



# The Humanities in American Life

Insights from a Survey of the Public's Attitudes & Engagement

A Report from the Humanities Indicators Project of the  
American Academy of Arts & Sciences

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# **The Humanities in American Life**

## **Insights from a 2019 Survey of the Public's Attitudes & Engagement**

**A Summary of Findings Prepared by the  
Humanities Indicators**

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# Executive Summary

In fall 2019 the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Humanities Indicators project, with funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, administered the first nationally representative survey dedicated to understanding Americans' engagement with and attitudes toward the humanities. The survey asked 5,015 American adults, age 18 and above (in a sample drawn from NORC at the University of Chicago's AmeriSpeak panel) about their engagement in a variety of humanistic activities, as well as their beliefs about the personal, societal, and economic benefits of the humanities.

For the purposes of this study, the term *humanities* encompassed more than the academic disciplines associated with the field. The survey included questions about a wide array of activities in which Americans engage as part of their personal and work lives, such as: early childhood reading; K–12 and higher education in humanities subjects; later-in-life engagement with the humanities through books, the internet, television, and cultural institutions; and descriptive writing on the job.

Exploratory work revealed that the public had diverse conceptions of the term *humanities*. To overcome this lack of a common understanding, the survey first asked about the *what* and *where* of humanities activities (such as reading at home, thinking about an ethical choice, or visiting a history museum) without employing the term *humanities*. The term was then concretized for respondents by pointing them back to the earlier practices and also providing a definition rooted in some of the field's better-known disciplines ("studying or participating in activities related to literature, languages, history, and philosophy"). Only then were respondents asked about their opinions of the field.

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There is substantial engagement with the humanities in American life. However, very few people engage regularly in the full range of activities.

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The survey revealed that a substantial majority of Americans believes the humanities confer personal, societal, and economic benefits. The study also found considerable engagement in a range of humanities activities at home and in the workplace, as well as strong support for teaching humanities subjects in the schools. The survey also found relatively little agreement with a variety of negative statements about the field, such as "cost[s] too much" or is "a waste of time."

The survey offers four broad insights:

- There is substantial engagement with the humanities in American life. However, very few people engage regularly in the full range of activities, or even in all the activities associated with a given discipline (e.g., someone who watches history shows is not very likely to also research history topics online).
- Though Americans hold a generally favorable view of the humanities, especially as an area of education, their enthusiasm is relatively attenuated in comparison to other

intellectual fields and even to some of the humanities' component disciplines (especially history).

- Many Americans do not recall being exposed to the humanities by their parents, and most adults wished they had taken more humanities courses in school.
- And finally, a substantial share of Americans has been hampered at work due to a deficiency in one or more humanities skills, though the survey also reveals that many Americans do not think they need humanities skills in the workplace.

The results of the study enlarge the framework for thinking about the meaning of the public humanities, suggesting where and how the public engages with the humanities in their lives, what views they actually hold about the field, where and when they believe the humanities should be taught to young people, and finally, how Americans use humanities skills in the workplace, a topic that looms ever-larger in conversations about humanities majors and the future of the field.

# Introduction

While the humanities are frequently associated with academia, proponents of its disciplines often argue that they play a vital role in the life of the American public—though the nature of that role and the public’s opinions about it have been something of a mystery. To explore these questions, in fall 2019 the American Academy of Arts and Sciences’ Humanities Indicators project administered the first nationally representative survey on the subject, thanks to funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The survey asked 5,015 Americans, age 18 and above (in a sample drawn from NORC at the University of Chicago’s AmeriSpeak panel), about their engagement with a variety of humanistic activities in their daily lives and work, as well as their attitudes toward the field. (See Appendix B for a description of the study’s methodology.)

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[T]he development process and some of the findings demonstrated the potential challenges for the field when it comes to the humanities as an umbrella concept.

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The results may surprise many in the field, as the survey revealed considerable agreement about the personal and societal benefits of the humanities, substantial engagement with a variety of humanities activities at home and in the workplace, and strong support for teaching humanities subjects in the schools. The survey also found that relatively few Americans agree with a variety of negative statements about the field.

At the same time, the development process and some of the findings demonstrated the potential challenges for the field when it comes to the humanities as an umbrella concept, as a nonnegligible share of Americans has a rather different conception of the term *humanities*. The public also has a more favorable view of many of the constituent disciplines (particularly history, literature, and languages) than the humanities as a category. And even if a large majority of Americans disagree with some of the more extreme caricatures of the humanities (such as the proposition that they “undermine the values of my community”), the survey did turn up a high level of agreement with the statement that the field “tends to attract people who are elitist or pretentious.”

## What Are the Humanities?

For the purposes of this study, the term *humanities* encompassed more than the academic disciplines associated with the field. The term also includes a wide array of activities in which Americans engage as part of their personal and work lives, such as: early childhood reading; K–12 and higher education in humanities subjects; later-in-life engagement with the humanities through books, the internet, television, and cultural institutions; and descriptive writing and technical reading on the job.



While there have been dozens of studies about the fine and performing arts, decades of federally funded research about American attitudes to the sciences, and one large national study about public engagement with history, no national survey has been dedicated solely to the humanities as a field. While some arts surveys, most notably the National Endowment of the Arts' Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, have yielded valuable information about certain aspects of the humanities as they are practiced by Americans (particularly in the area of reading), Indicators staff could find only one national survey (conducted in the early 1990s) that asked even a single question about Americans' perception of the humanities.<sup>1</sup>

As a result, scholars in the field and leaders in the public humanities could only speculate, based on anecdotal evidence, about what the public thinks of their work. In light of downward trends in humanities majors and departmental funding on many campuses, many fear the worst. This has now been tested empirically, and the data suggest that the troubles in academia are not a symptom of widespread antipathy toward the field. But the survey does indicate that some groups of Americans are more engaged with and enthusiastic about the humanities than others. Hopefully, the study's findings will be of use to the field in assessing—and perhaps addressing—these disparities.

## The Content of This Report

The study's findings are presented in four parts:

1. Dimensions of the Humanities in Everyday Life (exploring American engagement in a variety of humanities activities);
2. How Americans View the Humanities (exploring broad views about the humanities);
3. The Humanities and Childhood (exploring childhood engagement with the humanities, views about the teaching of humanities subjects to children, and the subjects Americans wished they had studied more of in school); and
4. Humanities in the Workplace (exploring the extent to which Americans use humanities skills at work and whether their inability to perform humanities-related tasks has proven a barrier to their career advancement).

Each part includes an analysis of differences in engagement or attitudes among demographic groups. As with any first-of-its-kind study, the findings presented here tend to raise as many questions as they answer. Hopefully, they will spur additional research. Please feel free to contact the Indicators staff at [hiqueries@amacad.org](mailto:hiqueries@amacad.org) to share any thoughts you might have, or ask for additional details.

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<sup>1</sup>Research and Forecasts, Inc., *The Importance of the Arts and Humanities in American Society: A Nationwide Survey of American Public Commissioned by the National Cultural Alliance* (Washington, DC: National Cultural Alliance, 1993).

## A Guide to Interpreting the Survey Findings

The means and proportions included in this report are based on a sample of Americans, weighted to produce estimates for the US adult population as a whole. (See Appendix B for a description of the survey methodology.) The reported values are estimates and thus have a measure of error (also an estimate) associated with them, which is indicated by the inclusion of the word *estimated* in graph and table titles.

Two types of difference are noted in the report. The first type of difference is between a particular demographic group (e.g., 18-to-29-year-olds) and the entire adult population. These differences are highlighted in the tables. The second type of difference is that between demographic groups (e.g., between 18-to-29-year-olds and Americans age 60 and above). These are discussed in the report narrative.

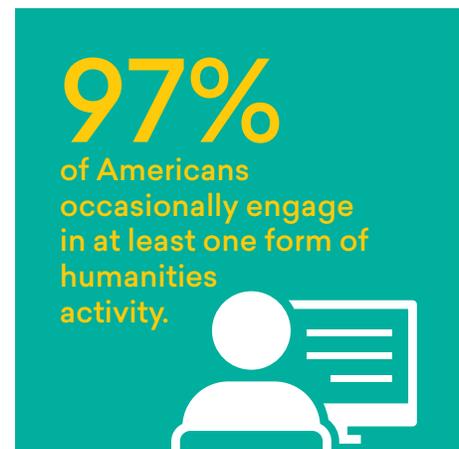
By virtue of the error associated with each estimate (either for the entire adult population or a particular demographic group), observed differences between them may be due to the sample that happened to be drawn for this survey rather than a difference between the actual values in the adult population, which could be known only if a census were conducted. For this reason, only differences between estimates that were found to be statistically significant at the 5% level are noted in the report.

Statistical significance gauges the reliability of an observed difference between two estimates. It indicates how certain one can be that the difference between the two values could actually be found in the adult population and is not due to chance (i.e., not due to the particular sample of adults that was surveyed as part of the study). If a difference between two groups (e.g., Asian and White Americans, or Asian Americans and the entire adult population) is significant at the 5% level, it means that if there really were really *no* difference between two groups, the difference observed in the study sample would be this big or bigger only 5% of the time.

# 1. Dimensions of the Humanities in Everyday Life

One of the main objectives of the study was to establish the level of public engagement with a mix of humanities activities across a variety of disciplines (art history, history, literature, languages, ethics, and religion). These activities included traditional forms of engagement, such as reading (of fiction or nonfiction) and visiting museums and historic sites, as well as more contemporary forms, such as sharing humanities content through social media and listening to podcasts on humanities subjects.

Working with key stakeholders in the humanities (including leaders of state humanities councils and specialists in the various academic disciplines) the Humanities Indicators staff identified a set of common types of humanistic activity. Unfortunately, space and time considerations meant that not every item suggested by humanities stakeholders could be included in the survey. In the end, 19 items were chosen that captured activities with a high likelihood of engagement while also representing the breadth of the humanities experience. The survey also extended beyond the yes/no format employed by many arts participation surveys to inquire about frequency of engagement.

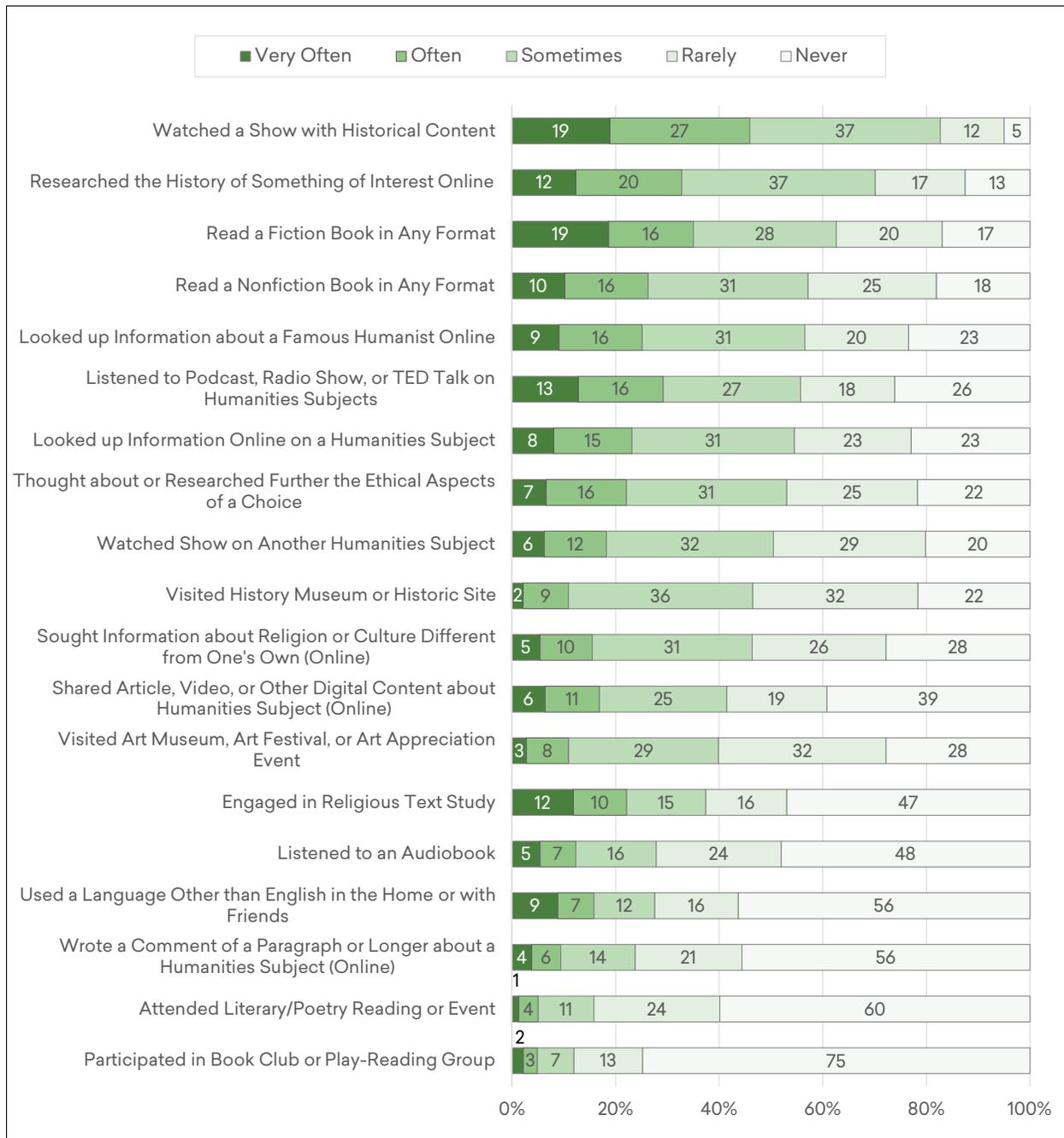


This chapter is organized into three sections: the first looks broadly at the “what” and “how often” of national engagement with the humanities; the second examines how these forms of engagement relate to one another; and the final section drills down into activity clusters (e.g., consuming humanities content through the media, reading-related activities, and online engagement with humanities through internet searches and sharing on social media), to explore how levels of engagement vary across demographic groups.

## The Semi-Engaged Public

The survey found that most American adults (97%) had engaged in at least one form of humanities activity at least sometimes in the previous year. A majority of the adult population engaged in no single activity often or very often, but the survey found nine activities that at least half of Americans engaged in sometimes or more frequently (**Figure 1A**). The most commonly practiced activities included consuming humanities-related audio and video content, researching humanities subjects online, and reading fiction and nonfiction books.

# 1A: Estimated Frequency of Adult Engagement in Humanities Activities in the Previous 12 Months, Fall 2019\*



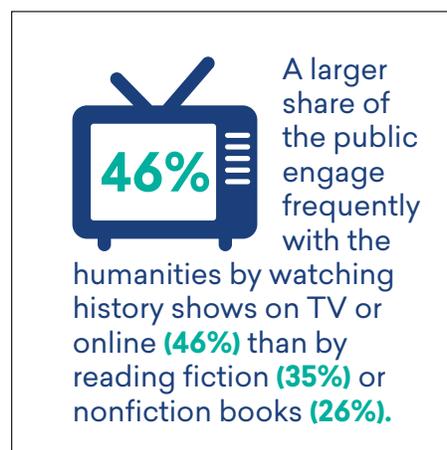
\*Activities are listed in descending order by the size of the share who engaged at least “sometimes.” The frequency shares for a given activity may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

**Source:** Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.

The shares of Americans engaging in each of the 19 activities included in the survey differed widely, however. At the high end, 83% of Americans watched shows with historical content at least sometimes; at the low end, 12% participated in book clubs or play-reading groups with the same regularity.

Watching shows with historical content (on a TV, computer, or other device) was particularly popular with Americans. Forty-six percent of the adult population—the largest share for any of the activities included in the study—had watched such shows often or very often in the previous 12 months. Among the various activities, watching a history show was also the activity that Americans were least likely to engage in rarely or never, with only 17% of adults doing so that infrequently. The share of Americans who had read works of fiction very often in the previous year (19%) was the same as the share who had watched historical shows at that rate, but the share of Americans who rarely or never read works of fiction was considerably higher (37%).

Activities that required leaving the home tended to have lower levels of engagement.<sup>1</sup> Visiting history museums and historical sites was at the upper end of the frequency range for activities that required leaving the home, as 11% of Americans did so often or very often, while another 36% did so sometimes. A similar share of Americans (11%) visited art museums or attended arts events often or very often, but only 29% placed themselves in the “sometimes” category. And while reading was one of the most common types of humanities activity, participation in reading-related activities outside the home—in the form of book clubs or literary events—had the lowest level of engagement in the survey, as only 5% of adults participated in these activities often or very often.



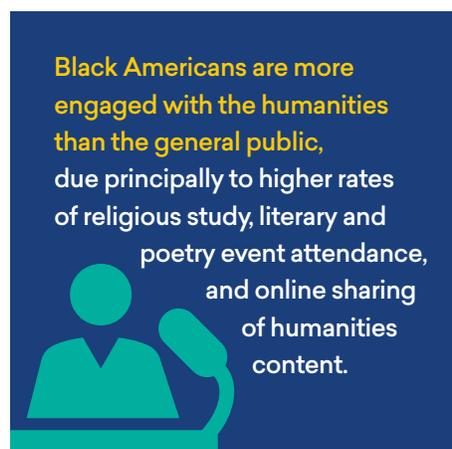
The survey also inquired about online humanities engagement, asking whether Americans had researched various humanities subjects, shared information about these subjects with others, or posted humanities-related commentary of their own. Depending on the subject, 46% to 69% of Americans recalled looking up humanities content at least sometimes in the previous year, and over half had listened to podcasts or other audio content on humanities topics. Researching history topics online was second in popularity only to watching history shows, with just 13% of Americans indicating that they never engaged in this activity. Sharing humanities content or writing about humanities subjects was considerably less common. Almost 60% rarely or never shared, and over three-quarters of Americans wrote about humanities subjects that infrequently.

<sup>1</sup>This pattern is consistent with that found by other surveys. See, for instance, the National Endowment for the Arts, *U.S. Patterns of Arts Participation: A Full Report from the 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2019) (hereafter referred to as *SPPA*).

## Who Engages Most Often?

To measure overall engagement with the humanities, each survey respondent was assigned a score based on the number of activities they engaged in and the frequency of that engagement (all activities were weighted equally). Respondents whose scores placed them in the top third of the distribution<sup>2</sup> were assigned to the “most engaged” category, and the third with the lowest scores constituted a “least engaged” category. Those with scores between the two poles were labeled “somewhat engaged.” **Figure 1B** indicates the shares of different demographic groups that fell into each category.

Figure 1B, like many others in the report, highlights where a difference between a demographic group and *all American adults* was found to be statistically significant at the 5% level.<sup>3</sup> The narrative goes further and discusses instances in which particular demographic groups (e.g., young adults, Americans with college degrees, etc.) were more or less likely than other such groups to have participated in a particular humanities activity or to have expressed a certain view of the field.



As Figure 1B shows, gender was not predictive of overall engagement in the humanities, but race was salient. Black and Hispanic Americans were more likely than White Americans to have been among the most engaged with the humanities. In the case of Black Americans this is attributable to their higher rates of religious text study, online activity, and participation in literary events. Hispanics were also more likely than White Americans to have attended literary events and much more likely to report speaking a language other than English with family and friends.

Age also proved to be an important factor in humanities engagement, as younger Americans were more likely than middle-age and older Americans to be among the most engaged. While approximately 40% of Americans ages 18 to 44 were among the most engaged, less than a third of those 45 and older were in this category.

The relationship of income to engagement was modest and less straightforward. The highest income Americans were more likely to be somewhat engaged than the lowest-income Americans, who were more concentrated at the poles of the engagement scale.

Additionally, education was found to be strongly related to overall humanities engagement. Only 26% of Americans with a high school education or less were among the most engaged,

<sup>2</sup>The distribution was weighted to ensure national representativeness.

<sup>3</sup>For a brief discussion of statistical significance and how it allows us to gauge the reliability of comparisons between estimates, please see “A Guide to Interpreting the Survey Findings” at the end of the introductory chapter.

## 1B: Estimated Distribution of Adults Across Levels of Engagement with the Humanities in the Previous 12 Months, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Most Engaged (%)	Somewhat Engaged (%)	Least Engaged (%)	Total (%)
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*				
All Adults (18+)	34	32	34	100
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	33	33	34	100
Women	35	32	33	100
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White, Non-Hispanic	<b>30</b>	33	<b>37</b>	100
Black, Non-Hispanic	<b>43</b>	30	<b>27</b>	100
Hispanic	<b>41</b>	30	<b>29</b>	100
Asian American	41	33	26	100
<b>Age</b>				
18–29	<b>40</b>	30	30	100
30–44	<b>38</b>	32	30	100
45–59	<b>29</b>	34	37	100
60+	<b>30</b>	33	<b>38</b>	100
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)**</b>				
Up to/including \$29,999	37	29	34	100
\$30,000–\$59,999	33	33	35	100
\$60,000–\$124,999	32	33	35	100
\$125K & Above	32	<b>37</b>	30	100
<b>Education</b>				
High School Diploma or Less	<b>26</b>	30	<b>44</b>	100
Some College	35	32	33	100
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	<b>41</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>23</b>	100

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant. The “most”/“somewhat”/“least” shares for a given demographic group may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

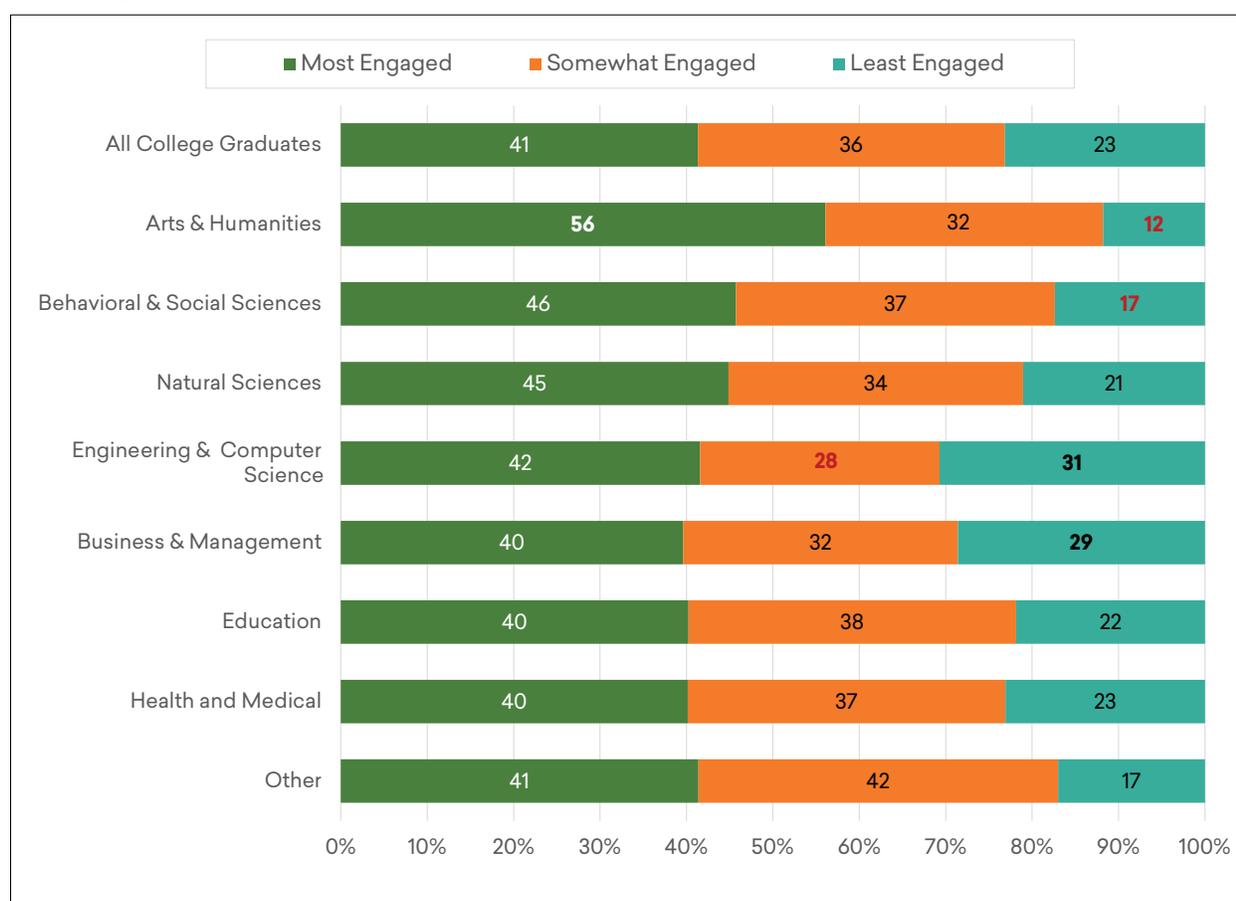
\*\*Approximate. The income data collected by the survey were categorical and did not align exactly with the 2018 income quartile estimates published by the US Census Bureau (the most recent available when this analysis was being conducted).

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

compared to 41% of college graduates. Disaggregating the college-educated population by undergraduate major revealed that arts and humanities majors were more likely than college graduates in general to have engaged with the humanities (**Figure 1C**). Focusing in on specific majors, fifty-six percent of arts and humanities majors fell into the “most engaged” category, compared to 40–46% of graduates from every other field.

Business majors were more likely than college graduates in general to be among the least engaged. So were majors in engineering and computer science. The share of arts and humanities majors in the “least engaged” category was statistically significantly smaller than for every other major examined, with the exception of behavioral and social sciences.

**1C: Estimated Distribution of College Graduates Across Levels of Engagement with the Humanities in the Previous 12 Months, by Undergraduate Major, Fall 2019\***



\*The difference between a value in **boldface** and the corresponding share for all college graduates is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black/White: value is higher than the share for all college graduates. Red: lower.) Not all differences between individual majors are statistically significant at the same level. The report narrative discusses notable between-major differences that were found to be statistically significant. The “most”/“somewhat”/“least” shares for a given major may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

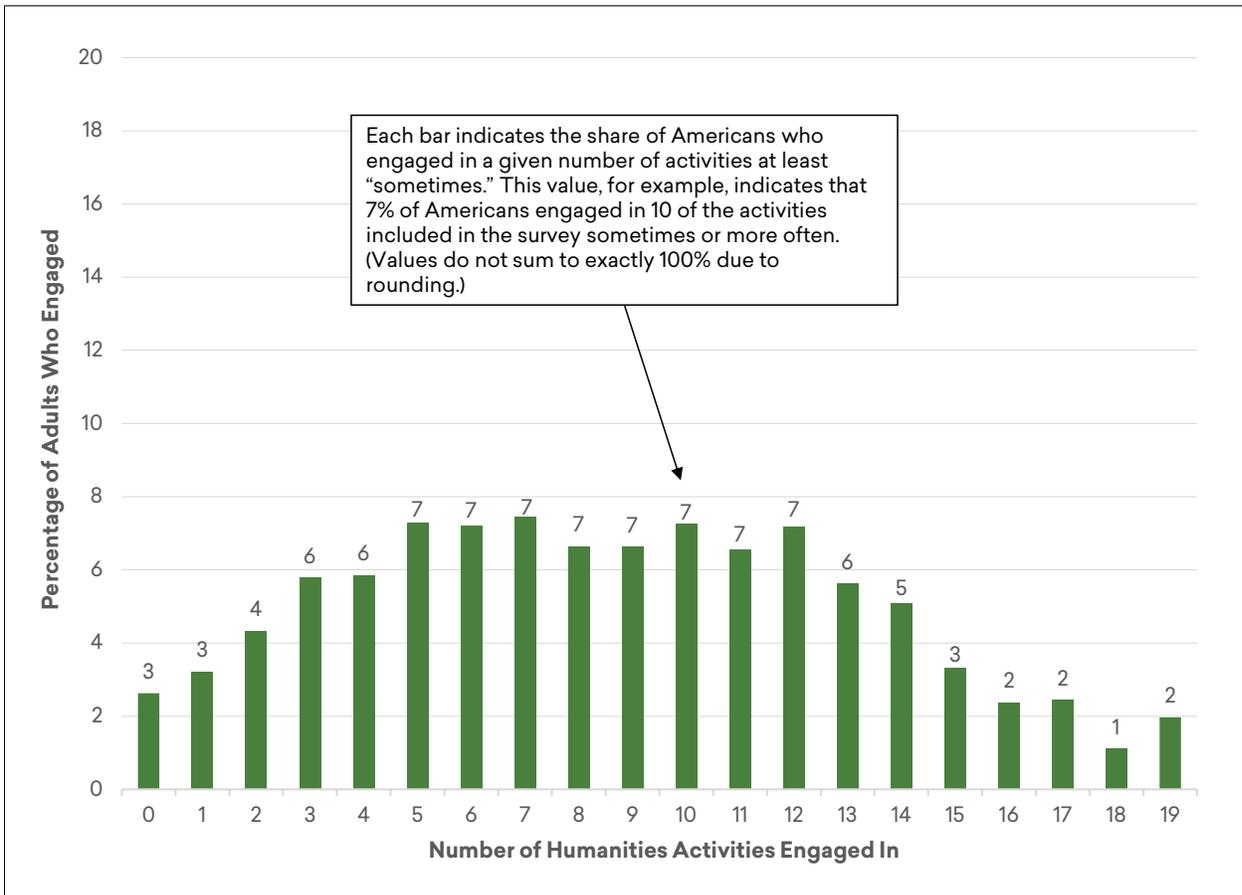
## Relationships among the Activities

As noted above, virtually every American engaged in at least one form of humanities activity in the year preceding the survey, and further analysis indicates that a substantial share of Americans engaged in multiple humanities activities with some regularity (**Figure 1D**). Approximately three-quarters of Americans engaged at least sometimes in five or more activities. Just over half of Americans engaged often or very often in three or more activities.

Translating the distribution above into average activity counts, American adults engaged at least sometimes in an average of nine activities, and more frequently (“often” or “very often”) in four.

A key question the survey sought to answer was how these various forms of engagement relate to one another in the daily lives of Americans. Do people who read also pursue other forms of humanities activity? Do the millions of Americans who watch shows with historical content engage with history in other ways, such as visiting historical sites? To probe

### 1D: Estimated Distribution of Adult Population by the Number of Humanities Activities in Which They Engaged At Least Sometimes, Fall 2019



**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

these issues, the strength of association among activities was explored using both correlation and factor analysis.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most striking findings from this analysis was that some of the most popular forms of humanities engagement were only weakly associated with the other activities. For example, the most common form of humanities engagement, watching shows with historical

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In sum, the study found that “doing the humanities” for most Americans involves only a portion of the full portfolio of activities that can be thought of as humanities-related.

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content, had only a weak relationship to every other form of activity in the survey, except watching shows on other humanities subjects. Similarly, fiction reading had a limited association with every other form of humanities activity in the survey except nonfiction reading.

These findings point to the key insight of the analysis: related activities tended to cluster by *mode* of engagement (e.g., online research versus visits to cultural institutions) rather than by the *substance or content* of that engagement (literature or history, for example). The analysis identified five such mode-based groupings of related activities:

- watching humanities content on TV or other devices;
- conducting research on the internet about humanities subjects;
- reading books (fiction and nonfiction);
- sharing or commenting on humanities content online; and
- visiting cultural institutions (art/history museums and historic sites).

The relationships among the activities in each of the above groupings were strong, while the relationships between the activities in one cluster and those in the others were only moderately strong or quite weak. In sum, the study found that “doing the humanities” for most Americans involves only a portion of the full portfolio of activities that can be thought of as humanities-related, and that what links the activities in which people engage is more how they are done than their substantive focus.

In the following sections, the report discusses clusters of activities that are related conceptually, but often cut across the different modalities noted above (e.g., “Reading”, a cluster that includes reading fiction and nonfiction, but also listening to audiobooks, religious text study, and participating in book clubs). While these clusters provide an opportunity to highlight notable variations in patterns of engagement across seemingly related activities, please bear in mind that some of the activities within each cluster are only loosely connected in practice for many Americans. The following analysis will also focus primarily on the share of Americans who often or very often engage in each of these activities, in order to facilitate analysis of differences among demographic groups with respect to their level of participation.

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<sup>4</sup>The correlation matrix is available as Appendix A in this report. Exploratory factor analysis is a statistical technique that groups together variables with similar response patterns.

## Reading

Even though the study found a relatively close relationship between fiction and nonfiction reading, a key difference is who tended to engage in these forms of humanities activity.<sup>5</sup> Older, wealthier, and college-educated Americans were more likely than others to engage in both types of reading, but the genres differed in their popularity with women.

Previous studies have shown that women are much more likely to read fiction books than men, and this becomes even more obvious when the frequency of this activity is considered.<sup>6</sup> The survey found that 43% of American women had read fiction often or very often in the preceding year, while only 26% of men had read in the genre at a similar rate (**Figure 1E**). However, the study did not find as much of a difference between men and women when it came to reading nonfiction. This was due to a markedly smaller share of women reading nonfiction than fiction. The share of men who often read fiction was similar to the share who read nonfiction (approximately one-quarter), while the share of women who read nonfiction (27%) was 16 percentage points smaller than the share who read fiction. The share of women who rarely or never read nonfiction was also 12 percentage points larger than it was for fiction (41% for nonfiction compared to 29% for fiction).<sup>7</sup>



of Americans  
often read a  
work of fiction  
or nonfiction.

The data also reveal that Hispanic Americans were less likely than Whites to read fiction frequently. Though the two groups read nonfiction with about the same frequency, the share of Hispanic Americans who often or very often read fiction was nine percentage points smaller than that for Whites.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, an analysis of reading by college major revealed that humanities majors were much more likely to be readers of fiction and nonfiction than college graduates in general. Almost two-thirds of humanities graduates read fiction often or very often, compared to 47% of college graduates generally. Humanities majors were more likely to read fiction than majors in every other field except education. The contrast with engineering and computer science majors was particularly pronounced, as less than one-third of graduates from those fields read fiction often.

<sup>5</sup>The survey did not ask respondents to differentiate between the consumption of books in print and e-book formats, since the mode of reading did not seem relevant to the question of engagement with the humanities.

<sup>6</sup>Previous studies have tended to ask only if the respondent had read at least one book in the past year (e.g., National Endowment for the Arts, *U.S. Patterns of Arts Participation*, 44–54).

<sup>7</sup>A similar pattern was suggested by the 2017 *SPPA*, which asked about reading of novels and short stories, histories, and biographies. See the summary in the Humanities Indicators on “Book Reading: Topics” at <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/public-life/book-reading-topics>.

## 1E: Estimated Share of Adults Who Engaged in Reading-Related Activities Often/Very Often in the Previous 12 Months, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Read Fiction Book	Read Nonfiction Book	Listened to Audiobook	Participated in Book Club/ Play Reading	Engaged in Religious Text Study
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*					
All Adults (18+)	35	26	12	5	22
<b>Gender</b>					
Men	<b>26</b>	25	11	<b>2</b>	21
Women	<b>43</b>	27	14	<b>7</b>	23
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>					
White, Non-Hispanic	38	26	11	4	21
Black, Non-Hispanic	32	27	16	6	<b>33</b>
Hispanic	<b>27</b>	24	12	6	20
Asian American	32	26	15	3	15
<b>Age</b>					
18–29	33	24	<b>15</b>	6	<b>18</b>
30–44	32	22	<b>15</b>	5	20
45–59	32	24	11	3	21
60+	<b>41</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>8</b>	6	<b>29</b>
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>					
Up to/including \$29,999	33	24	12	5	22
\$30,000–\$59,999	33	24	11	4	24
\$60,000–\$124,999	35	28	12	5	22
\$125K & Above	<b>44</b>	<b>32</b>	15	8	19
<b>Education</b>					
High School Diploma or Less	<b>25</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	4	20
Some College	35	25	12	4	23
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	<b>46</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>7</b>	24

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

Nearly half (49%) of humanities graduates read nonfiction often or very often, while only 35% of college graduates engaged with nonfiction this regularly. Graduates from five fields (behavioral and social sciences, business and management, education, engineering and computer science, and health and medical) were less likely to read nonfiction than humanities majors, as only around one-third of graduates from each of these fields read in this genre often or very often.

Twelve percent of Americans listened often or very often to audiobooks (and another 16% listened sometimes). The analysis of the relationships between activities described in the previous section revealed that Americans who listened to audiobooks were also somewhat more likely to be readers of nonfiction than fiction. Reading nonfiction and listening to audiobooks were also, along with fiction reading, activities that college-educated Americans were more likely to engage in than Americans with lower educational attainment. Audiobook use differed from reading of fiction and nonfiction, however, in that it was negatively associated with age. Although only a small share of young people listened to audiobooks, they were still substantially more likely than Americans age 60 and above to have done so. Additionally, Black Americans were found to be slightly more likely than Whites to have engaged with audiobooks on a regular basis.

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[H]umanities majors were much more likely to be readers of fiction and nonfiction than college graduates in general.

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While Americans' participation in book clubs and play-reading groups was markedly lower than for reading, this activity was similar to fiction reading in that women were more likely to have participated than men. College graduates were also more likely than those with less education to participate in these activities.

Similar to fiction and nonfiction reading, religious text study was significantly more popular with older Americans: 29% of Americans age 60 or older engaged in this activity often or very often, compared to just 18% of those ages 18 to 29. The salience of education, however, was far less pronounced for religious text study than for either fiction or nonfiction reading.

Black Americans were more likely to have engaged in religious text study than Americans in general, as 33% did so often or very often, compared to just 22% of all Americans. Black Americans were also more likely than whites, Hispanics, and Asian Americans to have engaged often or very often in this humanities activity.

## Watching and Listening to the Humanities

While many Americans engaged with the humanities through reading, the largest share of Americans engaged with the humanities through watching shows with historical content (on TV channels such as the History Channel and PBS or on YouTube or other online platforms). Some 46% percent of Americans watched shows with historical content often or very often, while less than one-fifth did so rarely or never.

## 1F: Estimated Share of Adults Who Watched or Listened to Humanities Content Often/Very Often in the Previous 12 Months, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Watched a Show with Historical Content	Watched Shows with Other Humanities Content*	Listened to Podcast, Show, or TED Talk on Hum. Subjects
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)**			
All Adults (18+)	46	18	29
<b>Gender</b>			
Men	<b>50</b>	19	29
Women	<b>42</b>	17	29
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White, Non-Hispanic	48	16	27
Black, Non-Hispanic	44	<b>23</b>	<b>36</b>
Hispanic	43	21	31
Asian American	34	18	34
<b>Age</b>			
18–29	<b>36</b>	19	<b>34</b>
30–44	42	17	<b>33</b>
45–59	46	17	29
60+	<b>56</b>	20	<b>22</b>
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>			
Up to/including \$29,999	44	21	30
\$30,000–\$59,999	49	19	28
\$60,000–\$124,999	44	16	29
\$125K & Above	47	15	29
<b>Education</b>			
High School Diploma or Less	42	15	<b>24</b>
Some College	<b>50</b>	<b>21</b>	28
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	47	19	<b>36</b>

\*Wording of question is described in narrative.

\*\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

Unlike every other humanities activity included in the survey, history show watching attracted a larger share of men than women (**Figure 1F**). While 50% of men often or very often watched shows with historical content (and 13% did so rarely or never), only 42% of women did so (and more than one-fifth of women rarely or never watched such programming).

Older Americans were substantially more likely to watch history-focused shows than their younger counterparts. Approximately 56% of Americans age 60 and above watched shows with history content often or very often, as compared to just 36% of Americans ages 18 to 29. The survey also detected that Asian Americans were less likely than Whites to often watch such shows.

The study found that a substantially smaller share of Americans watched shows with other humanities content (defined as “art, literature, philosophy, or world religions”). Only 18% of adults often or very often watched shows with this content, and almost half rarely or never watched such shows, although Black Americans were more likely than the adults in general and Whites to do so. And the highest-income Americans were somewhat less likely than those in the lowest income quartile to have watched shows with other humanities content.

Alongside the visual media, the survey found that 29% of Americans often listened to humanities content (defined in the survey instrument for this item as “art, history, literature, philosophy, and world religions”) in the form of podcasts, radio shows, and TED talks. Un-

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Unlike every other humanities activity included in the survey, history show watching attracted a larger share of men than women.

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like history show watching, older Americans were less likely than their younger counterparts to be listeners (as only 22% of Americans age 60 and older did so often or very often, and 52% rarely or never listened to humanities content). Also, Black Americans were more likely than Whites (and Americans in general) to listen to shows with humanities content.

All three types of activity in this cluster were at least weakly correlated with education, with Americans who completed at least some college being more likely to have engaged. In the case of listening, the relationship was stronger, with over one-third of college graduates having engaged, as compared to 24% of Americans with a high school education or less.

## Seeking the Humanities Online

Using the internet as a means of increasing one’s knowledge of the humanities was more evenly distributed across demographic categories than many of the other activities examined in the survey (**Figure 1G**). Just as for show watching, history was the most popular humanities subject for internet research. Thirty-three percent of Americans conducted searches on this topic often or very often (though a similar share, 30%, did so rarely or never).

## 1G: Estimated Share of Adults Who Sought Information about Humanities Subjects Online Often/Very Often in the Previous 12 Months, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Researched the History of Something of Interest	Looked Up Information about Famous Humanist*	Looked Up Information on a Humanities Subject*	Sought Information about Religion or Culture Different from Your Own
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)**				
All Adults (18+)	33	25	23	15
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	34	26	25	15
Women	32	24	22	16
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White, Non-Hispanic	33	24	22	13
Black, Non-Hispanic	32	24	26	<b>21</b>
Hispanic	33	29	26	18
Asian American	34	29	28	22
<b>Age</b>				
18–29	32	29	27	19
30–44	35	24	23	17
45–59	32	23	21	14
60+	32	25	23	13
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>				
Up to/including \$29,999	31	26	23	16
\$30,000–\$59,999	31	25	23	15
\$60,000–\$124,999	35	24	23	16
\$125K & Above	37	25	26	17
<b>Education</b>				
High School Diploma or Less	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>
Some College	34	25	24	16
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	<b>41</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>21</b>

\*Wording of question is described in narrative.

\*\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

Although it is not apparent from Figure 1G, the survey found that income was related to online research of history topics. While there was not a statistically significant difference between income groups with respect to frequent engagement, the survey detected a difference between income groups in the shares who *rarely or never* performed online research of history subjects. While only 23% of the highest-income Americans engaged this infrequently, 36% of the lowest-income Americans rarely or never went online to research a history topic.

A quarter of American adults often or very often sought information online about famous figures with a humanities connection (defined as a “philosopher, writer, historian, artist, or musician”), while another 31% did so sometimes. A similar share, 23%, often or very often

### 1H: Estimated Frequency of Adult Engagement in Online Research about a Religion or Culture Different from One’s Own in the Previous 12 Months, by Religious Affiliation, Fall 2019\*



\*Values in **boldface** are measurably different (black/white: higher; red: lower) at the 5% level from the share for all adults. Not all differences between faith groups are statistically significant at this level. The report narrative indicates the groups between which statistically significant differences were found.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

conducted searches for information about humanities subjects (“art, history, literature, or philosophy”) to gain a deeper understanding, and another 31% engaged in such research sometimes.

A smaller share of Americans, 15%, often or very often went online in search of information about a religion or culture different from their own. However, members of the two largest Christian faith groups in America, Protestants and Roman Catholics, together with the nonreligious, were statistically less likely than those of other faith traditions to explore religious and cultural differences online (**Figure 1H**).

Race was also predictive of online research on other religions or cultures, with Whites being less likely than Black and Hispanic Americans to have engaged. Age was also modestly associated with such online searches. Younger Americans were somewhat more likely than older adults to have sought such information. The disparity between the groups was modestly greater in the shares rarely or never seeking such information. Fifty-eight percent of Americans age 60 and above sought such information that infrequently, compared to 47% of those ages 18 to 29.

As was true for most reading-related practices, Americans with at least a college degree were substantially more likely than those with a high school diploma or less to have engaged in every type of online information gathering. Further investigation revealed that, except for research on history topics, humanities majors were more likely than college graduates in general to have frequently conducted humanities-focused research online. For example, 46% of humanities graduates often or very often looked up information about famous humanists, compared to only 30% of all college-educated Americans.

## Sharing the Humanities Online

A separate set of online activities—sharing humanities content online or writing a paragraph or more on a humanities subject—was similar to looking up information on other religions, as the share of Americans engaging was considerably smaller than for other types of online engagement. While 86% of Americans had accessed social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, LinkedIn, blogs, etc.) in the 12 months prior to the survey, only 17% of Americans had shared humanities content (described as being “about art, history, literature, philosophy, or world religions”) often or very often during that time (**Figure 1I**). In comparison, 58% of American adults had rarely or never done so. An even smaller share of Americans (9%) wrote a paragraph or more on a humanities subject with any great frequency (and 77% rarely or never did so).

Black and Hispanic Americans were more likely than White and Asian Americans to have engaged in frequent online sharing of humanities content. Blacks were also more than twice as likely as Whites to have written about humanities subjects online and somewhat more likely than Hispanics.

## 11: Estimated Share of Adults Who Shared Humanities Content Online Often/Very Often in the Previous 12 Months, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Shared Article, Video, or Other Content about a Humanities Subject*	Wrote a Comment of a Paragraph or Longer on Humanities Subject*
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)**		
All Adults (18+)	17	9
<b>Gender</b>		
Men	16	9
Women	18	10
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White, Non-Hispanic	15	8
Black, Non-Hispanic	<b>25</b>	<b>17</b>
Hispanic	21	11
Asian American	<b>10</b>	12
<b>Age</b>		
18–29	<b>23</b>	12
30–44	18	11
45–59	15	8
60+	<b>14</b>	8
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>		
Up to/including \$29,999	<b>22</b>	<b>12</b>
\$30,000–\$59,999	18	10
\$60,000–\$124,999	<b>14</b>	7
\$125K & Above	<b>12</b>	7
<b>Education</b>		
High School Diploma or Less	16	9
Some College	19	11
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	16	8

\*Wording of question is described in narrative.

\*\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

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Black and Hispanic Americans were more likely than White and Asian Americans to have engaged in frequent online sharing of humanities content.

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In addition to race, income had a bearing on Americans' engagement in online sharing and writing of humanities content. For both types of activity, the least affluent Americans were more likely than the most affluent to engage. Engagement in both activities was also related to age, with younger Americans the

more likely to engage often or very often. The relationship between age and online writing about the humanities is more apparent when the share engaging rarely or never is considered. While 70% of Americans ages 18 to 29 rarely or never wrote a paragraph or more on a humanities subject, 81% of the oldest Americans wrote that infrequently.

## Heading Out for the Humanities

While most of the engagement questions included in the survey asked about activities that can be undertaken in private, the survey also asked about forms of humanities engagement that involve venturing outside one's home: visits to museums and historic sites, attendance at art festivals and other art appreciation events, and participation in literary and poetry activities.

History- and art-related outings were similar to one another (and most other forms of humanities activity) in that they were more common among those with college degrees (**Figure 1J**). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the associated costs, Americans with the highest incomes were more likely to have engaged in these activities often or very often than those in lower-income categories.



### College graduates

are more likely to engage with humanities activities than other Americans, especially in the forms of reading, internet research, and visiting museums and historic sites.

Literary events stood apart from the other types of humanities outings. First, though only a small share of Americans engaged in any of the three types of outings with any regularity, attendance at literary events was even less common. Just 5% of adults attended these events often or very often, while 84% did so rarely or never. Americans with a college degree were more likely than those with a high school education or less to make history- and art-related trips, but education was not found to be predictive of literary event attendance. And though income was related to literary event attendance, Americans in higher income categories were *less* likely to participate in such outings.

There were also differences among racial/ethnic and age groups with respect to literary event attendance. Hispanics and Black Americans were nearly three times as likely to have frequently attended such events as Whites, and the youngest American adults were more than twice as likely as those 45 and older.

## 1J: Estimated Share of Adults Who Engaged in Humanities Activities Outside the Home Often/Very Often in the Previous 12 Months, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Visited a History Museum or Historic Site	Visited Art Museum, Festival, or Appreciation Event	Attended Literary/Poetry Readings/Events
The difference between a value in boldface and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*			
All Adults (18+)	11	11	5
<b>Gender</b>			
Men	12	10	4
Women	10	12	6
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White, Non-Hispanic	11	9	<b>3</b>
Black, Non-Hispanic	11	14	<b>9</b>
Hispanic	9	14	<b>8</b>
Asian American	8	13	7
<b>Age</b>			
18–29	11	14	<b>9</b>
30–44	11	10	6
45–59	11	11	<b>3</b>
60+	11	10	4
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>			
Up to/including \$29,999	9	11	7
\$30,000–\$59,999	10	8	6
\$60,000–\$124,999	12	12	4
\$125K & Above	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Education</b>			
High School Diploma or Less	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	5
Some College	9	10	4
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	6

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

## Additional Forms of Engagement

Finally, the survey asked about two other types of connection with the humanities—ethical thinking and use of a language other than English—that do not fit neatly within the other activity groupings explored in the survey.

Twenty-three percent of Americans often or very often thought about or researched the ethical aspects of a choice in their life (and another 31% did so sometimes; **Figure 1K**). The youngest adults, ages 18 to 29, were somewhat more likely to have engaged ethical questions than older Americans, and Americans with at least a college degree were more likely to have done so than those with a high school diploma or less education. (These findings invite further study of public understandings of the term *ethics*, as well as perceptions about what it means to engage in thinking on the subject.)

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These findings invite further study of public understandings of the term *ethics*, as well as perceptions about what it means to engage in thinking on the subject.

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The final humanistic activity included in the survey was the use of a language other than English with family and friends. (The use of languages at work is discussed in Chapter 4.) The survey found that 16% of Americans often or very often used a language other than English in their personal lives. Seven percent

of Americans who identified as “White (Non-Hispanic)” used a language other than English often or very often with family or friends (84% did so rarely or never), and 11% of Black Americans used another language regularly (76% did so rarely or never). A dramatically larger share of Hispanics (46%) and Asian Americans (64%) used a language other than English frequently.

A quarter of Americans ages 18 to 29 used a language other than English with family and friends often or very often, compared to only 7% of Americans age 60 and above. Conversely, 59% of 18-to-29-year-olds rarely or never used a language other than English, while 84% of Americans age 60 or above used a non-English language that infrequently.

## 1K: Estimated Share of Adults Who Engaged in Other Humanities Activities Often/Very Often in the Previous 12 Months, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Thought about or Researched Ethical Decision	Used a Language Other than English with Family/Friends
The difference between a value in boldface and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*		
All Adults (18+)	23	16
<b>Gender</b>		
Men	21	17
Women	23	15
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White, Non-Hispanic	21	7
Black, Non-Hispanic	22	11
Hispanic	26	<b>46</b>
Asian American	24	<b>64</b>
<b>Age</b>		
18–29	<b>28</b>	<b>25</b>
30–44	22	<b>20</b>
45–59	19	14
60+	20	<b>7</b>
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>		
Up to/including \$29,999	24	18
\$30,000–\$59,999	21	15
\$60,000–\$124,999	22	15
\$125K & Above	21	15
<b>Education</b>		
High School Diploma or Less	<b>15</b>	16
Some College	24	14
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	<b>28</b>	17

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

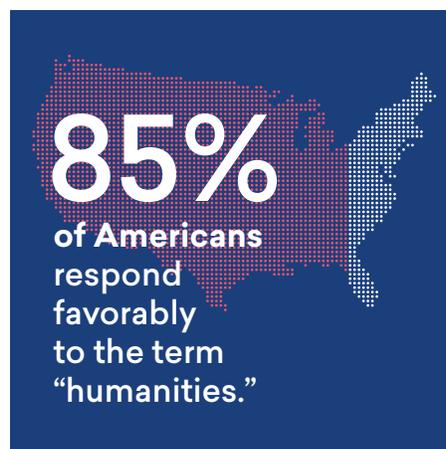
**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

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The survey was designed to illuminate not only how Americans “do” the humanities, but also how they feel about them. The next chapter explores Americans’ beliefs about the field and what it contributes to their personal well-being, the nation’s civic life, and the economy. As in this chapter, there will be an exploration of the similarities and differences among demographic groups, with a focus on those who hold strongly positive opinions about the field as well as those with negative views about the humanities.

## 2. How Americans View the Humanities

While other surveys have inquired about certain aspects of humanities engagement, this survey is the first to thoroughly investigate public opinion about the field at a national level. The survey asked the public for their opinions about the field in three forms. First, after building up to a definition of the humanities by asking respondents about their engagement in humanities activities and then offering an explicit definition,<sup>1</sup> the survey posed a series of questions about respondents' level of agreement with statements about the field and its value (ranging from “the humanities should be an important part of every American’s education” to “the humanities are a waste of time”). Next, the survey asked respondents about their perceptions of a series of terms, including *humanities*; some of the field’s component disciplines (e.g., *history*, *literature*, *philosophy*); and other fields, such as *science* and *engineering*. A third category of perception questions—about the importance of teaching humanities subjects to young people—is addressed in Chapter 3.



### Favorability Ratings of the Humanities Compared to Other Fields

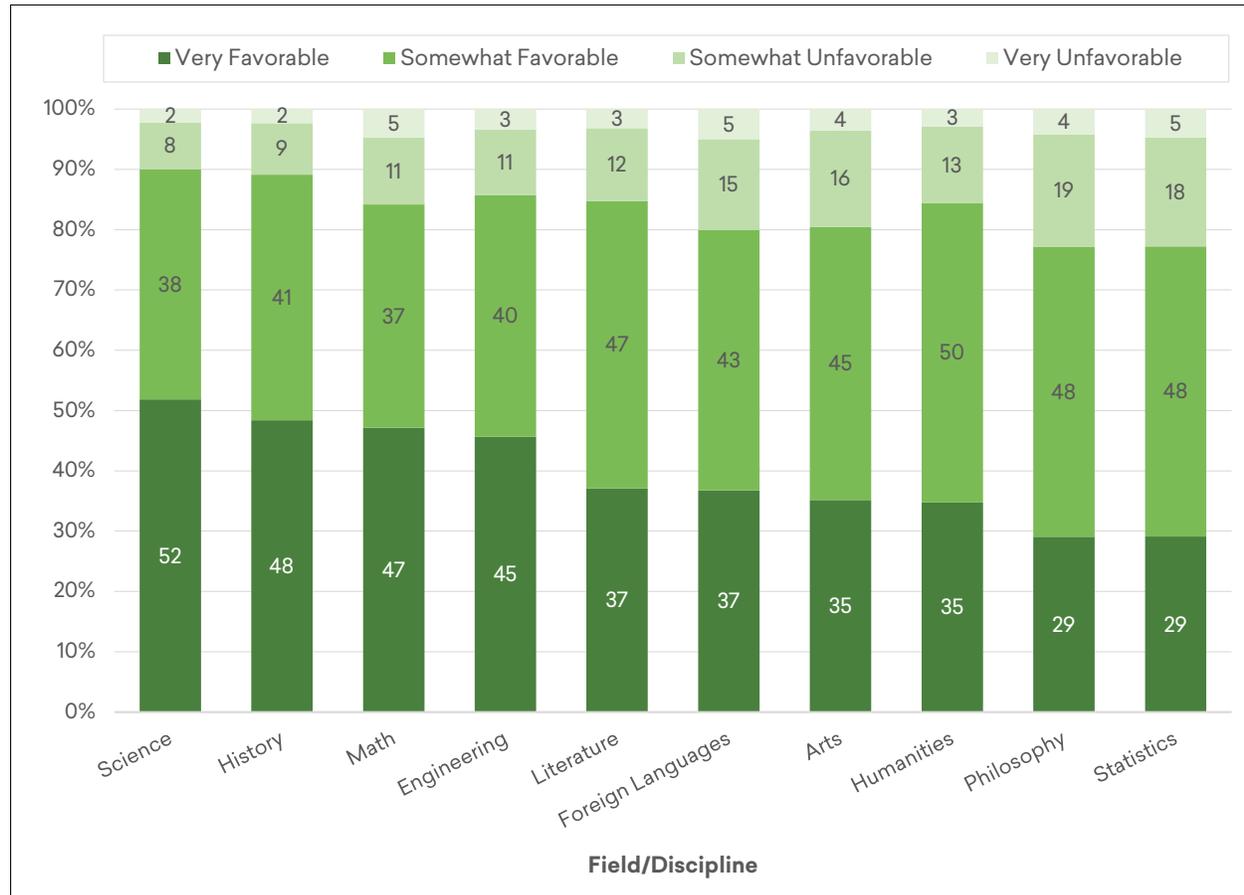
The humanities were similar to most science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields in the share of Americans having a favorable reaction to the terms, as 84–90% viewed each of these fields at least somewhat favorably (**Figure 2A**). Most of the STEM fields, however, were substantially more likely than the humanities to be viewed very favorably. While 35% of Americans responded very favorably to the term *humanities*, the term *science* was viewed very favorably by more than half of Americans, and *engineering* and *math* were viewed very favorably by approximately 46% of Americans.<sup>2</sup>

In most cases, the public responded as favorably, if not more so, to particular humanities disciplines than to the broader field. Among the disciplines, *history* was particularly popular, with 48% of Americans viewing it very favorably, which was similar to the share for

<sup>1</sup>In the survey instrument, the term *humanities* was introduced as follows: “In the previous questions, we asked about a range of activities that are often described as ‘the humanities.’ This includes studying or participating in activities related to literature, languages, history, and philosophy.”

<sup>2</sup>For more on Americans’ views of the sciences, see American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *Perceptions of Science in America* (Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2018).

## 2A: Estimated Shares of Adults with Favorable and Unfavorable Impressions of Academic Fields and Disciplines, Fall 2019\*



\*Field/discipline bars are listed in descending order by the size of the share who had a very favorable impression of the term. The share values for a given field/discipline may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

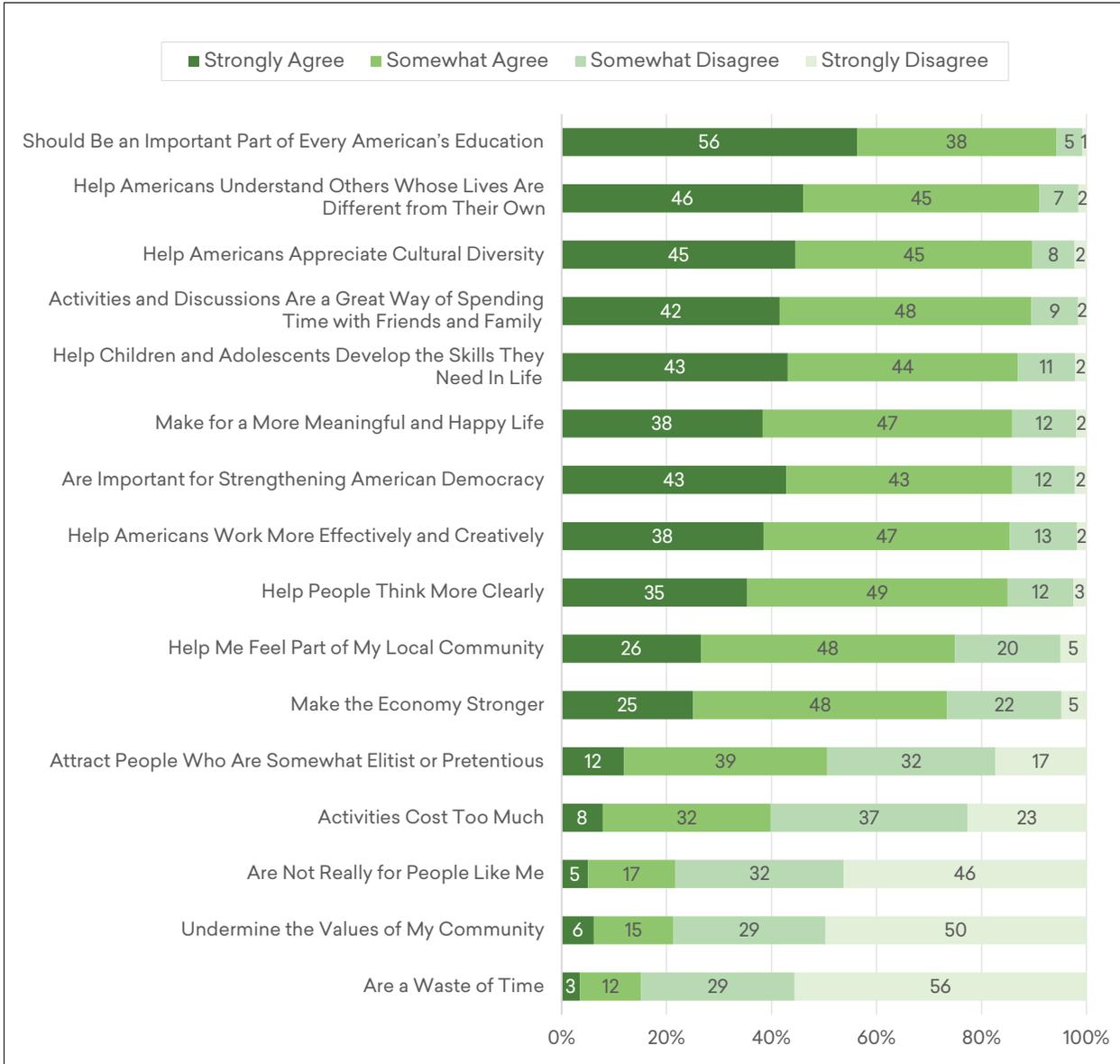
**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

*science* (52%). The terms *literature* and *foreign languages*<sup>3</sup> received ratings that were essentially the same as *humanities*, being viewed very favorably by 37% of Americans. Among the humanities disciplines, only in the case of *philosophy* did a smaller share react very favorably (29%), which put it on a par with *statistics*.

To probe more deeply into the public's impressions about the value and utility of the field, the survey offered a series of positive and negative comments about the humanities (developed in consultation with stakeholders in the field) and asked respondents to indicate the

<sup>3</sup> Instead of the more accurate "languages other than English," *foreign languages* was used in this question because respondent feedback during the survey development process indicated it was a term more easily comprehended in this context by the general public.

## 2B: Estimated Shares of Adults Who Agree and Disagree with Statements about the Humanities, Fall 2019\*



\*Statements are listed in descending order by the size of the share who agreed at least somewhat. The share values for a given statement may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

strength of their agreement. More than 84% of Americans agreed at least somewhat with all but two of the positive comments, and (with one notable exception) at least 60% disagreed with each of the negative statements about the field (**Figure 2B**).

The statement that received the greatest assent was “the humanities should be an important part of every American’s education”: 56% of Americans agreed strongly, and another 38% agreed somewhat. The positive statement to receive the lowest level of agreement was

“the humanities make the economy stronger.” (Only 25% strongly agreed with this idea, though another 48% agreed somewhat.)

The negative propositions received the lowest levels of agreement in this portion of the survey, and a majority of Americans agreed with only one of them: that “the humanities attract people who are somewhat elitist or pretentious.” Only 12% of the adult population strongly agreed with this sentiment, but another 39% agreed somewhat. The only other negative statement to receive substantial agreement was the idea that “humanities activities cost too much.” Forty percent of Americans affirmed that view, though only 8% strongly agreed.

A scale comparable to that for engagement was constructed to gauge Americans’ overall perception of the humanities. (In the discussion below, the segment of the sample with the most positive view is referred to as “Fans”; the least enthusiastic are called “Skeptics.”)<sup>4</sup> The study revealed substantial differences in Americans’ enthusiasm for the humanities—and some striking contrasts with engagement patterns (**Figure 2C**).

While women were no likelier to have engaged with the humanities than men, they were somewhat likelier to be fans. And though older Americans were less likely than their younger counterparts to be among the most engaged, Americans age 60 and above were considerably *more* likely to be fans of the field than younger adults.

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The study revealed substantial differences in Americans’ enthusiasm for the humanities—and some striking contrasts with engagement patterns.

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Conversely, Black Americans, while overrepresented among the most engaged, were not more likely to hold positive views of the field than other Americans. In fact, Blacks were somewhat less likely to be fans than Whites, and more likely to be neutral than both Whites and Hispanics. Substantial shares of

Black Americans strongly agreed with many of the positive statements about the humanities, but they were also more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to agree with many of the negative statements.

While income was not related strongly or in a straightforward way with engagement, when it came to perception, there was a clear positive association, with the highest-income Americans more likely to be fans—and less likely to be skeptics—than the lowest-income Americans. This was attributable largely to more affluent Americans’ lack of agreement with negative statements about the humanities.

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<sup>4</sup>The scale included responses to the question about the term *humanities* and all the statements shown in Figure 2B—with the exception of “attract people who are somewhat elitist or pretentious,” since it was felt to be of a different character than the other statements (i.e., it is a view one could hold of the humanities while also being enthusiastic about the field). For each of the negative statements, a respondent received a higher score for less agreement with the statement. Please see Chapter 1 for a description of how the engagement segments were created, as the segments for perception were constructed in the same manner.

## 2C: Estimated Distribution of Adults Across Levels of Enthusiasm for the Humanities, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Most Positive: “Fans” (%)	“Neutrals” (%)	Least Positive: “Skeptics” (%)	Total (%)
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*				
All Adults (18+)	34	32	33	100
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	32	31	<b>37</b>	100
Women	<b>37</b>	34	<b>30</b>	100
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White, Non-Hispanic	36	32	32	100
Black, Non-Hispanic	30	<b>40</b>	30	100
Hispanic	33	31	36	100
Asian American	33	31	36	100
<b>Age</b>				
18–29	30	29	<b>42</b>	100
30–44	<b>29</b>	32	<b>38</b>	100
45–59	32	34	34	100
60+	<b>44</b>	34	<b>22</b>	100
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>				
Up to/including \$29,999	<b>30</b>	33	<b>38</b>	100
\$30,000–\$59,999	36	33	31	100
\$60,000–\$124,999	36	32	32	100
\$125,000 & Above	<b>39</b>	32	29	100
<b>Education</b>				
High School Diploma or Less	<b>24</b>	33	<b>43</b>	100
Some College	33	32	34	100
Bachelor’s Degree or Above	<b>47</b>	32	<b>21</b>	100
<b>Political Identification**</b>				
Liberal	<b>51</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>21</b>	100
Moderate	33	35	32	100
Conservative	<b>24</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>39</b>	100
“Haven’t Thought about It”	<b>20</b>	27	<b>53</b>	100

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant. The “fans”/“neutrals”/“skeptics” shares for a given demographic group may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

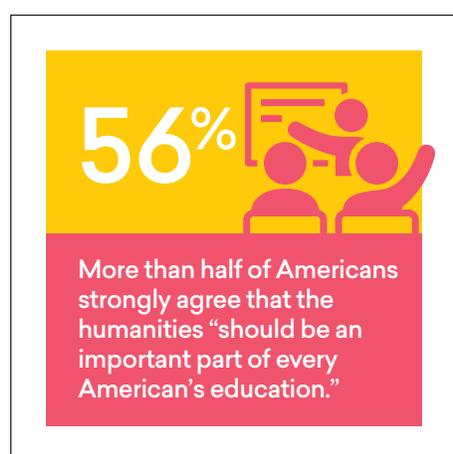
\*\*Self-reported. Survey respondents were asked, “When it comes to politics, do you usually think of yourself as ...?”. *Liberal* includes those who described themselves as “Liberal” or “Extremely Liberal;” *Moderate* includes those who identified as “Slightly Liberal,” “Moderate,” or “Slightly Conservative;” and *Conservative* includes those who identified as “Conservative” or “Extremely Conservative.”

**Source:** Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.

One area where engagement and perception did align was education. Americans with college degrees were not just more engaged with the humanities than those with less education (as discussed Chapter 1), they also expressed more enthusiasm for the field. Bachelor's degree-holders were almost twice as likely as those without college experience to be fans.

The survey found an even sharper contrast by political identification, as 51% of liberals were fans, compared to just 24% of conservatives. The political segment that held the least favorable views about the humanities, however, was people who had not really thought about their political beliefs (described from here on out as “apolitical”). Over half of this group (which accounts for 12% of the adult population) were skeptics.

## The Educational Benefits of the Humanities



As Figure 2B indicates, statements about the benefits of humanities education were among the most popular with Americans. Of the 16 statements included in the survey, a majority of Americans, 56%, strongly agreed with only one: “the humanities should be an important part of every American’s education.” But 43% of Americans strongly agreed that the humanities help children and adolescents develop skills they need for life, and a smaller share, 35%, strongly agreed that the humanities help people think more clearly. In all three cases, however, 84% or more of Americans agreed at least somewhat that the humanities provide these benefits.

Larger shares of women than men believed that the humanities should be an important part of Americans’ education and that exposure to the field helps young people develop the skills they need (**Figure 2D**). Hispanics were somewhat more likely than White Americans to believe that the humanities help people think more clearly.

Older Americans (age 60 and above) were more likely than younger adults to strongly agree with all three statements. And Americans with a bachelor’s degree were also more likely than those with less education to believe that the humanities confer educational benefits. The gap in perception was particularly striking in the case of the statement dealing with the general importance of humanities education. While almost 70% of college graduates strongly agreed with this sentiment, less than one-half of those with a high school education did so.

Political identity was also highly predictive of Americans’ belief in the educational value of the humanities. Liberals were substantially more likely to strongly agree with each of the education-related statements than either conservatives or the apolitical.

## 2D: Estimated Share of Adults Who Strongly Agree with Statements about the Educational Benefits of the Humanities, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Important Part of Education	Help Young People Develop Skills They Need	Help People Think More Clearly
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*			
All Adults (18+)	56	43	35
<b>Gender</b>			
Men	<b>52</b>	40	34
Women	<b>60</b>	46	37
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White, Non-Hispanic	56	42	34
Black, Non-Hispanic	56	47	36
Hispanic	59	44	<b>42</b>
Asian American	56	40	32
<b>Age</b>			
18–29	51	41	34
30–44	53	40	32
45–59	55	41	33
60+	<b>63</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>			
Up to/including \$29,999	56	44	36
\$30,000–\$59,999	56	44	34
\$60,000–\$124,999	55	41	34
\$125,000 & Above	61	43	39
<b>Education</b>			
High School Diploma or Less	<b>47</b>	40	<b>31</b>
Some College	55	40	<b>32</b>
Bachelor’s Degree or Above	<b>68</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Political Identification</b>			
Liberal	<b>70</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>50</b>
Moderate	56	41	32
Conservative	<b>48</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>27</b>
“Haven’t Thought about It”	<b>42</b>	38	<b>27</b>

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

## The Personal Benefits of the Humanities

Alongside the perceived educational benefits of the humanities, large majorities of Americans at least somewhat agreed that the humanities provide a range of personal benefits. Among those who strongly agreed, 41% embraced the idea that the humanities were a “great way of spending time with friends and family,” and a similar share (38%) supported the idea that the humanities “make for a more meaningful and happy life” (Figure 2E). Only about one-quarter, however, strongly agreed that the humanities helped them “feel part of [their] local community.”

Women were somewhat more likely than men to strongly agree that the humanities were a great way to spend time and also make for a better life, and Americans with at least a bachelor’s degree were more likely than those with less education to strongly agree with these two sentiments.

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The oldest Americans were more likely than the youngest adults to embrace the propositions that the humanities are a great way of spending time and also make for a good life.

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Differences among racial/ethnic groups were found for all three statements. Black Americans were more likely to strongly agree with each statement than Whites. The difference between the two groups was particularly pronounced for the statement that the humanities help one “feel part of the community.” While more than one-third of Black Americans—as well as Hispanics—strongly agreed, less than one-quarter of White Americans agreed that wholeheartedly. Asian Americans were substantially less likely than Blacks and Hispanics to feel that the humanities were a great way of spending one’s leisure time.

The oldest Americans were more likely than the youngest to embrace the propositions that the humanities are a great way of spending time and also make for a good life. The difference was more pronounced in the case of the latter statement. While only 32% of Americans ages 18 to 29 strongly agreed that the humanities added meaning and happiness to life, 45% of those 60 and older did.

Responses to the “great way of spending time” and “feel part of local community” statements diverged along income lines, with Americans in the upper two categories of the income distribution less likely than the least affluent Americans to agree strongly. The disparity was greater with respect to the humanities promoting a sense of community, as only about 20% of the highest-income Americans strongly agreed, in comparison to over one-third of the lowest-income Americans.

Liberals were substantially more likely to strongly agree with each of these propositions than moderates and conservatives. There was a difference of 14 percentage points between liberals and conservatives in the shares of those who strongly agreed that the humanities hold value when spending time with friends and family (with 49% of liberals but only 35% of conservatives strongly agreeing). There was an even larger difference—of 21 percentage points—between the two political sides in the shares of those who strongly agreed the field supported a meaningful and happy life (which had strong assent from 50% of liberals

## 2E: Estimated Share of Adults Who Strongly Agree with Statements about the Personal Benefits of the Humanities, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	A Great Way of Spending Time with Friends and Family	Meaningful and Happy Life	Feel Part of Local Community
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*			
All Adults (18+)	41	38	26
<b>Gender</b>			
Men	<b>36</b>	36	25
Women	<b>47</b>	41	28
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White, Non-Hispanic	39	37	<b>23</b>
Black, Non-Hispanic	47	<b>45</b>	<b>36</b>
Hispanic	45	39	<b>34</b>
Asian American	<b>30</b>	36	25
<b>Age</b>			
18–29	39	<b>32</b>	27
30–44	39	35	25
45–59	40	38	23
60+	<b>46</b>	<b>45</b>	30
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>			
Up to/including \$29,999	45	42	<b>34</b>
\$30,000–\$59,999	43	40	27
\$60,000–\$124,999	39	34	<b>22</b>
\$125,000 & Above	<b>37</b>	37	<b>21</b>
<b>Education</b>			
High School Diploma or Less	40	37	27
Some College	38	<b>34</b>	23
Bachelor’s Degree or Above	<b>46</b>	<b>44</b>	29
<b>Political Identification</b>			
Liberal	<b>49</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>35</b>
Moderate	40	37	25
Conservative	<b>35</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>19</b>
“Haven’t Thought about It”	41	32	25

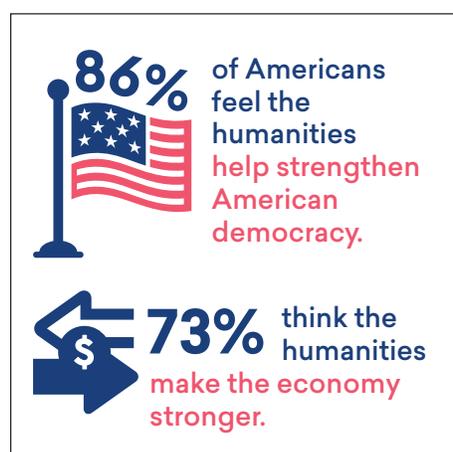
\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

compared to 29% of conservatives). These differences reflect greater ambivalence among conservatives, however, not substantial levels of disagreement. Less than 18% of conservatives disagreed (somewhat or strongly) with either statement. With one exception (that the humanities are “a great way to spend time with friends and family”), liberal Americans were also more likely than apolitical adults to strongly agree with the propositions.

## The Societal Benefits of the Humanities

Alongside the educational and personal benefits ascribed to the humanities by most Americans, the survey found that most Americans believed the field contributes a variety of societal benefits. As shown in Figure 2B, around 90% of Americans agreed at least somewhat that the humanities help one understand people whose lives are different from their own and to appreciate cultural diversity. Slightly smaller shares (around 85%) thought the humanities strengthen the nation’s democracy and aid Americans in working more effectively and creatively. Despite the latter perception, a considerably smaller share of Americans (73%) thought the humanities help strengthen the economy.



As **Figure 2F** indicates, the share of the adult population that expressed *strong* agreement with each statement is substantially smaller than the shares that expressed at least some agreement (as depicted in Figure 2B), ranging from 25% for “make the economy stronger” to 46% for “help Americans understand others.” In most cases, there was a gender divide. On every item except the statement about American democracy, the share of women who strongly agreed was at least 20% larger than the share of men.

The analysis found modest differences between racial/ethnic groups on three of the statements. Black Americans were somewhat more likely than Whites to strongly agree that the humanities help Americans appreciate cultural diversity. Blacks, joined by Hispanic Americans, were also more likely to embrace the notion that the humanities help Americans work more creatively and effectively. And a larger share of Hispanics than White Americans strongly agreed that the humanities make the economy stronger.

The oldest Americans were more likely than those ages 18 to 59 to strongly agree that the humanities promote mutual understanding. They were also more likely than those in every other age bracket to feel strongly that the humanities bolster American democracy.

On the two statements related to the economy, modest income effects were also evident, with the least affluent Americans more likely than those who were substantially better-off to believe that the humanities boost the economy and make for more creative and effective workers.

## 2F: Estimated Share of Adults Who Strongly Agree with Statements about the Societal Benefits of the Humanities, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Help Americans Understand Others	Help Americans Appreciate Cultural Diversity	Strengthen American Democracy	Help Americans Work More Effectively & Creatively	Make the Economy Stronger
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*					
All Adults (18+)	46	44	43	38	25
<b>Gender</b>					
Men	<b>41</b>	<b>40</b>	41	<b>34</b>	<b>22</b>
Women	<b>50</b>	<b>49</b>	44	<b>43</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>					
White, Non-Hispanic	46	42	42	36	23
Black, Non-Hispanic	48	48	46	42	28
Hispanic	45	48	41	43	<b>31</b>
Asian American	42	44	43	38	23
<b>Age</b>					
18–29	44	44	40	40	23
30–44	43	41	<b>37</b>	36	25
45–59	45	43	40	36	25
60+	<b>51</b>	49	<b>51</b>	41	26
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>					
Up to/including \$29,999	46	45	43	41	<b>29</b>
\$30,000–\$59,999	46	43	42	40	24
\$60,000–\$124,999	46	45	43	34	23
\$125,000 & Above	45	45	44	37	22
<b>Education</b>					
High School Diploma or Less	<b>40</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>35</b>	37	25
Some College	43	44	42	35	23
Bachelor’s Degree or Above	<b>55</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>43</b>	26
<b>Political Identification</b>					
Liberal	<b>61</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>35</b>
Moderate	45	43	40	37	21
Conservative	<b>33</b>	<b>33</b>	37	<b>29</b>	<b>18</b>
“Haven’t Thought about It”	<b>38</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>30</b>	36	26

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

Education was predictive of strong agreement on all but one of these statements; namely, that the humanities make the economy stronger. College graduates were more likely to agree strongly with these statements, particularly those about the humanities promoting understanding, appreciation for diversity, and democracy. The share of college graduates who strongly agreed with each of these statements was about 15 percentage points larger than for those with a high school education or less.

Finally, the political divide evident on other statements carried over to every one of these propositions. The widest separation was on the statement about the humanities making the economy stronger, as the share of liberals who strongly agreed was nearly twice the share of conservatives. The statements about whether the humanities help Americans understand others or appreciate cultural diversity were also marked by a wide gulf. About 60% of liberals strongly agreed with both propositions, but just one-third of conservatives held similar views. For every one of these statements, liberals were also substantially more likely to express strong agreement than apolitical Americans.

## Doubts about the Humanities



While the survey indicates that many Americans ascribed a wide array of positive benefits to the humanities, a substantial share of the public also agreed at least somewhat with several negative statements about the field. As Figure 2B indicates, Americans were most likely to agree, by a substantial margin, that the humanities attract people who are pretentious and elitist (51%) and that humanities activities cost too much (40%). In both cases, however, only a small share strongly agreed with each statement (12% and 8% respectively). Given the relatively small shares of Americans who agreed with the negative statements, the following analysis differs from the previous items. It examines the demographics

of those who *somewhat* agreed as well as those who *strongly* agreed. Examining this combination was necessary because the share of those who strongly agreed was so small as to severely complicate efforts to take an in-depth look at the demographic patterns.

Americans who were Black, younger, or in lower income brackets, as well as those who lacked a college education or were apolitical were substantially more likely than adults generally to agree with most or all of the negative statements (**Figure 2G**). The analysis also revealed several notable between-group differences. For instance, liberals were less likely than conservatives and the apolitical to agree with every one of the statements. And a clear gender divide was found for one statement: women were more likely than men to agree that humanities activities cost too much.

Blacks were more likely than Whites to agree with every negative statement. On the statements about humanities activities costing too much or the field undermining one's values, Hispanics joined Blacks in being likelier than Whites—and Asian Americans—to strongly agree. A key difference between Blacks and Hispanics is that the former group was more likely to believe that the field attracted elitist and pretentious people.

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Americans with a college education were substantially less likely to hold negative views about the humanities.

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As indicated above, the statement that the humanities “attract people who are somewhat elitist or pretentious” elicited the highest level of support. Over 60% of Black Americans, Americans ages 18 to 29, the apolitical, and Americans without any college education agreed with this statement. Fifty-seven percent of Americans with household incomes below \$30,000 also agreed with this statement. The Humanities Indicators staff encountered substantial disagreement among field stakeholders about the implications of these findings. Some stakeholders observed that this statement spoke only about attractions and tendencies and was not a comprehensive statement about the field or people who lead or attend humanities activities (e.g., “people who engage in the humanities *are* elitist and pretentious”). Staff noted this as a consideration for interpretation and for potential future iterations of the survey.

The finding that Black Americans were more likely than adults in general to agree with all but one of the negative statements about the humanities is notable, given that Blacks are underrepresented in most academic humanities programs.<sup>5</sup> But additional research will be needed to determine whether the two phenomena are causally linked, as perception of the field is but one of several factors that might explain the paucity of Black Americans pursuing humanities degrees. That 35% of Black Americans concurred with the proposition that the humanities “undermine the values of my community” is also striking in view of the finding (discussed in Chapter 1) that Black Americans were more likely to be among the most engaged with activities in the field.

Americans with a college education were substantially less likely to hold negative views about the humanities, but the share who agreed with the negative statements varied by college major. Americans with a college degree in the humanities were less likely than college graduates in general to affirm most negative statements about the field (though nearly one-third of humanities graduates—a share statistically indistinguishable from that for college graduates generally—agreed that it attracts people who are elitist or pretentious). Graduates from engineering and computer science programs were more likely than college

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Alexandra Vollman, “Modernizing the Humanities,” *Insight into Diversity*, June 27, 2018. For the trend in traditionally underrepresented minorities among recent college graduates, see Humanities Indicators, “Racial/Ethnic Distribution of Bachelor’s Degrees in the Humanities,” <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/higher-education/racialethnic-distribution-bachelors-degrees-humanities>.

## 2G: Estimated Share of Adults Who at Least Somewhat Agree with Negative Statements about the Humanities, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Attract Elitists	Activities Cost Too Much	Not for People Like Me	Undermine Values	Are a Waste of Time
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*					
All Adults (18+)	51	40	22	21	15
<b>Gender</b>					
Men	52	<b>36</b>	23	20	17
Women	48	<b>43</b>	21	22	14
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>					
White, Non-Hispanic	47	37	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	13
Black, Non-Hispanic	<b>63</b>	45	<b>30</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>21</b>
Hispanic	53	45	26	<b>31</b>	18
Asian American	54	30	19	15	14
<b>Age</b>					
18–29	<b>62</b>	42	<b>29</b>	<b>27</b>	20
30–44	52	<b>46</b>	26	24	18
45–59	46	39	21	22	14
60+	<b>45</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>					
Up to/including \$29,999	<b>57</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>
\$30,000–\$59,999	51	41	23	23	13
\$60,000–\$124,999	47	<b>35</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	12
\$125,000 & Above	<b>40</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>	11
<b>Education</b>					
High School Diploma or Less	<b>62</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>23</b>
Some College	49	39	21	19	14
Bachelor’s Degree or Above	<b>39</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Political Identification</b>					
Liberal	<b>45</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>
Moderate	50	38	19	20	13
Conservative	53	43	22	22	17
“Haven’t Thought about It”	<b>61</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>27</b>

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

graduates in general to agree with the statements about elitism, humanities being “a waste of time,” and the field “not being for people like me” (though each of the latter two sentiments received assent from less than 16% of engineering and computer science graduates).

## The Humanities and Other Terms

The survey also asked another type of perception question, soliciting reactions to certain field and discipline names. The humanities stood out among the fields for the relatively small share of Americans who held a very favorable opinion when it was reduced to a single word—even after the term had been defined for them (**Figure 2H**). On this measure, American attitudes about the humanities and the arts were similar, both in the shares of Americans with very favorable impressions of the two terms and in the differences among demographic groups.

Black and Hispanic Americans were somewhat likelier than Whites to react very favorably to both *humanities* and *arts*, and women were more likely than men to have a very favorable reaction to the terms. This contrasts with the STEM field names, where men reacted more favorably than women. For example, 57% of men had a very favorable impression of *science*, while only 47% of women did. More support for STEM was also found among higher-income Americans than among the less affluent, while arts and humanities elicited similar levels of strong support across all income categories.

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Almost 70% of humanities graduates held very favorable views about the humanities, a larger share than graduates from every other field except the fine and performing arts.

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The only notable point of contrast between humanities and arts was that age was not predictive of Americans’ impressions of the term *art*, but the oldest Americans (age 60 and above) were somewhat more likely than younger adults to have a strongly favorable impression of *humanities*.

The differences by education level that were evident in Americans’ responses to positive and negative statements about the humanities were also found in their responses to the various field names. Americans with college degrees were more likely than less educated Americans to have a positive impression of *humanities* (and every other field name), but even among college graduates, the share having a very favorable view of *humanities* (and *arts*) was below 45%.

Liberal Americans were more likely than conservatives to have a very favorable impression of *humanities*, *arts*, and *science* (but not of the other STEM field names). For *arts* and *humanities*, however, the gaps (26 percentage points for the one; 30 percentage points for the other) between liberals and conservatives dwarfed the gap for *science* (10 percentage points). Liberals were also considerably more likely than the apolitical to have a favorable impression of *arts* and *humanities*.

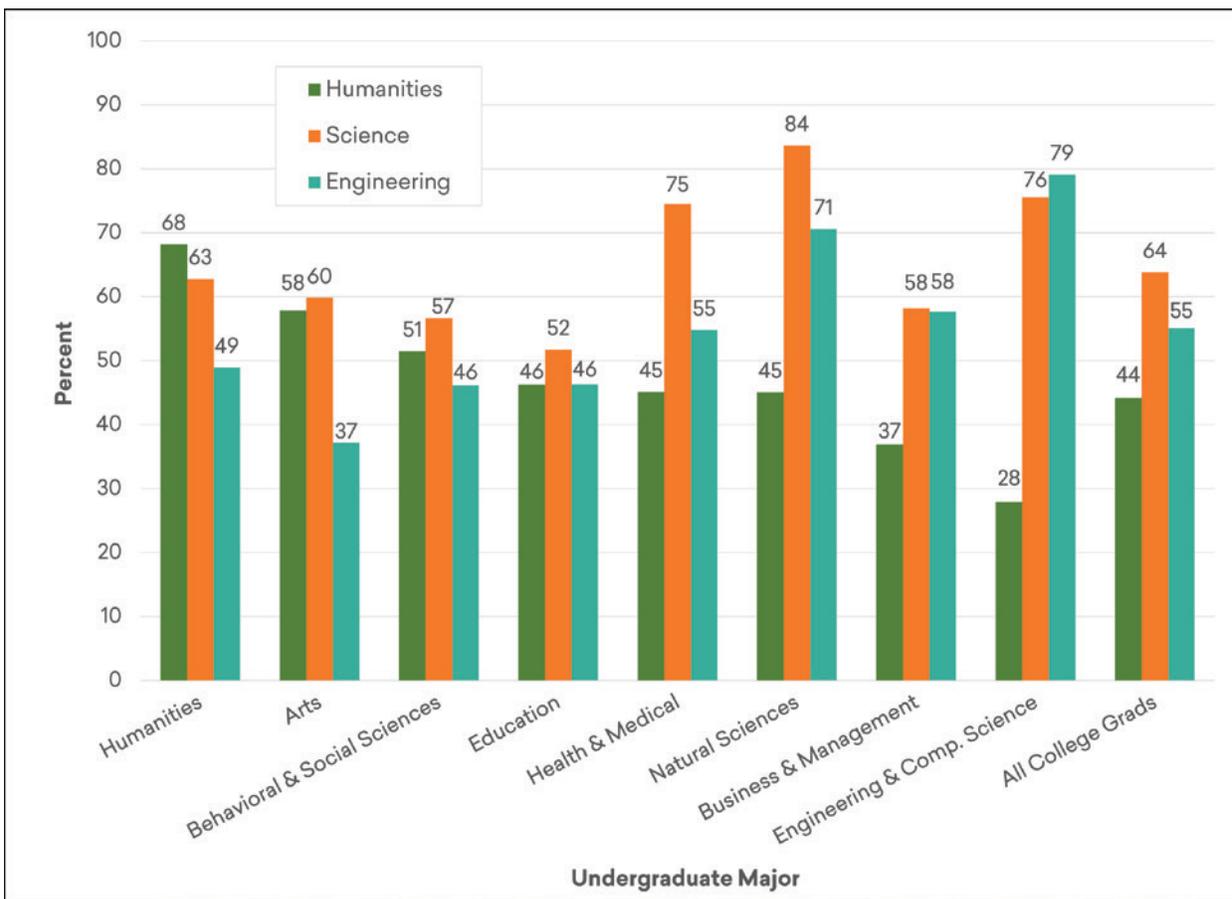
## 2H: Estimated Share of Adults with a Very Favorable Impression of Academic Fields, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Science	Math	Engineering	Arts	Humanities
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*					
All Adults (18+)	52	47	45	35	35
<b>Gender</b>					
Men	<b>57</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>
Women	<b>47</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>					
White, Non-Hispanic	53	46	47	33	33
Black, Non-Hispanic	<b>46</b>	46	<b>39</b>	40	<b>41</b>
Hispanic	55	51	46	<b>42</b>	39
Asian American	55	50	51	30	33
<b>Age</b>					
18–29	47	<b>37</b>	39	38	34
30–44	53	46	47	37	33
45–59	51	47	45	31	30
60+	55	<b>55</b>	49	35	<b>40</b>
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>					
Up to/including \$29,999	48	43	<b>37</b>	37	37
\$30,000–\$59,999	49	45	43	34	34
\$60,000–\$124,999	54	50	51	34	33
\$125,000 & Above	<b>60</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>57</b>	35	36
<b>Education</b>					
High School Diploma or Less	<b>42</b>	43	<b>37</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>28</b>
Some College	50	44	46	34	33
Bachelor’s Degree or Above	<b>64</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Political Identification</b>					
Liberal	<b>59</b>	47	46	<b>49</b>	<b>50</b>
Moderate	52	45	46	33	35
Conservative	49	<b>56</b>	51	<b>23</b>	<b>20</b>
“Haven’t Thought about It”	<b>41</b>	41	<b>33</b>	34	<b>27</b>

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.

## 2I: Share of College Graduates with a Very Favorable Impression of Academic Fields, by Undergraduate Major, Fall 2019\*



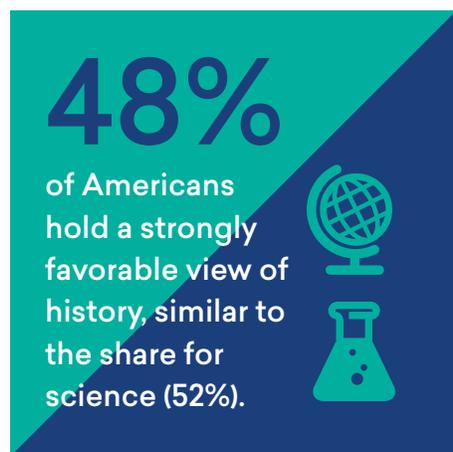
\*Majors are listed in descending order by the size of the share having very a favorable impression of the humanities. Not all observed differences between majors are statistically significant. Statistically significant differences of note are discussed in the report narrative.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

Almost 70% of humanities graduates held very favorable views about the humanities, a larger share than graduates from every other field except the fine and performing arts (**Figure 2I**; the difference between the humanities and arts depicted in the graph was not found to be statistically significant). Only 28% of engineering and computer science graduates had as favorable an impression of *humanities*, a smaller share than every other comparison field. Conversely, less than half of humanities graduates had a very favorable impression of *engineering* (smaller than the shares of engineering and natural science majors who held that view). And while 63% of humanities majors held very favorable views of *science*, that percentage was smaller than the share of graduates from the natural sciences who were as kindly disposed toward the term.

As with the term *humanities*, the study found notable differences among demographic groups' impressions of the field's component disciplines. In line with the findings about

reading presented in Chapter 1, a greater share of women than men had a very favorable impression of *literature*—and *languages*—than men (**Figure 2J**). And older Americans (those age 60 and above), who were substantially more likely than younger adults to engage in history and reading activities, were also more likely to hold very favorable views of *history* and *literature*—particularly in comparison to the youngest cohort of American adults (ages 18 to 29).



A substantial gap separated White Americans' and Hispanics' impressions of the term *foreign languages*,<sup>6</sup> with 33% of Whites holding a very favorable impression, compared to 52% of Hispanics. Differences between racial/ethnic groups were also found for *history*, *literature*, and *philosophy*. Asian Americans were substantially less likely than both Whites and the adult population as a whole to have a very favorable impression of the terms *history* and *literature*. In the case of *literature*, the share of Asian American who responded very favorably to the term was also lower than the shares of Black and Hispanic Americans. And while 37% of Black Americans had a very favorable impres-

sion of *philosophy*, only 24% of Asian Americans and 27% of Whites had as favorable an impression.

For two of the disciplines, there were modest differences between the least and the most affluent Americans. In the case of *history*, those in the top income quartile were more likely to have a favorable view of the term. The reverse was true for *philosophy*.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given their greater propensity to read fiction and nonfiction, Americans with bachelor's degrees were more likely than less educated Americans to have a very favorable impression of *literature* and *languages*. Americans with college degrees were also more much more likely to have a strongly favorable impression of *history*. This is notable, in view of the finding (discussed in Chapter 1) that college-educated Americans were only slightly more prone to watch shows with historical content than those with a high school education or less—though college graduates were quite a bit more likely to research the history of something of interest. College graduates were also more likely to have a very favorable reaction to the term *philosophy*, but the gap between this group and those without any college education was not nearly as large as it was for the other terms.

Some of the largest gaps in enthusiasm for the various field names appeared when results were analyzed by political beliefs. Liberals and conservatives were similar in their

<sup>6</sup>As explained earlier in this chapter, the term *foreign languages* was chosen over the more preferable term, "languages other than English," based on feedback received from the public during the survey development process.

## 2J: Estimated Share of Adults with a Very Favorable Impression of Humanities Disciplines, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	History	Literature	Foreign Languages	Philosophy
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*				
All Adults (18+)	48	37	37	29
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	50	<b>32</b>	<b>32</b>	27
Women	47	<b>42</b>	<b>41</b>	31
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White, Non-Hispanic	50	37	<b>33</b>	27
Black, Non-Hispanic	44	40	37	<b>37</b>
Hispanic	48	40	<b>52</b>	35
Asian American	<b>35</b>	<b>25</b>	37	24
<b>Age</b>				
18–29	<b>40</b>	33	39	29
30–44	46	38	41	31
45–59	46	34	33	25
60+	<b>59</b>	<b>42</b>	35	30
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>				
Up to/including \$29,999	45	38	37	<b>34</b>
\$30,000–\$59,999	50	37	33	28
\$60,000–\$124,999	48	37	37	26
\$125,000 & Above	53	37	42	28
<b>Education</b>				
High School Diploma or Less	<b>43</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	26
Some College	47	36	35	29
Bachelor’s Degree or Above	<b>55</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Political Identification</b>				
Liberal	<b>55</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>41</b>
Moderate	45	36	35	27
Conservative	<b>54</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>17</b>
“Haven’t Thought about It”	<b>36</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	30

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.

enthusiasm for *history*, and both groups were somewhat more likely than moderates to be very favorably disposed toward the term. For all other terms, however, liberals were substantially more likely than conservatives to have a very favorable impression. The largest gap between the two groups was with *philosophy*. While 41% of liberals had a very favorable impression of the term, only 17% of conservatives were this favorably disposed to it. For all four terms, liberals were also markedly more likely than the apolitical to have a very favorable impression.

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This chapter summarizes only two of the three perception questions included in the survey. The next chapter takes up questions about the humanities in childhood and education, exploring Americans' memories of their engagement with the humanities as children, as well as their attitudes about humanities education for young people and their thoughts about which subjects they wish they had studied more while in school. These education-focused findings add nuance to the findings in this chapter about Americans' general appreciation of the field.

### 3. The Humanities and Childhood: Americans' Experiences and Attitudes

A growing body of research demonstrates a link between childhood experiences with the humanities and academic success. One of the most robust findings in educational research is the positive relationship between early exposure to reading, a core humanities competency, and later academic achievement.<sup>1</sup> Other research across a variety of domains—from linguistics to cognitive science—suggests that acquisition of a second language is more likely to be successful in childhood, and a study published in 2017 found that children in dual-language immersion programs (in which half of instruction is in English and half in another language) demonstrated greater English reading achievement.<sup>2</sup>



In view of the significance of exposure to the humanities for young people, a substantial portion of the Survey of the Humanities in American Life was dedicated to the humanities and childhood. The study's findings enhance understanding of the childhood humanities experience in three key ways. First, they reveal the climate of opinion in which humanities education occurs, providing insight as to whether, when, and by whom Americans believe humanities subjects should be taught. The survey also yielded findings about the relationship between recalled childhood exposure<sup>3</sup> and adult engagement with and attitudes toward the humanities. An analysis of data from the National Endowment for the Arts' Survey of Public Participation in the Arts found that childhood engagement with the

<sup>1</sup>Greg J. Duncan, Amy Claessens, Aletha C. Huston et al., "School Readiness and Later Achievement," *Developmental Psychology* 43, no. 4 (2007): 1,428–46. Also see A. G. Bus, M. H. IJzendoorn, and A. D. Pellegrini, "Joint Book Reading Makes for Success in Learning to Read: A Meta-analysis on Intergenerational Transmission of Literacy," *Review of Research in Education* 65, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 1–21.

<sup>2</sup>Joshua K. Hartshorne, Joshua B. Tenenbaum, and Steven Pinker, "A Critical Period for Second Language Acquisition: Evidence from 2/3 Million English Speakers," *Cognition* 177 (August 2018): 263–77. On dual-language immersion programs, see Jennifer L. Steele, Robert O. Slater, and Gema Zamorro, "Effects of Dual-Language Immersion Programs on Student Achievement: Evidence from Lottery Data," *American Educational Research Journal* 54, Issue 1\_suppl (2017): 282S–306S.

<sup>3</sup>Self-reported. Respondents were asked to report about experiences that for most would have occurred many years in the past. The survey did not include any priming language that would have enhanced respondent recall. Please keep in mind the influence that adult opinions and experience—and changes in cognitive functioning over the life course—can have on memory. For example, see Michael Ross, "Relation of Implicit Theories to the Construction of Personal Histories," *Psychological Review* 96, no. 2 (1989): 341–57.

arts was associated with higher levels of adult participation, and the present survey suggests a similar association exists for the humanities.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the survey reveals how Americans feel about their own humanities education. It sheds light on whether they now wish they had taken more courses in humanities subjects while they were students and how they feel about those subjects relative to others (such as science).

## Childhood Exposure to the Humanities

To explore early childhood exposure, the survey asked respondents whether they remembered their parents engaging in a variety of humanities activities. For every activity in the survey, except discussing art, a majority of Americans recalled seeing their parents engage at least sometimes. Reading, however, was the only humanities activity that a majority (53%) recalled seeing their parents engage in often or very often (**Figure 3A**).

A substantial share of Americans also recalled their parents discussing family history with some frequency (40%). The least common type of childhood exposure was to parental discussions of art, as only 10% of Americans remembered this being a regular feature of their home lives during childhood.



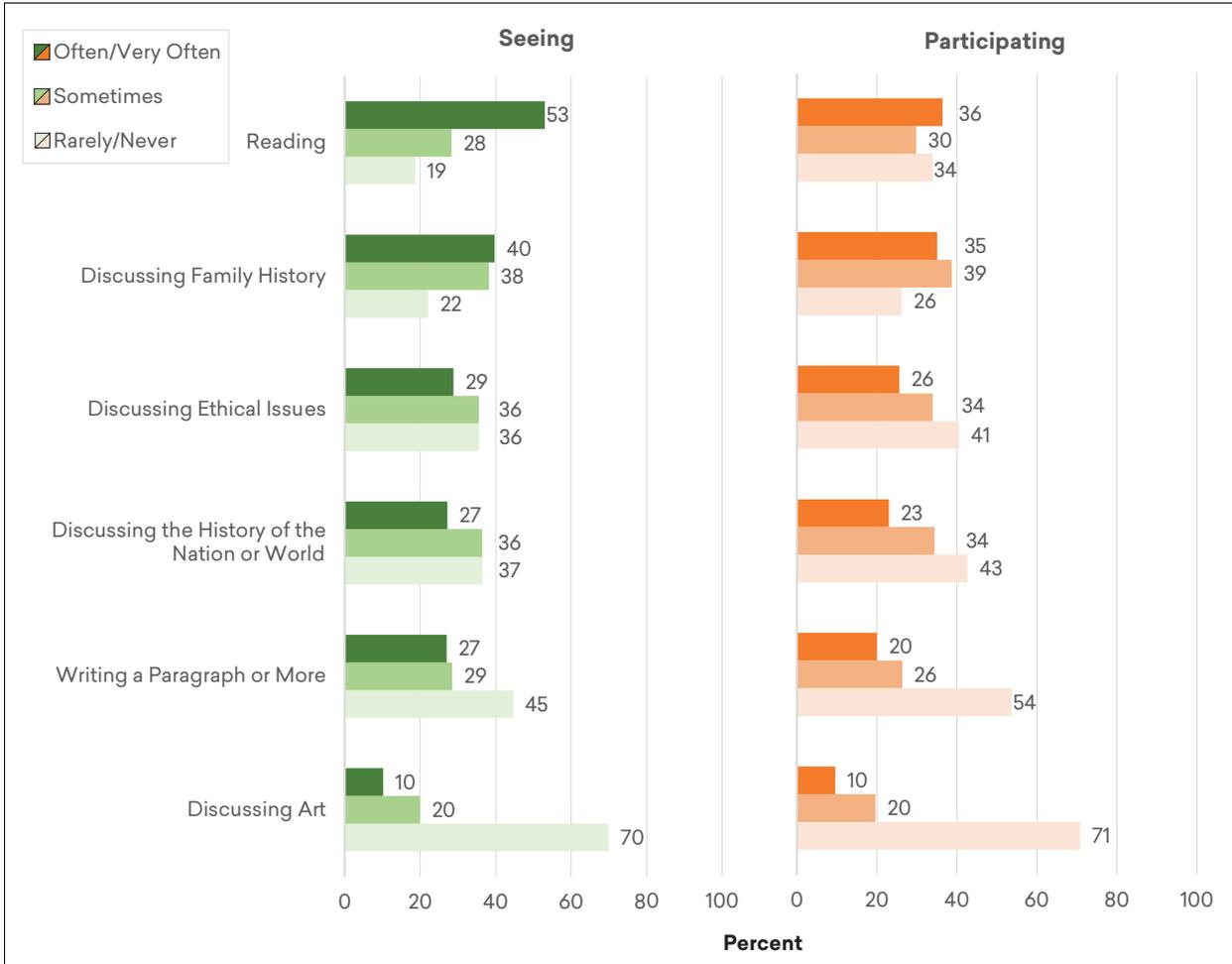
The survey also asked people whether they had participated with their parents in the same activities and found that Americans were much less likely to have participated frequently in reading with their parents than to have seen their parents engage that regularly. While over half of Americans recalled seeing parents read often or very often, only 36% recalled participating in reading activities with them that frequently, and one-third of Americans never or only rarely read with their parents (less than 20% saw their parents read that infrequently). However, the share indicating that they “sometimes” participated with their parents in reading was virtually identical to the share who recalled seeing their parents read that frequently.<sup>5</sup>

Black Americans were more likely than those identifying as White or Hispanic to recall exposure to the humanities as children, a difference due largely to Black Americans’ greater tendency to recall participating with their parents in humanities activities (**Figure 3B**). Taking writing a paragraph or more as an example, when one moves from seeing to participating,

<sup>4</sup>Nick Rabkin and E. C. Hedberg, *Arts Education in America: What the Declines Mean for Arts Participation* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2011), 25–39.

<sup>5</sup>For the trend in the rate of reading to young children by family members, see the Humanities Indicators (<https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/public-life/reading-young-children-family-members>).

### 3A: Estimated Shares of Adults Who Saw Parents Participate/Participated with Parents in Humanities Activities as Children, Fall 2019\*



\*Frequency shares for a given activity may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

the share for Whites shrinks by half. In the case of Black Americans, the share decreases by only one percentage point.

Gender was also a dimension of variation, with women somewhat more likely than men to recall exposure to the humanities as children. Childhood exposure to the humanities also differed with income. Only 28% of the most affluent Americans were among the least exposed, whereas 39% of the least affluent were in this category.

Childhood exposure to the humanities was positively associated with subsequent educational attainment. Forty-one percent of college-educated Americans were among the most exposed, as compared to 28% of Americans with a high school education or less. Because this analysis simply reveals a correlation between these two variables, the finding should

### 3B: Estimated Distribution of Adults Across Levels of Exposure to the Humanities as Children, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Most Exposure (%)	Some Exposure (%)	Least Exposure (%)	Total (%)
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*				
All Adults (18+)**	34	31	35	100
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	<b>31</b>	32	<b>37</b>	100
Women	<b>38</b>	30	<b>32</b>	100
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White, Non-Hispanic	33	32	35	100
Black, Non-Hispanic	<b>42</b>	32	<b>25</b>	100
Hispanic	34	28	37	100
Asian American	32	32	36	100
<b>Age</b>				
18–29	35	32	33	100
30–44	33	32	35	100
45–59	36	31	34	100
60+	34	30	37	100
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>				
Up to/including \$29,999	33	28	<b>39</b>	100
\$30,000–\$59,999	34	31	35	100
\$60,000–\$124,999	34	33	33	100
\$125,000 & Above	38	34	<b>28</b>	100
<b>Education</b>				
High School Diploma or Less	<b>28</b>	30	<b>42</b>	100
Some College	34	31	35	100
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	<b>41</b>	33	<b>26</b>	100

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant. The “most”/“some”/“least” shares for a given demographic group may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

\*\*The childhood exposure segments (like those for adult engagement and perception) are relative, meaning that respondents have been compared to one another rather than to a fixed standard. Each survey respondent was assigned a score based on the number of activities they observed or participated in and the frequency of that exposure. Respondents falling in the top third (approximately) of the weighted distribution of the scores were assigned to the “most” exposure category, those with scores in the middle third to the “some” category, and those falling in the bottom third to “least.”

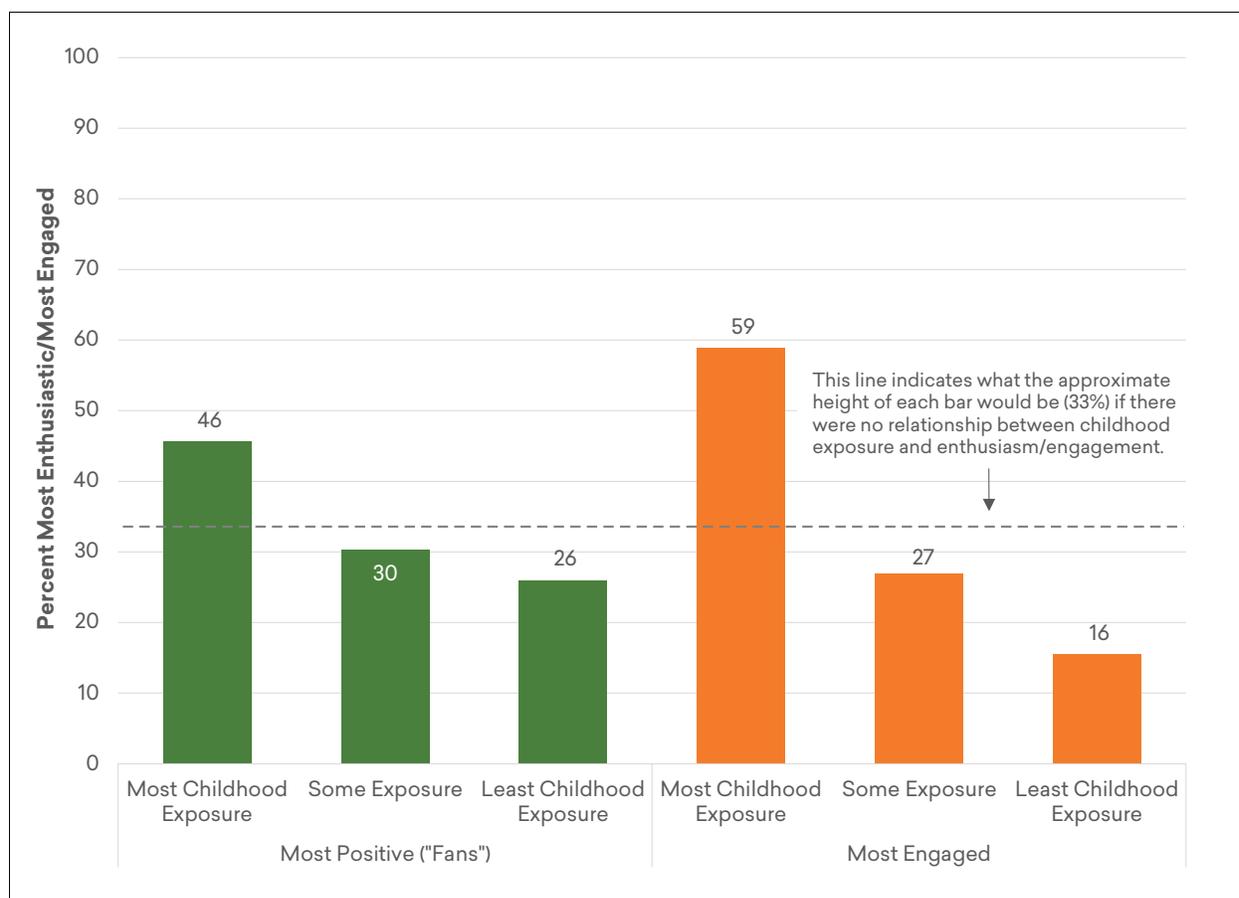
**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

not be understood to mean that greater humanities exposure in childhood led to higher educational attainment. The analysis was not designed to establish causal relationships.

Similarly, the analysis did not attempt to establish a causal linkage between reported childhood exposure and subsequent attitudes about and engagement with the field, but it did find a correlation. Americans who had more exposure to the humanities in their childhood homes were likelier to have positive views of the humanities (**Figure 3C**). Only 26% of Americans with the least exposure to the humanities in their childhood homes expressed a high level of enthusiasm for the humanities (using the scale described in Chapter 2), compared to 46% of those with the most childhood exposure.

The relationship between childhood exposure and adult engagement was even stronger. Fifty-nine percent of the Americans who were highly exposed to the humanities as children were among the “most engaged” on the scale described in Chapter 1. Only 16% of the least exposed had a similar level of engagement with the humanities as adults.

### 3C: Estimated Shares of Adults with Highest Level of Humanities Enthusiasm/Engagement, by Level of Childhood Humanities Exposure, Fall 2019



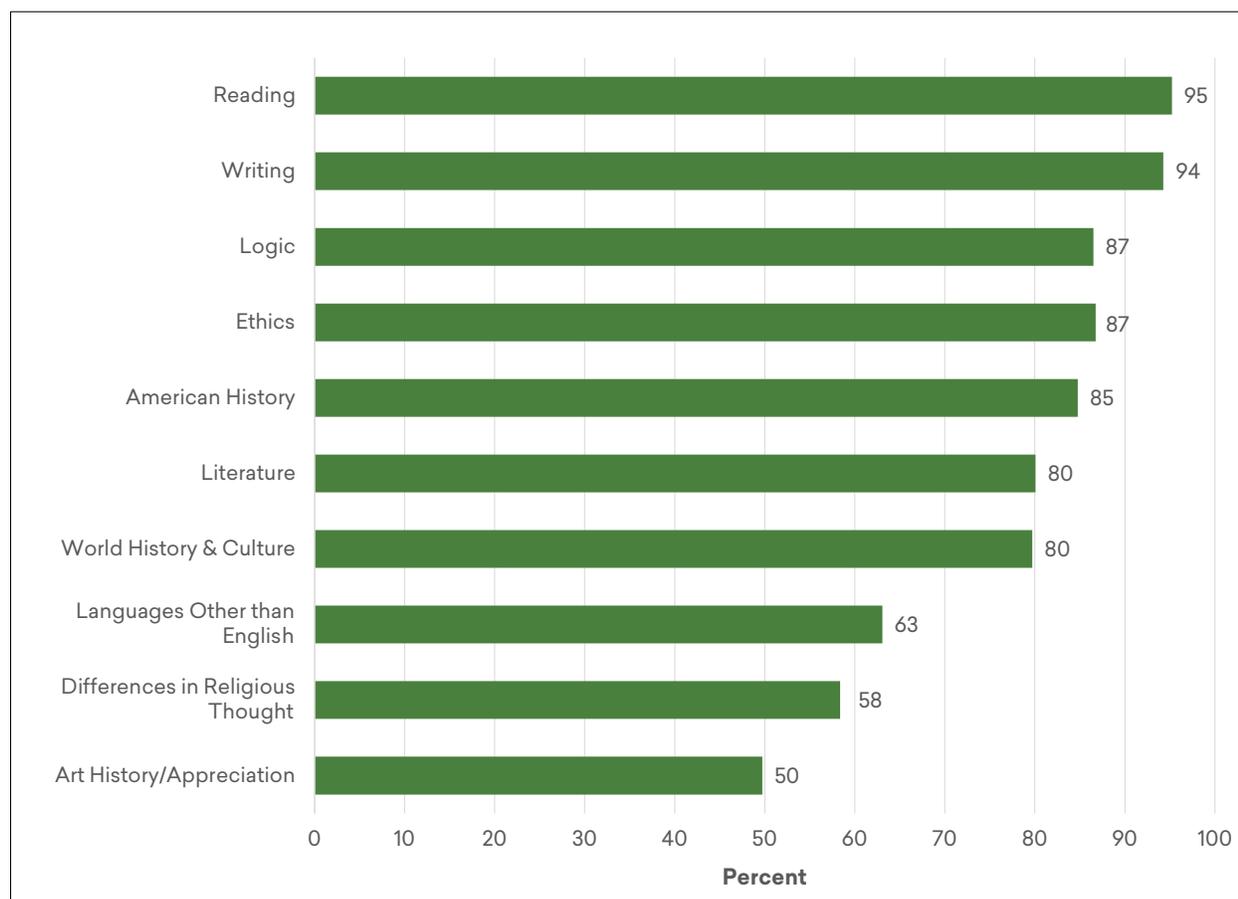
**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

## Perceptions of the Importance of Humanities Education for Young People

As indicated in Chapter 2, over 90% of Americans agreed that the humanities should be an important part of every American’s education, and 87% believed that the humanities help children and adolescents develop the skills they need in life (see Figure 2B). Americans were also found to be at least as—if not more—favorably disposed to most of the field’s component disciplines as they were to the field as a whole. However, when it came to teaching humanities subjects to children, adults were less supportive of some disciplines than they were of humanities education broadly (Figure 3D).

For most of the humanities subjects in the survey, including the basics of reading and writing, as well as ethics, logic, literature, and history (both of the United States and the world), at least 80% of Americans felt that teaching them to children was important or very important. But substantially smaller shares of Americans felt as positively about teaching

### 3D: Estimated Share of Adults Who Believe Teaching Humanities Subjects to Children Is Important or Very Important, Fall 2019



Source: Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.

young people languages other than English (LOTE),<sup>6</sup> differences in religious thought, and art history/appreciation.

These results do not explain why a person might feel the teaching of a subject is unimportant. Someone could believe a particular subject is inherently unimportant, or they could have doubts about the nature or quality of the education a child would receive in that subject (even if they actually consider such knowledge essential). Once again, these findings beg further exploration into some of the underlying attitudes and beliefs.

LOTE, differences in religious thought, and art history/appreciation were also standouts in another respect, one in which they were joined by American history: the study found considerable variation among groups of Americans in their support for teaching this material (**Figures 3E**). For instance, except in the case of American history, women were substantially more likely than men to believe it important or very important that these subjects be taught to young people. In the case of art history/appreciation, for instance, more than half of women (55%) considered the subject at least important for a child's education, compared to just 44% of men.

Beyond basic reading and writing, a third or more of Americans believe elementary school is too early for humanities learning.



Race was a salient dimension of variation for all four subjects. Black and Hispanic Americans were more likely than Whites to believe that teaching art history/appreciation and differences in religious thought was important. Blacks and Hispanics were joined by Asian Americans in being substantially more likely than White Americans to believe it important that young people learn LOTE. However, non-White Americans were *less* likely to see the teaching of American history to young people as important. The greatest gap was found between Asian and White Americans. Eighty-seven percent of White Americans believed teaching the country's history to young people was important or very important, while 72% of Asian Americans expressed this view.

Political belief was also associated with Americans' views of the importance of young people learning these subjects. Conservatives were markedly less likely than liberal Americans, and somewhat less likely than moderates, to consider art history/appreciation and LOTE important for young people to learn. Conservatives were also less likely to think that teaching primary and secondary students about differences in religious thought was important, but the disparity was not as pronounced. In contrast, conservative Americans were somewhat more likely than liberals and moderates to value the teaching of American history to youth.

<sup>6</sup>For this portion of the survey, "languages other than English" (LOTE) was used in the lieu of the term "foreign language" (employed earlier in the survey when asking about views toward academic disciplines), because the Humanities Indicators' interest was in Americans' views about the use of school time to teach children non-English tongues specifically, a historically contentious issue in the United States.

### 3E: Estimated Share of Adults Who Believe Teaching Humanities Subjects to Children Is Important or Very Important, Fall 2019 (Part 1)

	American History	Art History/ Appreciation	Differences in Religious Thought	Languages Other than English
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*				
All Adults (18+)	85	50	58	63
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	85	<b>44</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>57</b>
Women	85	<b>55</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White, Non-Hispanic	87	<b>45</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>57</b>
Black, Non-Hispanic	<b>80</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>72</b>
Hispanic	<b>81</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>79</b>
Asian American	<b>72</b>	47	61	<b>80</b>
<b>Age</b>				
18–29	<b>73</b>	51	59	68
30–44	84	52	58	65
45–59	87	50	56	64
60+	<b>92</b>	47	61	<b>57</b>
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>				
Up to/including \$29,999	<b>81</b>	<b>56</b>	60	65
\$30,000–\$59,999	85	49	57	59
\$60,000–\$124,999	86	46	58	62
\$125,000 & Above	<b>89</b>	45	58	<b>70</b>
<b>Education</b>				
High School Diploma or Less	<b>80</b>	48	55	<b>58</b>
Some College	87	48	58	61
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	<b>89</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Political Self-Identification</b>				
Liberal	84	<b>62</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>74</b>
Moderate	85	47	59	62
Conservative	<b>92</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>52</b>
“Haven’t Thought about It”	<b>74</b>	52	<b>52</b>	61

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

### 3F: Estimated Share of Adults Who Believe Teaching Humanities Subjects to Children Is Important or Very Important, Fall 2019 (Part 2)

	Ethics	Literature	Logic	World History & Cultures
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*				
All Adults (18+)	87	80	87	80
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	85	77	86	78
Women	88	83	87	81
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White, Non-Hispanic	87	80	88	80
Black, Non-Hispanic	85	80	83	77
Hispanic	85	81	85	81
Asian American	89	76	91	81
<b>Age</b>				
18–29	<b>81</b>	76	85	76
30–44	86	80	87	81
45–59	89	81	87	79
60+	<b>90</b>	82	88	82
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>				
Up to/including \$29,999	<b>81</b>	79	82	78
\$30,000–\$59,999	87	81	87	79
\$60,000–\$124,999	<b>90</b>	79	88	81
\$125,000 & Above	90	83	<b>93</b>	83
<b>Education</b>				
High School Diploma or Less	<b>81</b>	77	<b>80</b>	<b>74</b>
Some College	89	79	<b>90</b>	80
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	<b>92</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Political Self-Identification</b>				
Liberal	<b>90</b>	84	89	<b>84</b>
Moderate	87	79	87	79
Conservative	86	80	87	81
“Haven’t Thought about It”	<b>79</b>	79	<b>79</b>	<b>70</b>

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

Across virtually all the subjects included in the survey (including the additional topics shown in **Figure 3F**), apolitical Americans were much less likely than Americans with a political identification to believe that the teaching of humanities subjects was important or very important for youth. In the case of American history, world history, ethics, and logic, the share of apoliticals who felt that instruction was important for children was smaller than the share for each of the political segments. For every other subject except literature, apoliticals were less likely than liberals to feel it was important that children be taught the material. Only in the case of art were apoliticals more likely than members of one of the political groups (in this case, conservatives) to feel the teaching of a subject was more important.

As was the case for the attitudes toward the humanities in general (see Chapter 2), education level was consistently predictive of Americans' attitudes about the value of teaching humanities subjects to children. Americans with college degrees were more likely than those with a high school diploma or less education to affirm the importance of teaching every humanities subject

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Americans with college degrees were more likely than those with a high school diploma or less education to affirm the importance of teaching every humanities subject to young people.

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to young people. For example, while 86% of college graduates felt instruction in world history was important for young people, only 74% of Americans with a high school education or less shared this view. In the case of art, although the association was still positive, it was decidedly less pronounced than for most other subjects.

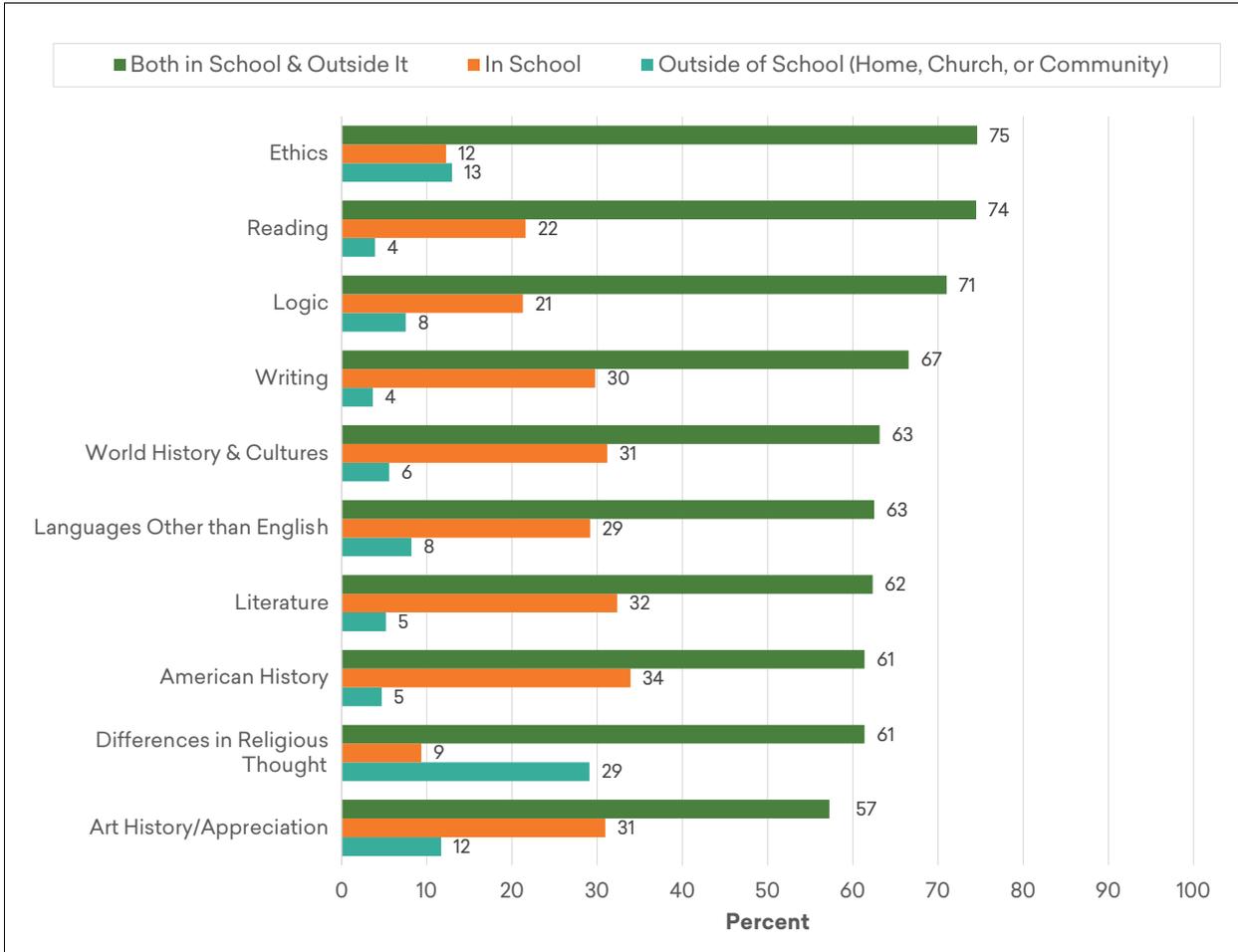
While large majorities of Americans supported teaching American history, ethics, literature, and world history to young people, older Americans were more likely than young adults to see their value. The gap between the two groups was particularly wide on the question of teaching American history. Whereas 73% of Americans ages 18 to 29 felt this sort of instruction was important or very important for young people to receive, the share of Americans age 60 and above who felt this way was 17 percentage points higher. LOTE was the only subject where the oldest adults were less likely than the youngest—and the middle-aged—to feel it important that children receive instruction.

Income and belief were correlated for all subjects except literature, world history, and differences in religious thought. In most cases, higher-income Americans were more likely to consider humanities education important, but for art history/appreciation the pattern was reversed. While 56% of Americans in the first income quartile felt this type of instruction was important for young people, only 45% of the most affluent Americans felt the same.

## Where and When the Humanities Should Be Taught to Young People

For every humanities subject in the survey, a majority of Americans felt that instruction should occur both in a formal educational setting and outside it (in a student's home, church, or community; **Figure 3G**). Approximately three-quarters of the adult population

### 3G: Setting in Which Adults Believe the Humanities Should Be Taught to Children (Estimated Distribution), by Subject, Fall 2019\*



\*The shares for a given subject may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

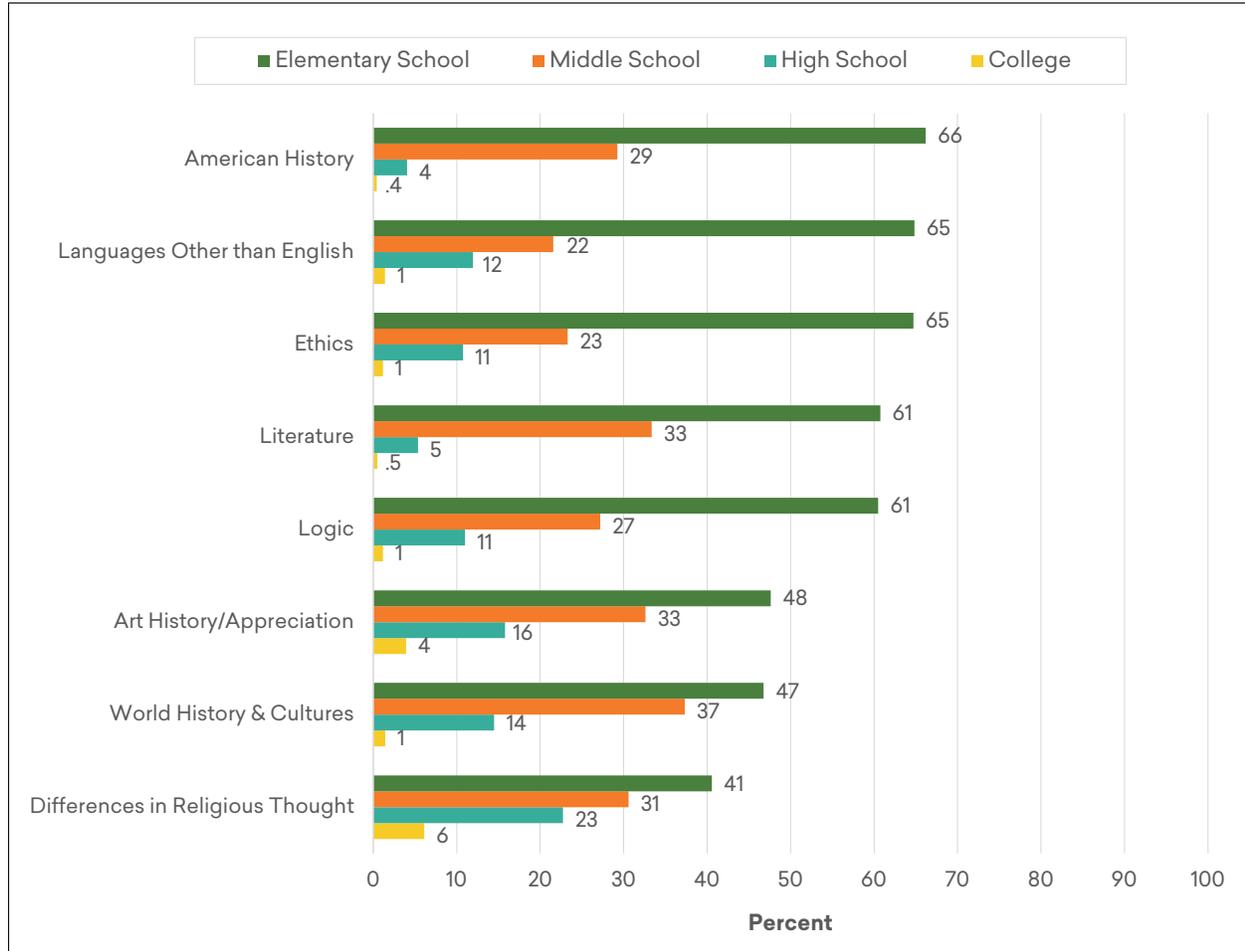
**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

believed reading and ethics ought to be taught both within and beyond school walls—the largest shares among the subjects in the survey.

For most subjects, less than 10% of adults felt that instruction should take place exclusively outside of school. Slightly larger shares felt that art history/appreciation (12%) and ethics (13%) were best taught outside of school, and a substantially larger share (29%) believed differences in religious thought should be taught this way.

As with Americans’ other opinions about humanities education and young people, this study does not tell us *why* Americans feel that a subject is best taught in a certain setting. For instance, someone might believe that a humanities subject (such as religion or ethics) is better taught outside of school due to a concern that school-based instruction will instill values at odds with those of a student’s family or community. Or the concern could be

### 3H: School Level at Which Adults Believe the Humanities Should First Be Taught to Children (Estimated Distribution), by Subject, Fall 2019\*



\*Limited to people who indicated that they believed a subject should be taught at school or both at school and outside it (in home, church, or community). The shares for a given subject may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

that schools will have less time to teach subjects considered more essential. One can also imagine multiple motivations for the belief that a subject should be taught only in school. Someone could feel that LOTE, for example, should be taught only in the schools because time with family and friends is better spent on other pursuits. Another person might value LOTE learning highly but not have the personal expertise or the monetary resources to obtain the professional help that would make learning outside school possible. Additional research will be necessary to understand what drives Americans’ attitudes about where children should study the humanities.

For every subject in the survey, Americans who felt a subject should be taught in school (including those who believe it should be taught *both* in school and in the home/church/community) were most likely to believe that instruction should begin at the elementary level.

Beyond the basics of reading and writing, however, a substantial share felt that elementary school was too early for humanities learning (**Figure 3H**).<sup>7</sup> Depending on the subject, between a third and 39% of Americans felt that the country's history, LOTE, ethics, literature, and logic should be taught later in a student's educational career. Substantially larger shares (52–60%) believed art history/appreciation, world history and cultures, and differences in religious thought should not be taught until middle school or later.

For all subjects, those who thought teaching should be delayed were most likely to want instruction postponed to middle school. The share of Americans who believed instruction should not begin until that time ranged from 22% for languages other than English to 37% for world history and cultures.<sup>8</sup> For three subjects, however, nonnegligible shares of Americans believed that instruction should wait until high school. Approximately 15% of those who felt art history/appreciation and world history/culture should be taught in school believed that young people should not receive instruction of this kind until high school. An even larger share, 23%, believed the teaching of differences in religious thought should be similarly delayed.

## Which Subjects Do Americans Wish They Had Studied More Of?

The study found that 78% of Americans wished they had taken more courses in at least one humanities subject in school, with languages other than English garnering the most interest (**Figure 3I**). Given a range of humanities and nonhumanities subjects to choose from (and allowed to select more than one), almost half of Americans (49%) chose LOTE, followed by computer science (45%), social and behavioral sciences (40%), and business (39%).

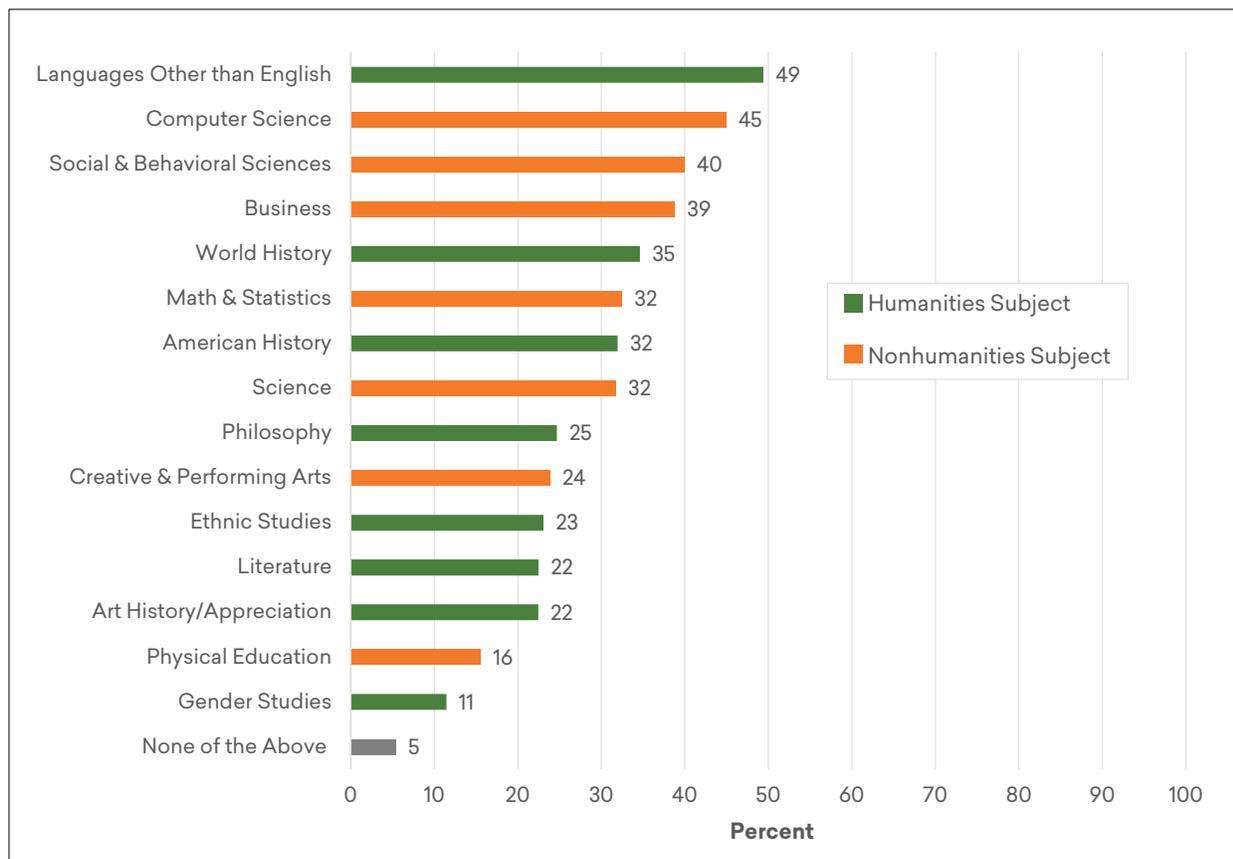
History was the second most popular among humanities subjects. Thirty-five percent of Americans wished they had studied more world history, and 32% felt they would have benefited from more American history. (Looking at history generally, 43% of Americans wished they had taken more courses in American and/or world history.) Philosophy, ethnic studies, literature, and art history/appreciation generated interest from 22% to 25% of Americans. (As a reminder, the survey was administered in fall 2019, well before the protests and national conversation around racial justice spurred by the death of George Floyd in police custody.) Just 11% of Americans wished they had taken more courses in gender studies.

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<sup>7</sup>The data indicated that almost all Americans believed reading and writing should be taught at the elementary level.

<sup>8</sup>While 65% of Americans who thought students ought to learn LOTE at school indicated that such education should begin in elementary school, the most recent data available indicate that these classes are offered in only one-quarter of the nation's elementary schools (and only 15% of public elementary schools). See the Humanities Indicators, "Language Instruction in Elementary and Secondary Schools," <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/k-12-education/language-instruction-elementary-and-secondary-schools>.

### 3I: Estimated Share of Adults Who Wish They Had Taken More Courses in Selected Subjects, Fall 2019



**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

It was not possible as part of this survey to explore the nature of the desire to have studied a given subject. It is not known for instance, whether expressed interest was for personal enrichment or professional advancement. It is also unclear how disinterest in a subject should be construed. A person might not wish to have studied more of a subject due to a negative experience (such as finding courses in the subject discouraging or not compelling). But another possibility is an awareness of opportunity costs: a person may have greatly enjoyed a given subject in school and taken a large number of classes in that area, but now realize that exposure to other subjects also would have been beneficial. Understanding what drives Americans' preferences for humanities education will require further research.

The study does reveal, however, how different groups compare to one another and the adult population as a whole in their desire to have studied more humanities (**Figures 3J & 3K**). The discussion below treats each subject separately in order to provide profiles that can serve as decision-making resources for those designing humanities-focused education experiences both within and beyond school walls.

### 3J: Estimated Share of Adults Who Wish They Had Taken More Courses in Selected Humanities Subjects, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019 (Part 1)

	American History	Art History/ Appreciation	Ethnic Studies	Gender Studies
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*				
All Adults (18+)	32	22	23	11
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	31	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>9</b>
Women	33	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White, Non-Hispanic	33	21	<b>19</b>	10
Black, Non-Hispanic	28	23	<b>30</b>	<b>16</b>
Hispanic	34	28	<b>31</b>	<b>16</b>
Asian American	<b>13</b>	21	32	10
<b>Age</b>				
18–29	<b>24</b>	23	27	<b>16</b>
30–44	<b>27</b>	<b>18</b>	21	12
45–59	34	21	20	10
60+	<b>41</b>	<b>27</b>	24	10
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>				
Up to/including \$29,999	33	25	26	<b>15</b>
\$30,000–\$59,999	33	21	23	12
\$60,000–\$124,999	32	22	22	9
\$125,000 & Above	28	22	20	8
<b>Education</b>				
High School Diploma or Less	35	20	22	12
Some College	34	21	23	10
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	25	13
<b>Political Self-Identification</b>				
Liberal	30	<b>30</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>19</b>
Moderate	29	22	22	10
Conservative	<b>44</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>
“Haven’t Thought about It”	<b>24</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	10

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

### 3K: Estimated Share of Adults Who Wish They Had Taken More Courses in Selected Humanities Subjects, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019 (Part 2)

	Languages Other than English	Literature	Philosophy	World History
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher than the share for all adults. Red: lower.)*				
All Adults (18+)	49	22	24	34
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	<b>46</b>	20	25	34
Women	53	25	25	35
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White, Non-Hispanic	47	21	23	35
Black, Non-Hispanic	<b>56</b>	27	28	31
Hispanic	53	27	<b>31</b>	37
Asian American	55	24	30	34
<b>Age</b>				
18–29	48	24	28	30
30–44	47	<b>18</b>	22	30
45–59	50	21	23	33
60+	52	<b>26</b>	25	<b>42</b>
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>				
Up to/including \$29,999	53	<b>27</b>	27	36
\$30,000–\$59,999	47	22	24	33
\$60,000–\$124,999	47	21	24	35
\$125,000 & Above	52	<b>16</b>	23	34
<b>Education</b>				
High School Diploma or Less	<b>45</b>	24	23	34
Some College	51	21	26	33
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	<b>53</b>	22	26	37
<b>Political Self-Identification</b>				
Liberal	<b>58</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>39</b>
Moderate	48	22	24	32
Conservative	47	19	<b>17</b>	<b>39</b>
“Haven’t Thought about It”	<b>42</b>	19	<b>19</b>	<b>24</b>

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

## American History

Americans with a bachelor's degree were somewhat less likely than those with less education to wish they had taken more courses in the nation's history. This was the only humanities subject for which this was true.

American history is also unique in that Americans identifying as conservative were considerably more likely to wish they had taken more classes in the subject than those with other political orientations or the apolitical. Forty-four percent of conservatives wished they had taken more courses in American history, but only about 30% of liberals and moderates, and less than one-quarter of apoliticals, felt the same. With the exception of world history, conservatives were *less* likely than liberals to wish they had studied more of every other subject.

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American history is also unique in that Americans identifying as conservative were considerably more likely to wish they had taken more classes in the subject than those with other political orientations.

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Asian Americans were less likely than other racial/ethnic groups to wish they had studied American history (just 13%). Age was positively associated with the desire to have studied more history, with 41% of Americans age 60 and above indicating a desire for more American history study, as compared to less than one-quarter of Americans ages 18 to 29.

## Art History and Appreciation

For art history/appreciation (and several other subjects), important variations were noted along gender lines, as 26% of women compared to just 19% of men wished they had taken more classes in the subject. Age also mattered. The oldest Americans (age 60 and above) were more likely than all but the youngest adults (ages 18 to 29) to wish they had studied more of the subject.

College graduates were somewhat more likely than less educated Americans to wish they had taken more art history/appreciation courses. Americans also differed along political lines: conservative Americans were substantially less likely than liberals to wish that art history/appreciation had been a bigger part of their education. Apolitical Americans were also found to be less likely than liberals to wish they had studied more of the subject.

## Ethnic Studies

Women were more likely than men to wish they had taken more ethnic studies classes, and Whites were less likely than Asian, Black, and Hispanic Americans to feel this way. The least

affluent Americans were somewhat more likely than the highest-income Americans to wish they had studied more of the subject.

Politically liberal Americans were more than twice as likely as conservatives—and substantially more likely than the apolitical and Americans generally—to wish they had taken more ethnic studies courses. This gap between liberals and conservatives was one of the largest (in percentage terms), second only to the disparity for gender studies.

## Gender Studies

Although only a small share of women wished they had taken more gender studies classes, they were half again as likely as men to express such a desire. Black and Hispanic Americans were more likely than Whites to wish they had studied more of the subject, and the youngest adults were somewhat more likely than older generations.

Income was also a predictor of desire to have delved more deeply into this subject. The lowest-income Americans were almost twice as likely as the highest-income to wish they had taken more of the subject. Further investigation revealed that this disparity was not reducible to the fact that those of lower income were much more likely to be women than men. The difference was driven largely by male preferences. Men in the lowest income quartile were more than two-and-a-half times as likely as the most affluent men to wish they had taken more gender studies.

As with ethnic studies, a strong association was found between political identification and interest in gender studies, with almost one-fifth of Americans who described themselves as liberal expressing the wish to have taken more gender studies, compared to 5% of conservatives. This was the largest gulf found (in percentage terms) between these two political segments for any of the subjects. Liberals were also more likely than moderates and apolitical Americans to wish that gender studies had been a greater part of their education.

## Languages Other than English

As was true for several other subjects, women were more likely than men to wish they had more exposure to LOTE as students. Black and Hispanic Americans were found to be more likely than Whites to wish they had taken more classes in the subject. Along with race and gender, education was also predictive of whether Americans wished they had studied more LOTE. College-educated Americans were somewhat more likely than those with a high school diploma or less education to express a desire to have taken more of the subject. Finally, liberals were more likely than moderates, conservatives, and apolitical Americans to wish they had engaged in more LOTE study.



## Literature

Literature was like LOTE in that women were more likely than men, and Black and Hispanic Americans more likely than Whites, to indicate that they wished they had studied more of the subject—though the disparities were less pronounced than with LOTE. And while age was positively associated with the desire to have studied more literature, the age bracket most different from the oldest Americans in this respect was not the youngest but the 30-to-44-year-olds.

In contrast to age, income was negatively associated with literature study. While over one-quarter of Americans in the lowest income quartile expressed a desire to have studied more in this area, only 16% of the highest-income Americans did.

Differences along political lines were also noted, with Americans who identify as liberal being more likely than moderates, conservatives, and the apolitical to wish they had studied more literature.

## Philosophy

Women were no more likely to wish they had studied philosophy than men, but Black Americans and Hispanics were found to be somewhat more likely than Whites to wish they had taken more classes in the subject. The wish to have taken more philosophy courses was also strongly associated with political belief. Americans identifying as liberal were twice as likely as conservatives and considerably more likely than apolitical Americans to wish they had studied the subject more.

## World History

World history was similar to philosophy in that the study found fewer between-group differences for this subject than for others. A correlation emerged, however, between age and a desire to have studied more world history, driven by the comparatively large share of the oldest Americans who wished they had received more education in the subject. While approximately one-third of younger Americans expressed a desire to have studied more world history, 42% of Americans age 60 or above held this opinion.

Unlike the other subjects, Americans toward the poles of the political spectrum were more likely than moderates or the apolitical to wish they had learned more about world history. While 39% of both liberals and conservatives wished they had taken more classes in the subject, less than one-third of moderates and only 24% of apoliticals shared that sentiment.

## Humanities Subjects and College Majors

A key question the study sought to answer was how likely STEM majors were to wish they had studied more humanities subjects as part of their formal education. Analysis turned up few differences between STEM majors and college graduates in general. All the observed

differences between Americans who had majored in a STEM field—whether engineering/computer sciences, health and medical science, or the natural sciences—and college graduates in general were eight percentage points or less, and in only two instances was the difference found to be statistically significant. College graduates who had majored in health and medical sciences as undergraduates were somewhat less likely than college graduates generally to wish they had taken more American history in college, with only 19% of such majors expressing this desire, as compared to 27% of all bachelor's degree-holders. For art history and appreciation, 18% of engineering and computer science majors wished they had taken more of such courses, compared to 26% of all college graduates.

As for the wish to study the humanities more generally, no notable differences were found among the majors. For every major—including humanities majors—the average graduate wished they had taken more courses in two to three (out of eight) subjects in the survey.

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The next chapter examines the role that skills acquired via humanities education—such as reading, writing, historical perspective, and cross-cultural understanding—played in Americans' work lives. The first set of findings deals with the extent to which people deployed these skills on the job. The remainder of the chapter explores whether Americans felt they lacked the humanities-related competencies necessary to succeed at work.

## 4. Humanities in the Workplace

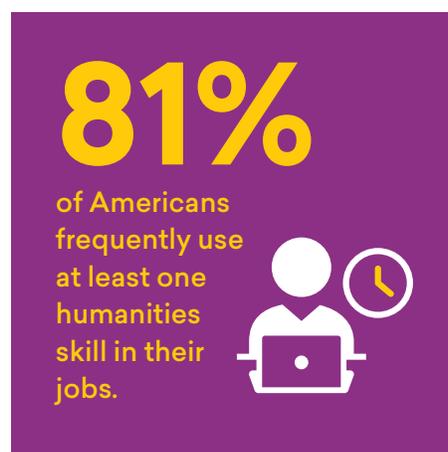
A final set of questions in the survey asked about engagement with the humanities in the workplace. Research about the relationship between humanities education and the workplace tends to examine employment patterns, earnings, and the needs of employers, but rarely explores the use of humanities skills on the job.<sup>1</sup> The survey sought to address that imbalance.

Drawing on existing literature on the subject, and after consultation with stakeholders in the field, the survey inquired about a set of skills often cited as particular benefits of humanities study. These included reading, writing, use of a language other than English, working with and understanding others, and applying a historical perspective to a task.<sup>2</sup> The survey asked about the frequency with which respondents used these skills in their jobs and whether they felt limited by a deficiency in any of these skill areas.

The survey revealed that a substantial share of Americans deployed humanities skills with some regularity in their current or most recent job. Of the seven skill areas included in the survey, Americans used an average of four at least sometimes in the workplace, and 81% used at least one of these skills often or very often in their jobs.

More than half of Americans worked with people from different cultures often or very often as part of their work, and a slightly larger share engaged in descriptive writing; however, Americans were far less likely to use other humanities-related skills (**Figure 4A**). The skill they were least likely to use in the workplace was speaking languages other than English (LOTE), with less than 10% of Americans doing so often or very often.

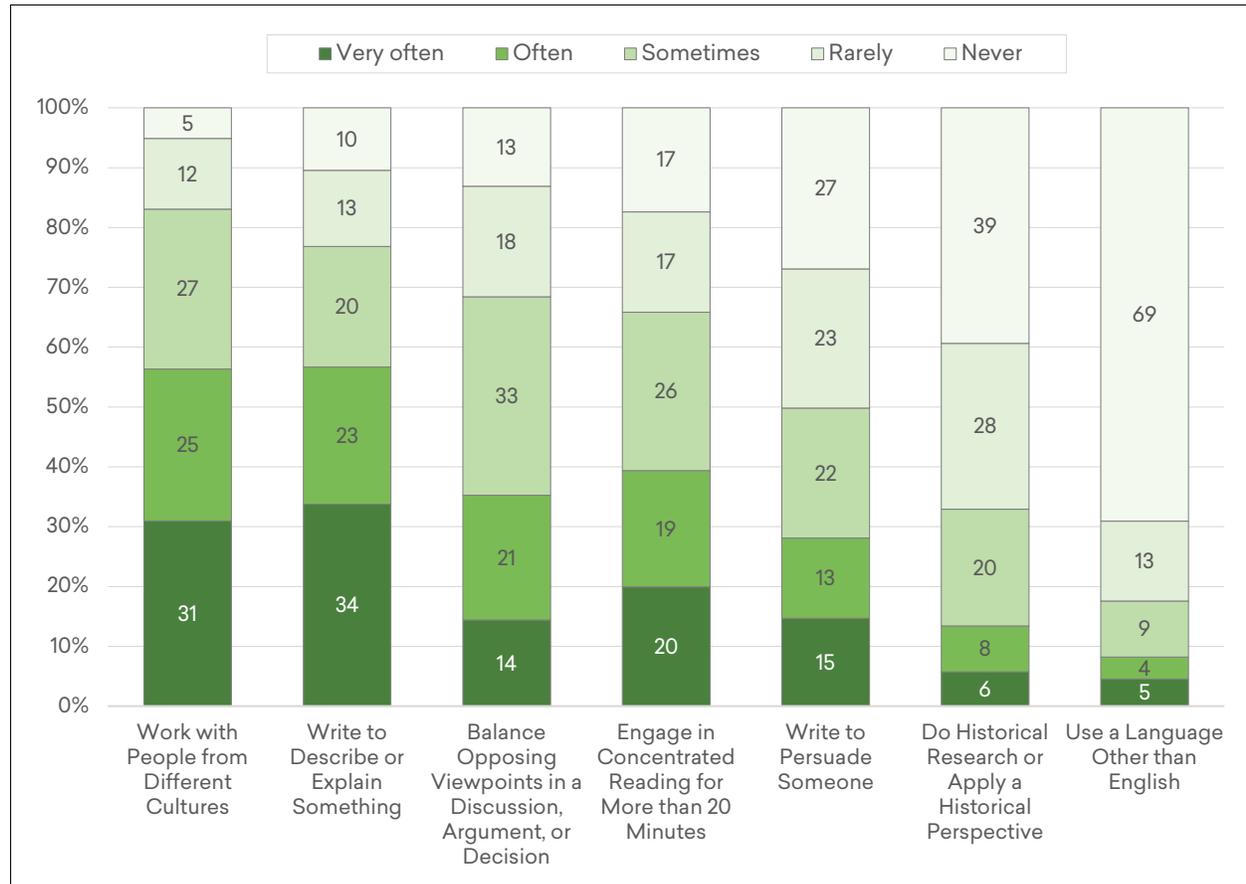
For each skill, a majority of Americans believed the competence was necessary for their job (**Figure 4B**).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, a substantial share of Americans believed that they did not need



<sup>1</sup> Studies on this subject can be found going back at least to the 1980s, in reports such as Michael Useem, *Liberal Education and the Corporation: The Hiring and Advancement of College Graduates* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1989); Debra Humphreys and Patrick Kelly, *How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment: A Report on Earnings and Long-Term Career Paths* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2014); and Clare Lyonette, Wil Hunt, and Beate Baldauf, *Occupations and Skills of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Graduates and Postgraduates* (Warwick, UK: Clare Lyonette, Wil Hunt and Beate Baldauf, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> A 2017 study found that demand for communication skills was particularly acute, with demand for employees possessing these skills outstripping supply by over 100%. Such skills, along with the ability to work effectively in teams, have been identified by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as core competencies that individuals need to function as workers and citizens. See “The Value of the Humanities,” Prepared by Macquarie University for Deloitte Access Economics (July 2018).

## 4A: Estimated Frequency of Adult Use of Humanities Skills in the Workplace, Fall 2019\*



\*Skills are listed in descending order by the size of the share who used the skill at least “sometimes.” The frequency shares for a given subject may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

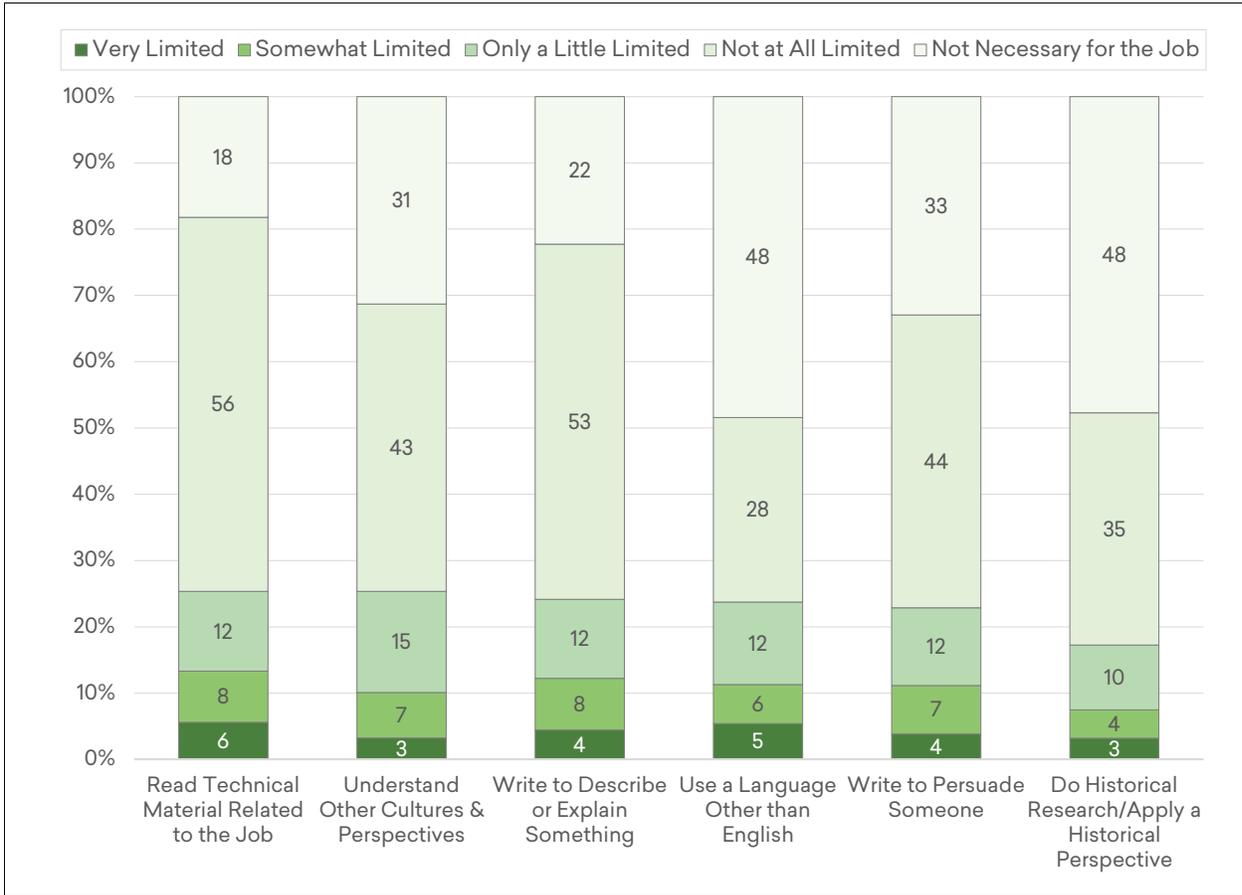
**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

these skills to do their work. Approximately a fifth of Americans indicated that they did not need to read technical materials related to the job or write descriptively, while nearly one-third of Americans’ jobs did not call for persuasive writing or understanding other cultures. Nearly half of Americans thought that historical research and LOTE were unnecessary on the job. Across all seven humanities competencies in the survey, however, only 9% of adults believed that *none* of these skills was necessary for their job.

In most skill areas, roughly one in four Americans believed a deficiency had hampered them in their job. The exception was use of historical research or perspective on the job, which had the smallest share (17%). The share who believed a lack of these skills had done more than a little damage to them professionally (by limiting them somewhat or more in

<sup>3</sup> It is possible that some respondents indicated they were not limited by deficiencies in a particular skill because the skill was not necessary in their job, but cognitive testing conducted as part of the questionnaire development process suggested that the distinction between “not at all limited” and “not necessary for the job” was clear.

## 4B: Estimated Share of Adults Who Believe a Lack of Humanities Skills Limited Their Advancement at Work, Fall 2019\*



\*Skills are listed in descending order by the size of the share who believed they were limited in any way at their job. The frequency shares for a given skill may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

their job) was substantially smaller, but it still ranged from 14% of Americans who believed their career had been hampered by their ability to read technical materials to 7% who thought their lack of facility with historical research and perspective had impeded their work. Looking across all of these skill areas, 29% of Americans felt they had been held back in their jobs at least somewhat by a deficit in one or more area.

## Who Uses the Humanities at Work?

Looking at the work use of humanities skills overall (employing a scale constructed in a manner similar to those for leisure-time engagement and perception in Chapters 1 and 2), several differences among demographic groups are apparent (**Figure 4C**).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>The workplace segments (like those for engagement, perception, and childhood exposure) are relative, meaning that respondents have been compared to one another rather than a fixed standard.

## 4C: Estimated Distribution of Adults Across Levels of Work Use of Humanities Skills, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Use Most (%)	Use Somewhat (%)	Use Least (%)	Total (%)
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher. Red: lower.)*				
All Adults (18+)	33	31	37	100
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	34	31	35	100
Female	32	30	39	100
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White, Non-Hispanic	<b>30</b>	30	<b>40</b>	100
Black, Non-Hispanic	36	34	<b>30</b>	100
Hispanic	<b>38</b>	31	31	100
Asian American	<b>45</b>	39	<b>16</b>	100
<b>Age</b>				
18–29	<b>25</b>	31	<b>44</b>	100
30–44	35	32	34	100
45–59	33	30	37	100
60+	36	30	35	100
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>				
Up to/including \$29,999	<b>24</b>	26	<b>50</b>	100
Up to/including \$59,999	<b>28</b>	31	41	100
Up to/including \$124,999	35	34	<b>31</b>	100
\$125K & Above	<b>52</b>	29	<b>18</b>	100
<b>Education</b>				
High School Diploma or Less	<b>16</b>	27	<b>57</b>	100
Some College	29	34	38	100
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	<b>53</b>	32	<b>15</b>	100

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant. The “most”/“somewhat”/“least” shares for a given demographic group may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

For instance, White Americans were somewhat less likely than Black and Hispanic Americans, and substantially less likely than Asian Americans, to report using these skills at work. The survey also found an association between age and the use of humanities skills, with the youngest adults, ages 18 to 29, less likely than older age cohorts to deploy these skills at work.

Americans in the highest income bracket were substantially more likely than less affluent Americans to employ these skills in the course of their work. The education gap was also pronounced, as 53% of Americans with a college education were among those most likely to use humanities skills at work (compared to just 16% of Americans with a high school education or less). As with overall engagement with the humanities in people's personal lives (described in Chapter 1), no gender difference was detected in the use of humanities skills at work.

The age, income, and education disparities described above also extended to most of the humanities skills when examined individually (with a focus on the share using a skill often or very often; **Figures 4D & 4E**). Some of the widest differences were found in relation to reading and writing, where a gap of more than 26 percentage points separated the highest and lowest income quartiles on every skill. The disparity was even larger—more than 32 percentage points for each skill—between those with college degrees and those with a high school education or less.

Though the disparity was less pronounced, the association with education was found for all the other skills about which the survey inquired except LOTE. Use of LOTE was a standout in two other respects. First, the direction of the correlation with income was reversed, with less affluent Americans being more likely than those with more income to have used that skill on the job often or very often. Second, the correlation with age was reversed, with younger people being more likely to have deployed languages other than English in the workplace.

Only one statistically significant difference was found by race/ethnicity in the use of reading and writing skills at work: Hispanic Americans were somewhat less likely than Black Americans to have engaged in concentrated reading often or very often. But when it came to the three skills that involved negotiating diversity (in the forms of culture, viewpoint, or language), Whites were substantially less likely than other racial/ethnic groups to have frequently used these abilities at work. For example, just 3% of Whites often used a language other than English at work, compared to 30% of Hispanics and 18% of Asian Americans. Additionally, while almost 60% of Asian Americans had often balanced opposing viewpoints, only a third of Whites had done so.

While highly educated Americans were more likely to use humanities skills on the job, the analysis did not detect statistically significant differences among the various college majors with respect to the likelihood of frequently using these skills at work.

The highest-income Americans are **substantially more likely** than less-affluent Americans to use humanities skills in their work.



#### 4D: Estimated Share of Adults Who Use Writing and Reading Skills Often/Very Often in the Workplace, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Write to Describe or Explain Something	Engage in Concentrated Reading for More than 20 Minutes	Write to Persuade Someone
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher. Red: lower.)*			
All Adults (18+)	57	39	28
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	56	40	31
Female	58	38	<b>25</b>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White, Non-Hispanic	57	40	29
Black, Non-Hispanic	59	42	26
Hispanic	53	34	24
Asian American	57	42	30
<b>Age</b>			
18–29	<b>46</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>18</b>
30–44	58	37	27
45–59	60	39	30
60+	61	<b>50</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>			
Up to/including \$29,999	<b>42</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>18</b>
Up to/including \$59,999	54	37	<b>22</b>
Up to/including \$124,999	62	43	32
\$125K & Above	<b>76</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Education</b>			
High School Diploma or Less	<b>37</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>14</b>
Some College	56	38	<b>22</b>
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	<b>77</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>47</b>

\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

## 4E: Estimated Share of Adults Who Use Other Humanities Skills Often/Very Often in the Workplace, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Work with People from Different Cultures	Balance Opposing Viewpoints in a Discussion, Argument, or Decision	Do Historical Research or Apply a Historical Perspective	Use a Language Other than English
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher. Red: lower.)*				
All Adults (18+)	56	35	13	8
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	57	37	15	8
Female	56	34	12	8
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White, Non-Hispanic	<b>51</b>	33	13	<b>3</b>
Black, Non-Hispanic	<b>63</b>	<b>42</b>	16	5
Hispanic	<b>68</b>	36	13	<b>30</b>
Asian American	<b>81</b>	<b>58</b>	21	<b>18</b>
<b>Age</b>				
18–29	62	32	13	<b>14</b>
30–44	60	39	12	9
45–59	56	34	12	7
60+	<b>50</b>	35	16	<b>5</b>
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>				
Up to/including \$29,999	53	<b>28</b>	11	<b>12</b>
Up to/including \$59,999	54	33	13	8
Up to/including \$124,999	57	37	14	<b>6</b>
\$125K & Above	<b>65</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>19</b>	6
<b>Education</b>				
High School Diploma or Less	<b>49</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>7</b>	9
Some College	56	34	<b>10</b>	7
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	<b>65</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>23</b>	8

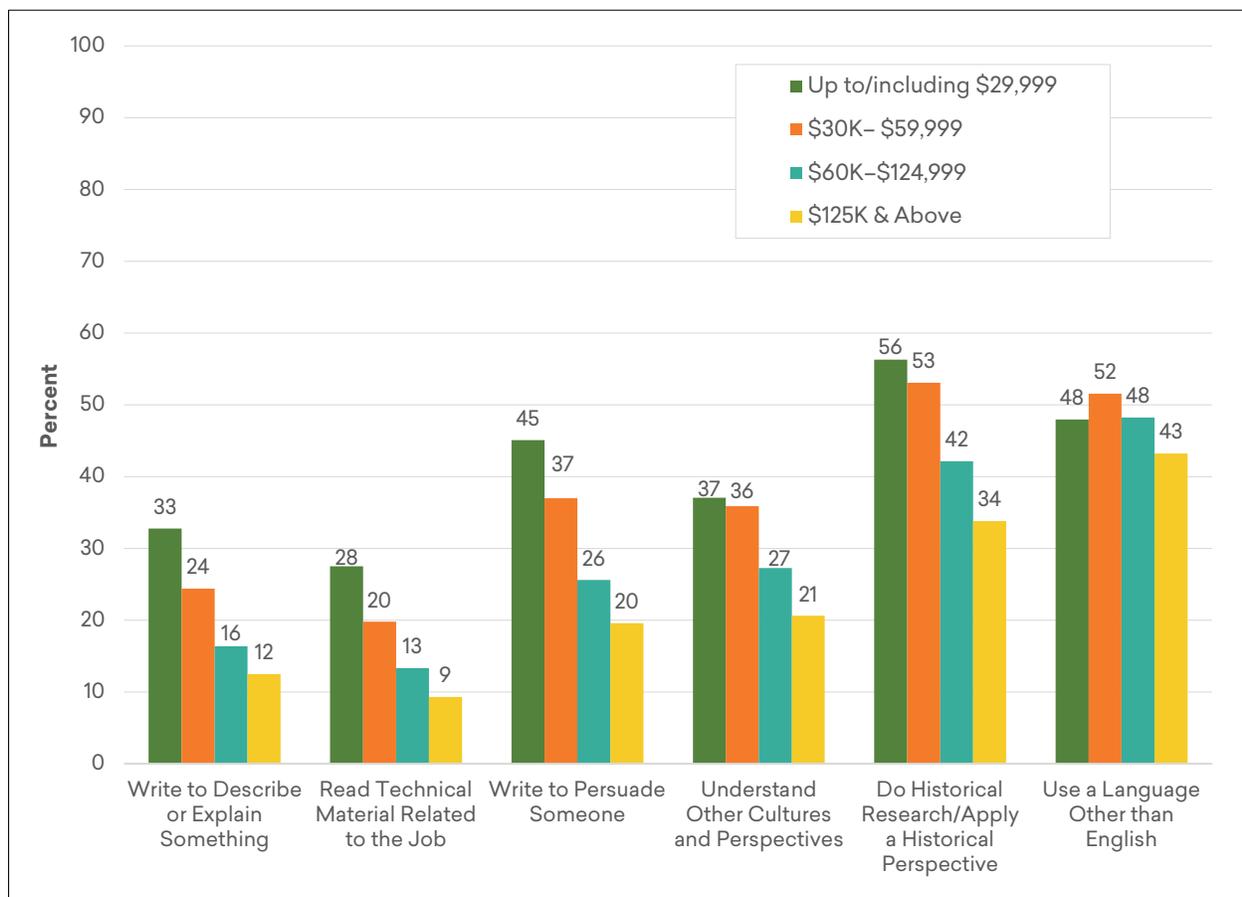
\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.

## Humanities: Not Required for (Some) Jobs

As shown in Figure 4B, a sizable share of Americans—from approximately one-fifth to almost one-half—believed that they did not require each of the humanities-related skills included in the survey to do their jobs. Further analysis revealed that among the demographic variables included in the study, two—income and education, the same factors that were so closely associated with the use of humanities skills on the job—were most predictive of whether Americans felt these skills were required for their job. As **Figures 4F and 4G** illustrate, Americans with lower incomes and lower levels of education were more likely to think that most humanities skills (the exception being use of LOTE) were unnecessary for their jobs. For example, 33% of Americans in the lowest income quartile thought descriptive writing was not necessary, and 28% of them believed they did not need to read technical materials related to the job (**Figure 4F**). Less than half as many Americans in the top two income brackets thought the same.

**4F: Estimated Share of Americans Who Believe Their Job Does Not Require Humanities Skills, by Income Quartile, Fall 2019\***



\*Not every between-group difference depicted in the graph is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative describes notable differences that were found to be statistically significant at that level.

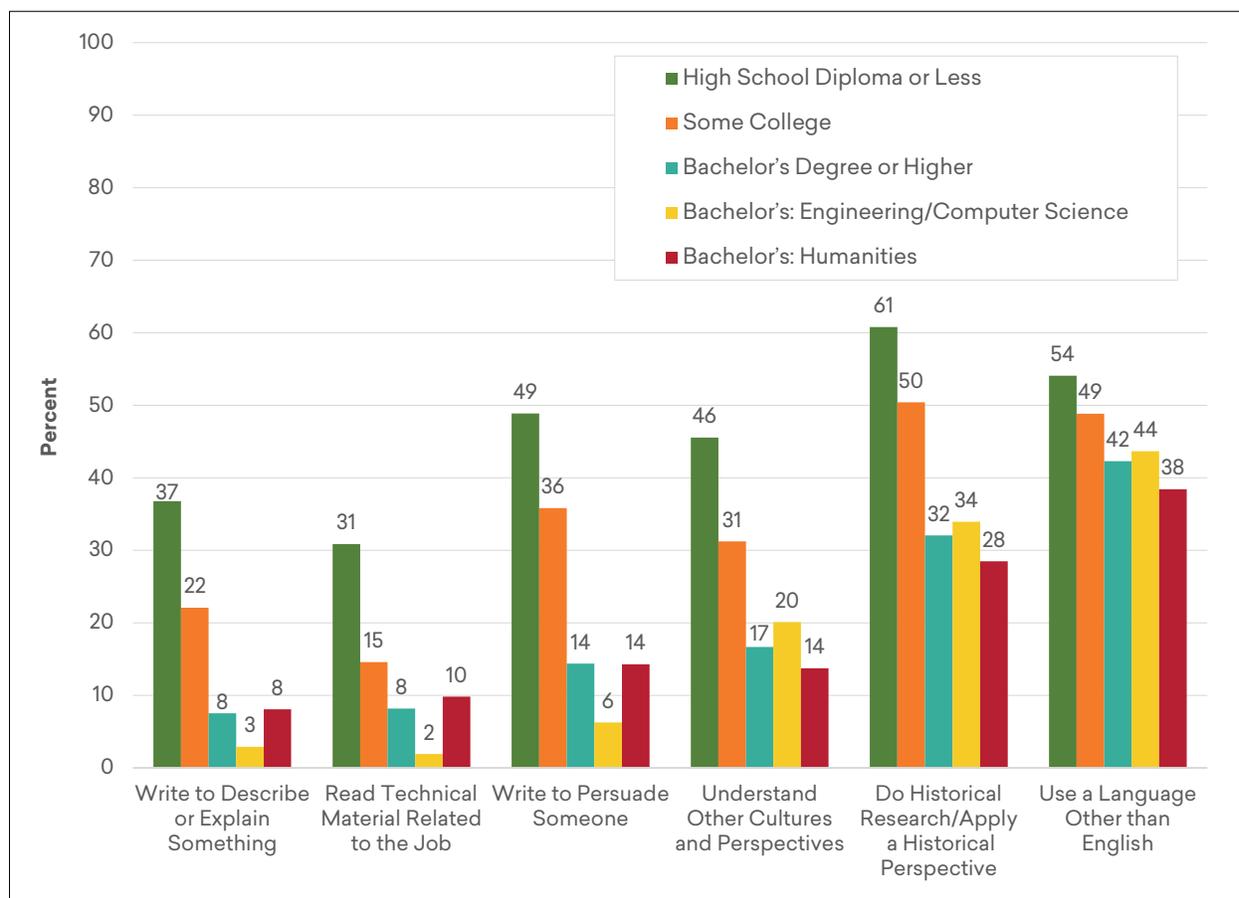
**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

Americans without a college education were also substantially less likely to report a need for humanities skills in their jobs than Americans with college degrees (**Figure 4G**). For instance, while more than 30% of Americans with only a high school education thought reading technical material or writing to describe or explain something was unnecessary for their jobs, just 8% of Americans with a college degree shared those views.

The narrowest gap between college graduates and those with a high school education or less was found in the shares who did not consider a language other than English necessary for their work. Fifty-four percent of Americans with no more than a high school education thought language use unnecessary, and 42% of Americans with a bachelor’s degree or higher concurred.

An analysis of college graduates by major revealed that for three skill areas—both types of writing as well as technical reading—Americans with a bachelor’s degree in

### 4G: Estimated Share of Americans Who Believe Their Job Does Not Require Humanities Skills, by Education, Fall 2019\*



\*Not every between-group difference depicted in the graph is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative describes notable differences that were found to be statistically significant at that level.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

engineering/computer science were less likely than both college graduates in general and humanities majors to believe the skills were unnecessary for their job. For example, only 6% of engineering/computer science majors thought persuasive writing unnecessary for their jobs, compared to 14% of both humanities majors and the college-educated population as a whole.

## Humanities Deficiency as a Career Limitation

The survey was designed to gauge the extent to which Americans believed that the inability to deploy a humanities-related skill had limited them professionally. However, because the survey asked whether respondents felt hampered in their ability to advance “at your job,” the responses do not reveal how lack of a particular skill might have shaped someone’s larger career (e.g., by preventing them from applying for a job or being hired). Further research will be required to fully understand the role of humanities skills in Americans’ career trajectories.<sup>5</sup>

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Of those who believed that reading and writing were necessary for their job, approximately one-third felt they had been limited at least a little bit in their career advancement by an inability to perform these skills.

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What the survey does reveal is who was most likely to feel that a deficiency in a humanities skill had hampered their ability to perform or advance in their job. The shares in **Figures 4H** and **4I** are of those Americans who believed that a given skill was *necessary for the performance of their job*. As Figure 4B indicates, the share of Americans who believed that a skill

was not necessary for their job ranged from 18% for “read technical material related to the job” to 48% for “use a language other than English” and “do historical research or apply a historical perspective.” The shares shown in Figures 4H and 4I were thus calculated using a markedly smaller denominator, which is why the shares for all adults in the first row of those two tables are greater than the shares obtained by summing the “very limited,” “somewhat limited,” and “only a little limited” segments of each column in Figure 4B.

Of those who believed that reading and writing were necessary for their job, approximately one-third felt they had been limited at least a little bit in their career advancement by an inability to perform these skills (Figure 4H). Non-White Americans, the youngest adults, and those with less income were more likely to indicate that the lack of one of these skills had been an impediment in their work life.

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<sup>5</sup> An example of a longitudinal assessment of the relationship between career paths and skills can be found in a recent study by the Strada Institute for the Future of Work and Emsi, which analyzed the resumes of thousands of college graduates to assess job movement through the first three jobs. See Michelle R. Weise et al, *Robot Ready: Human+ Skills for the Future of Work*, (Indianapolis: Strada Institute for the Future of Work, 2019).

## 4H: Estimated Share of Adults\* Who Feel Limited in Advancement at Work by Their Inability to Perform Reading and Writing Tasks, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Write to Describe or Explain Something	Read Technical Material Related to the Job	Write to Persuade Someone
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher. Red: lower.)**			
All Adults (18+)	31	31	34
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	30	32	33
Female	32	30	35
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White, Non-Hispanic	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>29</b>
Black, Non-Hispanic	<b>44</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>45</b>
Hispanic	<b>44</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>46</b>
Asian American	<b>48</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Age</b>			
18–29	<b>42</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>45</b>
30–44	32	31	37
45–59	28	28	<b>29</b>
60+	<b>26</b>	27	30
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>			
Up to/including \$29,999	<b>48</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>49</b>
Up to/including \$59,999	32	30	37
Up to/including \$124,999	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>
\$125K & Above	<b>20</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Education</b>			
High School Diploma or Less	<b>42</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>45</b>
Some College	31	30	36
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>

\*Share indicating that the skill is necessary for their job.

\*\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

#### 4I: Estimated Share of Adults\* Who Feel Limited in Advancement at Work by Their Inability to Perform Other Humanities-Related Tasks, by Demographic Group, Fall 2019

	Understand Other Cultures and Perspectives	Do Historical Research or Apply a Historical Perspective	Use a Language Other than English
The difference between a value in <b>boldface</b> and the corresponding share for all adults is statistically significant at the 5% level. (Black: value is higher. Red: lower.)**			
All Adults (18+)	37	33	46
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	38	30	43
Female	36	36	49
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White, Non-Hispanic	35	<b>28</b>	46
Black, Non-Hispanic	<b>46</b>	<b>45</b>	53
Hispanic	36	38	41
Asian American	46	<b>50</b>	44
<b>Age</b>			
18–29	40	<b>44</b>	<b>56</b>
30–44	37	33	48
45–59	35	29	41
60+	36	30	<b>40</b>
<b>Household Income (Quartiles)</b>			
Up to/including \$29,999	<b>47</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>52</b>
Up to/including \$59,999	36	38	50
Up to/including \$124,999	<b>32</b>	<b>25</b>	42
\$125K & Above	34	<b>23</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Education</b>			
High School Diploma or Less	<b>45</b>	<b>47</b>	51
Some College	37	33	48
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	<b>31</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>40</b>

\*Share indicating that the skill is necessary for their job.

\*\*Not every observed difference between demographic groups (e.g., between the youngest adults and those age 60+, or between Asian and White Americans) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative discusses notable differences that were found to be statistically significant.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

Americans with less education were also substantially more likely to indicate that they were limited by a deficiency in one of these skills. More than 40% of Americans with a high school diploma or less felt that their limited skills in this area held them back in their jobs. While it was markedly smaller, a substantial share of Americans with college degrees also felt limited by their reading and writing skills (23–26% percent). No statistically significant differences were found among the college majors with respect to the share who felt hampered by a deficiency in these skills.

For the three other humanities skills—understanding other cultures and perspectives, doing historical research or applying a historical perspective, and using LOTE—those with less income and education were again likelier to report difficulty (Figure 4I). The youngest adults were substantially likelier than older Americans, and women modestly more likely than men, to indicate that a lack of proficiency in applying a historical perspective or using LOTE was a barrier to their advancement.

Black, Asian, and Hispanic Americans were more likely than Whites to report having been held back professionally due to a skill deficit in employing a historic perspective at work. And Black Americans were more likely than Whites and Hispanics to feel that they suffered professionally from an inability to understand other cultures and perspectives. Finally, the study detected another difference between Black and Hispanics, with the former more likely to report that a lack of multilingualism was a barrier to advancement.



## Workplace Use: Relationship with Leisure-Time Engagement and Perception

This analysis did not attempt to establish a *causal* linkage between use of the humanities in the workplace and either attitudes about the field or engagement in humanities activities outside of work. Nevertheless, the survey did find a correlation between using humanities skills at work and both perception and leisure-time engagement.

Americans who used the humanities most at work were more likely to have highly positive views of the humanities (using the scale described in Chapter 2; **Figure 4J**). While 48% of Americans who used the humanities most often at work were “fans” of the field, only 26% of Americans who used the humanities least often in their job were as enthusiastic.

The relationship between work use and enthusiasm was somewhat less pronounced when examined in light of Americans’ reaction to some of the specific statements linking the humanities and the economy. The strongest association was found for the statement, “the humanities help Americans work more effectively and creatively.” Almost half of Americans who used

#### 4J: Estimated Distribution of Adults Across Levels of Enthusiasm for the Humanities, by Level of Work Use of Humanities Skills, Fall 2019\*



\*Values in **boldface** are measurably different (black/white: higher; red: lower) at the 5% level from the share for all adults. Not all differences between use segments depicted in the graph are statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative describes notable differences that were found to be statistically significant. The “fans”/“neutrals”/“skeptics” shares for a given work-use level may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

**Source:** *Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.*

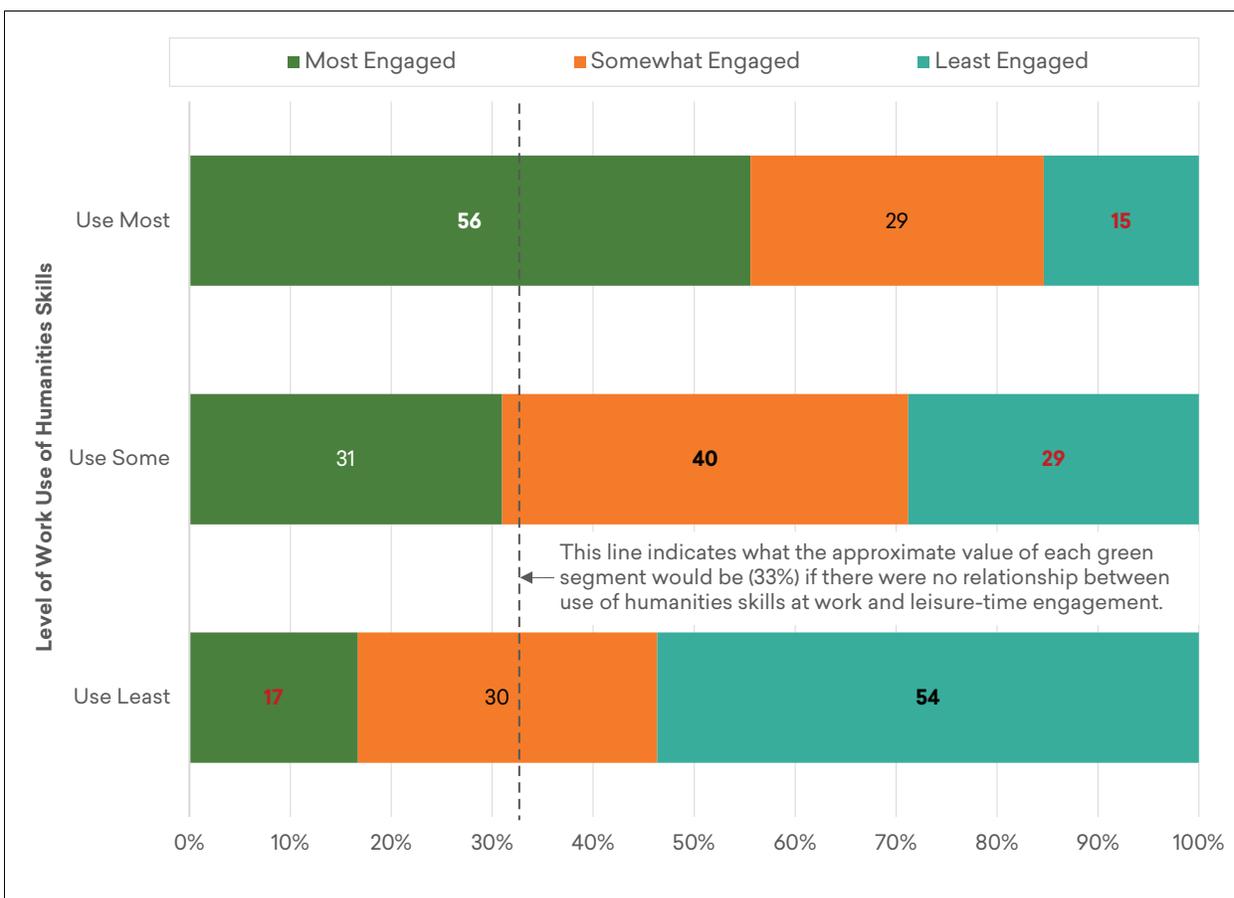
humanities skills the most in the workplace strongly agreed with that sentiment. While that share was larger than for those who used humanities the least at work (32%), when those who somewhat agreed with the statement are considered along with those who strongly agreed, the difference between the two workplace-use segments is negligible.

For the proposition that the humanities “help children and adolescents develop the skills they need in life,” 54% percent of Americans who used humanities skills the most at work strongly agreed, compared to only 37% of Americans who used such skills the least at work. Americans who used the humanities most often at work were also more likely than lower intensity work users to agree that the humanities help “make the economy stronger,” but just 33% of the heaviest users of humanities skills at work strongly agreed with the statement.

A stronger relationship was found between work use and engagement with the field in one’s leisure time (**Figure 4K**). Fifty-six percent of the Americans who used the humanities most at work were also among the “most engaged” with the humanities in their personal lives. Only 17% of the those who used the humanities least at work were as engaged outside the job.

The correlation between work use and leisure-time engagement was most apparent in the case of speaking LOTE. Seventy-seven percent of Americans who often or very often used another language in the workplace also often or very often used a LOTE with family and friends. Only 6% of those who rarely used a LOTE at work used such a language often or very often at home.

#### 4K: Estimated Distribution of Adults Across Levels of Leisure-Time Humanities Engagement, by Level of Work Use of Humanities Skills, Fall 2019\*



\*Values in **boldface** are measurably different (black/white: higher; red: lower) at the 5% level from the share for all adults. Not all differences between use segments depicted in the graph are statistically significant at the 5% level. The report narrative describes notable differences that were found to be statistically significant. The “most”/“somewhat”/“least” shares for a given work-use level may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

**Source:** Survey of the Humanities in American Life, 2019.

Though the association was still substantial, work use was less predictive of leisure-time reading and historical research. Thirty-eight percent of Americans who did concentrated reading often or very often at work read nonfiction as often outside of work, while 16% of those who rarely or never did concentrated reading at work often read nonfiction outside of work. As further evidence of the more tenuous relationship between work and leisure-time reading, almost 30% of those who often did concentrated reading at work rarely or never read nonfiction at home. Fifty-seven percent of Americans who often or very often included a historical element in their work also frequently sought information on history subjects in their home lives. Only 28% of those who rarely did historical research or applied a history perspective at work researched history topics outside of work with any frequency.

In statistics, one is routinely reminded that correlation is not causation, and that is a particularly important reminder here. These findings can point only to an association between Americans' use of humanities skills at work and their level of enthusiasm for and engagement with the humanities as a field. Whether use of the humanities at work fosters (or is fostered by) attitudes toward the field and leisure-time engagement remains an open question.

The causality question is not the only one raised by these findings. What should one make of the substantial share of Americans who engaged in an activity at work but not outside it? And why did such a large share of those who used the humanities intensively at work not embrace the idea that the humanities contribute to a healthy economy? Once again, this survey can point only to interesting areas for further research.

# Conclusion

After working with the humanities community for almost twenty years, we recognize that a broader definition of the field—one that situates the humanities in the day-to-day experiences of most Americans—will not sit comfortably with all stakeholders. While many in the public humanities have embraced the expansive definition used in this survey (and more generally by the Humanities Indicators), many scholars have chafed at what they consider an overly broad conception of the field. Some have even advised us that they perceive our definition as undermining the integrity of the humanities, observing that the definition of the field can work only within the boundaries of the academy. Clearly, we have strayed from that perspective by asking the questions we have.

As this report demonstrates, if the humanities are broadly conceived—as a set of humanistic practices and skills that may connect to academic study of humanities subjects but often are not necessarily part of the academy—you will find considerable engagement with and support for the field in the general public. No matter where you look in the data, you will find some members of every demographic group actively engaged with the humanities and strongly supportive of the field. Of course, the reverse is also true, as substantial shares of Americans in every demographic category do not engage in most humanities activities and are (at best) ambivalent about the field.

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Broadly speaking, the survey offers four important takeaways for further consideration:

- There is substantial engagement with the humanities in American life. However, very few people engage regularly in the full range of activities, or even in all the activities associated with a given discipline (e.g., someone who watches history shows is not very likely to also research history topics online).
- Though Americans hold a generally favorable view of the humanities, especially as an area of education, their enthusiasm is relatively attenuated in comparison to other intellectual fields and even to some of the humanities' component disciplines (especially history).
- Many Americans do not recall being exposed to the humanities by their parents, and most adults wished they had taken more humanities courses in school.
- And finally, a substantial share of Americans has been hampered at work due to a deficiency in one or more humanities skills, though the survey also reveals that many Americans do not think they need humanities skills in the workplace.

The divide between the academic and public humanities seems particularly relevant because so many of the current conversations about the future of the field are situated within the academic humanities, either in the pages of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* or *Inside Higher Ed* or in blogs and editorials written by students and scholars for a more general audience.<sup>1</sup> Most of this commentary perceives that public attitudes about the humanities play a critical role in the health of the field, be it in the form of parents dissuading their children from majoring in the humanities, members of the public not reading books by humanities scholars, or administrators and funders shifting funds to other fields.

Nevertheless, we hope that the insights from this report will be useful both for the stakeholders in the field and researchers interested in the humanities and culture. Taking a narrow view of the humanities confines the conversation to an academic echo chamber in which the trend in the number of majors and funding levels for departments serves as a proxy for public engagement and support. This limits the conversation to a self-referential discussion that will do little to advance public understanding about the humanities or open the frame to a larger set of possible solutions to the challenges facing many departments. The data presented here expand the framework for thinking about these questions, suggesting where and how the public engages with the humanities in their lives, what views they actually hold about the field, which subjects remain of interest later into adulthood, and finally, how humanities skills actually play a role in a workplace that seems to loom ever larger in conversations about selecting college majors.

While we hope that these findings will inform, illuminate, and broaden conversations about the field, we also recognize that this study and the findings presented here raise as many questions as they answer. The goal was to establish the “what” of the humanities in Americans’ daily lives. Understanding the “why” behind the patterns discerned by this study will require further research in a variety of modes, as survey-based investigations need to be supplemented by rigorous qualitative research to understand the drivers of the behaviors and attitudes described here. Nevertheless, the findings from this survey demonstrate that a more expansive understanding of the humanities can offer a rich and profitable area for further research and that this report can serve as the start of a new—and perhaps long-overdue—sociology of the humanities.

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<sup>1</sup> This conversation is only a small part of the conversation about the humanities and humanities subjects. A forthcoming report from the What Everyone Says about the Humanities (WEIS) project, which analyzed an extensive corpus of comments about the humanities in both traditional and social media, notes that academic discourse about the crisis in majors, programs, and funding is largely absent from the larger public discourse about the field. See their Key Findings page at <https://we1s.ucsb.edu/research/we1s-findings/key-findings/>.

# Appendix A: Correlation Matrix for All Humanities Engagement Variables

	Research Famous Humanists	History Research	Research Other Hum. Subjects	Research Religion or Culture	Wrote Comment	Shared Content	Podcasts and Radio Shows	History Shows	Shows with Other Hum. Content	Art Museum, Festival, or Art Appr.	History Museum or Site	Literary/Poetry Reading Event	Fiction	Nonfiction	Audio-books	Book Club/Play-Reading Group	Religious Text Study	Ethical Decisions	Speak Language Other than English
Research Famous Humanists	<b>1.00</b>	0.62	0.74	0.57	0.44	0.49	0.43	0.34	0.48	0.37	0.35	0.31	0.26	0.42	0.27	0.23	0.13	0.47	0.19
History Research		<b>1.00</b>	0.65	0.55	0.33	0.39	0.35	0.37	0.40	0.33	0.37	0.23	0.24	0.40	0.22	0.16	0.12	0.43	0.14
Research Other Hum. Subjects			<b>1.00</b>	0.63	0.45	0.46	0.43	0.38	0.53	0.42	0.40	0.34	0.27	0.46	0.29	0.24	0.16	0.51	0.21
Research Religion or Culture				<b>1.00</b>	0.41	0.42	0.41	0.26	0.47	0.37	0.33	0.33	0.24	0.40	0.29	0.25	0.26	0.51	0.24
Wrote Comment					<b>1.00</b>	0.67	0.31	0.22	0.38	0.30	0.25	0.40	0.13	0.27	0.27	0.28	0.19	0.34	0.20
Shared Content						<b>1.00</b>	0.35	0.23	0.37	0.30	0.27	0.35	0.15	0.27	0.26	0.23	0.19	0.35	0.18
Podcasts and Radio Shows							<b>1.00</b>	0.33	0.47	0.37	0.34	0.33	0.20	0.36	0.36	0.20	0.17	0.45	0.19
History Shows								<b>1.00</b>	0.55	0.27	0.35	0.19	0.16	0.31	0.14	0.08	0.10	0.32	0.07
Shows with Other Hum. Content									<b>1.00</b>	0.44	0.38	0.39	0.21	0.40	0.26	0.23	0.20	0.52	0.21
Art Museum, Festival, or Art Appr.										<b>1.00</b>	0.65	0.48	0.27	0.34	0.29	0.28	0.10	0.35	0.20
History Museum or Site											<b>1.00</b>	0.39	0.26	0.37	0.24	0.21	0.12	0.33	0.14
Literary/Poetry Reading												<b>1.00</b>	0.25	0.33	0.30	0.45	0.19	0.34	0.24
Fiction													<b>1.00</b>	0.51	0.27	0.25	0.09	0.21	0.03
Nonfiction														<b>1.00</b>	0.31	0.28	0.28	0.38	0.12
Audiobooks															<b>1.00</b>	0.33	0.17	0.30	0.16
Book Club/Play-Reading Group																<b>1.00</b>	0.21	0.21	0.17
Religious Text Study																	<b>1.00</b>	0.22	0.09
Ethical Decisions																		<b>1.00</b>	0.21
Speak Language Other than English																			<b>1.00</b>

# Appendix B: Survey Development and Methodology

Development of the survey began in 2017 with a thorough review of similar surveys in the arts and culture sector, a series of preliminary surveys using Amazon Mechanical Turk, and consultations with stakeholders in the field. A preliminary version of the survey instrument was tested in a series of cognitive interviews administered by NORC at the University of Chicago in spring 2018. These interviews tested the viability of survey items, probing for the underlying assumptions respondents brought to specific terms and any difficulty they had in interpreting the questions in the intended manner. NORC staff concluded that the instrument performed well and, with only a few minor revisions, would elicit valid responses.

The survey sample was a subset of NORC's AmeriSpeak ([www.amerispeak.org](http://www.amerispeak.org)), a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US household population. The panel is built around an ongoing set of relationships with 30,000 households, which helps ensure: (1) an adequate response rate; and (2) a shorter survey (as most of the desired demographic data has already been collected), which prevents respondent fatigue and related decline in response quality. AmeriSpeak staff worked with Humanities Indicators personnel to shape a final survey instrument that could be administered online, on the phone, or (if needed) in person to assure a representative respondent pool. NORC also translated the survey instrument into Spanish to assure that members of the nation's largest non-English-speaking population could also complete the survey.

The survey instrument was pretested at the end of October 2019 and administered from November 14 to November 25, 2019. In total, NORC collected 5,015 responses, 4,732 by web mode and 283 by phone mode (with 109 respondents taking the survey in Spanish). The survey completion rate was 27%.

NORC then cleaned and prepared a data file of respondent survey and demographic data, including the weights necessary to generate nationally representative estimates of engagement and opinion levels. For additional details on the sampling design and composition, survey administration, and response rates, please visit the Humanities Indicators website at <https://bit.ly/HumSurvey>.

# Appendix C: Stakeholders Consulted

## Consultations in Advance of the Survey

The following stakeholders were consulted as part of the questionnaire development process. Indicators staff were responsible for the final selection and arrangement of all questions.

Phillip Bahar, Chicago Humanities Festival	Elizabeth Lynn, Center for Civic Reflection
Eva Caldera, Phi Beta Kappa	Esther Mackintosh, Federation of State Humanities Councils
John Paul Christy, American Council of Learned Societies	Jane McAuliffe, Library of Congress
John Dichtl, American Association for State and Local History	Hunter O'Hanian, College Art Association
Amy Ferrer, American Philosophical Association	Valerie Paley, New York Historical Society
Jim Grossman, American Historical Association	Lynn Pasquerella, Association of American Colleges & Universities
Christine Henseler, 4Humanities / Union College	William Rivers, Joint National Committee for Languages / National Council for Languages and International Studies
Sunil Iyengar, National Endowment for the Arts	Kathy Rosa, American Library Association
Stephen Kidd, National Humanities Alliance	Judith Tanur, Stony Brook University (Humanities Indicators Advisory Committee)
Paula Krebs, Modern Language Association	Jeff Thomas, National Endowment for the Humanities
David Laurence, Modern Language Association	Steven Wheatley, American Council of Learned Societies
Elise Lipkowitz, National Science Board	Ann Wise, Phi Beta Kappa
Alan Liu, 4Humanities / University of California, Santa Barbara	

## Consultations Following the Survey

Following the administration of the survey, the following stakeholders were asked to provide input as to the types of analysis and reporting that would be of greatest value to the field.

Nicholas Allen, University of Georgia

Maryrose Flanigan, a2ru

Catherine Allgor, Massachusetts Historical Society

Matthew Gibson, Virginia Foundation for the Humanities

Vyta Baselice, Federation of State Humanities Councils

Kimberly Gilmore, History Channel

Yota Batsaki, Dumbarton Oaks

Jim Grossman, American Historical Association

Carin Berkowitz, New Jersey Council for the Humanities

Beatrice Gurwitz, National Humanities Alliance

Kristen Boudreau, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Sara Guyer, Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes / University of Wisconsin

Brian Boyles, Mass Humanities

Dianne Harris, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Jack Buckley, American Institutes for Research

Christine Henseler, 4Humanities / Union College

Alison Chang, College Art Association

Christina Chia, John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute

Cecily Hill, National Humanities Alliance

Jonathan R. Cole, Columbia University

Michael Hout, New York University

John Dichtl, American Association for State and Local History

Sunil Iyengar, National Endowment for the Arts

Ellen Dunlap, American Antiquarian Society

David Kidd, Democratic Knowledge Project

Jessica Feldman, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Stephen Kidd, National Humanities Alliance

Amy Ferrer, American Philosophical Association

Heather Kim, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Daniel Fisher, National Humanities Alliance

Jim Kitterman, Maryland Humanities

Gavin Kleespies, Massachusetts Historical Society

Paula Krebs, Modern Language Association	Lynn Pasquerella, Association of American Colleges & Universities
Modupe Labode, The Smithsonian Institution	James Pawelski, University of Pennsylvania
Lori Lefkovitz, Northeastern University	Daniel Reid, Whiting Foundation
Felice J. Levine, American Educational Research Association	Miranda Restovic, Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities
Dennis Looney, Modern Language Association	Jason Rhody, Social Science Research Council
Esther Mackintosh, Federation of State Humanities Councils	William Rivers, Joint National Committee for Languages / National Council for Languages and International Studies
Teresa Mangum, Obermann Center for Advanced Studies / University of Iowa	Tom Rudin, The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine
Barbara Mennel, Center for the Humanities and the Public Sphere / University of Florida	Dana Schaffer, American Historical Association
Jess Miner, Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics	James Shulman, American Council of Learned Societies
Scott Muir, National Humanities Alliance	Shannon Smith, Wyoming Humanities
Julie Mulvihill, Humanities Kansas	Susan Smulyan, Center for Public Humanities / Brown University
Melissa Nobles, Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Camilla Somers, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
Diane O'Donoghue, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life (Tufts University) / Brown University	Judith Tanur, Stony Brook University
Sara Ogger, Humanities New York	Eric Waggoner, West Virginia Humanities Council
Koby Oppenheim, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation	Steve Wheatley, American Council of Learned Societies
Valerie Paley, New York Historical Society	Ann Wise, Phi Beta Kappa

# Appendix D: Survey Instrument

Would you like to take this survey in English or Spanish?

1. English
2. Spanish

*This survey is about activities that people engage in at work or in their everyday lives and subjects they may have studied at school. It covers a wide range of activities, many of which you may not do often or at all. The first section asks about things you may do outside of school or work.*

1. Thinking now about some of the things you do in your personal life, how often did you engage in the following activities over the past 12 months?

- A. Visited an art museum, art festival, or art appreciation event
- B. Visited a history museum or historic site
- C. Attended a literary reading or other literary event (including poetry readings)
- D. Listened to a podcast, radio show, or TED talk on art, history, literature, philosophy, or world religions
- E. Watched a show with historical content (on TV channels such as the History Channel and PBS, or on YouTube or other media)
- F. Watched a show on art, literature, philosophy, or world religions
- G. Thought about or researched further the ethical aspects of a choice in your life
- H. Used a language other than English in the home or with friends

## RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Very often
2. Often
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

2. Thinking specifically about book-related activities, how often did you engage in the following activities over the past 12 months?

- A. Read a fiction book (such as a novel or collection of short stories) in any format
- B. Read a nonfiction book (such as a biography, history, or analysis of any aspect of culture or religion) in any format
- C. Listened to an audiobook
- D. Participated in a book club or play reading group
- E. Engaged in religious text study (of the Bible, Torah, Quran, etc.) in either an individual or group setting

**RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- 1. Very often
- 2. Often
- 3. Sometimes
- 4. Rarely
- 5. Never

3. Over the past 12 months, have you accessed social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, LinkedIn, blogs, etc.)?

**RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

4. Now thinking about some of the things you do on your smartphone, computer, or other device, how often did you engage in the following activities over the past 12 months?

- A. Written a comment of a paragraph or longer about art, history, literature, philosophy, or world religions on social media or another online site (including Facebook, Tumblr, blog, Reddit, etc.)
- B. Shared an article, video, or other digital content about art, history, literature, philosophy, or world religions on social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube)
- C. Looked up information about a famous philosopher, writer, historian, artist, or musician, to gain a deeper understanding of him/her
- D. Looked up information about art, history, literature, or philosophy, to gain a deeper understanding of the subject

- E. Researched the history of something of interest in your life (for example your family or neighborhood history, or the history of a sports team, artist, or musician)
- F. Sought information about a religion or culture that is different from your own

**RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- 1. Very often
- 2. Often
- 3. Sometimes
- 4. Rarely
- 5. Never

5. In the past 12 months, have you taken a course in history, literature, philosophy, or a language other than English (either online or in a classroom)?

**RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

6. This question focuses on when you were growing up, that is before you turned 18 years old.

How often do you recall seeing your parents or other adults doing the following activities?

- A. Reading
- B. Writing a paragraph or more of text
- C. Discussing your family's history
- D. Discussing the history of the nation or world
- E. Discussing art
- F. Discussing ethical issues

**RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- 1. Very often
- 2. Often
- 3. Sometimes
- 4. Rarely
- 5. Never

Again, focusing on the time when you were growing up before you turned 18 years of age.

7. How often do you recall participating with your parents or other adults doing the following activities?

- A. Reading
- B. Writing a paragraph or more of text
- C. Discussing your family's history
- D. Discussing the history of the nation or world
- E. Discussing art
- F. Discussing ethical issues

**RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- 1. Very often
- 2. Often
- 3. Sometimes
- 4. Rarely
- 5. Never

8. Do you presently or did you previously hold a job that earned a wage or salary?

**RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

9. When it comes to your current or most recent job, how often do (or did) you perform the following tasks:

- A. Write to describe or explain something
- B. Write to persuade someone
- C. Use a language other than English
- D. Engage in concentrated reading of materials (in print or online) for more than 20 minutes at a time
- E. Work with people from different cultures
- F. Balance opposing viewpoints in a discussion, argument, or decision
- G. Do historical research or apply a historical perspective to your work

### RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Very often
2. Often
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

**10.** To what extent are (or were) you limited in career advancement at your job by your ability to perform the following tasks?

- A. Write to describe or explain something
- B. Write to persuade someone
- C. Read technical material related to the job
- D. Use a language other than English
- E. Understand other cultures and perspectives
- F. Do historical research or apply a historical perspective to your work

### RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Very limited
2. Somewhat limited
3. Only a little limited
4. Not at all limited
5. Was not necessary for the job

**11.** In general, how important do you think it for K–12 students to receive an education in the following subjects?

- A. Reading
- B. Writing
- C. Literature
- D. American History
- E. Languages other than English
- F. Art history or art appreciation
- G. Logic
- H. Ethics

- I. World history and cultures
- J. Differences in religious thought

**RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- 1. Very important
- 2. Important
- 3. Somewhat important
- 4. Just a little important
- 5. Not at all important

**12.** Where do think is the best place for a child to learn about the following subjects?

- A. Reading
- B. Writing
- C. Literature
- D. American History
- E. Languages other than English
- F. Art history and art appreciation
- G. Logic
- H. Ethics
- I. World history and cultures
- J. Differences in religious thought

**RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- 1. In school
- 2. Outside of school (home, church, or community)
- 3. Both

**13.** At what school level should children begin to learn about each subject?

- A. [SHOW IF Q12A=1/3] Reading
- B. [SHOW IF Q12B=1/3] Writing
- C. [SHOW IF Q12C=1/3] Literature
- D. [SHOW IF Q12D=1/3] American History
- E. [SHOW IF Q12E=1/3] Languages other than English

- F. [SHOW IF Q12F=1/3] Art history and art appreciation
- G. [SHOW IF Q12G=1/3] Logic
- H. [SHOW IF Q12H=1/3] Ethics
- I. [SHOW IF Q12I=1/3] World history and cultures
- J. [SHOW IF Q12J=1/3] Differences in religious thought

**RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- 1. Elementary school
- 2. Middle school
- 3. High school
- 4. College

*In the previous questions, we asked about a range of activities that are often described as “the humanities.” This includes studying or participating in activities related to literature, languages, history, and philosophy. Please keep this definition in mind as you answer the questions that follow.*

**14.** Please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

*Remember, when we use the word “humanities” here, we mean studying or participating in activities related to literature, languages, history, and philosophy.*

The “humanities” . . .

- A. Should be an important part of every American’s education
- B. Attract people who are somewhat elitist or pretentious
- C. Make for a more meaningful and happy life
- D. Are a waste of time
- E. Help Americans work more effectively and creatively
- F. Activities cost too much
- G. Activities and discussions are a great way of spending time with friends and family
- H. Are important for strengthening American democracy
- I. Help me feel part of my local community
- J. Help Americans understand others whose lives are different from their own
- K. Are not really for people like me
- L. Help Americans appreciate cultural diversity

- M. Undermine the values of my community
- N. Make the economy stronger
- O. Help people think more clearly
- P. Help children and adolescents develop the skills they need in life

**RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Somewhat agree
- 3. Somewhat disagree
- 4. Strongly disagree

15. Looking back on your own education, which of these subjects do you wish you had taken more of?

*Select all that apply.*

**RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- 1. Literature
- 2. American History
- 3. Languages other than English
- 4. Philosophy
- 5. Gender studies
- 6. Art history and appreciation
- 7. Ethnic studies
- 8. World history
- 9. Computer science
- 10. Science (including biology, chemistry, physics)
- 11. Math and statistics
- 12. Creative and performing arts
- 13. Physical education
- 14. Business
- 15. Social and behavioral sciences (including economics, political science, psychology, and sociology)
- 16. None of the above

16. Please tell us your impression when you hear someone use the following terms

- A. History
- B. Engineering
- C. Literature
- D. Math
- E. The humanities
- F. Science
- G. The arts
- H. Foreign languages
- I. Statistics
- J. Philosophy

**RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- 1. Very favorable
- 2. Somewhat favorable
- 3. Somewhat unfavorable
- 4. Very unfavorable

17. What was the field of your undergraduate degree?

*If you were a double major, with majors in more than one of the broad fields listed below, please select two.*

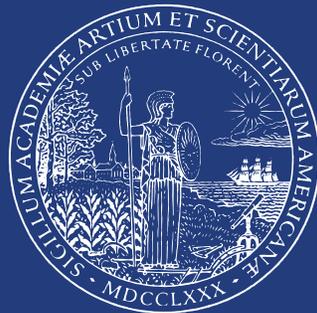
**RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- 1. Behavioral and social sciences (including economics, political science, and psychology, and sociology)
- 2. Business and management
- 3. Education
- 4. Engineering and computer sciences
- 5. Fine and performing arts (including, music, dance, and studio arts)
- 6. Health and medical
- 7. Humanities (including literature, languages, history, and philosophy)
- 8. Natural sciences (including life and physical sciences; math; and statistics)
- 9. Other, please specify



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