

INTERDISCIPLINARY HUMAN STUDIES (IHS)

A General Introduction

Only three universities in the world have a Department of Interdisciplinary Human Studies (at the time of writing you'd have to go to Louisiana or Kyoto for the others) and *only* the University of Bradford's B.A. (honours) degree course *explicitly* combines the established arts subjects of Philosophy and Literature with the newer social sciences of Psychology and Sociology. This degree course was awarded 24/24 for its teaching quality, which is the highest possible standard.

The course appeals to people with genuine sense of inquiry and curiosity who, whilst wishing to study at an academic level, are intent on extending their range beyond conventional disciplinary boundaries. Such students find that their grasp of all four subject areas is enhanced by understanding the links between them. Interdisciplinary Human Studies at Bradford thus attracts students both at the beginning of their academic careers and also more mature students who may wish to place an already familiar discipline into the broader context of interdisciplinarity.

Many of the greatest and well-known thinkers are interdisciplinary polymaths - Freud, Nietzsche, Weber and Marx to name a few. They are interested in interdisciplinary study for what it can tell us about people – all of them valued academic study as an insight into the way human beings think and behave both individually and socially. A degree in Interdisciplinary Human Studies thus examines the history and nature of human thought and behaviour and the complementary frameworks offered by literature, psychology, sociology and philosophy for exploring human potential.

In developing an understanding of people informed by a grasp of all four strands of contemporary academic thought, Bradford IHS graduates are especially well equipped to address the complex issues facing today's society. While many go on to become teachers and work in education, religion or law, Interdisciplinary Human Studies at Bradford is also rewarding for anyone who have a deep general interest in how the life of the mind affects our everyday lives. IHS explores questions at the very heart of what it means to be human in the 21st Century.

In taking a multi-disciplinary approach to social science and the humanities, our students receive a broad and flexible education, whilst at the same time being able to specialise in a particular subject area over their three years of study.

IHS gives a differentiated and thorough understanding of philosophy, psychology, literature and sociology, but at the same time does not force you to commit at the outset to a particular subject. It will be possible at various stages in your three years to specialize in a certain area based on your interests and academic performance. This is a course of study that will enable you to keep your options open for a little while OR make a commitment to one particular direction.

IHS is also ideally suited to postgraduate study due to the quality of its teaching and a strong emphasis on high academic standards.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN ACTION: A STUDENT GUIDE

It is easy to find a simple dictionary definition of the word ‘interdisciplinary’:

Involving more than one branch of learning

That is at least a start but it does not take us very far in understanding how the idea functions in our Interdisciplinary Human Studies BA. So we might add

To study important and complex human problems that can’t be fully understood by any one academic discipline.

But just how do we use the four disciplines in IHS – English, philosophy, psychology and sociology - in an interdisciplinary way? And more to the point, how does the student experience this interdisciplinarity? Broadly, there are **three** main levels of interdisciplinarity in the IHS degree. At the **first level** if you would encounter interdisciplinary elements in the way we study each of our single disciplines. In other words, even where our modules focus on one discipline, we always try to study that discipline in a broader context and to stress its interaction with other disciplines.

So, for example, if you were studying a first-year English module on the 19th century you would read set books by leading authors such as Jane Austen, Dickens or Kipling and closely analyze them. Through this you would be getting the kind of sound introduction to studying English Literature that you would expect on an English degree elsewhere. But you would also learn about a great deal of contextual material: how women’s role was perceived in the nineteenth century, what life was like in the crowded industrial towns, what were the arguments for and against the British Empire, and so on. You would then be able to link your knowledge of the book and of its background, both learning about the rich, human context of literature and enriching your appreciation of the text itself.

But in a degree with the word ‘interdisciplinary’ in its title you would certainly expect more than this. This brings us on to the **second level** of interdisciplinarity in IHS.

From the second semester of the first year onwards – after you have gained a grounding in the four disciplines in your first semester - we mount a series of interdisciplinary modules which are taught by more than one tutor and which use different disciplinary perspectives to study the same topic. Each of the succeeding semesters has its own interdisciplinary module. At present the five interdisciplinary modules are:

Year 1 Semester 2

Rhetoric and Language: Literary and philosophical approaches to the use of the English language in the media, politics, academic discourse and imaginative writing.

Year 2 Semester 1

Group Project

Year 2 Semester 2

Beliefs and Ideals

Year 3 Semester 1

Nature and Culture

Year 3 Semester 2

Evolution

(for a description, see below)

The **third level** of interdisciplinarity is in the final year dissertation, a substantial, independent work of 12-15,000 words. Of course some students may just want to specialize in their dissertation completely in one discipline – perhaps because they have a very specific career in mind – and that is an equally valid choice to make. You do not have to be interdisciplinary in your dissertation. But many of our students are interested in topics – in morality, politics, ethics, religion or the arts – which can best be explored by using a range of disciplines to bear. If you wanted to study, say, the encounter between western and eastern cultural values, the role of gender in education, the arguments for and against euthanasia or the meanings of Shakespearean tragedy, then it would help in all these cases to have a broad perspective drawing on different disciplines.

Naturally, all students will have the help of an individual academic supervisor with their dissertation, but there is a great deal of scope for adventurous exploration, and to make your own, fresh interdisciplinary synthesis. The dissertation can be the high point of the three years on the IHS degree and also something of permanent value to keep after a student has graduated. And, to end on a practical note, potential employers may well find the IHS dissertation a proof of something most of them look for above all – the capacity to take responsible initiatives and to think for yourself. More broadly still, an interdisciplinary approach can remain useful throughout one's life when handling complex challenges, whether these arise at work or in one's own personal life..

Why are there five pathways through IHS?

You will notice that when you apply to study Interdisciplinary Human Studies there are five 'course codes'. These are: LQVO BA/IH, Q300 BA/Eng, V500 BA/Phil, C800 BA/Psych, L300 BA/Soc.

LQVO BA/IH:

This applies if you think that you would like to maintain an interdisciplinary pathway throughout the three years of your degree. If you choose this code it DOES NOT mean that you will be restricted in any way, or be unable to specialise in one particular discipline. You are simply saying that you prefer to opt for ALL FOUR DISCIPLINES for the full three years.

If you already feel that ONE PARTICULAR discipline appeals to you more than another, go for one of these options:

English: **Q300 BA/Eng**

Philosophy: **V500 BA/Phil**

Psychology: **C800 BA/Psych**

Sociology: **L300 BA/Soc**

Please choose a particular subject course code if you already have a preference. This gives us some indication of where your particular interests may lie and means that subject specialists can be made aware of student numbers on particular modules for your third year.

It will not mean that you are restricted in any way if you wish to change direction when you become more familiar with all four disciplines.

Your final degree will be in Interdisciplinary Human Studies, but you may develop a specialism which you will wish to emphasise to future employers, or in pursuing your Masters or Doctorate at a later date.

Our students are highly prized in today's competitive job market, since they are well-educated, flexible, competent, communicative and confident people... all personal skills which will remain at a premium in our fast-changing world.

Short Descriptions of some of our Interdisciplinary Modules

1. Beliefs and Ideals

This module focuses on the relevance of the Enlightenment to the contemporary world. Beliefs and Ideals investigates and assesses the tensions in our modern world between the forces of so-called 'progress' such as science, secularism, technology, positivism etc. and the anti-Enlightenment critique stemming from Nietzsche, Weber and others, right up to contemporary post-modernist thinkers. Thus, while we enjoy the apparent 'benefits' of science, technology and modern democracy – we must also accept our subjectivity as human beings who not only have material needs but require a framework of meaning to our existence as well.

2. Nature and Culture

Nature and Culture investigates what it means (if anything) to be human. Students learn about both Western and Eastern philosophical traditions and their notions of human nature. This module also focuses on specific areas of human activity that can shed light on human nature. This has recently included a philosophical and sociological study of humour, posing the straightforward but profound question – why do we laugh?

3. Contemporary Debates in Society and Culture

Here, students are given a critical account of the most important sociological issues in contemporary society. These include the Risk Society, Nationalisms, Post-structuralist Feminism, Late-Modernity and Rationalization. This module enjoys immense popularity with students and will equip you with a broad, but thorough understanding of how people live in today's world.

4. Group Module

This second year module prioritises the practical skills of group work and a group presentation forms the core of the assessment. Students complete the Group Module with the ability for discussion, debate, and skills for communicating and researching an academic subject. The module provides solid and practical experience for a range of career applications.