

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

2009

The humanities and social sciences, together the “human sciences,” are a collection of disciplines that focus on human beings and their societies.

Ten disciplines form the heart of the human sciences: administration (or administrative science), anthropology, archeology (or ancient civilizations), economics (or economic sciences), geography, history, psychology, religion, political science, and sociology. Philosophy, too, is often considered part of the human sciences.

In France, most programs in the human sciences are found in the universities, where, with the blurring of the boundaries separating the disciplines, they have become very diverse. Although for the most part still quite academically oriented, growing numbers of programs are adapted to the needs of employers. Cross-disciplinary programs, such as masters in mathematics and computer science for the humanities, reveal that scientific methods play a key role in the human sciences.

It would be futile to try to summarize in a few paragraphs the scope of current research in the human sciences. Two basic points are worthy of note, however. It is no longer possible for a researcher to closet himself or herself within a given discipline without taking an interest in the links between that discipline and others. Indeed, crossing academic boundaries is now the rule, rather than the exception. No one today should be surprised to meet a scholar of Latin who is also an expert in information technology. The environmental, social, and political challenges that we face today confirm the need for wide-ranging, cross-disciplinary knowledge and skills. As Bruno Latour has noted, sharing across the sciences and social sciences the knowledge gained in each can only enrich them all.

The work of internationally renowned scholars such as Michel Foucault and Michel Serres illustrates the benefits of building bridges among philosophy, sociology, history, the sciences, technology, and policy studies.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, who revolutionized anthropology, forced us to reconsider the western vision of the world. Historians Fernand Braudel, Jacques Le Goff, and Georges Duby changed the way Europeans thought about their past (and the past of others). René Girard led us to another view of both violence and sacredness, while Gilles Deleuze showed us new ways of deciphering the signs that surround us. All are professors of doubt and of the restless human spirit, without which there would be no humanities and no social sciences.

ORGANIZATION OF STUDIES IN FRANCE

The human sciences are taught in the universities and in certain grandes écoles, notably the Écoles normales supérieures. No longer are the majority of the students of the Écoles normales supérieures destined for teaching careers in France's secondary schools or universities, but, because the schools offer an education of extraordinary quality, they remain the royal road for students interested in literary and philosophical careers.

Students of philosophy acquire skills in close reading and analysis, abstraction, and argument, as well as the ability to speak and write with ease. The discipline shares borders with history, the sciences, the arts, and politics, enabling students to gain an excellent general education. Students are urged to master other languages, notably Latin, Greek, German, and English. Within the universities, philosophy is increasingly combined with other disciplines, such as sociology, law, or literature.

Theology teaches students to think in a structured way about God or divinity. With the notable exception of the public Université Marc Bloch in Strasbourg, theology programs are generally found in private institutions, such as the Institut Catholique in Paris and similar institutes in Lille, Lyon, Toulouse, and Angers.

Geographers study the relations between human activities and the physical world, often for the purpose of developing and managing land and other natural resources. Geography, therefore, straddles the human and natural sciences. The discipline has many subfields, among them geomorphology, climatology, and demography. Today, new methodologies and career opportunities are propelling a renaissance in the field, with the emergence of new specialities such as geomatics and geomarketing. Although several specialized schools of engineering offer geography, most programs are found in the universities from the licence to the doctoral level. Graduates work in a wide variety of fields from teaching to urban and regional planning, environmental protection, and tourism.

History programs, too, are found almost exclusively in the universities, where most historical research is done. Like geography, the discipline has been greatly influenced by the development of new computer techniques, such as geographical information systems that process data from satellites, and by the hard sciences. In other ways, too, the boundaries of history and geography have become permeable, sharing research topics, data, and techniques with historic and documentary preservation, medicine, and other fields.

As in most of the human sciences, most history programs involve 5 years of study or more. Many students choose careers in teaching and research, but journalism, media, and culture (including historic preservation) offer opportunities as well. Double majors (history and art history, for example, or history and law), combined with solid language studies, widen graduates' employment options.

Psychology is another speciality of the public universities, but programs are also found in other types of institutions, notably the Catholic institutes of Paris and Angers and the Conservatoire national des arts et métiers (CNAM). A master's degree (5 years of study, plus internship) is required for professional practice as a psychologist. Degree programs in the field involve in-depth study of science (biology, statistics). Graduates earn a legally regulated professional credential.

Psychoanalysis, the discipline founded by Sigmund Freud, centers on a theoretical model of psychic functioning as well as a method of investigating the psyche, particularly its unconscious component. Psychoanalysis is also considered to be a specific form of clinical practice, although the profession of psychoanalyst, unlike that of a psychiatrist or psychologist, is not legally regulated. No university diploma or license confers the legal right to practice as a psychoanalyst or psychotherapist. Classical training in psychoanalysis, during which the future analyst must undergo psychoanalysis, is a long process that begins only after the candidate has completed a master's degree. Psychoanalytic interpretation demands an extensive education, notably in various aspects of the humanities.

As relevant as today's news, programs in sociology, anthropology, and ethnology are concentrated in the universities. All three disciplines focus on social phenomena and the forces that govern relations among individuals and between individuals and groups. Many of the students who earn their licence in one of these disciplines continue on for a master in urban studies, regional planning, social development, publishing, marketing, workplace efficiency, or human resources. Professionally oriented and research-oriented master's programs are available in many specialized areas that build on the disciplinary groundwork laid at the licence level. Examples include the sociology of work, of urban settings, of human migration, of families, and even of politics, law, and athletics. New master's programs to train future organizational mediators have sprung up in response to an urgent social need. Graduates of such programs focus on geography, sociology, and sometimes theology and counseling. Others who earn their licence in sociology, anthropology, or ethnology go on for a graduate degree in journalism, business, or political science. At one of France's institutes of political science they may focus on field investigations, scientific survey design, interview techniques, sample design, or data analysis.

Special mention should be made of an institution that is unique in its legal status, in the variety of disciplines that it offers, and in the intensity of its belief in the benefits to be gained from the blurring of the traditional boundaries separating history, anthropology, sociology, economics, geography, linguistics, psychology, demography, the cognitive sciences, political science, philosophy, and mathematics. Although it is not a university, EHESS (École des hautes études en sciences sociales, school of advanced studies in the social sciences) is a major center of European research in the social sciences, with 47 research centers, 300 faculty members, and 3,000 students. More than half of the doctoral degrees awarded by EHESS go to international students. The institution offers a doctorate in the history, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy of the European legal system, one of many available doctoral programs

Fields

Anthropology, archaeology, ethnology, geography, history, philosophy, psychoanalysis, psychology, sociology, theology.

Also see the following subject profiles: Anthropology, History and Archeology, Geography, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, Psychology, Communication and Journalism, Languages, Economics, Cultural Heritage and Historic Preservation, Human Resource Management, International Relations and Political Science, Library Science.

Sectors of activity

teaching, urban planning and city management, land-use planning and regional development, local government, environment, culture, journalism, historic and cultural preservation, health, human resources, tourism

Websites

- ABG, Association Bernard Grégory, career assistance for recent doctoral recipients in all disciplines www.abg.asso.fr
- Directory of higher education and research, published by the CNRS, the French national center for scientific research <http://www.urec.fr/annuaire/> The directory provides access, through keywords, to all of the disciplines that make up the human sciences
- ANRT, Association nationale pour la recherche technique (national association for technical research). ANRT points out that 15 percent of all doctoral dissertations financed by private firms touch on the human sciences (psychology, sociology, and even literature). <http://www.anrt.asso.fr/index.jsp>
- ANVIE, Association nationale pour la valorisation interdisciplinaire de la recherche en sciences de l'homme et de la société auprès des entreprises (national association for interdisciplinary commercial and industrial applications of research in the human sciences) <http://www.cnrs.fr/cw/fr/nomi/prix/Anvie96/anvie95.html>
- CAIRN, 174 journals in the humanities and social sciences) <http://www.cairn.info/>
- CNRS, Centre national de la recherche scientifique (national center for scientific research), department of humanities and social sciences <http://www.cnrs.fr>
- EHESS, École des hautes études en sciences sociales (school of advanced study in the social sciences),) <http://www.ehess.fr/fr>
- INETOP, Institut national d'étude du travail et d'orientation professionnelle (national institute for the study of work and professional orientation). For international specialists in the field of professional orientation, INETOP offers advanced courses and diplomas <http://inetop.cnam.fr/>
- Institut Géographique National (national institute of geography) <http://www.ign.fr/>
- Institut national d'Études Démographiques (national institute of demographic research) <http://www.ined.fr>
- Persée, an electronic compilation of journals in the humanities and social sciences <http://www.persee.fr>
- Fédération de Revues en sciences humaines et sociales (federation of journals of the humanities and social sciences), <http://www.revues.org>
- Sciences Humaines magazine <http://www.scienceshumaines.com/>
- Psychoanalytic Society of Paris <http://www.spp.asso.fr>

Keywords

adolescent – advertising – analysis – anthropology – antiquity – archeology – archives – argumentation – art – behavior – biodiversity – biology – brain – cartography – change – childhood – cities – civilization – climate – clinical – cognitive – communication – conservation – context – criminology – culture and cultural heritage – demography – development – documentation – Earth – ecology – economics – education – emotion – engineering – ethnology – ethnomusicology – Europe – evolution – exchange – frontier – geography – geology – geometry – geopolitical – health – history – humanities – human resources – information – interactions – knowledge – language – law – letters – linguistics – literature – living – man – management – marketing – mediation – memory – meteorology – museum studies – neurosciences – news – organization – past – pedagogy – philosophy – physiology – politics – present – preservation – psychoanalysis – psychology – publishing – research – relations – religion – representation – science – secular – social – sociology – society – sustainable – time – theology – topography – tourism – translation – water – work – worlds – urbanism