Liberal Studies

Choose from specializations in American studies, Chicago studies, history, religious and ethical studies and interdisciplinary studies.
Expand your world and your mind.

MASTER OF ARTS IN LIBERAL STUDIES

The part-time Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program cuts a wide swath through the humanities and social sciences, studying the work of some of the world’s most powerful thinkers.

Philosophy, history, literature, art, natural and social science. Minds like Shakespeare, Darwin, Freud and Aristotle. What ideas will change the way you view the world, or create new opportunities for you?

Northwestern University’s Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (MALS) program cuts a wide swath through the humanities and social sciences. It is designed to provide a challenging intellectual experience that will expand your horizons and help you develop the knowledge and skills essential for professional development in diverse fields — or for advanced graduate study.

Most MALS students find that the key benefit of the program is its focus on the critical thinking skills that are necessary in today’s professional world. From teaching, advertising and law, to business, the arts, and any number of other fields, professionals with broad-based knowledge are well-positioned to excel if they can analyze and synthesize complex information, weigh evidence, challenge assumptions, and navigate competing considerations and perspectives in order to solve real problems.

The MALS program — by enriching students’ understanding of a broad array of social and cultural issues while improving their ability to analyze, write and complete research — is excellent preparation for the intellectual demands of professional life.

Secondary-school teachers can gain a competitive edge by deepening their subject-area knowledge. For other students, the program can clarify a next career stage or provide excellent preparation for further graduate study.

Seminar-style, small group discussions — not traditional lectures — form the core experience of the MALS program. Courses are designed around weekly readings drawn from subjects such as history, religion, philosophy, art, literature, film and more. You will find that the discussions — and your written responses to the readings — challenge and strengthen your critical faculties as you enrich your understanding of vitally important social and cultural issues.
Nine courses need to be completed to earn the MA in Liberal Studies degree. Students need to complete two core courses, six elective courses and a capstone project. The core courses consist of IPLS 410 Introduction to Cultural Analysis and one MALS seminar course (IPLS 401). Students may take electives in subject areas such as philosophy, religion, history, art history and literature.

**CORE COURSES** (2 COURSES)
- IPLS 401 Seminar in Liberal Studies
- IPLS 410 Introduction to Cultural Analysis

This course introduces students to interdisciplinary cultural analysis through an intellectual history of critical theorists and thinkers. Through close reading, seminar discussion and presentations, students develop their critical analysis skills. These courses are required of all MALS students within the first year of study.

**OPTIONAL SPECIALIZATIONS**
Students who wish to lend more structure to their MALS experience may complete a specialization in:
- American Studies
- Chicago Studies
- History
- Religious and Ethical Studies
- Interdisciplinary Studies

A specialization may be especially beneficial to educators, students who are thinking of going on to a PhD program, or anyone who wants to combine interdisciplinary methods with specific subjects.

Students complete four thematically linked courses to earn a specialization.

**ELECTIVES** (6 COURSES)
Students may take electives in subject areas such as philosophy, religion, history, art history and literature. See sps.northwestern.edu/mals for details and course listings.

**INDEPENDENT STUDIES**
Students also have an opportunity to take up to two independent studies, which count as elective credit towards their graduate degree. Independent studies are customized courses of study undertaken by a single student under the guidance of an instructor. Students often use these opportunities to springboard into thesis work.

**CAPSTONE PROJECT** (1 COURSE)
Students sign up for the final course in the program during the term in which they start their master’s essay. The capstone project for the MALS program is a thesis (45 to 75 double-spaced pages) written under the supervision of a graduate faculty member. The capstone project presents an opportunity to research and explore a topic thoroughly. Students often elect to expand a seminar paper from a previous course. With the approval of the program director, students can create an interdisciplinary project rather than writing a traditional thesis.
Applicants must hold a bachelor’s degree from a regionally accredited institution or its foreign equivalent. A competitive undergraduate record that indicates strong academic ability is required. Work, internship, or research experience is highly desirable but not a requirement. The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is not required, but strong scores bolster chances for admission. For more information visit sps.northwestern.edu/mals.

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

- Online application — access from sps.northwestern.edu/mals and then click on “Start Application Process”
- $75 nonrefundable application fee
- Sealed copies of official transcripts from ALL attended colleges and universities.
- Official transcripts must arrive in our office in the original sealed envelope issued by the institution. Northwestern University School of Professional Studies accepts electronic transcripts from U.S. institutions via secure electronic transcript providers. Consult with your institution to see if they are part of a secure e-delivery network. All electronic transcripts should be sent to spsadmissions@northwestern.edu. Please note transcripts are not accepted by fax or personal email.
- Applicants with international transcripts must request an official course-by-course evaluation of transcripts from a NACES member such as WES or ECE. A course-by-course evaluation will translate courses, degrees and grades to U.S. equivalency.
- Two letters of recommendation focusing on academic achievement and writing ability
- Statement of purpose (see following)
- Writing sample (see following)
- Current resume or curriculum vitae

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Applicants must submit a 300-word statement of purpose explaining how the degree program will help them meet their academic and professional goals. Applicants who did not major in liberal arts or a related field should explain how other academic and nonacademic experiences have prepared them to undertake graduate study in this program.

For detailed admission information visit sps.northwestern.edu/mals
For application assistance call 312-503-2579 or email mals@northwestern.edu.
“Instead of having to focus on one discipline like religion, history or literature, I was able to create my own track of courses that integrated all of these fields. I could also take classes in other colleges and graduate departments at a university with an outstanding reputation.”

Stephanie Cisneros (MALS ’16) International Student Advisor at Northwestern University

“There is a highly supportive environment here. SPS has helped me tremendously.”

Megan Miskiewicz (MALS ’16)
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