The University of Virginia was established in 1819 by Thomas Jefferson as one of our nation’s first public institution of higher education. Under Jefferson’s guidance the university became the first in the United States to offer studies in a broad spectrum of academic interests such as astronomy, architecture, political science, botany and philosophy, radically innovative compared to only three allowed specializations at other universities: medicine, law and religion. Rooted in liberal ideas he affirmed that “This institution will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind. For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it.” As one of the founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson wrote the Constitution of the United States of America based on his liberal arts education. The founding father’s careful study of past civilization’s experiment with governmental structures taught them the principles that they wanted to incorporate in their new government. For example, Jefferson’s study of the ancient Greek philosophy proved that Democracy triumphs aristocracy. Based on the knowledge that the liberal arts include *history*, geography, literature, linguistics and philosophy we can conclude that democracy is based off of the liberal arts.

This broad field of study helps an individual gain a deeper understanding of the "water we humans swim in", as David Foster Wallace described it in his commencement speech to the graduating class of 2005 at Kenyon College.  Through knowing and gaining an understanding of the human experience over a long period of time, a person can appreciate how we got to where we are today; they can understand the past decisions, mistakes and movements that caused disasters, massacres, revolutions and positive changes.  Democratic principles themselves arose through earlier civilizations' experimentation with various forms of government based upon their own knowledge and understanding of human history and human failures at the time. The liberal arts are rooted in critical thinking and the ability for each individual to reason for themselves. This is also the heart of a democratic society; a government based in the people requires the people to be careful, conscientious thinkers who can look at a situation and evaluate it for themselves, and then use that reasoning to place an informed vote. In our current geopolitical crisis with global warming and growing social and economic inequalities to name a few, it will be more important than ever that people have an understanding of the liberal arts.