



# The Humanities at NYU: Tradition and Innovation



THE  
**HUMANITIES  
INITIATIVE**

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY



Since its founding 180 years ago, New York University has been a pioneer of higher education in the United States, feeding the aspirations and creativity of a modern democratic society. Now, as observed by President John Sexton, “as a 21st-century research university, NYU is nothing less than the celebration, continuation, and expansion of what defines us as human — our intellectual and expressive experience and our thirst for more.”

Albert Gallatin shocked the world of educators in 1830 by announcing at an international “Convention of Scientific and Learned Gentlemen” that a new nation demanded a new kind of university, one very different from the Columbias and Princetons offering primarily classical and theological education for an elite. This would be a university that would “elevate standards of learning in the United States,” “diffuse knowledge” and render education “more accessible to the community at large.” A former Secretary of the Treasury under Thomas Jefferson, Gallatin shaped the institution that we now fondly know as NYU, broadening the classical curriculum, widening access to higher education, and striving to make college relevant to the demands of urban life.

Thanks to Gallatin’s vision, NYU has long been a protean institution, building new schools and programs to serve its evolving educational mission. It was, for instance, among the first universities to open a law school and a medical school, in 1835 and 1841, respectively. The Graduate School of Arts and Science was founded in 1886, making New York University only the second academic institution in the United States to grant Ph.D.s.

Particularly in the last two decades, NYU has become a world leader in scholarly research in the humanities. Again, in the words of John Sexton, “the humanities at NYU reflect the university’s profound commitment to subjecting ideas to scrutiny and review in the broadest, deepest and most immediate forum, yielding a rich array of conversations and criticism.” The Partners’ gift to the Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS) in 2003 allowed for the hiring of more than 60 faculty in humanities disciplines in FAS and the Institute of Fine Arts. The creation of The Institute for the Study of the Ancient World in 2008 has also contributed to NYU’s growing excellence in the humanities. The Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development and The Gallatin School of Individualized Study have also added faculty in humanities fields ranging from media studies to late antiquity and the history of science. The Medical School is currently exploring new curriculum in the area of Medical Humanities – and the Stern School of Business, the Law School, and the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service offer collaborative programs in areas such as business and legal ethics and philanthropy. In an era when advanced study in the liberal arts has increasingly been challenged by policy makers and critics on both sides of the Atlantic, NYU is leading traditional disciplines in new directions and forging new fields of interdisciplinary inquiry.

In the following pages, you will learn more about the commitment of NYU’s faculty and students to their research, to the broader public, to professional education, and to the global community. NYU’s humanities scholars deepen traditional approaches and open new paths to the study of meaning and expression, of past worlds and diverse cultures. Across eighteen schools and institutes and over a dozen sites abroad, scholars in the humanities at NYU cultivate new knowledge about every aspect of human experience, from ancient times to the contemporary moment.



## BELLEVUE LITERARY PRESS AND THE MEDICAL HUMANITIES

NYU is at the forefront of the emerging medical humanities, the exploration of the way that the humanities and the medical sciences engage each other and deepen our understanding of culture, the body, and the mind. The Bellevue Literary Press at NYU's Medical School is directly responsible for much of this interaction, or as Editorial Director Erika Goldman says, "Bellevue Literary Press focuses on bringing together and promoting a dialogue between the 'Two Cultures' of the arts and the sciences through literary publishing." Bellevue was the publisher of the 2010 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, Paul Harding's *Tinkers* – the first work of fiction from a small press to win the Pulitzer in almost thirty years. The Medical School also sponsors the *Bellevue Literary Review*, a literary magazine under the editorship of Dr. Danielle Ofri which publishes twice yearly and features short stories, poetry, and essays on health and healing, illness and disease.

In the spring of 2010, the Humanities Initiative and Bellevue Literary Press hosted a pair of panels on the medical humanities, ranging from the history of illness metaphor in literature and the complexities of the doctor-patient relationship, to the role of the visual arts in medicine and the history of *Gray's Anatomy* – the former featuring remarks by Laura Ferguson, the Medical School's first artist-in-residence. The Humanities Initiative has also facilitated ongoing scholarly conversation on the medical humanities. Coordinated by Erika Goldman, Prof. Jerry Lowenstein (Medical School) and Bradley Lewis (Gallatin), The Humanities Initiative's Working Research Group on Health, Humanities, and Culture "fostered the creation of a community that has brought people together from the Medical School and the Square, allowing for an ongoing dialogue that has enriched all of our individual projects," according to Goldman.

"The humanities allow us to better interact with each other and show us that it is this interaction between seemingly disparate people and ideas that lets us glimpse an enduring web of connection ... To study the humanities is to see the magic in reality."

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