from catastrophic illness and its consequences to long-festered inequities and injustices.

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<sup>91</sup> Jennifer Hijazi, “This Palestinian Poem on Jerusalem Is Finding New Life,” *PBS NewsHour*, December 11, 2017, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/poetry/this-palestinian-poem-on-jerusalem-is-finding-new-life>.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Dalya Cohen-Mor, *Mahmoud Darwish: Palestine’s Poet and the Other as the Beloved* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 86.

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