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Humanities Research Group "Why Humanities?"  
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Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

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2016

## 2016 'Why Humanities?' Winner

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*University of Windsor*

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## Why Humanities? Contest

Winner 2016

### Why Humanities?

Layale Bazzi

Hi, I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> year Physics undergraduate student, and I believe the humanities are a vital component to my degree. You may be amused that a student majoring in a technical science is preaching about the importance of the humanities, but hear me out.

I work with complex mathematical equations that deal with the reality we live in. Day in and day out, I am differentiating, integrating, rearranging and solving equations that describe the physical world around us and enable me to predict the outcome of a phenomenon with astonishing accuracy. I study the relative motion between objects in motion and at rest, and I can tell you how much you'll age if you go off on a two-way ten-year journey in space at sixty percent the speed of light.

It's eight years, if you were curious.

What I can't tell you, are the ethical implications of going on such a flight. There is no mathematical equation to describe the psychological and sociological ramifications of leaving home behind for ten years and returning as a completely different person. I can't derive a formula that can explain the politics of conducting such a flight and relate it to what morals it corresponds to; that's not in the job

description of a physicist. All I can provide are facts about nature, and not human nature.

That's why humanities are important to me.

Humanities give me a frame to work in. Philosophers provide moral guidance to my equations and can evaluate my experiments to ensure that I am keeping humanity's best interests at heart without harm. Literature allows me to relay my information using metaphors and alluding to classical works in order to explain to the general public exactly what I am doing – much thanks to Douglas Adams, author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* – without resorting to fancy buzzwords.

The study of humanities provides a bridge between the infamous crazy scientist and the general public. Take for example *National Geographic* – the majority of the content has been made accessible for amateur science enthusiasts while still retaining the correct information. Without humanities, there would be a severe gap between my field of study and the rest of the world.

And so, while the answer to “Life, the Universe and Everything” is not forty-two, it is somewhere between the Standard Model and Plato's dialogues. On behalf of scientists everywhere, thank you.