Founded in 2014, AAI is an independent scholarly institute dedicated to providing supplementary humanistic education to the Harvard intellectual community.

We fulfill our mission by posing questions about human purpose and meaning that young people need to confront at some point in their education. Our approach is designed to open up students to the value of deep and broad thinking and to stimulate the spirit of intellectual adventure that is too often checked, insufficiently stimulated, and frequently misdirected.

Our programs, guides, and recommendations are designed to motivate students to challenge themselves in intellectually ambitious ways: to ask better questions, to spend time with classic works, to explore diverse areas of thought and inquiry, and to make time for genuinely independent thought despite the everyday busyness.
The Great Conversation: How Should We Live?

AAI's flagship program, a four semester long chronological survey through the finest books in the Western tradition that address this ethical question. How Should We Live is a question that lies right at the core of human identity. Its ever elusive answer has been pursued, examined and fought over throughout various traditions for millennia.

Dr. Arthur Brooks
Harvard Professor of Practice & AAI Fellow

"The Abigail Adams Institute helped to amplify my work on human dignity and potential for all. Collaborating closely with scholars inside and outside of Harvard, Dr. Petranovich brings new perspectives to Harvard's campus, on topics ranging from politics and business to philosophy and culture."

Abrania Marrero
Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

"In our work- and student-centered lives, it is often so difficult for us to take the time to explore the things of true meaning and substance in this world. The things that go beyond, that satisfy our human need for wisdom, beauty, and goodness. TGC offers a place to grapple with those questions, build a community, and encounter much-needed respite as we pursue TRUTH together."

Great Ideas Debates

The Great Ideas Debate invites students, faculty, and alumni to hear different and opposing perspectives on subjects of perennial importance but which do not get the attention they deserve at the modern University.
Questions That Matter

Common Good in the Age of Trump
Summer Seminar

This five-day intensive seminar, open to rising high school seniors through college freshman, examines the roots of our situation exploring fundamental tensions around such phenomena as freedom, self-interest, authority, dogma, and common good. Students study the ideas and perspectives behind modern liberal society and how different ways of thinking have shaped what the common good looks like today.

Man and Woman, Body and Soul in the Western Tradition
Summer Seminar

Questions surrounding sex and gender, and sexual equality and freedom, are especially fraught these days, both personally and politically. This course seeks to get behind the polemics to understand the metaphysical and philosophical roots of these questions in the Western tradition.

Ella Starkman-Hynes
McGill University

"Studying at the Abigail Adams Institute was a profoundly formative experience for me. The summer seminars I attended in 2018 – "The American Proposition" and "Capital and the Good Life" – gave me the opportunity to engage in discussion and debate on philosophy, politics, and the economy with scholars and students from around the world. In fact, being welcomed into this community inspired me to continue my studies in the United States, and set me on the path to pursuing a Master's degree in History at Yale University."
**A Course Guide for the Harvard Humanist**

Your college years can be a time of grounded and well-ordered intellectual growth. This course guide is meant to be useful to any Harvard student who wants to make the best use of the College’s academic resources in the humanities. It highlights some of Harvard's truly outstanding courses and teachers. It also provides a framework for thinking about what a humanistic education can look like in the twenty-first century, and it offers practical advice on how to get such an education at a large modern research university like Harvard.

The courses are included in the guide based on recommendations from students and young alumni who believe that becoming an educated person requires proper inclination and diligent work on behalf of the student.

**Mary Broker '20**

"I highly recommend [Religion 40](#) for those of any religious background. The readings are diverse and fascinating; the course serves as an excellent introduction to important Christian texts."

**David Brannon '21**

"[Humanities 10](#) is designed with freshmen in mind, so plenty of guidance is given for essays and reading comprehension. The opportunity to interact with high-level faculty around a varied, expansive curriculum is unparalleled."

**Weekend Seminars**

AAI's weekend seminars allow for a short, intense, deep dive into a particular text, philosophy, or theme. Past seminar topics have included Capitalism and the Good Life, Eric Voegelin, Personalism, and the American Proposition.

**Victor Mezacapa**

Harvard College '18

"Student like me and my friends have a sense of what’s missing from the curriculum. We can go to AAI and oftentimes they can fill a lot of the gaps in our education that we want filled, but that we can't necessarily fill ourselves."
Building Community

Student-Led Discussion Groups

Each summer, and often during the school year, students have the opportunity to create and lead their own discussion groups. Topics have ranged from Augustine and C.S. Lewis to modern politics and the campus learning culture.

Gabrielle Landry
Harvard College '22

"The AAI Student fellowship program has given me a chance to discuss with a group of people of diverse backgrounds, ages, and educational/professional levels. During each discussion I can ask questions, present my ideas, and listen to others' thoughts in a respectful, intellectual, and no-pressure community of friends."

Annual Christmas Party

Abigail Adams' Birthday

Gabrielle Landry
Harvard College '22

"The AAI Student fellowship program has given me a chance to discuss with a group of people of diverse backgrounds, ages, and educational/professional levels. During each discussion I can ask questions, present my ideas, and listen to others' thoughts in a respectful, intellectual, and no-pressure community of friends."
**Medical Humanities Fellowship**

Through a rotating series of annual topics, the Medical Humanities Fellowship of the Abigail Adams Institute aims to help undergraduate and post-baccalaureate pre-medical students reflect on the “big questions” in medicine—the meaning of suffering, the dignity of the human person, the physician-patient relationship, and more.

Often these students are immersed in the sciences with few opportunities for engagement with the medical humanities, and this fellowship is AAI’s attempt to help develop well-rounded, humanistic physicians who are familiar with the breadth of humanistic and ethical concerns so central to the practice of good medicine. Daniel E. Lage M.D. is the current director of the fellowship.

**Scholars Workshop**

Forum for faculty fellows, post-docs, and graduate students to present their works-in-progress. AAI built this forum to be the place where “first feedback” is provided to scholars’ nascent projects.

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**Joseph Barisas**
Harvard College ’21

"The Abigail Adams Institute has greatly supported, guided, and inspired me in my intellectual journey at Harvard. Though their mentorship and endless resources, I have become a greater pursuer of knowledge for its own sake and have been growing in all areas of my life ever since."

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**Dimitrios Halikias**
Graduate Student in the Harvard Department of Government

"With the generous support of the Abigail Adams Institute, our political theory working group concluded a successful Fall 2019 semester. Our working group’s purpose is to foster the fraternal, intellectual, and professional development of graduate students in political theory at Harvard. The Institute has facilitated everything from brainstorming discussions to paper workshops to preparation for dissertation research."

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**Daniel Lage, MD, MSc**

"As Graduate students and professional students, the Abigail Adams Institute gives us the opportunity to get connected to people and to ideas."