Liberal Arts – Undergraduate live chat

Are you interested in studying a degree designed to address the complex problems you find most interesting? Speak to our Director of Student Experience and current Liberal Arts students about this transdisciplinary programme. We can show you how our unique degree can support your interests across disciplines.

Hi everyone! Welcome to the Liberal Arts live chat. I’m Gavin, deputy head of school and admissions tutor. We’ll be really happy to answer any of your questions about our program.

I’ve got a current final year student with me as well: Ceara, can you introduce yourself?

Hello! My name is Ceara and I am a fourth year Liberal Arts student. My pathway specialises in looking at the Middle Eastern and North African regions and sustainability there. I am happy to answer all of your questions :) 

Just to get warmed up: could I ask everyone to fill in the following little quiz?
Why are you interested in this unique degree programme?

Corinne Micaelli: I'm a College Counselor

katie: My current A levels are Maths, History and Art as I wanted a wide range of subjects so that I could continue enhancing many different skills I want to take forward in my education. This Liberal Arts course at Warwick appeals to me as I can continue using a multi-disciplinary approach. I did an Extended Project Qualification this year, researching to what extent art influenced society during the Italian Renaissance, to do this I looked at many different aspects of society and really enjoyed doing it. Therefore I want to do a degree where I can look at different issues using many different approaches as I believe this is a more effective way to assess issues in all areas of life.

Just pop in whatever information you'd like and we can use that as a basis to get started.

And once you've finished, if you wouldn't mind introducing yourself that'd be lovely. :)

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Would it be helpful for me to share a bit of general information about the program?

Hello, I'm Katie, unfortunately my quiz box keeps disappearing.

Gosh, sorry about that. Let me look...

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Hello, I'm Katie, unfortunately my quiz box keeps disappearing.

Is that better?
Yes, thank you.

Great. Sorry about that!

Hi - Sorry I'm late. I was in the wrong chat. I was wondering what advice you have for crafting an effective personal statement.

That's a good question. At Warwick we use the UCAS application, which requires a 4000 character statement that goes to all of the universities you apply to. However, since Liberal Arts is so different from any other programs, we ask for a second personal statement:

Hi Olivia--welcome to the livechat, and no worries at all.

Hi - Sorry I'm late. I was in the wrong chat. I was wondering what advice you have for crafting an effective personal statement.

The second statement is also 4000 characters long, and it has some prompts to help you talk about whether or not our program would be a good fit for you (and vice versa).

Oh, great. Where would I find the prompts? Are they on the website?

Hi - Sorry I'm late. I was in the wrong chat. I was wondering what advice you have for crafting an effective personal statement.

In terms of advice: the second statement lets you be a bit more personal, a bit more informal, and speak directly to us (well, to me!) about the program and how you'd like to use it.

Hi Olivia, when I applied I was focusing on articulating what I was passionate about and what drew me to Liberal Arts. My key advice is to write authentically about something you are passionate about. For me I wrote about wanting to solve complex global problems so PBL was a great fit for me :)

Oh, great. Where would I find the prompts? Are they on the website?

The prompts will come in an email sent directly to you from liberalarts@warwick.ac.uk once we receive your UCAS application. It usually takes us up to a few weeks (since it takes a while for UCAS to get stuff out to us).

Oh, I see. And thanks, Ceara - that's very helpful.

I'm glad!
Olivia—I think you’re based in New York, is that right? Doing the IB?

Or are you doing the Italian curriculum?

I am doing the Italian curriculum, with an IB certificate in Visual Arts.

Fab. That’s a really good preparation for our program. Are you especially interested in Visual Arts, or are there other areas you’d be interested in as well?

Hi, I was wondering what key things that you look for in someones initial personal statement if their personal statement is aimed towards a different course?

And thanks Katie for that information: you’ve got a really interesting collection of A-levels. It’s especially neat that you’re working on the Italian Renaissance—we have two Renaissance-ists in the department.

I am very interested in visual arts, particularly art history, but I feel like I would be better served by a more well-rounded education.

Hi, I was wondering what key things that you look for in someones initial personal statement if their personal statement is aimed towards a different course?

The first personal statement we only read for the quality of writing. The specific stuff about our program we only look for in the second statement.

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<th>SPECIALIST INTERESTS</th>
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So, our course allows you to pick modules from across the University, but we support you to develop a specific strategic focus (what we call your ‘pathway’)

Okay. Thanks, that’s helpful

Some of these are based in disciplines (so you would take 50% of your degree in that discipline), or you can do a specialist interest:
This would allow you to put together modules from a range of departments all around a specific strategic interest you’ve got. Ceara’s doing a specialist interest pathway… Ceara, could you talk about that?

Yeah, it is also worth noting that pathways can change and evolve over time. During your time at university it is only natural that you learn different things and with that your interests may change. So you can still tailor a pathway to reflect what you are doing more specifically towards the end of the degree - you aren’t tied down by your specific choice when it comes to Specialist Interests.

Absolutely, and we work really closely with students to help them work out what they want to do, and how best to accomplish that. So the specialist interest pathway is totally unique to you, and we help you to define a specific title for your pathway as well.

You can get a good idea of the structure of the course here:

So my research focuses mainly now on the Middle Eastern and North African region and I look at the politics, culture, and sustainability there. I was on a Social Justice pathway but I am currently redefining what it is called now since I am now looking more at politics and sustainability of the region. This is a conversation you can have with your tutors and they are more than happy to help.

You can see from the course structure that we work really closely with students in the first year to help them develop problem-based learning and research skills, so that they’re able to acquire the specific content knowledge they need from other modules as quickly as possible (and more effectively than traditional courses).

Okay. Thanks, that’s very helpful. On the screen are the sections in red compulsory modules?

I have to go but there will be the opportunity to speak to students in the future :)

Thanks Ceara! Just to say to everyone: you’re always welcome to come visit and meet our students anytime. :}

Okay thank you Ceara!

Thank you, Ceara!
What kinds of qualifications are you looking for in the liberal arts? Does it depend on the focus?

Okay. Thanks, that's very helpful. On the screen are the sections in red compulsory modules?

Yes, that's right. In the first year you've got the two big content modules built around complex interdisciplinary problems, and then there's Qualitative Methods—that one is required, and it's about how you do research. How to do interviews, focus groups, research ethics, etc. We also have an option for Quantitative Methods, to give students a foundation for further research in economics, sociology, psychology, biology, etc.

What kinds of qualifications are you looking for in the liberal arts? Does it depend on the focus?

Only for some very specific modules. For Liberal Arts as a whole, we look for AAA at A-level, but we don't specify particular A-levels.

What kinds of qualifications are you looking for in the liberal arts? Does it depend on the focus?

If you're interested in a pathway like Economics, then we'd ask you to take the Quantitative Methods module along with Macro and Micro economics in the first year. Or if you want to do Global Sustainable Development, we'd ask you to take at least two of the first-year modules they offer.

In the second year what do you do in the consumption and sustainability modules?

But in short: no, and we'll work with you to sort out your first year module choices to make sure you can do whatever you like in second or third year.

What kinds of qualifications are you looking for in the liberal arts? Does it depend on the focus?

Consumption and Sustainability are both built around two parts of the same basic problem: the need to consume and the need to sustain resources. So in Consumption, students work on all kinds of ideas linked to consumption:
In the second year what do you do in the consumption and sustainability modules?

So you'll work on aspects of pop art, grime music, marketing/advertising... sociological approaches to commodification, historical case studies, all sorts.

In the second year what do you do in the consumption and sustainability modules?

In Sustainability, you'll look at the other side of the coin. My colleague Tim works a lot on "systems thinking" as a way to map complex sustainability issues, so he'll work with you on that particular methodology by looking at corporate sustainability, logistics, policy analysis... things like that.

Okay, thanks that sounds really interesting. How many students are able to take the year abroad option each year, and what do students do in their year abroad?

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We're SO into study abroad. We have a whole range of dedicated partners in addition to the dozens of university options.
Okay, thanks that sounds really interesting. How many students are able to take the year abroad option each year, and what do students do in their year abroad?

We’ve had students go all over. Ceara spent half the year in Hong Kong and half the year at Leuphana University in Germany, who we do a lot of research with on liberal education.

Okay, thanks that sounds really interesting. How many students are able to take the year abroad option each year, and what do students do in their year abroad?

However, you can also do a sandwiched work placement year instead of a year studying abroad. We have a dedicated placements officer who works with our students to get them work experience, placements, and graduate jobs.

(some info here)

So yes, about half our students do a study abroad year or a year in a work placement as part of their degree. This makes it a four year degree instead of three.

Thanks, and what style of examination do your students have?
Awesome question. We believe in diverse forms of assessments that reflect the real academic and professional activities you’ll undertake after graduation:

Thanks, and what style of examination do your students have?

So, we assess continuously with a mix of assignments. Podcasts, videos, policy briefs, lots and lots of groupwork... extended research projects, conference presentations, all sorts.

Thanks, and what style of examination do your students have?

We’re also very happy to help students design their own assessments. These can be creative (I had a student do a dissertation with a dance component in addition to the formal academic research bit), or applied (I’ve got a dissertation student working on a toolkit for media outlets reporting on repatriation of extremist fighters from the Middle East.

Oh wow that’s really diverse. Also, how many students do you take on a year and how many apply to this course?

Thanks, and what style of examination do your students have?

So we always give students lots of chances to try things out, experiment, learn, adjust—we never allow single assessments worth more than 50% (unless it’s a portfolio type of thing), so you don’t have so much pressure to smash it on one exam.

Are most assessments group based?

Oh wow that’s really diverse. Also, how many students do you take on a year and how many apply to this course?

We cap at 35 per year, but we try to keep it closer to 30. With about 100 students in the program, we really want to make sure we have the space and time to build special relationships with our students (and so they can learn how to work with each other in a way that other students typically don’t).

Are most assessments group based?

No, most are individual, but we always try to work in group assessments as well—since the professional world is almost all about groupwork, we want to give you lots of practice and training (and give you examples to draw on for job interviews)
OPTIONAL MODULES

- The Apocalyptic Imaginary
- Posthumous Geographies I: Underworlds
- Posthumous Geographies II: Paradises
- Utopia: Text, Theory, Practice
- Quantitative Research Methods: Understanding Relationships
- Impact Evaluation: Frameworks for Implementing and Assessing Transdisciplinary Interventions
- Problems in Governance: The European Union
- The Monarch: The role of the Head of State in the British Political System

Naturally there are different assessments in all our modules (which you can see here)

And, of course, you'll have more traditional assessments in optional modules that you might take outside our department/

I have to go to class, but thank you for all the information. Much appreciated!

Of course! You're always welcome to get in touch with any questions—anytime.

Do your students find they struggle with their optional modules outside the department because they are not doing that degree?

Not particularly. This is the key difference between our program and other LA programs in the US/UK. We spend so much time with our first years showing them how to take on a different kind of role in their optional modules—instead of worrying about not having all the same content knowledge, we teach them how to 1) acquire quickly what they actually need, 2) deploy what they do have in a flexible way, and 3) play a leadership role in the classroom (or work environment). Those are really the key skills of problem-based learning.

Do your students find they struggle with their optional modules outside the department because they are not doing that degree?

Over 90% of our students last year graduated with a 2.1 or a 1, and they tend to do as well or better in individual modules.

Do your students find they struggle with their optional modules outside the department because they are not doing that degree?

(at or above average, I should have said!)
Do your students find they struggle with their optional modules outside the department because they are not doing that degree?

The main issue our students tend to have is getting bored in lectures—we don't do any in our department, since all we do are student-led interactive workshops. So our students sometimes find more traditional modes of teaching frustrating.

Okay thanks, that's really useful, I think what stood out to me about this course is the fact it gives you skills that are useful in a real working environment.

How do you run your workshops and what do they entail, do you have any examples?

Thanks! Yes, for sure. In my Art and Revolution workshops (after the first few weeks of training), students break into 3 groups: one doing primary research in the archives, one doing theory, one doing critical research. They all then come together to brief each other and create presentations analyzing the primary sources they found.

So students really are teaching themselves, working through the implications of their analysis (and the importance of the materials they found), and I help to facilitate and guide the discussion, reflection, etc.

That's just about our time up... any last questions I can help with?

No I think that's everything. Thanks, this has given me a lot of information.

For sure, happy to. And you're always welcome to come by the department and sit in on classes if you like.

Okay thank you. If I have any more questions how do I get in touch? Do I have your email?

You can email me at g.e.schwartz.leeper@warwick.ac.uk, or email liberalarts@warwick.ac.uk and we'll get right back to you.

Okay thanks Gavin!

Absolutely. Great to meet you, and best of luck!