Humanities Research for the Public Good

Connecting Independent Colleges with Their Communities through Undergraduate Research
Opening Workshop ● Washington, DC ● June 26-28, 2019

BACKGROUND READINGS

1. Sheila A. Brennan, "Public, First," in Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein, eds., *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), pp. 384-389: *http://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/debates/text/83* (open-access edition).

2. Gregory Jay, "The Engaged Humanities: Principles and Practices for Public Scholarship and Teaching," *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship* 3:1 (Spring 2010), pp. 51–63: *http://jces.ua.edu/the-engaged-humanities-principles-and-practices-for-public-scholarship-and-teaching*.

3. Paula M. Krebs, "Thinking About the Public," *Inside Higher Ed* (April 5, 2013): *https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2013/04/05/essay-how-public-humanities-reshaped-deans-thinking-about-academic-humanities*.

4. Steven Lubar, "Seven Rules for Public Humanists," *On Public Humanities* (June 5, 2014): *https://stevenlubar.wordpress.com/2014/06/05/seven-rules-for-public-humanists*.

Public, First

SHEILA A. BRENNAN

As a public historian who has practiced in both analog and digital modes, I am attuned to the articles in the *Chronicle* and conversations—on Twitter, at meetings, and at conferences—from traditional and alt-academics who see digital and online projects as a means for sharing academic research with "the general public." Skeptics ask why academics have lost their publics, while proponents point to popular digital humanities projects (Bender). It is important to recognize that projects and research may be available online, but that status does not inherently make the work digital public humanities or public digital humanities. Public history and humanities practices—in either digital or analog forms—place communities, or other public audiences, at their core.

Digital humanities scholars and practitioners are defined by the digital, which makes the difference in their humanities scholarship. Public historians and public humanities scholars are defined by the "public," even when definitions of these practices are contested (National Council on Public History; Lubar). Suzanne Fischer offers a useful way of describing public history as "cracking open history as a democratic project, and doing it transparently, in public." She also suggests that while public historians work with specific audiences on projects, they also have "a duty to serve particular communities" ("On the Vocation of Public History"). Public digital humanities, then, should be identified by the ways that it engages with communities outside of the academy as a means for doing digital humanities scholarship.

Research projects, online textbooks, tools, course websites, online journals, or social networks are not inherently "public" digital humanities projects merely because they have a presence on the Web. Working in public—an intentional approach to working and sharing research and practices—does not equate to doing public digital humanities. Similarly, launching a project website or engaging in social media networks does not necessarily make a project discoverable, accessible, or relevant to anyone other than its creators. Doing any type of public digital humanities work requires an intentional decision from the

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beginning of the project that identifies, invites in, and addresses audience needs in the design, as well as the approach and content, long before the outreach for a finished project begins. Public historians and other professionals working at cultural heritage institutions have learned that by not seeing "the public" as real people they have sometimes viewed "the public" as an unidentified "other." By examining the roots of public history, scholars interested in creating public digital humanities projects can avoid these pitfalls and see their work as part of a long tradition of publicly engaged scholarly work.

Public History Roots

Public digital humanities, digital public history, and digital public humanities all have strong roots in public history. In the United States, the practice of public history can be traced back to the early nineteenth century, when white women and men of means volunteered their time to save and preserve community stories, objects, and places (Kammen; West). The federal government got involved in the history business in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Federal history and museum programs, such as the National Park Service and Smithsonian Institution, were grounded in practices borrowed and adopted by scientists and naturalists and used in publicly funded spaces (Meringolo). Government civil servants assumed responsibilities to care for, interpret, and collect materials on behalf of citizens. Many of these practitioners also belonged to professional organizations in equal numbers with academic historians, such as the American Historical Association. Technological advances in preservation and research materials during the mid-twentieth century (e.g., microfilm) led to standardizing and specializing practices of archivists, for example, and to a growing divide among academic historians and practicing public historians (Townsend). These practitioners often did not identify their work as "public history"; rather, some referred to this work as "applied history" (National Council on Public History). Their work was, and still is, service-driven, carrying with it a significant amount of intellectual labor and institution building. Individuals practicing within or collaborating with cultural heritage institutions and university libraries, as may be the case for digital humanities scholars, continue this tradition of service-driven work that shapes and contributes to new forms of scholarship.

The public history movement that we know today emerged in universities in the 1970s, responding both to the employment crisis in the United States (and the marketability of history majors) and to the social and labor history movements

that engaged communities in questioning existing social, political, and cultural structures and inequalities (Stanton, xiv)—including those embedded in cultural heritage institutions. In the late twentieth century, many self-identified public historians continued to view the "public" as generalized and passive. Public history may have offered scholars new ways of communicating (e.g., through museum exhibits), but as Denise Meringolo observed, many scholars did not rethink the structures and relationships involved in that communication flow (*Museums, Monuments,* xxi). Oral historians, like Michael Frisch, filled that gap by encouraging all historians to think of their role as facilitators. By recording conversations with the unfamous, they could save and make available for the public record the lives and histories of ordinary citizens. Frisch popularized the term and philosophy of "shared authority," as integral to public history practices before the birth of the modern web browser (Frisch). Tom Scheinfeldt has argued that because these public history practices from the mid- to the late twentieth century were "highly technological, archival, public, collaborative, political, and networked," they represent another branch in the broad genealogy of digital humanities ("Dividends of Difference").

A key figure in this genealogy is labor historian Roy Rosenzweig, who saw potential to broaden and diversify the historical enterprise using digital means. Roy's passion motivated him to found the Center for History and New Media1 in 1994 to use digital media to democratize history by incorporating multiple perspectives and inviting everyday citizens to contribute their own stories for new digital collections built to document major events and the histories of their own communities.2 To some, this mission may have sounded utopian, but Roy was practical. He believed that all scholars, but historians in particular, shared responsibility for documenting, saving, and preserving historical evidence in analog and digital formats (Rosenzweig). This meant historians could, and should, build digital projects and platforms that would be used, and useful, and never isolated from the larger networks of libraries, archives, and museums. This foundation in public history makes the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (RRCHNM) different from most digital humanities centers; as a result, most of its projects are created for and with audiences outside of academia and serve as models for public digital humanities work.

Doing Public Digital Humanities

Each public digital humanities project must begin by identifying audiences outside of the academy. To help see audiences as people with interests, lives,

agendas, and challenges, some digital project teams borrow techniques from user-centered design and create user personas. The Smithsonian Learning Lab[3] offers a good example for the process of creating named personas that represent real teachers, the primary audience for the Learning Lab's new digital initiative (Milligan). Understanding audiences is not a skill most humanities scholars are taught in graduate school, but it is a key element for successful digital projects.

Identifying and collaborating with specific audiences helps public digital humanities projects be relevant, useful, and usable. This means working with those groups to identify the needs of a potential platform, assess its functionality, and then measure its effectiveness for communicating ideas. The *Histories of the National Mall* project team from the Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media identified tourists and individuals new to the D.C. area (e.g., summer interns) as the primary audiences for its mobile public history project.[4] Before customizing an Omeka site, the team tested the site architecture, content, functionality, and terminology with different users using paper mock-ups. Once the site was prototyped in Omeka, the team spent time on the National Mall with friends and family members to test different iterations of the site before the beta launch. This type of audience identification and evaluation is even more important for software projects. During its original grant, the Omeka team surveyed museum professionals before, during, and after the beta release and conducted focus group testing to gauge needs, assess the effectiveness of the software to meet those needs, and explore the usability of the Omeka software.[5] While time-consuming, these steps are necessary to include in the work plan of any digital project to ensure its success.

Projects must be accessible to those identified as potential audiences in a number of important ways. First, any public digital humanities project should be designed such that people of all abilities can use and access it on the Web. Second, projects should be built in ways that reach primary audiences on the platforms they regularly use. This may mean designing a light mobile framework to reach people who only access the Web from handheld devices. If users communicate on one specific social media space, the project should be there. If users speak multiple languages, the platform choice must allow for that content to be accessible in those languages. Third, the language, symbols, and navigational paths embedded in the digital project must be understandable by its users and participants. A public digital humanities project should never make the audience feel dumb or unwelcome in that space. Fourth, names are important. Projects should be named after something meaningful to the targeted audiences,

or something that is intentionally not associated with a familiar term. Omeka, for example, fits into the latter category. The Swahili term embodies what the web publishing platform is designed to do: display or lay out wares; to speak out; to spread out; to unpack. Because the word itself was unfamiliar for most users, it could take on the meaning of a new piece of software. The name of *Histories of the National Mall,* on the other hand, directly tells tourists visiting the National Mall that the site is about the history of that public space. Acronyms and clever naming can work for some digital humanities projects, but it is best not to alienate or mislead users.

Developing a public digital humanities project is a challenging process that requires building a team with many different skills sets. When a team lacks expertise in public humanities, it should find public humanities scholars with whom to collaborate. There is often a public historian or a community activist who is eager to share knowledge and experience with audience engagement. Digital humanities project teams that incorporate and invite voices from user communities in the early stages will build fabulous new digital things that are relevant, useful, and productive for those targeted users. To do public digital humanities, the "public" needs to come first. Always.

Notes

1. Formally known as the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (RRCHNM) at George Mason University, http://chnm.gmu.edu/.

2. The *September 11 Digital Archive* is an example, http://911digitalarchive.org/.

3. http://learninglab.si.edu/news/2015/03/our-personas-introducing-naomi-javier-samantha-and-nicole.

4. *Histories of the National Mall,* http://mallhistory.org/.

5. Omeka, http://omeka.org/.

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In this essay, a leading public scholar examines the current state of public and engaged scholarship and predicts a major role for new media.

The Engaged Humanities: Principles and Practices for Public Scholarship and Teaching

Gregory Jay

Abstract

Will public scholarship and community engagement become central to revitalizing the humanities in the 21st century? Efforts to connect humanities research and teaching with projects to advance democracy, social justice, and the public good might take advantage of the latest episode of crisis, and even argue that they represent a strong new direction for revival. After a brief review of how definitions of the humanities have changed since the 1960s, the essay contends that the future of the humanities depends upon two interrelated innovations: the organized implementation of project-based engaged learning and scholarship, on the one hand, and the continued advancement of digital and new media learning and scholarship, on the other hand. A number of examples of engaged humanities practice are examined, their institutional obstacles analyzed, and the principles common to them enumerated. The conclusion focuses on how new media are changing the nature of "the public" once more, offering opportunities for different kinds of scholarship, teaching, and engagement.

Introduction: A Short History of Change

Will public scholarship and community engagement become central to revitalizing the humanities in the 21st century? Since the early 1990s, an increasing number of courses, projects, centers, and institutes have arisen around this notion, and there is now even an entire national organization (Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life [http://www.imaginingamerica.org/]) dedicated to advancing the cause. Its Curriculum Project Report provides an in-depth study of arts-based projects that link campuses and communities in common efforts to advance social justice (Goldbard, 2008). In the academic humanities, developments carrying such monikers as the "scholarship of engagement" or "public scholarship" have begun to share aims and methods with such arts-oriented initiatives. George Sanchez, for example, has documented powerful models for combining humanities scholarship and community engagement (2002; 2004). But it may be difficult to see how humanities scholarship can advance community cultural development in quite the concrete ways demonstrated by projects in art, theater, and music. Moreover, the term "humanities" is itself a disputed one, ranging from the classical liberal arts to today's interdisciplinary scholarship in cultural studies, which often critiques traditional humanities work for its ivory-tower separation from real life and its various exclusionary biases of race, nation, class, and gender. Within

higher education, debates over critical methods (deconstruction, feminism, postmodernism, et al.) have coincided with a steady decline in institutional support and prestige for the liberal arts, as curricula find themselves marginalized by the burgeoning of the professional schools and patent-producing sciences (see Cohen, 2009). One index is indicative: the Modern Language Association's job list, whose declines over the last two years are the steepest on record (June, 2009). Yet as Gale and Carton (2005) note, "the contemporary crisis of the humanities in America is … centuries old" (p. 38), and reports of its death greatly exaggerated. Efforts to connect humanities research and teaching with projects to advance democracy, social justice, and the public good might take advantage of the latest episode of crisis, and even argue that they represent a strong new direction for revival. Given the drastic budget cutbacks, grim hiring forecasts, mounting student debt, and challenges presented by the digital revolution, such arguments face a stiff wind. This essay will contend that the future of the humanities depends upon two interrelated innovations: the organized implementation of project-based engaged learning and scholarship, on the one hand, and the continued advancement of digital and new media learning and scholarship, on the other hand.

One thing these two innovations have in common is their attention to, and redefinition of, the "public," especially in relation to the purpose and practice of higher education. In the wake of the critique of traditional humanities work for its racial, gender, class, and nationalist or imperialist biases, we must take seriously the continued importance of expanding who we mean when we say "the public," and to whom our work is accountable. The issue of accountability in turn intersects with the need to assess the outcomes of our practices, both in terms of student learning and public good (which is traditionally a mission mandate for publicly-funded institutions). Humanities faculty have found the institutional pressure to increase assessment difficult to manage, beyond pointing toward such artifacts as the quiz, test, or student paper. Assessments of public good or community benefit may be just as perfunctory, as in post-event surveys and reports of attendance. The

kinds of projects made possible by community engagement, service learning, participatory action research, and multimedia production can enhance the possibilities for demonstrating achievements in learning and community development, bringing along other skills such as collaboration, intercultural communication, and digital literacy.

To understand the current debates over public scholarship and evaluate its new practices, however, we need to look back (in admittedly reductive fashion) at the last few decades of controversy in the humanities. Such a backwards look is necessary because it would be misleading to think that simply undertaking structural innovations on campus to connect "the humanities" to the community or to public scholarship would suffice to make our future clear. We do not have a consensus about what "the humanities" include or stand for; thus just as we need "critical reflection" on how we engage the community, we need to join with the community in critical reflection on what we mean by "the humanities" and what we want from them. Edward Ayers (2009) reminds us that the phrase "the humanities" is only about a hundred years old, and was invented as an academic bureaucratic device or "secular glue" to "hold together the disparate components of a higher education system assembled from elements of German research universities, Oxbridge tutelage, and French training for civil service" (p. 25). The phrase took root when adopted in the 1930s "in the curricula of elite institutions from the Ivy League to Chicago to Berkeley" and was adopted as the anchor for most "general education" programs (Ayers, 2009, p. 25).

Since the 1960s, a critique of the humanities has grown along two fronts. First, the socio-political movements on behalf of oppressed or exploited identity groups challenged the presumptive universalism of the academic humanities curricula, exposing the degree to which previous dominant views of what it meant to be human restricted that image to whites and males and the rich and powerful. As classically defined, the "liberal arts" had been so-called because of its intended effect of liberating the mind from superstition and bias (and, in class terms, as appropriate to free men but not slaves); in practice the institutionalization of the

humanities in American colleges and universities too often became a matter of credentializing the ruling class or assimilating new members to the ideological club of the elite. Beginning in the 1960s, expansion of what and whom we studied in the humanities coincided with an expansion of who was allowed to study the humanities, as college education was opened more broadly to women and people of color (though for the latter, this opening remains narrow and perhaps once more is closing). In terms of scholarly interest, curriculum development, and student enrollment, this opening of the canon and the classroom shifted the future of the humanities decisively, though the preponderance of humanities enrollments remains tilted toward women and whites, while students of color, often being first generation college students, look to majors with more sure vocational and financial benefits.

Second, the importation and elaboration of Continental critical theory from the 1960s through the 1990s brought paradoxical changes in the relation of humanities work to the public. On the one hand, structuralist and post-structuralist analysis injected socio-political concerns into humanities scholarship and challenged the dominant models of aesthetic formalism and historical objectivity. Though often accused of creating a brand of abstruse philosophizing that alienated the intellectual reading public, the European-influenced academics were actually trying to offer a rejuvenated and reengineered school of ideological critique grounded in the traditions of Marxism and existentialism. This theory revolution was concentrated in departments of English and comparative literature, but also had an impact among historians, religious studies scholars, students of art and music, and even some philosophers. Although branded as a kind of "theoretical antihumanism," with its antipathy to "bourgeois individualism" and its focus on "the subject" rather than "the person," postmodern theory continued the tradition of critical thinking, interdisciplinarity, debate over values, and the posing of profound philosophical questions typical of humanities scholarship (Jeyifo, 2006). When post-structuralism in turn gave way to the rise of what called itself "cultural studies," the turn both underscored critical

theory's inherent socio-political concerns and revamped the movement in ways that spoke more clearly to public issues.

But the publics spoken to by poststructuralists such as Paul de Man or Michel Foucault or Helene Cixous differed radically from those at the base of the cultural studies paradigm advocated by Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton (and in the educational field by Paolo Freire, in theatre by Augusto Boal, and in feminism by Adrienne Rich). For cultural studies people, scholarship should not only address the concerns of the public, the marginalized and the working class, it should also emerge in some way out of collaboration with them (hence the resonance with "critical pedagogy"). Though often in contentious debate with other wings of the theory movement, cultural studies scholars joined them in advocating approaches that departed radically from the aesthetic formalism of previous modernist critics, and they extended these approaches across a broad spectrum of mass and popular culture. But neither the post-structuralists nor the cultural studies scholars wrote in ways accessible to a large common reading public, nor did they spend much time in active collaboration with schools, museums, social agencies, or community organizations, despite the claim of their scholarship to be working on behalf of a libratory politics. In retrospect it appears that the scholarship of theory and cultural studies was easily accommodated by the institutional regimes of publication, tenure, and a new "star system" of celebrity thinkers who appealed to an exclusively academic audience in contrast to an earlier generation of "public intellectuals." The public for the humanities may actually have shrunk in part because of this esotericism, which also did not succeed in building any kind of funding base in the form of government grants or foundation dollars, leaving it vulnerable when the downturn came. An exceptional bright spot is the current wave of interest in, and funding for, the "digital humanities," which is partly owing to its power to connect humanities work to a larger public.

Academics Going Public

These major trends in the humanities since the 1960s have dwarfed simultaneous efforts to enlarge the practices of community engagement

and public scholarship at institutions of higher education. Granted, appreciation for what we call "public humanities" has always been fairly strong–as in support for museums, symphonies, libraries, film series, music performances, and literary readings. Many campuses have a humanities center that showcases research, sponsors lectures, and otherwise does public programming, though without connecting these to an engaged curriculum or community development projects. For example, such a vision of public humanities can be found on the website of the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage at Brown University (http://www.brown.edu/Research/JNBC/about_phach.php). The Center's thoughtful mission statement does not include the kinds of collaborative cultural development work with a social justice orientation that this essay and Imagining America focus upon. In contrast, Stanton (2008) writes that "Engaged research must have an intentional public purpose and direct or indirect benefit to a community …a public purpose beyond developing new knowledge for its own sake" (p. 24). "Public scholarship" and engaged curriculums differ from the public humanities, then, as they require projects of collaborative knowledge-creation involving teams of individuals and organizations from on and off-campus in quite complex partnerships that sometimes take years to create (see Gibson, n.d.)

The Imagining America Curriculum Project documents many fine examples of such projects, but these stand out precisely because they are exceptions to normative campus goals, structures, and reward systems. For decades the triumvirate of "teaching, research, and service" has ruled, with "service" a distinctly less-rewarded and less-respected afterthought in the typical academic's workload. Usually projects in community engagement or public arts and humanities are misleadingly categorized as "service" rather than knowledge production, and so downgraded. Some debate about this value system is recurrent, as in the reception of Ernest Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Boyer attempted to replace the triumvirate with a quadruped: the scholarship of discovery, integration, application, and teaching (Boyer, 1990). This proposal had the advantage

of trying to separate engagement from service. Though often discussed, Boyer's reform never took hold widely. Insofar as the "application" category was intended to subsume engagement, it perpetuated a "missionary" model in which knowledge was first created on campus and then "applied" to "problems" off-campus, effectively pathologizing the community and future campus partners.

In reflecting on the move from public humanities to public scholarship and engagement, the arts provide useful comparisons. As the Curriculum Project Report shows, arts faculty and practitioners have successfully created hundreds of outstanding projects that go beyond public performance to public engagement: they advance community cultural development, enrich democratic dialogue, create exciting aesthetic advances, and fashion meaningful collaborations among diverse partners (see the Community Arts Network website [*Home*, 1999-2010] as well as Animating Democracy's Project Profile Database). The arts have historically been more comfortable with collaborative production and community engagement than the humanities, though many art schools and departments do not support community engagement because of their concentration on studio teaching of future artists. The humanities have tended toward solitary work whose results may be presented publicly but are not designed to be, and which often make the transition awkwardly or in static, almost ceremonial presentations. While a large body of collaborative art projects testifies to how students, faculty, and community can join together on the creation and execution of work that advances the public good, there is less precedent when it comes to collaborative knowledge-making in the humanities. Humanities research has tended toward the museum and library (and now the online database) rather than toward knowledge produced through community engagement. Some humanities disciplines, however, have included participatory and community based action research in various areas, public history and oral history projects, literacy campaigns, and some kinds of documentation initiatives and event commemorations, though these, too, are often asymmetrical in terms of university-community relations. Again, the kinds of

collaboration that new media make possible could have a powerful impact in making the production of humanities knowledge "public" in highly visible ways.

Despite the obstacles, service learning and engaged curriculum projects in the humanities have become a major avenue for public scholarship in the last ten years, helping to create collaborations in which university and community partners share in the design, execution, and analysis of intellectual projects that have real-life impact. Though initially more oriented toward "doing for" the community than collaborating with it, service learning practices have recently begun to move toward the kind of collaborative ethic espoused by community engagement models. The emphasis, however, has been more on student learning than on getting the university's research mission in synch with a commitment to engagement, though Campus Compact has begun to alter this focus by initiating the Research University Civic Engagement Initiative. (Civic Engagement at Research Universities, 1999-2010; see also Stanton, [2008]).

Many faculty and students have testified to the excitement of such collaborative projects and the prospect they offer for rejuvenating humanities education and salvaging the reputation of the humanities with the public. In promising moves, some humanities institutes have leveraged their resources and readjusted their missions to create successful, innovative programs of community-university collaboration, such as those at the University of Texas and the University of Washington. Founded in 2001, the Institute at UT Austin consciously aims to augment the traditional activities of such organizations "by actively fostering public access to and involvement in humanistic inquiry" (Gale & Carton, 2005, p. 39). Moreover, as founding (now former) Director Evan Carton explains, the Institute struggled to get beyond "outreach" models of engagement that always privileged the campus over the community: "the outreach model reinforces conventional academic and public conceptions about the legitimate production and ownership of knowledge. A vital practice of the humanities, we believe, depends upon the breakdown of this hierarchy and this conception" in which all expertise rests with the academic experts (Gale & Carton, 2005, p. 40). Instead, as the Curriculum Project Report found, partnerships need to be "reciprocal and collaborative," producing knowledge through jointly designed activities and "ensuring that community engagement projects serve communities as well as they do students" (Goldbard, 2008, p. 56). Through a long-term process of dialogues, Texas eventually devised the "Writing Austin's Lives" project, which "would elicit and collect family histories, personal experiences, and diverse visions of life," and hundreds of citizen-writers responded. The project "overturned the top-down dissemination from the university to the community" that other Institute programs "continued to reinforce" (Gale & Carton, 2005, p. 41). Gale and Carton's (2005) thoughtful essay on their work embodies the kind of "self-critical awareness" that is a key ingredient in successful engagement.

A parallel transformation occurred at the University of Washington's Simpson Center for the Humanities, led by Kathleen Woodward. The Center helped sponsor the exemplary Seattle Labor History and Civil Rights Project (About the Project, 2004-2010) and in 2009 received a large NEH challenge grant for innovation in the digital humanities, including "the public circulation of our scholarship" (Simpson Center Receives Major NEH Grant, 2010). While the Simpson Center continues to fund faculty fellowships, interdisciplinary scholarship, and public lecture programs, it has expanded its scope with such initiatives as its "Public Humanities Institute for Doctoral Students," and is advancing plans for a Graduate Certificate in Public Scholarship. The Institute's purpose is "to put public scholarship in the portfolios carried by our doctoral students into their future and thus to help bring about the structural change in higher education" that sustainable engagement requires (Woodward, 2009, p. 113). These and similar efforts at other campuses discussed by Woodward demonstrate how strategic reorientation of traditional humanities programs–following the principles of reciprocity and collaboration and guided by concerns for social justice and community cultural development–can produce concrete, replicable results.

Instead of reorienting their humanities center, other campuses have founded offices

with an original mission-focus on engagement. Stanford University's Haas Center for Public Service (begun in 1984 and named in 1989) has grown in two decades into a model for fostering the connection of academic study with community and public service. It coordinates a rich array of opportunities for students, faculty, and community organizations, with a focus on leadership training and careers in public service. Humanities departments are scarcely represented in its course list, however, except for some sections of Writing and Rhetoric. At the University of Michigan, the Arts of Citizenship (AOC) program was founded in 1998 under the directorship of David Scobey (now director of the Harward Center for Community Partnerships at Bates College). AOC stood out early on for the collaborative process it followed with community organizations in the Detroit and Ann Arbor areas, partnering to create projects, for example, on the Underground Railroad and with youth theater for minorities, that helped bridge the chasm between Detroit communities and the ivory towers of the University of Michigan.

At the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee we studied the AOC model and fashioned the Cultures and Communities Program quite differently from a humanities or arts institute. We adapted the AOC mini-grant model, and have now awarded more than 30 grants over nine years to fund an array of collaborations. These have included a city-wide commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Milwaukee's Open Housing marches (soon to be a teaching-resource website); a Holocaust education partnership with the Milwaukee Jewish Council; an oral and video documentation initiative focused on black men in Milwaukee; a collaboration with the Milwaukee Muslim Women's Society on "Combating Islamophobia"; two community-based day-long conferences on finding "common ground" against racism, sponsored by the Interfaith Council of Milwaukee; and a Hmong Arts preservation initiative (Her-Xiong & Youyee Vang, 2009). Reciprocity begins with the application, which must be a collaborative project proposed together by a community partner and a university entity. The CC staff mentors applicants, nurtures new relationships among partners, and oversees the receipt of the reports from grantees that become the basis for assessing outcomes. The requirement of public partnership puts the community at the table from the start as an equal member of the team designing the research, learning, and product.

For example, an oral history project (led by Associate Director Dr. Cheryl Ajirotutu) in the African-American community began with meetings between the professor and a community board to review the idea, refine the syllabus, choose interviewees, and outline protocols. Students went into the community not only to gather the narratives, but also to work in the neighborhood, at the community garden, in youth tutoring, and in other development initiatives. The students researched, wrote, edited, and then presented their oral history projects to their interviewees, in public forums on campus and in the neighborhood that were eventually broadcast by the university's television station. To prepare, the class also studied the problematic of cross-cultural interviewing in select films and literary works as well as in anthropology (this model has now been extended to courses sited in post-Katrina New Orleans). Meanwhile, students enrolled in our Peck School of the Arts "Multicultural America" sections have been using photography, digital video, blogs and web authoring in their collaborations with local Milwaukee non-profit organizations. Led by Dr. Vicki Callahan and Dr. Shelleen Greene, these classes have promoted skills in multimedia authorship and critical visual studies through service-learning projects designed in collaborations with these partners, who otherwise lack the technical staff or facilities to complete such projects. Students are producing public scholarship in internet-based formats that serve to document the history, mission, current activities, and planned events of our partners.

Another CC wing sponsors an undergraduate minor in multicultural studies, which includes a service-learning requirement. That requirement is in turn administered by CC's Institute for Service Learning, which is thus tied directly to the curriculum and which works closely with the grants office in expanding opportunities for new community partners to come aboard. Campus participants have come from the College of Letters and Science as well as the schools of Education, Arts, Information Science, and Architecture and Urban Planning. We differ from

a humanities institute in that we administer a degree curriculum emphasizing multiculturalism and community engagement, and thus in the way we integrate courses, advising, service learning, grants, and public programming. UWM's Center for 21st Century Studies remains the campus's premier humanities/social science institute in the traditional mold; however, spurred by UWM's membership in Imagining America, the two offices are now working together on a planned series of events focused on exploring the meaning and methods of "public scholarship." The kind of multidimensional institutional profile we have built can be found on other campuses, such as at the Ginsburg Center at the University of Michigan and the Public Humanities Collaborative at Michigan State University.

I am not going to prophesy that education through public scholarship represents the (immediate) future of the humanities, at least in the practical sense. It's too expensive and time-consuming, and too peripheral in the eyes of those administering the university's primary commitments to undergraduate education and advanced research. Undergraduates can be more efficiently processed and credentialed through huge lecture courses largely managed by teaching assistants, whereas engaged classes typically require small cohorts working closely with a faculty member. Public scholarship may also not be the future of the humanities because many scholars come to their careers with solitary temperaments and a tendency to see the attachment of scholarship to public purposes as either crudely instrumental or simply a "service" dimension of their labor that cannot be counted like a publication. It is probably also the case that public-minded scholars are pushed out of the profession early on by its biases. As the work of the Simpson Center shows, graduate education in the humanities would have to be substantially reengineered if we were to produce future faculty adept at public scholarship and new media, knowledgeable in its methods, educated in its history, able to critique its examples, and ready to use it to further their research agenda. Despite these challenges, opportunities abound, but we need to reflect carefully on a few key points that summarize lessons learned so far.

TEN KEY POINTS FOR REFLECTION

1. Community Engagement versus the Political Economy of Higher Education

As general support revenues fall, campuses rely more on outside grants and tuition revenue. Activities that do not bring in outside revenue are marginalized and defunded. Activities not integrated with curriculum and enrollments are de-prioritized, since they do not produce tuition dollars. Engagement, service projects, and public arts or humanities are seen as "loss leaders" at best, and among the first targets for budget cuts. The public support for a campus generated by such engagement is impossible to capitalize on immediately as increased revenue; if directed at less economically prosperous parts of the community, such engagement also does not create an alumni capable of giving back in the form of foundation donations. Service or project-based learning usually limits class size and is thus expensive. How do we "go to scale" with engagement given these constraints? For academic and financial reasons, then, engagement should be structured into the university's core curriculum and adoption of new media, so that engagement, technology, and tuition dollars reinforce engagement rather than conflict with it.

2. "That Doesn't Count": Institutional Barriers to Engagement and Public Scholarship

Academic structures, policies, and reward systems work against community engagement practices in multiple, often intentional, ways. While there are differences specific to disciplines, the general resistance takes the same form ("that doesn't count," "that isn't valued," "that's amateurish," "that's service, not scholarship," etc). Advocates should take a page from the Imagining America Tenure Team Initiative Report (http://www.imaginingamerica.org/TTI/TTI.html) and argue that engagement resides on a continuum of scholarship, not separate from it. Engagement and publicly-oriented humanities work are forms of research and of the production of new knowledge. Project participants need

to design this claim and its outcomes into the plan from the start and produce objects that can document the achievement of them and so substantiate assessment. Do not cede the ground of "research" or "scholarship" to others. Do not argue that engagement should be valued equally with research and scholarship: Show that engagement IS research and scholarship, though it is also so much more. For one example, see the Research Service Learning: Scholarship with a Civic Mission program at Duke University (Hart Leadership Program, http://hart.sanford.duke.edu/index.php/rslrsl.htm).

Most campuses have one or more offices supporting various kinds of engagement or public scholarship, but these are rarely affiliated with an academic department, which is the unit that holds the real power on campus. Engagement gets outsourced and marginalized, and is not seen as part of the essential or required work done by the core institutional players. Bringing engagement into the structures sponsored by departments (requirements for courses and the major, scholarships, tenure and promotion criteria, etc.) is thus vital. In lieu of that, work to connect all the units sponsoring engagement to form a campus office or network that can advocate on behalf of public scholarship, new media, and the engaged arts.

3. What Comes First, the Discipline or the Community?

Going local is not always respected or valued by our disciplinary structures of assessment. Faculty are trained to have a primary affiliation with and loyalty to their discipline: They see themselves as belonging to a "profession" first – as philosophers, historians, literary critics, etc. They do not limit their focus to a locale, which would be seen as "provincial." Merit is largely determined nationally, even internationally, through peer-reviewed publication or performance and job mobility. Faculty are encouraged to move among jobs and not to become "tied down." Academic humanities research typically overlooks local subjects and local audiences. Thus connections between campuses and communities weaken, and financial support declines. As government support for higher education withers, campuses can strengthen their support base by infusing engagement into the humanities curricula, rather than restricting themselves to ivory-tower practices that disconnect campus and community. They can also use new media to structure that engagement and disseminate it to a wider, even global, public.

Projects can be "glocal," then, at once embedded in local conditions and still examining forces, ideas, and trends that are global in origin and effect. The Colorado Center for Public Humanities (2008), for example, offers itself "as a think-tank" that "will investigate the public value of the humanities disciplines in relation to historical change by sponsoring programs that help to clarify the roles that humanities-based scholarship can play within the region, the nation, and the world more generally" and promises that it will "encourage interaction between the scholar and the wider public by matching scholars with particular communities, funding appropriate research activities, and supporting the production of books, film, and web-based conversation that are aimed at extra-academic groups."

4. Educating the Students and Practitioners

Whatever their disciplinary home, students and practitioners (including staff and faculty) will need a common core of education in issues related to community engagement: race, class, and gender studies; white privilege; principles of organization based in mutuality; cultural identity theory; local history; techniques for reflection, etc. This may not be the kind of knowledge emphasized in, or even covered by, the usual training or normative scholarship in the discipline. Students from a wealthy university need to reflect upon their own class position and cultural identity before going to work as tutors in local schools or assistants at a food pantry or as English as a second language instructors (Jay, 2008). Successful community engagement requires critical reflection on gender, sexuality, diversity, and multiculturalism. Engagement almost always involves asymmetries of power and resources in relationships among individuals from distinctly different places and backgrounds who have had little or no previous

contact. Reflection activities (journals, essays, performance, online discussion, social networking technologies, etc.) about these issues should be threaded throughout the project. Assessment of outcomes should include measuring the impact of engagement on the attitudes and knowledge of students and faculty in the area of diversity; specific projects might also be assessed for their contribution to addressing community conflicts around race or gender or nationality or religion. For a valuable set of essays on this topic, see Carolyn O'Grady (2000), ed., *Integrating Service Learning and Multicultural Education in Colleges and Universities.*

5. The Necessity for Asset Mapping of Community and Participants

The community is a set of assets, not an amalgam of deficits. Humanities expertise resides in the community as well as on campus. Preparation for engagement should include a collaborative mapping of community assets beneficial to the project. All the participants bring a variety of skills and knowledge to the collaboration. These need to be mapped early on and the project in part shaped by what people bring to it, with recognition that not all authority need be academic. Participants should feel empowered to use their skills and to experiment in order to grow. Preparation of faculty and students should thus include an explicit critique of the "missionary" role taken formerly by campuses toward communities, and a recognition that community partners stand in the position of educators in relation to faculty as well as students. This may be particularly true when it comes to local knowledge of art and culture in the communities around campus. Students should assess the skills and talents they bring to the partnership and offer ways that these can be put to use. Partners and faculty should likewise see students as bringing resources, not empty heads or bleeding hearts.

6. Turning Projects into Partnerships

Examples abound of outstanding one-time projects linking campus and community. These take an enormous amount of energy and result in a high level of knowledge for all participants;

unfortunately, unless the project turns into a partnership, the return on the investment of time, resources, and passion is limited. Moreover, a community partner can be left standing at the altar after one or two semesters, abandoned (yet again) by a campus that then seems to be practicing "drive by" engagement. While we should not abandon limited-term projects, programs should strive to engage communities in ways that create long-term partnerships. Ideally, projects should be such that different cohorts of students from different classes over multiple years can "plug in" to them. Such sustained programmatic engagement is also more likely to find outside funding but will require commitment of initial seed money by campus. If there is a service-learning program, then sustainability may be achieved by planning for multiple classes to work with the same partner over the years.

7. Reexamining Course Goals, Learning Outcomes, and Assessment

Specific goals of engaged humanities projects and classes may differ from those of traditional courses and programs, though they must remain academic in focus. Traditional curriculums emphasize the production of an object (a work of art, a performance, an essay or monograph) whose quality is measured irrespective of any value to a community or a larger social purpose. Engaged practice also includes the goal of linking the production of knowledge to community cultural, social, and/or economic development and the advancement of social justice. Success is measured by such rubrics as extent and diversity of participants, impact on an identified community need, effective communication, innovation or dissemination of successful techniques for collaboration, expansion of the information base beyond traditional academic materials, transformations in self-understanding of participants, etc. Engaged curriculums will need to specify these additional goals and outcomes on the syllabus at the outset, and make clear how their achievement will be measured and how it is integrated into the academic content of the course

8. Institutionalizing Engaged Courses

Most engaged class offerings are the product of the initiative of one or two faculty and a group of students, who use a regularly listed course as the platform for their project. Much work goes into redesigning the syllabus for the course, creating reflection assignments for students, meeting with community partners, and building assessment instruments. When that particular faculty member moves on and someone else is assigned to teach the class, the engaged component may be dropped, and all that work lost. Sustainability requires having engagement written into the prescribed course description in the campus catalogue and securing commitment from the department to support that component whenever the class is offered. Even better, making an engagement experience or service-learning class a requirement for the major, for a minor or a certificate program, or for the college's general education requirements will enormously strengthen sustainability. Sustainability also depends on assessment and the "feed-back loop." Projects and syllabi should have clearly stated humanities-oriented objectives for outcomes and be able to assess whether these have been met, and what further initiatives initial successes suggest. If outcomes fall short, campus and community partners can identify weak spots, misunderstandings, resource limits, and devise a mutually agreed-upon set of action steps.

9. Balancing Work Loads for Faculty, Students, and Community Partners

Engagement courses and projects often add substantially to everybody's workload, at least initially. For faculty there may be months of preparation, including research, meetings, fund raising, syllabus design, learning new software, and the training of students or staff. Campus resources are rarely allocated to support this work, though they ought to be. This is where a center or institute can play a crucial role in providing information on best practices, bibliographies, community contacts, and active networking with experienced faculty who have already done this kind of work. Students, too, will at first complain when their own load now includes going off-campus to work at times not on the course schedule. Faculty should be realistic in recognizing the additional burdens being placed on student time and thus make reductions in other parts of the syllabus. When planning a project with a community partner, faculty and students should be aware of the danger of adding to the workload of already overburdened non-profits with small staffs and limited resources. The more we ask of partners (help teach, write evaluations, review syllabi, come to conferences, etc.) the less time they have for the work they are trying to do, so that the partnership becomes a negative rather than a positive. Campus resources are not often available to compensate partners for their time, so every effort should be made to husband extra-mural resources to channel back to community agencies in compensation.

10. Diversity and Engagement

The disconnection between campus and community often appears dramatically when we look at the diversity, or lack thereof, among students, faculty, and staff. Recruitment and retention of students and faculty of color is a major priority at many campuses. Public humanities scholarship and engaged arts practices can be positioned to address this issue on multiple fronts, and it should be a priority of our collaborations. Engagement projects can be a bridge that brings underrepresented youth onto campus and into relationships with college students and faculty who can encourage their ambitions and mentor their journey to higher education. In turn, a disproportionate number of engaged scholars and artists are women and faculty and staff of color, who hope to give back to their communities and strengthen their cultural and economic development. These faculty and staff are also thus the most vulnerable when tenure and promotion decisions become embroiled in debates over "research versus service." Campuses should use the Imagining America Tenure Team Initiative report as a platform for debating how research norms often oppress women and faculty and staff of color by marginalizing knowledge or artistic production done through local collaborations or addressing local or minority concerns.

New Publics, New Media – Assessing the Future

These ten talking points do not exhaust the subject of public scholarship, engagement, and the future of the humanities. In closing, however, I think it essential to return to one last issue that cuts across the others: the advent of new media and the impact that the Internet, social networking, and digital technology are having on higher education, our relation to public communities, and assessment of our work. The analysis can begin with this simple question: How is the challenge of doing "public scholarship" different for the humanities? Work in the arts and in design or architecture has an inherent public component, produced with some consideration of public display, or public installation, or public performance, and thereby as part of public conversation on various issues. Academics working in the humanities, in contrast, typically produce written texts, often as commentaries on other written texts. The production of such work is largely a solitary endeavor, and its consumption takes place individually, in private rather than public. Humanities work can certainly aim to intervene in public conversations on important issues, but the road to such influence usually lies through a cross-platform marketing of scholarship into more public venues – newspapers, magazines, trade press books, symposia, public lectures – that cannot themselves be the primary listed achievements in tenure and promotion deliberations. The rules for those deliberations forcefully limit the public reach of humanities scholarship. While this has been the situation now for decades, the advent of the Internet and digital culture may provide some breakthrough.

Even in textual form, humanities work can now circulate much more broadly than in the day when it languished in the compact-shelving archive of the library, and social networking means that scholarly collaboration knows no geographical limits. Once introduced into web formats, such scholarship also moves, often unintentionally, in the direction of multimedia, if only through the addition of graphics, illustration, YouTube links, or connections to other related work. Academics now build home pages and subject web sites that serve as resource pages in the public sphere of the Internet. Multimedia scholarly e-journals like *Vectors* (http://www.vectorsjournal.org/) represent cutting-edge multimedia humanities scholarship, though the technological resources to produce such work remain in the hands of a very few and the knowledge to create them rare. Most humanities faculty are not trained to do so (though this is starting to change), and it can be argued that such multimedia authorship represents a different genre altogether from the normative academic paper or monograph. Yet the precipitous decline of the academic publishing apparatus, both in book and journal outlets, suggests that the digital alternatives will eventually supersede their hard-copy forerunners.

Whereas the new publics after the 1960s formed around categories of identity politics, the new publics of the 21st century are forming in and through networking, which connects people not only on the basis of avowed affiliation but also through media of interaction that cut across group barriers and spatial boundaries and create alliances of unexpected kinds. So as we debate the merits and character of "public scholarship," we need to sustain the critique of the notion of the "public" that exploded forty or more years ago, when the narrow definition of who, or what, counted as the "public" was challenged by so many who had been excluded from it. New media mean new opportunities for creating public humanities events of an interactive kind, in which the presentation of knowledge and the production of knowledge happen interdependently and simultaneously.

New media are changing the very nature of the "public," and thus what we might conceive of as public scholarship. Across our society and culture we have witnessed enormous transformations in our way of life with the advent of these media, leading to unexpected changes in how we work, eat, play, love, and of course in how we represent these activities to one another. Indeed, the post-structuralists got at least this right–that the line between the practice of life and the representation of life was dissolving in the post-modern era. What new media have done, in part, is to accelerate this process to dizzying speeds and to extend its reach across virtually all dimensions of human interaction, with the added meta-benefit that we can watch ourselves and reflect on ourselves

at the same time. No one should imagine that humanities scholarship will be immune from the viral speedup of new media or their capacity for embroiling the representation of knowledge in the generally ungovernable network of information and sensation exchange. New media will dramatically alter the future of the humanities, though it's far too early to predict exactly how. Will text messages and Twitter replace the analytical seminar discussion? Or as David Marshall (2005) asks, "Is this a reconstitution of a public sphere in which the humanities can participate, or is it the final fragmentation of the public into blogs?"

What we can say, however, is that new media are providing a platform for the process, content, and dissemination of public scholarship. Students are learning new expressive and documentation techniques using photography and video and combining these with words and argumentation. Community partners are getting access to technology they would otherwise not be able to afford or know how to use. The outcomes of projects are being disseminated globally rather than only locally, and the projects themselves are becoming "glocal" as they involve participants from far-flung quarters. Questions about inequalities of access and resources, of course, remain substantial, and not every project lends itself to digital interaction and multimedia. The use of such tools, however, can go a long way toward demonstrating how student skills and community benefits are being advanced through engagement projects, and their documentation through multimedia creates products that can then be the subject of assessment and evaluation in determining the research value, scholastic merit, and public good of the project.

Assessing the outcomes of public scholarship in the humanities presents challenges, whether that scholarship is done through old or new media. Traditional assessment of scholarship is by peer review. Who are the peers in publicly engaged scholarship? Can community partners participate in tenure and promotion documentation and review? Are distinguished scholars who have never done publicly engaged work really "peers" when it comes to reviewing such work by their colleagues? Such review will require a set of criteria, benchmarks, and methods of assessment not yet in place. Peer review is well-designed to establish whether a scholarly article or monograph offers new knowledge or substantially alters previous concepts or data. This may be possible in the case of some public scholarship produced through community collaboration or new media. Yet how do we (faculty, students, staff, community partners, funders) assess the benefits to the community, which are after all an essential aim of publicly engaged scholarship? Are we looking for a change of consciousness? Implementation of new programs? An increase in the number of participants in a given initiative? A tangible improvement in the lives of certain community members? A digital presence and interactive community? Short-term gains? Long-term?

These questions intersect with the abiding debate over whether scholarship should be instrumental at all, or remain the production of knowledge for its own sake. Engaged practitioners will need to use all the media they can muster to navigate these questions, especially since documenting the outcomes of public scholarship may be crucial to their survival as campuses cut budgets. What I think we can assert with some confidence, however, is that the project-basis of most public scholarship means that there will be products, often using new media, that can help substantiate assessment, be they performative, textual, or digital. We will need to intentionally design assessment into the original planning and execution of future projects, however, if we are to produce persuasive documentation. This will mean knowing what kinds of outcomes we are hoping for, and how we intend to measure them. If we can begin to lay these out in principle, then the specifics of their articulation within concrete projects will start to take shape organically. And that itself will need to be a collaborative enterprise, with an emphasis on demonstrating outcomes for both community and campus. If one outcome turns out to be the fashioning of a reality in which the campus is a member of the community instead of a stranger surveying it from distant shores, then we will know we're doing something right.

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Thinking About the Public

Serving on the board of a state humanities council, where she judged proposals designed for public impact, left Paula M. Krebs rethinking the way she argues on behalf of the humanities in academe.

[Paula M. Krebs](#) // April 5, 2013

With so much focus on higher education's obligations to job preparation, the humanities are perpetually playing defense, especially in public higher education. We academic defenders of the humanities generally take one of two lines: we argue that 1) our majors ARE work force preparation -- we develop strong analytical skills, good writing, problem-solving, etc., or 2) we have no need to justify what we teach because the value of the humanities, the study of what makes us human, is self-evident.

These arguments over the value of degrees in the humanities run parallel to a set of arguments I find myself making as part of a role I occupy, as a board member for my state council for the humanities. The National Endowment for the Humanities allocates about a third of its funding through the state councils, and the councils in turn fund humanities initiatives at the state level.

State humanities councils such as mine (Rhode Island's) re-grant our NEH allocation as well as the money we raise locally to community humanities projects. We've funded research on communities of Cape Verdean longshoremen in Providence, oral histories of Second World War vets in hospice care, talk-back events at local theaters, seashore sound archives, a documentary film about a female 19th-century life-saving lighthouse-keeper, and lots of fascinating digital work, from archiving to app development. All the projects must involve humanities scholars — some of those scholars are affiliated with universities, and others aren't. All of it aims at helping Rhode Islanders to understand ourselves, our histories, and our many cultures.

When economic times are tough, an agency such as the NEH is vulnerable unless legislators understand and value the role of the humanities in a strong democracy -- just

as university humanities programs are vulnerable in state funding contexts when legislators, boards of trustees, or voters don't have a clear understanding of the value of the humanities in the culture and in the workplace.

In a career spent in higher education in the humanities, most of it at a liberal arts college, I rarely had to justify teaching what I taught. The value of an English major was self-evident to my colleagues and my students. Sure, the occasional parent would squeak, "But how will she make a living?" But I never hesitated to reassure the anxious check-writers of the value of our product. Having worked in the worlds of both journalism and Washington nonprofits, I knew how many good jobs demanded only a bachelor's degree, writing skills, research and analytic abilities, and common sense.

But then came the Great Recession and what many are calling the end of the higher education bubble. Questions about tuition increases, student debt, and colleges' lack of accountability (that is, the paucity of data on employment for recent graduates) get attached, in public perception, to the unemployment rate and to a re-emergence of the old post-Sputnik fears that the nation is not training enough folks in STEM fields.

Organizations such as the Association of American Colleges and Universities have been proactive in making the case for liberal learning as preparation for good citizenship, pointing to its employers' surveys. They have found that employers believe that the skills colleges should focus on improving are: written and oral communication; critical thinking and analytic reasoning; the application of knowledge and skills in real-world settings; complex problem solving; ethical decision making, and teamwork skills. These skills are not exclusive to the humanities, but they certainly line up with the student learning outcomes in humanities instruction at my institution.

It's not as if defenders of the values of a liberal arts education are ignoring economic realities: many liberal arts colleges are adding business majors, humanities fields are requiring internships and experiential learning, and colleges and universities are scrambling to make contact with successful alumni and to gather post-graduation employment data.

There's nothing wrong with linking liberal arts education in general, and the humanities in particular, to work. The humanities are inextricably linked to work and to U.S. civic life. When Lyndon Johnson signed legislation to bring the NEH into existence in 1965, it was in a context in which the federal government was pushed to invest in culture, as it had in science. NEH's account of its own history explains that the head of the Atomic Energy Commission told a Senate committee: "We cannot afford to drift physically, morally, or esthetically in a world in which the current moves so rapidly perhaps toward

an abyss. Science and technology are providing us with the means to travel swiftly. But what course do we take? This is the question that no computer can answer."

Through my role in public humanities, I have come to understand that the humanities are what allow us to see ourselves as members of a civic community. Public history, public art, shared cultural experiences make us members of communities. This link has not been stressed enough in defense of the academic humanities. It's past time to make this important connection -- to help our boards of trustees, our communities, and our legislators to know what the humanities brings to civil society and gives to students as they enter the workforce.

In the first class I ever taught as a teaching assistant, I did my first lecture on *Death of a Salesman.* My topic was work -- how Willy's job is his identity. I pointed to a student I knew in the 150-student lecture hall and told him that his surname, Scribner, probably indicated the employment of some ancestor of his, a "scrivener," like Bartleby. Then I asked who else had last names that might have indicated a job. We had Millers and Coopers and Smiths, and many more.

When those students' ancestors worked as barrel-makers or at their forges, they worked those jobs for life, and their sons afterward did the same. But how many of us do the job our parents did? How many of our students will do the same job in their 30s that they will do in their 20s? Narrow ideas about work force preparation will not prepare our students for the work of the rest of their lives. Each job they take will train them in the skills they need to succeed in that particular industry. But a broad, liberal education will have been what made them people worth hiring, people who have learned the value of curiosity, initiative, problem-solving. Students in STEM fields and students in arts, social sciences, and humanities all will become members of communities, and a good background in the humanities will enrich their membership.

I loved the humanities as an English professor. But it was only when I became involved in public humanities that I began to understand their value not just for individuals but for communities. That's the public good. And that's why we cannot afford to let a narrow rhetoric of work force preparation push the humanities from our curriculums or defund the work of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Bio

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Seven Rules for Public Humanists

Steven Lubar ♦ June 5, 2014 ♦

If we want the humanities to be more than academic—if we want them to make a difference in the world—we need to change the way we work. We need to rethink some of the traditional assumptions of the humanities. I suggest here seven rules of thumb for doing public humanities.

1. It's not about you

Start not by looking at what you, your discipline, or the university needs and wants, but by what individuals and communities outside the university need and want. It's not, "we're from the university, and we're here to help," but, "What are you doing already, and how can we participate? How can we be useful?" It's not about telling people facts. It's a about a dialogue, a sharing of authority, knowledge, expertise

2. Be a facilitator and translator as well as an expert

Shared authority is complicated. In exhibits, it's often an invitation to the subject and to the visitor to provide their stories, and points of view, and to share in setting the rules. It's using oral history in historical projects and exhibits. It's web 2.0 methods of opening up online conversations. Having that conversation is not easy. Finding the right balance is tricky. The humanist needs to be not only an expert, but also a facilitator, and a translator. Seeking that balance is part of the work of every project.

3. Scholarship starts with public engagement

The work of public engagement comes not after the scholarship, but as part of the scholarship. I don't like the implications of "applied" or "translational"; those terms suggest we do our work, in our normal way, and that it is then converted into something for the public. There's a model here in the transformation of public art. In the 1970s, public art was all too often an art project sprung on a community by a government agency. It came from the artist, doing his own work, responding to his own community. Public art has moved to a model of community interaction. It's not just for the public; it comes from the public. What would humanities scholarship look like if it too developed out of a conversation? What if a humanities department was a hub of a community of artists, educators, scholars and the public?

4. Communities define community

Community is important, and hard to define. We're fascinated by the relationship of community and culture. But community is complicated, and best defined by the community, not by academics looking in. And so, in my experience, it's better to work with existing organizations than to try to invent them. Public humanities programs acknowledge that there already exist community organizations, institutions, and leaders, and try to work with them, rather than come in and try to create programs that we think the communities need.

5. Collaborate with artists

Calling something art rather than scholarship is a very freeing move. You have more flexibility. But working with artists to both perform and understand culture at the same time is best. You become part of the community culture, you support it, and you help a larger public appreciate it.

6. Think Digital

The digital opens up new opportunities for outreach, of course. But it is important to go beyond the digital as outreach to take advantage of digital's promise of a new kind of openness, a chance to share not just the output of a project, but every step along the way. And it opens up the opportunity for many voices, many ways of telling a story.

7. Humanists need practical skills

Doing public humanities takes specific practical skills, and universities should teach them. That means changing PhD programs, and providing new training for faculty. We shouldn't assume that working with communities is a skill that comes along with a traditional humanities Ph.D. Practical, hands-on skills, everything from oral history to reading balance sheets, is essential to the work of the public humanities.