Liberal Arts
Undergraduate study
Why study liberal arts at Bristol?

Liberal arts combines in-depth study of a single discipline with interdisciplinary exploration of other subjects. The Faculty of Arts at Bristol is home to world-leading researchers who are passionately committed to the ideals of liberal education. It is a place where an interdisciplinary outlook comes naturally and is practised on a daily basis. Our Liberal Arts courses aim to capture the best of Bristol’s education and research and make it available in an innovative and intellectually adventurous environment.

In year one, you will have flexibility of choice to discover new subjects. Your studies will also benefit from the many opportunities afforded by the rich cultural life of the University and the city of Bristol.

You can choose from either a three-year BA or an integrated, four-year master’s degree with study abroad (MLibArts). Each course offers its own advantages and distinctiveness. You will also take part in the Bristol Futures programme, which builds knowledge and experience in the fields of innovation and enterprise, global citizenship and sustainable development.

Become an arts student at Bristol and you will be joining a diverse group of staff, students and subjects united by a fascination in exploring how humans express their experiences. You will have opportunities to explore an impressively wide range of subjects with an average of ten or more contact hours per week. Through our innovative curriculum we ensure you develop the key skills and attributes employers seek while receiving a first-class education.
In the first two years you will take a combination of Liberal Arts core units and a choice of optional units taken from the full range of disciplines offered within the Faculty of Arts: bristol.ac.uk/arts/about/schools.

The core units are:
• Critical Writing in the Humanities
• Reading the Past
• Experiencing the Aesthetic
• Ideas and Society.

These units introduce key concepts, skills and methods within the humanities through the study of classic texts, seminal ideas and overarching themes. You will also be required to take the core unit Arts Students Count, intended to develop your quantitative skills. Finally, you will begin or continue your studies in either an ancient or a modern language.

In your first year, optional units will allow you to explore new areas and to lay a foundation for your choice of subject pathway at the end of the year. The subject pathway will be one of the disciplines taught by a department in the Faculty of Arts. There is also a cross-departmental pathway in Medieval Studies. At least one quarter of your credit points are taken in the pathway.

Students who choose to do the three-year BA Liberal Arts will spend their final year in Bristol, where one of their required units will be The Public Role of the Humanities (available as an option in MLibArts). Those who choose the four-year master’s (MLibArts) will spend their third year abroad, subject to satisfactory academic progress.

In the final year you will earn two thirds of the required credits by choosing a combination of units from your subject pathway and other options. The remaining credits will be gained through the completion of a dissertation in a topic of your choice. In this year particularly (although not exclusively), there will be possibilities to work with external partners, combining such experience with academic assessment.

‘The Liberal Arts degree equips you with the necessary skills to specialise in your personal interests with a broader perspective. Both the core units in the first two years and my year abroad in Salamanca have allowed me to develop this open-minded and interdisciplinary approach when studying modules from my history pathway and while making progress in Spanish.’

Emily (MLibArts Liberal Arts with Study Abroad)

We will ensure that you graduate with experience in formal writing, presentation skills and in using digital formats and other media to present knowledge, ideas and arguments. You will be experienced in working individually and in groups, and in making connections with and communicating to audiences beyond the University.

Throughout the Liberal Arts degree there is a strong emphasis on forging links, developing skills and taking responsibility. You will be encouraged to take advantage of the many cultural and intellectual activities offered across the University by incorporating them into your assessed work.

Guidance and assessment
You will receive personal guidance throughout the course, particularly with respect to the choice of options and the development of a coherent academic agenda. If you study abroad you will receive advice from both Bristol and the partner institution in selecting units of study that will develop and extend your knowledge and skills. It is anticipated that the yearly cohorts will develop a strong sense of identity and mutual support, fostered through the core units, group meetings and activities.

Assessment will be varied and closely tailored to the learning objectives of units. In addition to traditional essays and examinations, projects, presentations, portfolios, peer review exercises and online contributions are some of the alternative modes of assessment.
The skills that arts students traditionally bring to the workplace are now, more than ever, valued in every part of the employment market. Our students go on to succeed in careers as diverse as the subjects they study while here – commerce, tech start-ups, law, accountancy, theatre, museums, publishing, the charity sector, journalism, politics, education and international relations, to name just a few. Arts graduates also go on to work in sectors perhaps not immediately associated with arts disciplines, such as engineering and IT.

To ensure arts graduates continue to be appealing to employers, the Bristol Skills Framework enables students to recognise their development in areas such as academic writing, problem solving, group work and individual and group presenting. We will equip you with the tools to market your skills, your achievement and your potential in whatever career path you choose to pursue after you graduate.

Our liberal arts degrees offer high academic standards, strong disciplinary grounding, interdisciplinary breadth, innovative methods and emphasis on engagement beyond the University. This unique combination of knowledge, understanding and skills makes your degree especially attractive to employers.

The interdisciplinary nature of my degree has given me the chance to explore a wide variety of topics, while giving me the tools of critical thinking, analysis and problem solving. I hope to leave university with a high level of employability. Personal tutors are very supportive with both personal and academic issues.’

Vicky (BA Liberal Arts)
Contact us

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If you have any questions about courses, applications or any aspect of being a UK or international student at Bristol please contact the Enquiries Team.

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University guide to the city of Bristol
bristol.ac.uk/citybristol

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Photography
Liz Eve (Fotohaus), Patrick Metcalfe, Dan Rowley, Nick Smith
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