

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED SOCIETIES

PREPARING PUBLICLY ENGAGED SCHOLARS

A Guide for Innovation in Doctoral Education





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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A note from ACLS President Joy Connolly	2
Introduction	3
Section One: Working with Communities	9
Build Bridges, Not Walls: Connecting Campus and Community	10
D. Boehm, E. Salas, M. Salas Crespo, and A. Walls	
Caring for Stories in Community-Engaged Research and Coalitional Work for Justice	16
R. Bloom-Pojar and D. Koepke	
Putting a Human Face to Public Humanities through Digital Storytelling	22
C. Gudis and V. Romano	
Section Two: In the Classroom—Learning Together	30
Teaching Public Humanities in Practice	31
J. Friedman and E.W. Son	
Public Humanities Pedagogies, Justice-Centered Methodologies, and Community Empowerment	36
S. McCormick, K. Franklin, L. Casanova, J.A. Smith, and D. Brister	
Combahee Taught Us: Care and Collaboration in Black Feminist Pedagogical Praxis	43
T. Radford Shorts, LC Johnson, and T. Lindsey	
Section Three: Supporting Students’ Selves and Futures	47
Weaving a Web Together: How to Create Accountability and Support Structures for Graduate Students	48
LC Tosaya, LT Irwin, and RL Joseph	
Enabling Community-Engaged and Public-Facing PhDs	54
J. Anjaria and M. King	
A Canoe Concept Toward Sustained Indigenous Connections	60
M. Baricuatro, A.F. Camacho, G. Colello, J.U. Guerrero, J. Pico, and T.R. Na’puti	
Exploring Diverse Justice-Driven Careers for Publicly Engaged Doctoral Students	69
S. Ristovska and N. Pointer	
Conclusion and Recommendations	75
Appendix—Full list of Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellows and Host Organizations	79

A NOTE FROM ACLS PRESIDENT JOY CONNOLLY



ACLS believes in the value of publicly engaged humanistic scholarship that enriches society, broadens and improves scholarship, and strengthens communities of study, including people inside and outside academia. We are working toward what we call a “new academy” that is just and equitable, providing supportive and smooth paths for all, including first-generation scholars, women, scholars of color, and scholars pursuing innovative approaches to scholarship that may encounter resistance. Opening up pathways in doctoral education that will embrace and foster publicly engaged scholarship is part of that work.

From 2019 to 2021, thanks to the generous support of the Mellon Foundation, the Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society program enabled three cohorts of talented faculty to study and help address urgent issues facing communities across the country and to apply the insights they attained to the training of the next generation of scholars. The program offered two-year fellowships for faculty in doctoral programs in the humanities and interpretive social sciences. After spending a year in residence at US-based cultural, media, government, policy, or community organizations, fellows returned to their departments and worked to integrate public humanities methods and approaches into doctoral curricula. In doing so, they introduced students to a broader range of careers in which they might put their PhDs to use.

This report is a key part of our commitment to that work: We see it as a concrete resource that meets people where they are, tells stories of learning and change, and provides models for others to follow. The product of conversations between faculty and students, it furnishes insights into how best to strengthen publicly engaged doctoral programming and the general doctoral experience. We hope it will spark inspiration and lift up the community of faculty, graduate students, administrators, and community members who are working to make publicly engaged doctoral education accessible to all.

I would like to thank the co-writing teams who dedicated their time, thought, and emotional energy to opening these windows into their projects and perspectives. Thank you also to the ACLS staff who worked on the project, Desiree Barron-Callaci, John Paul Christy, and Jessica Taylor, and to the colleagues outside ACLS who offered feedback on drafts of the report and online resources, Michelle May-Curry and Stacy Hartman.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joy Connolly". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long, sweeping underline.

INTRODUCTION

Publicly engaged work is essential to the health of the academic humanities and social sciences, in both scholarship and teaching. Supporting and legitimating this work at the doctoral level is critical to building an academy that responds to the needs of society and academia today. Students often enter doctoral programs with commitments to communities beyond the academy and a desire to become publicly engaged faculty or to bring their doctoral training to bear in employment or activism outside of the academy. While there is a long history of publicly engaged work in universities and colleges across the disciplines, it has been and still is inconsistently supported in the formal training of doctoral students.¹

This guide aims to:

- demonstrate the value of publicly engaged work;
- give faculty, department chairs, administrators, and students concrete examples of how this work can be supported for graduate students; and
- offer recommendations for framing and sustaining ethical engagements between student-researchers, supporting faculty, and community members.

The guide explores a range of curricular and program innovations, from introducing graduate students to career pathways beyond the academy, to collaborative archival research with community partners, to incorporating land-based pedagogy in connecting and supporting Indigenous students. It is not comprehensive. Given this guide's focus on current work in doctoral education, it does not explore the long history of publicly engaged humanities within and beyond the academy, nor does it offer extensive advice for community organizations interested in working with institutions of higher education. Instead, we provide an [online repository of current resources](#) on publicly engaged humanities and social sciences, and elements of publicly engaged doctoral curricula.

ACLS is invested in the transformative work of building a “new academy”—one that answers the question “What, and who, is academic work for?” with a broader set of possibilities. The Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellowship embodied our commitment to help scholars pursue specialized knowledge *and* visions that create and strengthen communities. We aim to support those who want to understand an obscure text for its own sake *and* those who want to share that text with people for whom it might spark action. We are committed to

“expanding the forms, content, and flow of scholarly knowledge because we value diversity of identity and experience, the free play of intellectual curiosity, and the spirit of exploration—and above all, because we view humanistic understanding as crucially necessary to prototyping better futures for humanity. It is a public good that should serve the interests of a diverse public.”²

¹ For some examples of this long history, see recent collections such as the “Humanities in American Life: Transforming the Relationship with the Public” Summer 2022 issue of *Daedalus*, edited by Carin Berkowitz, Norman Marshall Bradburn, and Robert B. Townsend, <https://www.amacad.org/daedalus/humanities-american-life-transforming-relationship-public>, and *Anti-Racist Community Engagement: Principles and Practices*, edited by Christina Santana, Roopika Risam, Aldo García-Guevara, Joseph Krupczynski, Cynthia Lynch, John Reiff, Cindy Vincent, and Elaine Ward, Campus Compact, 2023, <https://styluspub.presswarehouse.com/browse/book/9781945459290/Anti-Racist-Community-Engagement#contents>. See “A Typology of the Publicly Engaged Humanities” from Humanities for All (<https://humanitiesforall.org/essays/five-types-of-publicly-engaged-humanities-work-in-u-s-higher-education>) for examples of the range of current and recent publicly engaged humanities scholarship.

² <https://www.acls.org/about/>

PUBLIC, PUBLICLY ENGAGED, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGED

This guide uses all three of these terms as part of a constellation of related methods that engage people outside the university in, or with, humanities and social science scholarship. Public humanities is an umbrella term that refers to efforts that originate in the academy to disseminate scholarship such as op-eds, museum exhibits, and public library speaker series; projects originating outside the academy that engage people in humanities work such as community archiving and national book clubs; and community-engaged research that welcomes particular groups into the production of new knowledge in partnership with scholars. In a survey of over 1,500 publicly engaged humanities projects across the United States, Daniel Fisher of the National Humanities Alliance found these projects shared five key goals:

- 1) Informing contemporary debates;
- 2) Amplifying community voices and histories;
- 3) Helping individuals and communities navigate difficult experiences;
- 4) Expanding educational access; and
- 5) Preserving culture in times of crisis and change. (“Goals of the Publicly Engaged Humanities,” <https://humanitiesforall.org/essays/goals-of-the-publicly-engaged-humanities/>.)

This broader vision informs our work across ACLS, with programs such as the [Leadership Institute for a New Academy](#), the Luce Design Workshop for a New Academy, and the [Intention Foundry](#), as well as grants and fellowships like the [ACLS Digital Justice Grant](#), the [Leading Edge Fellowship](#), and the [ACLS Open Access Book Prize and Arcadia Open Access Publishing Award](#).³ Many of these programs bring together academics with those outside the academy to expand where humanistic scholarship happens, or convene those within the academy, both scholars and administrators, to advance inclusion within. Rethinking graduate education is an essential part of this work. If scholarship is “for” many different purposes, then doctoral education should be designed accordingly. This is a practical necessity that acknowledges the scarcity of new faculty appointments and an expression of confidence that scholars can bring deep humanistic study and skills to bear beyond the academy.⁴ Emerging data shows that this wider preparation *also* benefits students on the academic job market. ACLS is supporting this work through publications like [Before the First Day of Graduate School](#); the newly created [Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Innovation Fellowship](#) aimed at supporting innovative dissertations, including those collaborating with community partners; and this guide.⁵

3 <https://www.acls.org/building-blocks-for-a-new-academy/>; <https://www.acls.org/intention-foundry/>; <https://www.acls.org/programs/acls-digital-justice-grants/>; <https://www.acls.org/programs/leading-edge/>; <https://www.acls.org/programs/open-access-book-prize/>.

4 For insight into the job market, see “Job Status of Humanities Ph.D.’s at Time of Graduation” from Humanities Indicators (<https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/workforce/job-status-humanities-phds-time-graduation>) or, for discipline-specific insight, see “The 2023 AHA Academic Jobs Report” (<https://www.historians.org/ahajobsreport2023>); “The MLA *Job List*, 2020–22” by Natalia Lusin and Mai Hunt (<https://www.mla.org/content/download/191179/file/Job-List-Report-20-22.pdf>); and “Academic Philosophy Data & Analysis” at <http://placementdata.com/>.

5 <https://www.acls.org/resources/before-the-first-day-of-graduate-school/>; <https://www.acls.org/programs/mellon-acls-dissertation-innovation-fellowships/>

The contributors to this guide were all fellows or participants in projects funded by the Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellowship—a program launched by ACLS in 2018 that was designed to support doctoral faculty in the humanities and social sciences as they advance publicly engaged research and promote change in doctoral education on their campuses. The projects and scholars funded by the Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society program represented diverse humanistic disciplines, areas of study, and modes of publicly and community-engaged research. The program supported three cohorts of 12 scholars in each competition (see the [appendix](#) for a full list of fellows and their host organizations).

Awardees undertook a two-year fellowship with a sequenced structure that allowed them to bring insights from their community-engaged research back into the doctoral curriculum and pedagogy at their home universities. In the first year, fellows pursued research projects while in residence at a variety of US-based cultural, media, government, policy, or community organizations, ranging from Freedom for Immigrants to the Northwest African American Museum and the American Bar Association.⁶ These host organizations were chosen by prospective fellows (some based on existing ties and some on newer connections) and had agreed at the application stage to dedicate resources to the fellow's residency. The fellowship provided funding to host organizations to account for the effort and cost of supporting the fellows' research. ACLS convened fellows for virtual and in-person meetings to share their experiences, and to provide them with information and resources related to public scholarship and career development for humanities graduate students. In the second year, fellows drew on this experience and additional funds to design programming supporting public engagement and doctoral training at their university.

Creating space for cohort formation is one role institutions can play in encouraging scholars venturing beyond familiar paths. Fellows were keen to share strategies for approaching deans and other university leadership that might work across institutional contexts, demonstrating that a community of practice in the public humanities has value in building the infrastructure. Assistance for doctoral faculty, we found, was also key to supporting the diverse professionalization needs of their own graduate students. Support for the publicly engaged efforts of junior faculty gave them more confidence in a wider set of professional futures for their graduate students. While some doctoral students have their own community ties to draw on for building community-engaged work, they also benefit from the connections and projects that faculty have been able to build (especially in cases where students have moved for their studies). Fellows pursued different avenues of innovation within doctoral education during their second fellowship year that reflected the unique contexts of their departments, universities, and students.

“A crucial first step, then, is for universities to recognize and support identities beyond that of solely “student,” “faculty member,” or “scholar,” and to instead honor the different roles we all play within multiple communities. Indeed, people in the academy are also—and already—members of communities, and community members are also—and already—experts producing knowledge.”

—Deborah A. Boehm, Esmeralda Salas, Margarita Salas Crespo, and Alana Walls, “Build Bridges, Not Walls: Connecting Campus and Community”

⁶ The forms of residency responded to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic starting in March 2020, with many fellows and host organizations devising hybrid or virtual modes of partnership and collaboration during times of social distancing.

Strengthening the opportunities for doctoral students in publicly engaged research, then, involves:

- supporting student-researchers as members of communities both inside and outside the university, with social and political commitments beyond the university and their own needs as community members within it;
- providing opportunities to learn how to engage with communities in research;
- teaching the scholarship of community-engaged research;
- giving insights into what it might mean to carry their scholarship into careers outside of the university; and more.⁷

Any plan for enhancing doctoral education is incomplete without the inclusion of the perspectives of doctoral students themselves. This belief drives the design of this guide. In early 2023, ACLS put out a call for proposals from Scholars and Society fellows to participate in a collaborative reflection process alongside graduate students and community members, with writing stipends available for all co-authors and funding to support ongoing programming. With many excellent submissions, ACLS selected 10 teams that covered a range of approaches to publicly engaged work in doctoral education. What follows are collaboratively written chapters from faculty, graduate students, and community members reflecting on how key aspects of their experience can be shared out beyond the specificity of the Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellowship program. Each piece contains insights and recommendations specific to its focus, while the conclusion brings together a set of recommendations that cut across all the projects.



Humanities graduate students are expected to add to research in their fields, fill gaps in theories, or further develop pedagogical practices. But as graduate students, we can also use our skills to better understand the research interests and issues we are passionate about, how to name them, and how to find potential projects and partners (in local communities, if we so choose) to ethically collaborate with on these issues. ”

—Rachel Bloom-Pojar and Danielle Koepke, “Caring for Stories in Community-Engaged Research and Coalitional Work for Justice”

Section One, *Working with Communities*, brings together pieces centered on how graduate students (as well as faculty and undergraduates) can become involved in community-engaged work through their studies and what values need to be prioritized in working with communities. “Build Bridges not Walls: Connecting Campus and Community,” by Deborah A. Boehm (University of Nevada, Reno), Esmeralda Salas, Margarita Salas Crespo, and Alana Walls, traces how involvement with immigrant justice work and advocating for change in the education landscape can both draw on students’ previous life experience and help build new knowledge and future careers. The stories of three former and current students reveal that support for community-engaged work must include faculty, undergraduates, and graduate students. “Caring for Stories in Community-Engaged Research and Coalitional Work for Justice,” by Rachel Bloom-Pojar (University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee) and Danielle Koepke, describes how graduate students can learn to prioritize “practices of care” in using their research skills to work with communities, through examining a community writing project around reproductive (in)justice with *promotores de salud* (health promoters). One lesson from the piece is how having the time

⁷ For other discussions and examples of how graduate students are engaged in learning around publicly engaged humanities, see *Approaches to Training in the Public Humanities* (May-Curry and Oliver, 2023), work by Imagining America (“Preliminary Findings from the Publicly Active Graduate Education Research Project,” <https://imaginingamerica.org/preliminary-findings-from-the-publicly-active-graduate-education-research-project/>), and “Navigating the Joys and Challenges of Public Scholarship in Graduate School,” <https://imaginingamerica.org/navigating-the-joys-and-challenges-of-public-scholarship-in-graduate-school/>), and Humanities Without Walls (<https://www.humanitieswithoutwalls.illinois.edu/>).

to show up, build relationships, and put research on the timescale of communities as much as possible makes community-engaged work possible. “Putting a Human Face to Public Humanities through Digital Storytelling,” by Cathy Gudis (University of California, Riverside) and Victoria Romano, uses the community-engaged work of the Los Angeles Poverty Department’s Skid Row History Museum & Archive to show how faculty and graduate students can get drawn into the work by community-engaged organizations, as people and scholars. An internship working on the Los Angeles Poverty Department’s digital archive gave ethnomusicology graduate student Victoria Romano the chance to expand her scholarly and creative practice in the realm of digital storytelling.

Section Two, *In the Classroom—Learning Together*, features essays about how publicly and community-engaged humanities can be learned in the classroom, whether in conventional courses or in courses that are themselves community-based. “Teaching Public Humanities in Practice,” by Jessica Friedman and Elizabeth Son (Northwestern University), gives an overview of graduate programs and courses in the public humanities, and describes one course at Northwestern to show how course design shapes how graduate students engage with the subject. Beginning with critical ethnography by performance studies scholars grounded the following discussions of methodologies, case studies, and assignments in the ethics of community engagement. “Public Humanities Pedagogies, Justice-Centered Methodologies, and Community Empowerment,” by Stacie McCormick (Texas Christian University), Lorenzo Casanova, Jason A. Smith, Kelly Franklin, and Dallas Brister, details the course “Contemporary African American Literature: Theorizing Livable Black Futures” and shares four students’ engagement with the course and plans for their future publicly engaged work. These include an affirmative project around Black girl literacy and storytelling, a project on queer of color voices in rural communities, a reconsidering of how to teach literature, and a disability-studies informed website. “Combahee Taught Us: Care and Collaboration in Black Feminist Pedagogical Praxis,” by Treva Lindsey (The Ohio State University), LC Johnson, and Tyiesha Radford Shorts, traces the lineages of community education for Black liberation, and the creation of the Black Feminist Night School during Dr. Lindsey’s fellowship as a virtual community learning space. This form of collaborative pedagogy was deeply grounded in shared investment in Black feminist goals.

Finally, Section Three, *Supporting Students’ Selves and Futures*, explores the institutional structures, approaches, and programming that can help support students in publicly engaged work, work against racism and colonial presents, and open up new possibilities for students’ future careers. “Weaving a Web Together: How to Create Accountability and Support Structures for Graduate Students,” by Lando Tosaya, Laura Irwin, and Ralina L. Joseph (University of Washington), is a conversation about how consciously formed cohorts of new graduate students and co-mentorships can help build webs to work against racism and sexism in the university. Students of color can use this mutual support to enable them to build community both inside and outside the program and do the work of learning and creating knowledge. “Enabling Community-Engaged and Public-Facing PhDs,” by Jonathan Anjaria (Brandeis University) and Moriah King, draws on both process and

“What we came to understand over the course of the inaugural year of Black Feminist Night School was that we were engaged in a form of collaborative pedagogy—we were learning and unlearning together. Although we shared the duties of co-facilitating and opened facilitation opportunities to graduate students to be co-facilitators as well, every person attending operated as a teacher and a learner.”

—Tyiesha Radford Shorts, LC Johnson, and Treva Lindsey, “Combahee Taught Us: Care and Collaboration in Black Feminist Pedagogical Praxis”



PhD curricula often assume students have similar backgrounds, motivations for doing research, and career goals. How can PhD programs account for and value the varied experiences people bring to PhD programs? ”

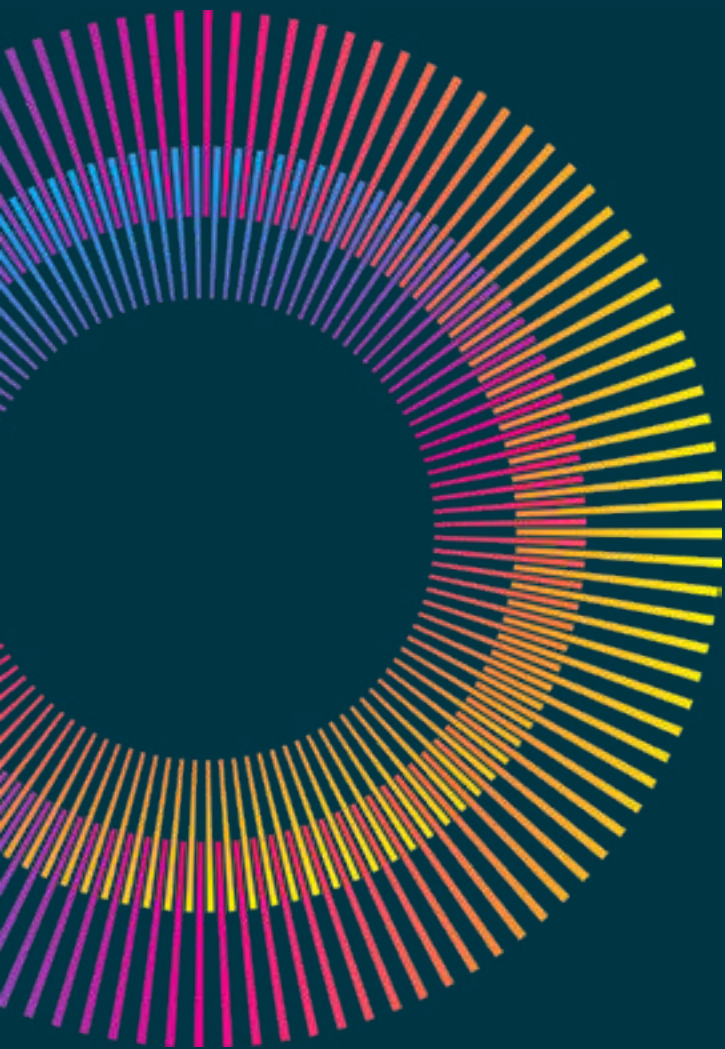
—Jonathan Anjaria and Moriah King, “Enabling Community-Engaged and Public-Facing PhDs”

individual trajectories to offer practical and hopeful strategies for students and departments alike in enabling community-engaged graduate work. These strategies emerge in part from their experiences working in research positions within government (for Dr. Anjaria during his Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society fellowship and for Moriah King prior to starting her PhD). “A Canoe Concept Toward Sustained Indigenous Connections,” by Malia Baricuatro, Annie Fay Camacho, Gabriella Colello, Jonathan U. Guerrero, Johansen Pico, and Tiara R. Na’puti (University of California, Irvine), centers Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander student experiences to address developing land-based education and critical Indigenous pedagogy as approaches for graduate education. Reciprocity and a continuous effort to make good are essential to this perspective on graduate education. Finally, “Exploring Diverse Justice-Driven Careers for Publicly Engaged Doctoral Students,” by Sandra Ristovska (University

of Colorado Boulder) and Nandi Pointer, reflects on a career diversity series on visual media, justice and human rights, the value both graduate students and faculty found in the series, and some recommendations to enable similar programs. This series showed the wide range of possible positions and opened up networks for both faculty and students.

This collection joins many initiatives and resources supporting exceptional and innovative engaged research at the doctoral level, helping students succeed professionally and advance publicly and community-engaged humanities. For a brief look at the range of these initiatives, please explore the [online resources page](#). Further support is available at the scholarly societies, through coalitions, and at universities, from independent thinkers and consultants to graduate students and faculty. The work is happening and ACLS is grateful to be a part of it. See the [conclusion](#) for a list of recommendations for further action, developed from the experiences described in this collection.

Section One: Working with Communities



BUILD BRIDGES, NOT WALLS: CONNECTING CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY

Deborah A. Boehm, Esmeralda Salas, Margarita Salas Crespo, and Alana Walls

The call to “build bridges, not walls,” often evoked by activists working to dismantle immigration detention systems, might also serve as a guide for community engagement within the academy. While Boehm was a 2019–2020 Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellow based at an abolitionist organization, Freedom for Immigrants (FFI), she encountered both walls and bridges between campus and community. Staff from NGOs successfully partnered with scholars to conduct research, though colleagues also recounted challenges that came up while implementing collaborative projects or communicated that academic collaborations might not be a priority within the more immediate work of abolition. For example, when Boehm suggested the possibility of co-authoring a book with activists, they agreed that it could be compelling, but did not see how they would find time to work on it. Staff members from several groups left their positions to pursue graduate studies; some returned to community organizing upon completion, while others changed course and followed different paths. After Boehm encouraged one activist who seemed particularly well-suited to academia to pursue a PhD, the individual politely declined: Why would they pay money to a university to read books they were already reading on their own?

These exchanges underscore some of the divides between universities and community organizations, as well as possibilities for collaboration and engaged research. Despite a tradition of community engagement in higher education, the image—and reality—of the ivory tower persists. Challenges limit the potential for partnerships, including structural inequities; disparate access to resources; divergent goals and timelines; and the often very different approaches, frameworks, and institutional cultures within academia and community organizations. Still, our experiences have shown that meaningful collaborations bridging campus and community can and do thrive, and that further institutional support of engagement is a way to develop new models for graduate education as well as enact broader structural change.

Here, we explore possibilities for integrating community engagement in graduate programs by focusing on our experiences working with diverse community collaborators. In particular, we share ways to build partnerships with community groups and incorporate engagement at various stages of graduate study, especially through:

- research project design that draws on students’ previous work in communities;
- curricular innovation that includes formal opportunities, such as internships and coursework, for engagement within degree programs; and
- support for students at all stages of higher education as they foster relationships that can lead to future graduate study, employment opportunities, and rewarding career paths.

Our discussion is based on Boehm’s research with FFI and other community groups, as well as our connections to the Department of Anthropology and the Department of Gender, Race, and Identity (GRI) at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), where the co-authors are currently or have previously

been affiliated. In particular, we draw on lessons learned from our involvement in several academic programs at UNR—the BA, MA, and PhD in Anthropology, and the BA, MA, and Graduate Certificate in Gender, Race, and Identity. Building on our commitments to organizations addressing diverse social issues—racial justice, economic and educational equity, immigrant liberation, and more—we argue for centering public engagement as a primary component of humanistic graduate training.

Research Design: Building Strong Relationships

***Esmeralda Salas:** While I was conducting ethnographic fieldwork, I spent a year observing the daily workings of an “English Language Learner” (ELL) program at a public high school in Nevada. During a vocabulary review from one assigned reading, “The Secret Water” by Daphne Liu, the teacher, Ms. Lewis,⁸ asked, “What is a ‘barrier’?” One of the students, Vigny, leaned toward another student, Iris, and said under her breath, “lo que nos quiere poner Trump [what Trump wants to build (along the border)].” From across the table, Vigny and Iris shared a sly grin before turning to me with a knowing look.*

Prior to beginning research for her MA thesis in linguistic anthropology, Salas spent nearly a decade working at several neighborhood schools within a large public school district in Nevada. During this time, Salas built strong relationships in her community, which allowed her to collaborate with teachers and parents on projects such as developing and implementing English language classes for adults. This period also allowed Salas to observe education from a vantage point different from the one she was accustomed to as a formerly labeled ELL student. As an educational support staff member, Salas noticed how bilingualism—a source of pride for students and parents alike—was often reduced to a linguistic “deficiency,” and how being deemed proficient in English in one state did not always mean a student was considered proficient by another state’s standards.

Yet, it was not until her graduate studies that Salas more fully came to understand how linguistic ideologies and language policies work in tandem to normalize, and privilege, particular linguistic practices within educational institutions—findings that came precisely out of relationships with research collaborators. Relationships built with members of the broader school community during Salas’s time as an employee also allowed her to conduct research in field sites that would have otherwise been difficult to access. Above all, working closely with students over time informed Salas’s research and opened up community-engaged collaborations that directly shaped her research project. Salas’s engagement with racialized and linguistically minoritized students, before and throughout her graduate studies, strengthened her commitment to sociolinguistic justice, and ongoing collaborative work with and within the local community.

Graduate Curriculum: Building Knowledge Together

***Alana Walls:** As part of a team of Reno educators and community members, my collaborators and I raced against the clock to complete a 500-page charter school application. At one point during the process, a local teacher, frantically working to finish her section, asked, “Alana, who is that theorist that you told us about—the one who talks about ‘opportunity gaps’?” For me, that moment illuminated the power of community-engaged research to co-create knowledge.*

⁸ We use pseudonyms for all research collaborators.

⁹ It was: Wilson, Alison, and Angela Urick. 2021. “Cultural Reproduction Theory and Schooling: The Relationship between Student Capital and Opportunity to Learn.” *American Journal of Education* 127 (2): 193–232.

As a former teacher with deep connections to the Reno independent charter school movement, Walls elected to complete an internship with a collective made up of local educators, parents, and community members working to open a new independent charter high school dedicated to racial, economic, and linguistic justice. Walls is currently in a dual degree program, completing both a PhD in Anthropology and an MA in Gender, Race, and Identity. The internship fulfilled requirements for the [“Applied Community Studies Emphasis,” one of three paths within the MA program in Gender, Race, and Identity](#)¹⁰ that supports students as they partner with local organizations. Each step of the way, the internship was designed and carried out through a collaborative process that included Walls, members of the collective, and Boehm as Walls’s advisor. During the internship, Walls supported the group as they worked toward their stated goals, researching and assisting with the drafting of the charter application, especially by bringing in relevant academic frameworks. At the same time, members of the group—experts in pedagogy, people with important insights about the local community, and families who had struggled with the public school system—shared their extensive knowledge with Walls.

Although Walls completed internship hours in 2022, she has continued to work closely with individuals in the independent charter movement. For example, building on her research about how the development of charter schools in Nevada impacts the current educational landscape, she advised educators and school administrators advocating for independent, public charters at the 2023 Nevada State Legislative Session. The projects Walls completed during her internship continue to support advocates as they educate legislators about the unique role these charter schools play in the community and offer strategies for navigating the state charter approval process. The opportunity to engage in a collaboratively designed internship has facilitated a lasting relationship with community members, helped to strengthen the bond between UNR and the communities it serves, and, above all, provided a platform to build knowledge together.

Career Paths: Building Community on Campus and Beyond

Margarita Salas Crespo: *After moving away from home for college, I was eager to connect with the local community. Early on, I volunteered at an event hosted by Mi Familia Vota and UNR’s Latino Student Advisory Board about recently passed legislation that offered driver authorization cards to Nevada residents regardless of immigration status. While talking with other volunteers, I mentioned that I had recently obtained DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and passed my driver’s license test. My peers asked if I might be willing to lead a workshop to help others prepare for the test, which I was excited to do. The workshop turned out to be the first of many ways that I engaged with community during my studies.*

As an undocumented student shielded by DACA, Salas Crespo’s academic goals have been consistently intertwined with her lived experiences and activism in the immigrant justice space. After receiving DACA, Salas Crespo enrolled at UNR, where her educational trajectory quickly led to community-engaged studies. She joined the Latino Student Advisory Board and began volunteering with local activist organizations, including Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada (PLAN); Tu Casa Latina; the ACLU of Nevada, where she would complete a Women’s Studies internship as part of her undergraduate coursework; and Mi Familia Vota, where she would later join the staff. She also completed an undergraduate thesis project focused on immigrant justice and community organizations supporting immigrants in Nevada. In 2016, Salas Crespo graduated with a double major in Anthropology and Women’s Studies, and a minor in Ethnic Studies.

¹⁰ <https://www.unr.edu/gender-race-identity/degrees/ma>

Salas Crespo's work in the community as a student—both as a formal part of her coursework and through extracurricular activities—opened up possibilities for a career path that she had not previously considered. After graduation, she worked as a community organizer with Mi Familia Vota and as a communications coordinator at the Children's Advocacy Alliance. She also pursued graduate studies, completing a post-baccalaureate certificate in International Migration Studies at COLEF–El Colegio de la Frontera Norte. Salas Crespo later joined the staff of then Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak, serving in different roles, including as an outreach coordinator, senior advisor in the state's newly established Office for New Americans, and political director. Salas Crespo is currently deputy secretary of state for Southern Nevada, responsible for the Notary and Document Preparation Services Divisions, programs that directly serve immigrants. Throughout and after her studies, Salas Crespo has worked to build community in diverse settings, advocacy that has led to a number of work opportunities, and, ultimately, a career in state government. During each stage of her trajectory, Salas Crespo has built a career that is informed by both her academic studies and her commitment to engaging with immigrant communities.

Conclusion: Recognizing and Nurturing Community

Through Boehm's research as a Scholars and Society Fellow, and as Salas, Salas Crespo, and Walls have pursued undergraduate and graduate studies, we have each seen how nurturing and supporting community is foundational to research, curriculum, and academic work. Many of the ways we have built relationships with community members have come directly out of our shared commitments to social justice and the critical approaches that guide our projects, underscoring how the divide between campus and community may not be as wide as people often assume it is. In fact, our individual and collective experiences show that bridges between campus and community are always stronger than walls. Drawing on the strengths of humanistic inquiry itself, our recommendations for supporting community engagement within graduate programs are to center human experience by taking the following steps:

- Prioritize co-design, co-creation, and co-authorship with community partners.
- Recognize existing community commitments by encouraging students to build on them.
- Encourage faculty and administrators to allow for and foster flexibility as a way to mitigate some of the structural challenges and barriers that students, especially those from underrepresented groups, often face as they carry out innovative projects.
- Develop internal funding programs and other mechanisms to ensure that students have the resources needed for collaborations to thrive and expand.

As the experiences we describe illustrate, institutional support of organic student-community collaborations can ensure that public engagement is an integral part of humanistic graduate programs. First, a focus on research that builds on well-established partnerships can strengthen the rigor of research itself. As Salas's experiences demonstrate, prior employment led to a creative and theoretically rich research project, at a field site that might have otherwise been difficult to access. Next, the internship-turned-collaboration that Walls completed underscores how institutions should individualize, and support flexibility within, curricular design—especially fruitful when building new collaborations. Finally, universities should encourage students to explore career pathways by integrating their work in communities within formal degree requirements, such as when Salas Crespo wrote a thesis about immigrant advocacy while also partnering with community groups, engagement that later led to a number of impactful positions in public policy and state government.

In addition, our experiences show that, in order to transform doctoral education, we also need to support engagement at all levels within the academy. Community-engaged doctoral training flourishes most when universities provide opportunities for, and recognize the importance of, engagement among undergraduate students, students pursuing a range of graduate degrees, alums working in communities, and faculty and staff engaged in projects guided by communities themselves. For example, as discussed above, Boehm's residency as a Scholars and Society Fellow allowed her to observe both challenges and innovations that come out of partnerships between academics and community organizers, and she has shared these insights with colleagues, students, and advisees at UNR, including through the launch of a new graduate seminar in GRI titled "Activist Scholarship." And, in turn, Boehm's students, faculty colleagues, and other Scholars and Society Fellows have provided models for new ways to connect with community that Boehm has incorporated in her own research projects. Institutional support of diverse forms of engagement from all members of the university and academic community can strengthen innovation in doctoral programs, but also within the university and the academy more broadly.

The Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellowship addressed many barriers to community engagement within academic programs, especially by funding collaborative research and a yearlong residency. **To expand the successes of the fellowship program, we encourage universities to initiate and further develop institutional support of community engagement in graduate education, especially by dedicating resources to student and faculty projects, and directly to community partners.** For example, just as STEM fields require particular resources to carry out research, such as the funding of labs and equipment, humanistic projects similarly have specific needs, including funding for travel, grants to partner organizations, and stipends to support scholars conducting research within communities. These and other kinds of support are ways to recognize the crucial, and yet often invisible, work that so many academics in the humanities carry out with, as part of, alongside, and in support of communities. Such institutional recognition of different forms of inquiry and engagement can harness the academy's tripartite mission of research, teaching, and service, while also challenging and transforming this guiding framework as a way to prepare students for diverse trajectories within and beyond the academy.

A crucial first step, then, is for universities to recognize and support identities beyond that of solely "student," "faculty member," or "scholar," and to instead honor the different roles we all play within multiple communities. Indeed, people in the academy are also—and already—members of communities, and community members are also—and already—experts producing knowledge. Community engagement in higher education thrives when communities are fostered and supported. Universities are especially well positioned, and have a responsibility, to nurture existing community networks and to support the development of new ones. Fortunately, we do not need to start from the beginning: Building bridges is easily achievable when we tap into the deep connections between campus and community that are already in place.

Deborah A. Boehm is Foundation Professor of Anthropology and Gender, Race, and Identity at the University of Nevada, Reno. She is the author of *Intimate Migrations: Gender, Family, and Illegality among Transnational Mexicans* (NYU Press) and *Returned: Going and Coming in an Age of Deportation* (University of California Press). Her work has been supported through a Fulbright–García Robles Award, an American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship, and an Andrew Carnegie Fellowship. Current research projects focus on US immigration detention regimes and the experiences of young people who migrate to the United States.

Esmeralda Salas completed an MA in Anthropology and a Graduate Certificate in Gender, Race, and Identity at the University of Nevada, Reno in 2021, and hopes to pursue a PhD in the future. Salas conducted graduate research about language ideologies, racism, and liberation among bilingual Spanish-English speakers, and has worked with immigrant students and families in a large public school district in Nevada.

Margarita Salas Crespo graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno in 2016 with BA degrees in Anthropology and Women's Studies and has a post-baccalaureate certificate in International Migration Studies from COLEF–El Colegio de la Frontera Norte. Appointed deputy secretary of state for Southern Nevada in 2023, Salas Crespo has conducted research about immigration detention and written about DACA, and was a staff member in former Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak's Office for New Americans.

Alana Walls is completing a PhD in Anthropology and an MA in Gender, Race, and Identity (Applied Community Studies Emphasis) at the University of Nevada, Reno. A former teacher, Walls conducts research about sex education programs, youth sexuality, and gender identities at a middle school in Reno, and has partnered with a community group that is proposing a new charter school dedicated to racial, economic, and linguistic justice.

Collaboration with Freedom for Immigrants: Deborah A. Boehm was a 2019–2020 Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellow in residency at Freedom for Immigrants (FFI), a national organization dedicated to abolishing immigration detention and all forms of incarceration. FFI monitors human rights abuses through a national hotline and in partnership with an extensive network of volunteers who visit people in detention. While based at FFI in Oakland, California, Boehm conducted fieldwork about the unseen spaces of US immigration detention; contributed to FFI's monitoring efforts, especially within her home state of Nevada; and carried out collaborative research with people directly impacted by detention—partnerships that have continued beyond the fellowship year.

CARING FOR STORIES IN COMMUNITY-ENGAGED RESEARCH AND COALITIONAL WORK FOR JUSTICE

Rachel Bloom-Pojar and Danielle Koepke

Community-engaged projects—the kind that embody collaboration, care, and co-curation—often lead you down paths you didn’t anticipate. In the best-case scenarios, those paths lead to something more meaningful than you could have imagined at the start of a project, partnership, or idea. For us, this project led us to coalitional work with a group of *promotores de salud* (health promoters) in writing and sharing stories about their experiences with *confianza* (trust/confidence) and reproductive (in)justice. Community writing projects are a form of coalitional work for justice when the process of writing stories prioritizes time and care for the writers, and when the process to publicly share the stories prioritizes the audiences and conversations about injustice that the writers want their stories to speak to.

We came together with a group of *promotores de salud* (promotores), the director of their program, undergraduate student translators, and each other to co-create a bilingual (Spanish-English) website, [Cuentos de Confianza](https://www.cuentosdeconfianza.com/), that features stories written by a group of Latina women who work for reproductive justice in their families and communities.¹¹ This group of *promotores* is specifically affiliated with Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin (PPWI),¹² which was Rachel’s host organization for her Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society fellowship residency in 2020–2021. The stories featured on the site were first developed in a community writing class that Rachel taught in fall 2021, and they are being shared in community education settings with Latinx communities across Wisconsin and Puerto Rico. In fall 2023, Rachel is offering the second iteration of the class and working with a new group of writers for the project.

We worked together as graduate student and faculty advisor through Danielle’s MA and PhD programs at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (UWM). Danielle is one of the first to graduate from UWM’s PhD program in Public Rhetorics and Community Engagement, a public- and community-oriented PhD program within the English Department that resulted from a merger of tracks in Rhetoric and Composition and Technical Communication. Through an internship and part-time project assistant position with Rachel, Danielle built the *Cuentos* website from scratch and has served as the primary site designer and manager. In May 2023, Danielle successfully defended her dissertation, which focused on her work with *Cuentos de Confianza* and her conceptualization of a cultural rhetorics praxis of care for digital storytelling projects about reproductive justice. **In this reflection, we share part of our story with *Cuentos de Confianza* to demonstrate how faculty and graduate students might leverage academic skills and resources to support coalitional work for justice.**

¹¹ <https://www.cuentosdeconfianza.com/>

¹² The findings and conclusions in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin, Inc.

Rachel

Creating Confianza

The focus on *confianza* in the *Cuentos* project emerged from the ethnographic research I have been doing with the PPWI promotores and their program director, Maria Barker, for the past four years. I first learned about how multidimensional and important *confianza* was for the promotores through focus groups in 2019. Then in subsequent years as my relationship with many of them deepened, I recognized that *confianza* was integral both to the promotores' work and my methods as a community-engaged researcher (Bloom-Pojar and Barker). Translated into English as trust or confidence, *confianza* is at the core of the work the promotores do as community-based educators and advocates for sexual and reproductive health. It is something they create, build, sustain, and enter into with others. It is something that takes time and often leads to people being vulnerable with others. With the vulnerability that comes with sharing parts of ourselves also comes responsibility for the people we share those things with to care for us and our stories.

Leveraging Resources

Thanks to the Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellowship in 2020, I was able to deepen my engagement and *confianza* with the promotores. Having the time to spend "in [virtual] residence" with their program allowed them to get to know me as a person, and it allowed me to slow down and dedicate more attention to the community engagement in my research process. Despite my fellowship being during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic with all in-person plans moving to virtual settings, I still connected with them in many deep and meaningful ways. During my first semester of the fellowship, Maria asked whether I might be able to teach a writing class for the promotores someday. We spent months talking through ideas for what that could look like, and how to ensure it wasn't just something added on top of my regular teaching load at the university. Ultimately, I was fortunate in that PPWI financially supported a couple of course releases for me to do this class and provide other support for the promotores program beyond the end of my fellowship.

As conversations continued with Maria and the promotores, I realized that the "public programming" portion of my fellowship might be able to support some form of story sharing with the promotores' communities. We thought a website or digital resource would work well, but figuring out what that might look like began to take shape when Danielle joined the team. In 2019, after hearing me discuss my work with the promotores in a graduate seminar, Danielle emailed me to express her interest in the project and openness to supporting it if I was ever looking for extra help. Although I didn't have a need or role for her then, we kept in touch and eventually devised a plan to create an internship in spring 2021 for her to work with me on this project and related public programming. A portion of my ACLS funds went toward paying Danielle for part-time work with the project. While she planned and led "cafecito" gatherings in our Digital Humanities Lab and a community-engaged research panel on campus, Danielle also worked with me on designing the community writing class and drafting various iterations of a website to host the promotores' stories. With additional support from UWM's Office of Undergraduate Research, two bilingual, undergraduate students, Juan Arevalo and Alejandra Gonzalez, also worked on the project as translators and researchers. The site would not be what it is today without the input, research, and writing of Danielle, Juan, and Alejandra, and I hope to continue bringing in students to support the project who have local ties to some of the communities the promotores work with around Wisconsin.

A Responsive Research “Agenda”

Throughout this project, the promotores navigated varied levels of *confianza* with each other, with me, and with what they felt community members had entrusted in them not to share with others. To demonstrate respect and care for that *confianza*, I paused and prioritized different things along the path of my research project to focus my time on this emerging project. I slowed down writing about my “research findings” and instead wrote course materials, proposals for funding, feedback for the promotores, and website content. In response to the writers’ busy schedules and hesitance toward sharing stories with a big group, I pivoted from a full class format to one-on-one meetings so each writer could work at their own pace and develop their stories with me as they desired. While the class was set to end in December 2021, it continued until June 2022 when the six writers completed their stories for the *Cuentos de Confianza* community launch event. We held that [event](#) at a local high school on the south side of Milwaukee and celebrated the writers with over 70 of their friends, family, and supporters.¹³ Much of this project developed organically and in response to requests by my community collaborators. Along the way, much of that process entailed uncertainty and ambiguity about what it was that we were building and working toward. I was grateful to have a graduate student whom I could trust with caring for the *confianza* I had built with the promotores, and I hope that working with me on this project helped Danielle see the messiness, risks, and rewards of doing slow, thoughtful, community-engaged work in the humanities.

Danielle

Coalitional Work with Communities

Community-engaged work has allowed me to ground who I am as a scholar in practical, meaningful actions. As a graduate student who was balancing various expectations, pressing timelines, and family responsibilities, I was cautiously excited at the opportunity to be a part of the *Cuentos* project but worried about how I could find time with all the academic pressures of being a PhD student, a teacher, and a mom of two. At first, I was generally interested in coalitional work that supported the promotores’ community education. As the project developed, I became more specifically passionate about prioritizing practices of care in community-engaged projects that center vulnerable, painful, and traumatic stories of reproductive injustice. Reproductive [in]justice was woven throughout the stories that the promotores shared in our community writing class. At the same time, it was also woven throughout my PhD studies and my own lived experiences as a young mother who became pregnant at 17. I drew on both my academic studies and these lived experiences to support our coalitional work with *Cuentos*.

During the span of two and a half years, I collaborated with Rachel, Maria, the writers, and our undergraduate translators as I designed, updated, and managed the *Cuentos* website. Though this work may not be considered as rigorous as a traditional research study, there was real-world value in my research, writing, and digital design because I was able to support the promotores’ stories, community health work, and advocacy for reproductive justice. Rachel and I had countless moments that confirmed the work we were doing was meaningful to the promotores and their communities. These happened alongside many moments of uncertainty about “bringing it back” to our academic community. For me, one of these moments was when we finally, after much caution and delay, held an exhibit for *Cuentos* at our university for interested faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates. Attendance was

¹³ <https://www.cuentosdeconfianza.com/eventos>

low, and every person who showed up was someone we had already built relationships with. At this event, I noticed how many people had the natural inclination to analyze the stories instead of simply sit with them or reflect on how they related to their own lives. In contrast, the *promotores* were using the *Cuentos* site in their home health parties and shared the stories as a teaching aid for community members to connect with and learn from. They have shared with us that this is opening the door to conversations and support around issues such as infertility, maternal mental health, and domestic violence in Latinx neighborhoods in Wisconsin. People are inspired by the stories, and they are noting how much they can identify with the writers and the challenges they have faced.

Community Engagement as a Graduate Student

Humanities graduate students are expected to add to research in their fields, fill gaps in theories, or further develop pedagogical practices. But as graduate students, we can also use our skills to better understand the research interests and issues we are passionate about, how to name them, and how to find potential projects and partners (in local communities, if we so choose) to ethically collaborate with on these issues. As a graduate student, I felt pressured to fit in or to prove that I deserved to be in my program. If I had continued to let that pressure impact my decisions, I would have missed out on the opportunity for coalitional work that makes a difference for local communities. For instance, in order to pursue working on *Cuentos*, I chose to step away from my job in the campus writing center. Though the writing center experience would translate more seamlessly to academic search committees reviewing my CV on the job market, I believed this community work was just as important. Rachel's ability to pay me and her willingness to help me in translating my work into the language of job "skills" for future applications made this community-driven work more possible for me. My work has included formal and informal research, public and academic writing and other deliverables, digital design, pedagogical development and practice, community and campus engagement, rhetorical dexterity, critical thinking, and reflection. I tried, failed, and reassessed potential avenues of research, writing, and engagement to find the best fit for doing meaningful work that I was passionate about. The dissertation that I produced in relation to this was a labor of love that I carefully constructed to tell the story of *Cuentos*, demonstrate how I practiced care in unique ways, and call other researchers to more deeply consider how they engage with sensitive or vulnerable community projects.

Practices of Care

Caring for people and stories necessarily comes with failure. One person cannot care *enough* for everything and everyone all the time. In this way, failure is always already part of care. However, failure does not need to be negatively charged. By embracing failure, I was open to possibilities and was able to manifest genuine care for *Cuentos*. One such experience was when I chose to step away from a second community partner. I was connected with [Lola's New Beginnings](#), a community organization that supports pregnant women and new mothers across Milwaukee County, through the relationship I built with Gaby, one of the *Cuentos* writers. As a bilingual health promoter and a prenatal and childcare coordinator (PNC/CCC) at Lola's, Gaby was interested in collaborating with me further based on our shared interests and because both of us were young, working mothers. We also realized through conversation that care and story were central to the work of the *promotores*, the PNC/CCCs, and to each of us, personally. During the months I spent building relationships at Lola's, I learned that they were extremely busy. I had wanted to learn more about the ways the organization centers story and relationality as practices of care while offering essential information, education, services, and resources for new or soon-to-be mothers and their families, but I acknowledged that their community initiatives should take priority over a graduate student's desires or deadlines. My time constraints would only

hinder their work. Before stepping away, I was able to offer my knowledge and abilities in digital design skills, writing, and research by advising ways to update their website and by documenting their unique history to have and use on their website. Failing in this way was a practice of care—for Lola's, for myself, and for *Cuentos*. I could not do my best work for them on a volunteer basis while juggling multiple jobs and other responsibilities, and it wasn't fitting into my dissertation in the way I had hoped it would unless I pushed for a more aggressive timeline than Lola's was comfortable with. It was difficult to step away, but it quite literally made more time appear for me, leading to the completion of the *Cuentos* site and the ability to creatively engage with community and academic circulation. By making more space for *Cuentos*, I felt able to slow down and take time with my design decisions and other actions so that the promotores' desires and needs were prioritized.

Recommendations

Throughout this process, I have come to understand four primary steps that graduate students should take when interested in doing community-engaged work:

- 1) **Slow down.** We are pushed to follow an aggressive, linear path and there never seems to be enough time for everything. When we resist this, we free up our time and space for genuinely good relationships, collaborations, and projects. Slowing down also allowed us to deeply consider how and whether we talk about the project, the writers, and their stories with different audiences.
- 2) **Show up.** There is value in being present, physically and mentally, and seeing what comes of it, whether it is at a class, a conference, a volunteer opportunity, or a community event. If you are engaging in community collaboration, showing up is also an important part of building trust.
- 3) **Reflexively discern ethical engagement.** It is imperative as grad students that we critically reflect on the ethics of our engagement with community partners. We should consider our intentions and the needs and desires of the community we are getting involved with and be wary of engaging only for personal or professional gain.
- 4) **Build relationships.** When building relationships is prioritized in our work as graduate students, we can sow the seeds for potential future collaborations. When we begin with authentic relationship and trust building, rather than a predetermined end goal in mind, we open ourselves up to new possibilities and meaningful partnerships.

Faculty members who are interested in supporting graduate students in doing community-engaged work should seek out ways to leverage their resources and influence to make it more viable for graduate students to take these steps within their allotted program timelines.

INVITATION TO EXPERIENCE CUENTOS

To conclude, we invite you to experience *Cuentos* for yourself at www.cuentosdeconfianza.com. While browsing the site, you will see that we have a Care Statement on the Confianza page, which summarizes the care we hope readers will take when engaging with the project:

We believe that stories and the people who tell them should be respected and cared for. Each person's experience in the world is unique and worthy of value. When someone is willing to share their story with us, they are sharing part of themselves. So the process of sharing stories about our lives is a process of *confianza* (trust/confidence). If you are going to listen to or read

the stories here, you are entering a space of *confianza* with our writers. Please take care of these stories and recognize that they reflect the writers' lives, identities, and relationships with other people. By sharing these stories, we invite you to learn, to grow, and to take action to fight for justice in your own community. We also hope that you see that your stories, your body, and your community are worthy of being cared for and protected. (“[What is Confianza?](#)”)

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Rachel Bloom-Pojar (she/her/ella) is an associate professor with the programs in Rhetoric, Professional Writing, and Community Engagement at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. She was a 2020–2021 Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellow in residence with Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin and their Community Education department. Rachel is a bilingual, qualitative researcher and teacher whose work focuses on Latinx community health, trust, reproductive justice, and language access. She is also the director of *Cuentos de Confianza*, a bilingual community writing project featuring stories written by *promotores de salud* who work with reproductive and sexual health education and advocacy.

Danielle Marie Koepke (she/her/hers) is a teaching assistant professor at Marquette University. She completed her PhD in the Public Rhetorics and Community Engagement program at UW–Milwaukee in 2023, where her research interests included cultural and digital rhetorics, reproductive justice, and feminist and queer theories. These areas of study have been foundational to her community-engaged work on the *Cuentos* project, and have also influenced her teaching praxis in courses such as Business Writing, Health Science Writing, and Writing for Social Action. You can find her work in *Composition Studies* and *The Digital Rhetoric Collaborative*, as well as other forthcoming publications.

Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society residency: Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin (PPWI) is a nonprofit organization that provides health care services, education programming, and advocacy to help people make informed and responsible decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. Since 2003, PPWI has provided Spanish-language programming and Latinx community outreach through its *promotores de salud* (health promoters) program. Dr. Bloom-Pojar's residency entailed work with the *promotores de salud* and the Community Education department. This included planning and facilitating Spanish sessions at PPWI's Safe Healthy Strong conference, agency-wide presentations about the *promotores* and her research with them, and administrative support for their various programs.

PUTTING A HUMAN FACE TO PUBLIC HUMANITIES THROUGH DIGITAL STORYTELLING

Catherine Gudis and Victoria Romano

In 1985, artist John Malpede founded the first theatrical troupe in the country composed of people experiencing homelessness, the Los Angeles Poverty Department, or LAPD (the *other* LAPD).¹⁴ From the start, as John McEnteer explains in his book *Acting Like It Matters*, “Malpede envisioned performances more as *modes of exchange*. He did not just want to show things to people, but to involve them....It was a kind of role reversal, *licensing the usually voiceless* to speak and compelling the usually oblivious, accustomed to a willed or preoccupied avoidance of certain social issues, to see and feel.”¹⁵ These modes of exchange, involvement, and creating affective relationships have also characterized the experiences many of us from the university, as student interns and faculty, have had with LAPD. As we’ve joined the ever-evolving roster of Skid Row artists, organizers, and other folks who just happen by LAPD’s Skid Row History Museum & Archive (SRHMA), opened in 2015, we have also become part of an **instantiation of community** and a public sphere enacted through the group and their activities.

LAPD and the SRHMA have created space for all of us, even those who don’t have firsthand experience with the issues they address through their performances, public programs, and multimedia art

Historically, academic internships abide by the “revolving door” model—students come in, perform service, and tag out before the next semester’s cohort arrives.

installations. These include the impacts of mental health challenges, the carceral system, public safety, NIMBY politics, and hotly contested planning projects threatening low- and no-income residents in the Downtown area. Co-author and UCR Professor Cathy Gudis has been an audience-participant and volunteer since the 1990s. UCR PhD candidate Victoria Romano was a summer 2021 Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society intern with LAPD. Historically, academic internships abide by the “revolving door” model—students come in, perform service, and tag out before the next semester’s cohort arrives. Instead, after her

experiences being involved at every level of LAPD goings-on, Romano became invested in the issues and people involved in the group, and thus became resolute that this manner of participation ought to outlast the confines of the academic semester system. She also acknowledged that McEnteer was *right*: There was no way to cross paths with the LA Poverty Department and not make compelling inroads into the Skid Row community and the individuals who make it matter.

As such, the group manages to keep us all coming back. Though UCR is 60 miles east, other students working hybrid or remotely often connect personally through their own life stories of housing insecurities, addiction, and prejudicial attitudes. Even digitally, remote interns build relationships and experience that same itch to return, usually as volunteers at later LAPD events, parades, and festivals. And for Skid Row’s robust artistic community—and returning interns—each visit to the museum or to an LAPD event feels like a reunion with hugs all around.

Both authors have struggled with the ways in which universities often promote ideas of “community

¹⁴ See lapovertydept.org.

¹⁵ John McEnteer, *Acting Like It Matters: John Malpede and the Los Angeles Poverty Department* (Streetwise Press, 2015), 81; our italics.

engagement” or “public-facing scholarship” without putting much stock (i.e., resources, credit, acknowledgement of labor involved in collaborative work) in it. These buzzwords might be part of university mission statements and promotional materials but too often graduate students and faculty are disincentivized to do the work, so it becomes an “add on” or a side hustle for individuals who choose such modes of public humanities. The first and most—or, in some places, *solely*—valued research in the academy still takes the form of scholarly articles and monographs. This is despite decades of reports and guidelines by professional organizations and faculty groups that laud efforts regarding “the increase and diffusion of knowledge” through new forms of scholarship, including digital creations, community-engaged work, and writings that are accessible for a broad audience and that enable scholars to participate in popular discourses.¹⁶ Still, as public humanities scholars we also bear the burden of justifying that different forms of knowledge production *are* peer-reviewed when they go through community vetting, that collaboratively produced writing with community is as valuable as sole authorship, and that multimedia storytelling might reach more people more effectively than 30+ pages of academic argument.¹⁷

Too often our institutions herald the one-way delivery, whereby the humanities are made “public” or called “publicly facing” (in contrast to what we guess must be “private” humanities—a kind of onanism, perhaps), but fail to create ongoing **modes of more meaningful, multidirectional exchange**. Universities also carry the historical baggage of being extractive, removing from rather than adding to the intellectual or economic capital of the communities within which they engage. In contrast, LAPD has guided and inspired us and other students and faculty to produce widely ranging work, from policy reports for advocacy purposes to digital storytelling reels, archival finding aids (including tedious metadata creation), and guides for people seeking services in Skid Row. Even without those outcomes, we’d still keep coming back.

How has this scrappy group managed the kind of community engagement to which universities aspire? One answer is that community is not “found” and then magically engaged in the course of a semester. It is cultivated, with care and intentionality, over the span of time. It involves a praxis. It necessitates belief

16 See, for instance, the American Historical Association’s Guidelines for Broadening the Definition of Historical Scholarship (2023) and Guidelines on the Professional Evaluation of Digital Scholarship by Historians (2015), at <https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/statements-standards-and-guidelines-of-the-discipline>; Imagining America’s Scholarship in Public: Knowledge Creation and Tenure Policy in the Engaged University (2008), https://imaginingamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/TTI_FINAL.pdf; and Organization of American Historians, AHA, and National Council on Public History report and white paper, Tenure, Promotion, and the Publicly Engaged Academic Historian (2010), <https://www.oah.org/2010/04/08/historical-associations-issue-recommendations-about-rewarding-public-history-work-for-promotion-and-tenure/>.

17 These issues have been addressed by numerous research universities, including University of Minnesota, which describes “engaged scholarship as having several attributes that may distinguish it from traditional scholarship,” such as: “1) Products are often published in both traditional disciplinary outlets and non-traditional venues. 2) The work is often multi-disciplinary. 3) Scholarly products often include multiple co-authors, including community partners who contribute to the work in significant ways. 4) The work often integrates research, teaching, and service in a way that makes it difficult to compartmentalize into a single category (e.g., teaching, research, service). 5) The work requires significant relationship-building with external partners to maximize its quality and impact.” See https://engagement.umn.edu/sites/ope.umn.edu/files/umn_pes_criteria_11.08.18_1%20Final.pdf.

These issues are also part of an October 2021 report by UCLA, which surveys a range of R1 universities to determine characteristics and modes of assessing community-engaged scholarship, available at https://communityengagement.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Tenure-and-Promotion-Policy-for-Engaged-Scholarship-Report-10_12_21.pdf.

Peer review may consist of vetting processes specific to the venue, purpose, or intent of the project, and by experts in their respective arenas, including scholars, stakeholders, stewards, community partners, and other public scholars, and be conducted after a project’s completion. See University of California, Berkeley, *Guidelines for Assessing Community-engaged Research* (January 2021), reproduced as Appendix II, https://communityengagement.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Tenure-and-Promotion-Policy-for-Engaged-Scholarship-Report-10_12_21.pdf.

One answer is that community is not “found” and then magically engaged in the course of a semester. It is cultivated, with care and intentionality, over the span of time. It involves a praxis. It necessitates belief that ideas in and about society—the humanities—also need to be turned to action.

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Otherwise, the notion of “community” remains an abstraction, an empty category that is too imprecise to be meaningful, or that perpetuates divisions—that “community” is always “out there” (them) and not “in here” (us), and categorically “of color.” With these basics in mind, we are offering this case study in order to articulate and highlight practices drawn from a grassroots group with over 35 years of experience working in, for, and by creating community.

The first lesson is in the time, effort, and intentionality to build this kind of community. Malpede and Henriëtte Brouwers, who has been Associate

Director since 2000, have become fixtures in the neighborhood and known entities insofar as their abilities to facilitate street-level connections through the arts. In 1985 Malpede was a paralegal for the Inner-City Law Center in Skid Row. During the day, he did outreach to people living unhoused and in substandard low-income apartments. At night, he would hold acting workshops at the law office; that’s where the members decided to name themselves as a department the city *ought* to have formed to address poverty, and took the acronym of the department the city *instead* used to deal with poverty—LAPD.¹⁸

LA Poverty Department opened its brick-and-mortar museum and archive in 2015—its first permanent space. On its mezzanine can be found the 35 years of documentation they’ve collected. The ground-level museum hosts changing exhibits, open-mic and movie nights, and community space for meetings and other events. It also serves as the stage set for new performances by the group, which rehearses there, too. Documentation of each of these new activities, including the annual Festival for All Skid Row Artists held at Gladys Park and the biennial *Walk the Talk* parade-performances through the streets of Downtown, is added back into the archives, which is itself often a source for community curated projects.

The Skid Row History Museum & Archive has the added imprimatur of its lofty title, granting LAPD propertied status as a now-housed entity. This allows the group to better realize its central mission, which is to shift the narratives about Skid Row and poverty. Or, as SRHMA Archivist Henry Apodaca likes to put it, LAPD and the Museum shift authority, so that people who live and work in Skid Row are the experts, with an institution named after the place of their expertise, not the university researchers, journalists, and others who helicopter in to extract the information they need, to “engage the community,” and fly out at the end of the research grant or academic year.

Duration like this might be hard to replicate. After all, LAPD’s heartbeat is the Skid Row neighborhood, and residents who have seen the group through decades of artistic production and advocacy. They show us how the humanities can work to, well, humanize the experiences of people who are typically unseen, ignored, and criminalized.

Since 2012, LAPD’s *Walk the Talk* has additionally served this role of highlighting how individuals can

¹⁸ John Malpede, interview by Clancey Cornell, Cathy Gudis, and Hayk Makhmuryan, April 21, 2023.

make a difference, by honoring people who have made an impact on others in Skid Row. LAPD calls for nominees, then holds semipublic recorded interviews with each, and over many months, elements of each narrator's life story are woven by the group into 10- to 15-minute performances. LAPD holds the parade every two years around Memorial Day, complete with a New Orleans-style brass band. They traverse a route through Skid Row, stopping at places of significance to honorees. There, LAPD acts out the honoree's story. Following the performance, the honoree addresses a large and enthusiastic crowd that amasses along the route. The parade-performance thus becomes a form of testifying and bearing witness, and in taking to the streets, a symbolic effort to resist the displacement and gentrification that persists to threaten this century-old multiracial neighborhood. *Walk the Talk* puts a human face to "Skid Row" and illuminates how individual actions can make headway in addressing otherwise seemingly intractable problems affecting the community.

In 2019–2020, a Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society fellowship gave UCR history professor Gudis the opportunity to be in residency at LAPD's Skid Row Museum & Archive—a university-community partnership with funds for both sides of the hyphen. When COVID-19 disrupted their work, they switched course to transform the archives derived from *Walk the Talk* into a publicly accessible online repository.¹⁹ It was launched in late May 2020 amidst global uprisings in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder by police.

Romano joined to work with LAPD as a Mellon/ACLS intern a year later to help with the digital archive, which today highlights 77 people through recordings of *Walk the Talk* performances and the original interviews. Her involvement marked ongoing efforts by SRHMA to activate the archive, and to develop new opportunities for different audiences, community members (including those brought in to develop new projects), and interns to engage with the history of Skid Row and LAPD. The archive opens opportunities to use digital storytelling to craft new narratives and expand upon those already represented. Romano's background in performance and video production made her well suited for the position. Still, her internship was a slowly revealing experience, characterized by the elements of patience, humility, and radical care that define a lot of the work at the museum.

Expertise quickly goes out the window when face to face with real people rather than just recordings or archival records. Confrontations with people experiencing mental health issues, happenstance conversations that led to details shared about firsthand sexual violence against women living on the streets, and multiple other unexpected exchanges became Romano's on-the-job training. These experiences exemplified trauma-informed care and lessons in developing human connections, all laced through her archival training.²⁰

Romano's culminating project came out of this varied experience, taking shape as a video essay. The infrastructure already existed for scholars, activists, and community members to remix the components

19 The Walk the Talk digital archive is at <https://app.reduct.video/lapd/walk-the-talk/#>. Since the 2020 Walk the Talk could not be held in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic, prerecorded performances were featured along with a Zoom launch of the digital archive. A publication, including remarks by John Malpede and an essay by Cathy Gudis, "Everybody Loves a Parade!" was also produced and distributed to participants; see *Walk the Talk 2020* (Los Angeles: Skid Row History Museum and Archive, 2021).

20 On trauma-informed care, see Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services* (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014); Downtown Women's Center (DWC), *Trauma- and Resiliency-informed Care Toolkit: A Resource Guide for Service Providers* (LA: DWC, 2019); and Tom Grode, "Towards Skid Row Community-Generated Best Practices for Trauma Informed Care," *Medium*, January 8, 2019, <https://manoftheseatom.medium.com/towards-skid-row-community-generated-best-practices-for-trauma-informed-care-e4a4b076b0>.

of the *Walk the Talk* archive using Reduct, a transcript-based video application that allows for easy searching, highlighting, and editing of videos. The software also lessens the level of experience needed to make new videos out of the archive, allowing the museum to invite a range of people, including interns, to create what they call “response reels”—essentially a meta-discourse on the contents of the *Walk the Talk* archive.²¹ Often, these montages were compiled in a manner that illustrated a sustained conversation across multiple interviews about some aspect of Skid Row history, either introduced or interspersed with commentary by the reel’s editor. When LAPD asked Romano to create a 7- to 10-minute reel, she thought about how she might engage her skills as a digital creator and music producer to intervene in a unique and meaningful way.

Throughout her graduate coursework as an ethnomusicology student, Romano experimented with submitting term papers in a video essay format.²² Because of the inherently audiovisual nature of her field, she thought it more engaging to show excerpts of the music in question, to see it performed in space and time, and to intervene as a talking head. She took her cues from YouTube video essayists such as Adam Neely and 12tone, who produced content referred to as “public musicology.”²³ She carefully observed their etiquette, and in doing so, learned how to avail herself of different dimensions available in an audiovisual medium, through which sound, text, and image combine to communicate research claims. Although this practice was sometimes considered “informal” by professors, Romano believes that these video essays reflect her generation’s mediascape and the modes through which they are consuming information, and will inevitably become a future medium for expressing academic research when this new vanguard arrives as senior scholars.

Romano’s way into the response reel assignment came to her while she digitized a recording of a recent performance by LAPD called *The New Compassionate Downtown*. In that performance, one of the LAPD players, Lorraine Morland, improvised a song *a cappella* about humility. Upon hearing it amidst her tasks, Romano’s creative impulses as a music composer were activated. She sampled Morland’s song and imported it into her DAW of choice,²⁴ Logic Pro X. She built onto it and created a fully realized song, which ultimately served as the original soundtrack to her response reel.

Likewise, the inspiration from Romano’s response reel emerged from small, mundane conversations with the SRHMA’s two archivists, Zachary Rutland and Henry Apodaca. Because she is not a cultural insider, Romano didn’t know the neighborhood norms, and staff gently steered her. Notably, several grammatical faux pas yielded swift, firm-yet-kind responses from supervisors. First, it was imperative that Skid Row be capitalized in every instance; as a subject, a tag, and whenever else referenced in the metadata. This was to distinguish the abstract, historical construction of a “skid row” from *the* veritable and long-standing neighborhood in Downtown Los Angeles. This also required her to refer to events as having happened *in* Skid Row, as opposed to *on* it. This small change from “o” to “i” demanded

21 The Reduct digital platform was customized for LAPD and Walk the Talk by media artist and Reduct.Video co-founder Robert Ochshorn. The remixing of the archive through response reels is unique to LAPD, with few clear parallels. One is to the projects of the South Asian American Digital Archive (saada.org), which has brought artists together to reflect on and create new work related to SAADA’s holdings and mission.

22 Ethnomusicology is the anthropology of music and study of music’s social dimensions by way of ethnographic methods.

23 Methodologies aimed at involving the public in scholarly discussions about music. See, for instance, Drew Massey, “A Profile for Public Musicology,” *Musicology Now* (American Museum Society), September 12, 2015, <https://musicologynow.org/a-profile-for-public-musicology/>; and Will Rubin interview, “Doing Public Musicology with Douglas Shadle,” *Sound Expertise* podcast (season 3, episode 11): July 25, 2023, <https://soundexpertise.org/doing-public-musicology-with-douglas-shadle/>.

24 Digital audio workstation—audio editing software.

her consideration, and so she set out to articulate Skid Row's placehood using the archive's contents. She researched place theory and creative placemaking and included her research findings in a scripted commentary. Her narration brought her into conversation with Skid Row community members, whose words and actions were featured in the montage of video clips. She used on-screen text to accentuate key scholarly ideas as well as to provide on-screen commentary that would normally constitute a footnote.

Ultimately, this project allowed Romano to intervene in a way that:

1. represented her personal scholarly and creative practice;
2. made generous use of the audio and visual dimensions of the archive's materials; and
3. produced an engaging and entertaining intervention into the archive built for consumption by a broad audience and including Skid Row community members.

Romano's contribution also stays in Skid Row, having been added to the digital *Walk the Talk* archive and included in subsequent public events in which she shared her video.²⁵ Those events became additional ways for an audience to gather together and respond in "reel time" to ideas shared in this format.

The digital storytelling and the embodied elements around it that are part of *Walk the Talk* enable pedagogy that diversifies our usual professional training in the humanities and acknowledges multiple modes of new knowledge production and dissemination. It answers some aspects of how one might teach creativity, or engage community, particularly in a quarter or semester. Another of the lessons of *Walk the Talk* is to embrace the messiness of real life and its recordings, and to recognize that the imposition of another narrative order can be equally messy but still compel others to see, feel, and act—to animate what in other contexts we, the audience, would have no other way to experience.

In this sense, the practice of remixing archival sources plays a significant role in public humanities, as a historiographic approach that reconsiders past efforts, as a release from the presumed authority of text- and archives-based scholarship, and as a way to revise the dominant model of sole authorship in the humanities. The practice allows us to shift cognitive authority in multiple planes—to challenge who gets to be the "experts" as well as the hierarchies that dominate traditional top-down learning environments. It allows unheard voices, especially people who are the most impacted by systemic inequities, to come to the forefront and to challenge false and limiting narratives about themselves, with others of us joining their ranks to add other insight and support. It is a participatory process that builds community and solidarity, even when mediated.

From a pedagogical perspective, story sharing also involves historical research, engagement with nontraditional sources, and narrative strategies significant to media communications. From a social perspective, it continues oral traditions that bind people together. It bears connections to many African and Indigenous knowledge systems and serves as a means of cultural survivance in spite of colonial and state violence. From an activist perspective, it is a form of public advocacy, which LAPD actively engages by creating popular education tools and crafting testimonies for City Council and other hearings that also pull from its archive.²⁶

²⁵ See <https://app.reduct.video/lapd/walk-the-talk/#/r/victoria-romano>.

²⁶ For instance, advocacy with the Skid Row Now and 2040 Neighborhood Coalition utilized the Walk the Talk archival materials and Reduct, with outcomes including a white paper by Cathy Gudis and the coalition, *Containment and Community: The History of Skid Row and Its Role in the Downtown Community Plan* (2022); see <https://www.lapovertydept.org/skid-row-now-and-2040/>.

Digital Storytelling has developed in part through the efforts of the Center for Digital Storytelling (now StoryCenter, <https://www.storycenter.org>). Formed in 1998 to harness the growing accessibility of online and digital media tools, the Center aimed to support communities to galvanize change through the power of personal voice. Several generations of community workshops and creative experimentation later, digital storytelling has grown to include games, immersive environments, augmented and virtual reality, and more. Yet personal narrative remains at the core of digital storytelling, which allows people from all walks of life to tell their own stories, to blend personal life and digital technology for community activism, education, communications, and the presentation of all forms of research. Many university libraries include “how to” guides, and StoryCenter offers free and paid workshops in English and Spanish.

The tactics of digital storytelling are central to the organizing and artistic expression of LAPD. These transfer well to training doctoral students and faculty in diversifying our own toolkits to meet the needs of our respective research sites. Some traditionalists in the academy might question the durability and sustainability of digital storytelling, based on the obsolescence of media technologies. Digital humanists have responded by pointing toward other time-based activities that are typically valued and celebrated by humanities scholars, like performances, exhibitions, concerts, etc. Creating digital works whose “originals” might not be available in 50 years could be similarly considered and valued, and “replicas” that salvage older digital content, such as the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine, could be considered documentation of the original production.²⁷ In any case, when we consider pedagogies for the next generation, particularly in the face of concerns about the future of the professoriate, digital storytelling surely serves the purpose of opening more professional opportunities in new technology studies, communications, and digital forms of artistic creation and interpretation, rather than less. The enduring question that remains is how, as public humanists, we can make sure a human face remains recognizable at multiple scales and in multiple media forms. This, perhaps, is the *real* lesson of LAPD for the public humanities, not only to be publicly facing but also to constitute a public that can recognize one another, with respect, humility, and the patience to listen and move at the speed of trust. Those, after all, are among the key concepts for relationship-building, and especially those we embark on as part of university-community partnerships, pedagogical projects, and internships. We need to “act like it matters,” throughout, because it does.

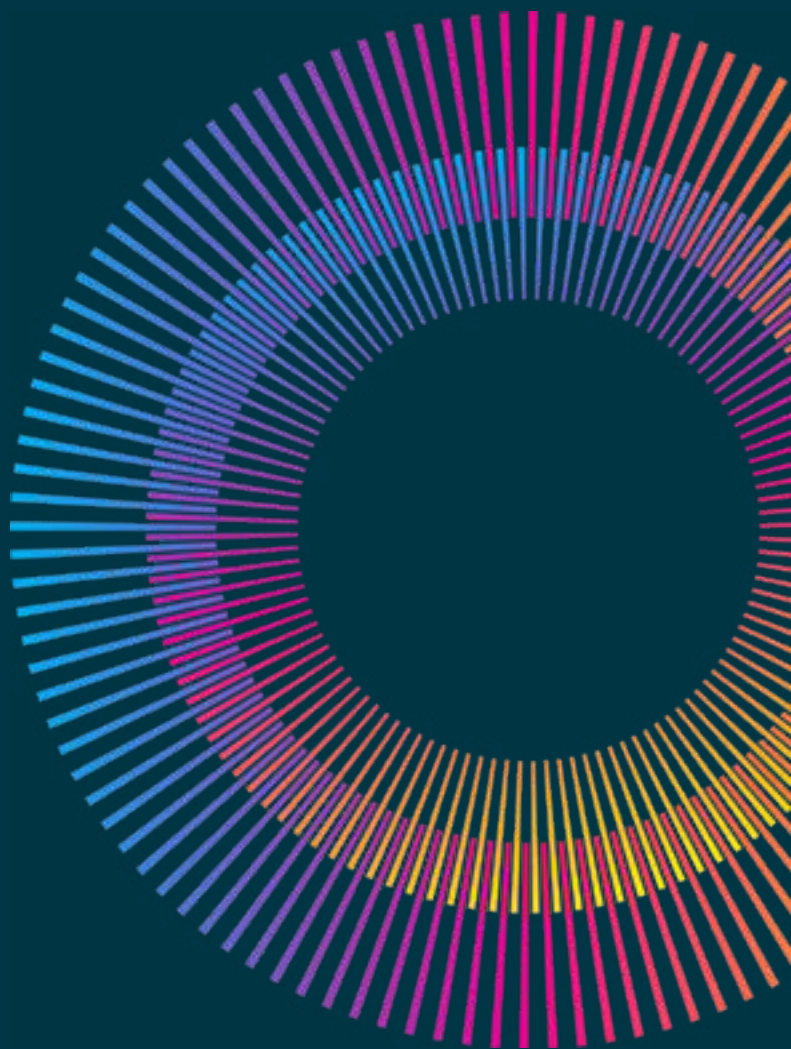
Catherine Gudis, associate professor of history and director of public history at UC Riverside, holds a Pollitt Endowed Term Chair for Interdisciplinary Research and Learning. Her public humanities projects include “[Slow Violence of the Supply Chain](#),” on the logistics industry in SoCal; the digital archive and mapping platforms, “[A People’s History of the Inland Empire](#)”; and the [Relevancy & History Project](#) with California State Parks. All aim to recover erased histories, and uplift the voices of those whose experiences narrate systemic state violence and its afterlives, as well as everyday joy, community, and resiliency.

²⁷ See Chapter 2, “Dealing with Digital Ephemerality,” in Kathryn Wymer, *Introduction to the Digital Humanities: Enhancing Scholarship with the Use of Technology* (New York: Routledge, 2023).

[Victoria Romano](#) is a PhD Digital Composition candidate at UC Riverside. She completed a BMus in Music Composition and a minor in Sociocultural Anthropology at Rutgers University. She holds a master's in Ethnomusicology from the University of California, Riverside. Her research and creative practice investigate the impact of audiovisual media and technoculture on placemaking, public memory, and consciousness. In 2021, she scored a feature film set in Dublin, Ireland, [When Men Were Men](#), in collaboration with two nonbinary transmasculine filmmakers. She intends for her score and its [companion scholarship](#) to elevate visibility and empathy toward trans and nonbinary folks as well as the issues that matter to them.

Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Residency: Founded in 1985, Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD) is made up of people with experiences in homelessness and who make art, live, and work in Downtown LA's Skid Row. Through performance, parades, festivals, and multimedia exhibitions, the group documents the experiences of people living in poverty and the sociopolitical forces that shape their lives and communities. In 2015, LAPD opened its [Skid Row History Museum & Archive](#) (SRHMA) to share its archives and provide space for civic dialogue. SRHMA functions as a means for exploring the mechanics of displacement in an age of immense income inequality by mining the neighborhood's activist history and amplifying effective community resistance strategies. Mellon-ACLS Scholars and Society Fellow Catherine Gudis served as a scholar-in-residence starting in 2019–2020, joining LAPD and the [Skid Row Now & 2040 Neighborhood Coalition](#) to advocate for new zoning to ensure low-income housing for Skid Row. With the group, she published the white paper [Containment and Community: The History of Skid Row and Its Role in the Downtown Community Plan](#) (2022), which was used for public advocacy and featured in the exhibition [Blue Book-Green Paper](#) at SRHMA (November 2022–September 2023). She continues to work with the group under the honorific title of “scholar-in-residence.”

Section Two: In the Classroom—Learning Together



TEACHING PUBLIC HUMANITIES IN PRACTICE

Jessica Friedman and Elizabeth W. Son

Trends in Public Humanities Graduate Curricula

When researching graduate programs or courses in **the public humanities**, a number of points of focus emerge. For some programs, the public humanities are connected to **activism and civic engagement**. For others, the public humanities are tied to **career diversity**, using local organizations to prepare students for jobs outside of academia. Still for other programs, the public humanities offer an **ethical approach to research and knowledge dissemination**. In an effort to identify trends among public humanities graduate curricula, we analyzed online materials from public humanities master's programs, graduate certificates, graduate minors, fellowships, and stand-alone graduate courses. We focused our research on programs that identify their work as the public humanities and/or community-engaged humanities. This focus did not include programs in related fields, such as public history, digital humanities, or the environmental humanities, though there is much overlap between these areas and the public humanities. We chose to keep a narrow focus to help us determine how graduate programs are defining and mobilizing the public humanities today. No matter how differently these programs describe their missions or the public humanities in general, they most overlap in their requirement of two key components:

- 1) a theory-focused introduction to public humanities seminar and
- 2) a practicum or internship in which students work with local organizations.

In this piece, we examine those two primary modes of public humanities courses in relation to “Public Humanities in Practice,” a class Elizabeth Son taught at Northwestern University.

Introductory graduate seminars focused on theorizing the public humanities emphasize defining the public humanities as a methodology in relation to key operational terms, including public, community, human, humanities, university, and expertise. Through critical theory and contemporary case studies, these seminars lead students to challenge assumptions they bring to their own research. At the same time that these courses provide students with a critical awareness of the scholarly conversations that animate the public humanities, they lead students to understand how the public humanities can be applied as a methodology to a wide range of projects. Public humanities as a methodology, rather than as a discrete field of study, affords students the opportunity to engage in some of its fruitful conversations on, for example, ethics and knowledge dissemination even if they do not foresee engaging with a community. [Georgetown University's “Introduction to Public Humanities: Theory, Methods, Ethics, and Practice,”](#) in contrast to most introductory public humanities courses, positions the public humanities as a field unto itself in addition to as a methodology. Even with an understanding of the public humanities as a distinct field, the course guides students to investigate it in relation to another discipline, enabling them to practice public humanities as a malleable approach. These theory-focused seminars' offerings of contemporary case studies take precepts of the public humanities seriously by looking at the knowledge produced and shared outside of a university campus. [Yale University's “Introduction to the Public Humanities,”](#) for instance, includes presentations by public humanities practitioners, showing students models for projects and career paths. The methodological approach in these seminars carries through to most public humanities master's programs or graduate certificates

in which students study public humanities in relation to another field (e.g., public humanities and theatre). Final seminar projects in which students devise plans for public humanities projects in conjunction with their primary research areas are a common practice among theoretically focused introduction to public humanities courses, as in Son's "Public Humanities in Practice" discussed below.

Graduate courses focused on engagement with community organizations provide students an opportunity to gain hands-on public humanities skills while contributing to a particular group. These courses are most often titled practicums or internships. They place each student in a local organization or a public-facing program on campus. The student reports to a professor in addition to a point of contact within the organization. Although the organizations assign students tasks based on present needs, the courses assign students a minimum and maximum number of hours to work at the organization during an academic term. Example assignments provided by some of these courses include writing communications or grant materials, managing social media, podcasting, performing oral histories, curating and cataloging a collection, learning historic preservation, or designing a website. Rather than confine a student's work in an organization to one academic term, [The University of Oklahoma's Community Engagement graduate certificate](#) includes multiple tiers of a student's involvement. A student in the certificate program takes a "Community Engagement Apprenticeship"

“ I was already interested in exploring potential career opportunities outside of the academy but perhaps one of the things that was most interesting about the seminar for me was the way in which it highlighted the opportunities for public-facing research within a university setting: that the choice isn't a binary of one or the other. ”

—a doctoral student who took the course

course in which they shadow a mentor in a local organization. The student then identifies a problem faced by the organization and proposes a project to create a solution. The student then works on their proposed project in a subsequent academic term as a capstone experience.

In addition to internships or practicums within public humanities graduate programs, which place students with a broad range of local organizations, some disciplines offer practical courses that specifically align with careers in which their students might be interested. For example, [University of Georgia's "Internship in the Performing Arts"](#) allows theatre graduate students to spend two months working full time for a performing arts organization. Public humanities practicums or internships enable graduate students to apply the methodologies they learn in theory-focused classes as they gain work experience outside of the academy. At Northwestern University students have the opportunity

to develop their skills and networks through the [Alice Kaplan Institute's Public Humanities Graduate Research Workshop](#) and to participate in internships through the [Center for Civic Engagement](#). Son's "Public Humanities in Practice" provides students with an understanding of public humanities as a methodology as well as tools to actively pursue community engagement in their own work.

Course Design Behind "Public Humanities in Practice"

Son's time as a Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellow in 2019–2020 inspired her to design and teach a new course in her graduate program focused on doing public humanities work. In winter 2022 she taught "Public Humanities in Practice" for the first time. The 10-week course was designed to introduce doctoral students to critical approaches to the public humanities and create space to explore what it means to be a performance-oriented public scholar. Along with studying various methodologies of the public humanities, students learned about the varied public practices of theatre, dance, and performance studies scholars, ranging from performances, post-show talkbacks, exhibits, installations, community oral history projects, digital archives, websites, op-eds, podcasts, films, community events, political actions, walking tours, and workshops to curriculum building. In doing so, the course

encouraged students to reflect on why and how one creates public-facing scholarship (e.g., op-eds and podcasts) and/or participates in community-engaged work (e.g., political actions and oral history archives).

Learning objectives included developing a clearer sense of the methodologies of the public humanities and different modes of knowledge production; learning about the breadth of public-facing scholarship and community-engaged work by theatre, dance, and performance studies scholars; developing some familiarity with multimedia platforms and digital humanities practices; and gaining exposure to multiple career pathways for PhDs in the humanities.

Keeping in mind students who were taking a public humanities course for the first time and those who were already doing community-engaged work but did not have formal training, the course started with readings introducing the public humanities. This led to discussions on how ideas of the public humanities have shifted over time, how one defines the public, and what it means to “do” the public humanities for those situated in universities. In order to center discussions around the ethics of doing community-engaged work, the course incorporated readings on critical ethnography by performance studies scholars Dwight Conquergood, D. Soyini Madison, and Patricia Nguyen, opening up discussions on what values and principles should guide one’s work with communities. Applying a critical theory-based approach to ethnography, these scholars highlighted different ways of knowing and situating oneself as a co-creator of meaning in situations rife with complex power dynamics, especially when one may be an “outsider.”

Centering critical ethnography earlier in the course helped set a tone where questions surrounding the ethics of community engagement were at the forefront of most class discussions and therefore allowed the class to interrogate the commonality and distinction between different modes of public humanities work. While there is overlap between different modes of public humanities work, creating public-facing scholarship tends to focus more on the question of widening one’s audience, while working with specific communities on projects is more intentional in its focus on partnership and process. These differences have implications on how one approaches the work and understands the stakes of doing public humanities work. The stakes are particularly high when working with communities as public scholars because of the power dynamics and potential impact on the community. Keeping these stakes in mind, Son led class discussions around the dangers of falling into “extractive” work with communities and creating knowledge that is unidirectional from the scholar to the community, in its creation and/or dissemination, and the importance of careful, thoughtful engagement that centers the community through the whole process.

After introducing students to the public humanities and to the concept of a public humanities methodology that could be applied widely, the course transitioned to case studies of different kinds of public-facing scholarship and community-engaged work by theatre, dance, and performance studies scholars. Each week focused on two case studies in each of these categories: community-based theatre and civic engagement; public writing, public-focused dramaturgy, and new media; performing activism and public history; digital methods for theatre, dance, and performance historical inquiry; and digital archives and museum work.

The case studies showcased both public-facing scholarship focused on the sharing of knowledge with audiences beyond those in academia, such as [Daughters of Lorraine Podcast](#) and [Digital Portobelo](#), and community-based work focused on partnering with communities, such as [The Penelope Project](#) and

KAN-WIN's "[Comfort Women](#)" [Justice Advocacy](#). Including KAN-WIN gave Son the opportunity to share what she learned during her fellowship year from working with this survivor advocacy organization on curating public opportunities for historical education and justice advocacy. Students also read about the development of and collaboration behind projects, interacted with "how-to guides" like Junebug Productions' story circle [toolkit](#) and [practice notes](#) or digital archives like [Dunham's Data](#), and on a few occasions, heard directly from public scholars who visited as virtual guest speakers. Centering class discussions on case studies allowed students not only to explore questions surrounding process, ethics, and sustainability that arise with public humanities work, but also to delve into the motivations, strategies, and challenges of specific projects.

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I appreciated that the seminar incorporated weekly case studies through which we could consider tangible ways of doing public scholarship. This intertwining of theory around public humanities and of exploration of the practice of public scholarship was a meaningful way to learn. In addition, I continue to think about conversations we had in the course around the careful, often slow work required to engage in ethical relationship with any communities with whom we might work while doing publicly engaged work.”

—a doctoral student who took the course

Assignments were designed to introduce students to multimedia platforms; develop their public writing, new media, or digital media skills; and help them conceive of a public humanities project. For a midterm assignment, students could choose to write an op-ed or create a new media or digital media project (e.g., podcast episode, website, a series of Instagram or Twitter posts, virtual story circle, or digital map). This helped students think about different modes of knowledge production and develop some familiarity with multimedia platforms and digital humanities practices. To help learn about these new modalities, students were encouraged to take advantage of on-campus and off-campus resources such as a university public writing workshop, [The Op-Ed Project's tips and tricks](#), and Northwestern's [digital storytelling tools](#) and [digital humanities library resources](#). For the final project, students created a proposal for a two-stage public humanities project that drew from their own research interests. The first stage of the project focused on a component that could be accomplished during graduate school, and the second stage focused on the larger components of the project that would require resources and time beyond graduate school. This assignment helped students think through the process of designing a public humanities project, starting with the project's aims, stakes, content, publics, and partnerships and then transitioning to a plan of

action for developing the skills and training to accomplish the project. Students were also encouraged to complete an [ImaginePhD](#) assessment of their skills, values, and interests to help with exploring multiple career pathways.

Key Takeaways for Teaching Public Humanities Courses

- Create space for students to reflect on the responsibility that comes with their knowledge and on how they can harness their expertise and experiences for change
- Share with students examples of the diverse range of modalities that knowledge dissemination can take
- Center questions around care and humility when learning how to engage with communities in an ethical way
- Provide students with opportunities to contribute to specific communities while developing their own versatile skill sets
- Celebrate the skills and experiences that students already bring to the table and help them understand how these other forms of knowledge can be integrated into public humanities work

Jessica Friedman, PhD, is a dance scholar and curator. She graduated from the Interdisciplinary PhD in Theatre and Drama (IPTD) program at Northwestern University. Her coursework experience in IPTD informs her current work curating “Dance to Belong: a History of Dance at 92NY,” an exhibition that bridges dance, activism, and the public humanities at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA in New York. Friedman is the author of articles, book chapters, and public scholarship.

Elizabeth W. Son, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Theatre at Northwestern University, with faculty affiliations in Asian American Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Performance Studies. She is the author of the award-winning book *Embodied Reckonings: “Comfort Women,” Performance, and Transpacific Redress*, among other articles, book chapters, and public scholarship. Son teaches “Public Humanities in Practice” to doctoral students in the Interdisciplinary PhD in Theatre and Drama (IPTD) program and other cognate programs at Northwestern. She is the former director of IPTD, and a co-founding member of [KAN-WIN’s “comfort women” justice advocacy](#) team.

During her **Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellowship** in 2019–2020, Son was a scholar-in-residence at [KAN-WIN](#), a Chicago-based organization that works to eradicate gender-based violence through survivor-centered services, education, and outreach to Asian American communities and beyond. KAN-WIN offers culturally and linguistically appropriate services and programs that include a 24-hour multilingual hotline, crisis intervention, legal and housing advocacy, transitional housing, counseling, support groups, children’s programming, and leadership training and opportunities. As part of her residency, Son worked on [“comfort women” justice advocacy](#) through public actions, community education, art and curation, and coalition building. She helped co-curate a six-month-long art exhibit titled “Embodying Justice” at [Awakenings Gallery](#). Son’s work with KAN-WIN inspired her to design and teach a new course focused on what it means to do ethical, community-centered public humanities work.

PUBLIC HUMANITIES PEDAGOGIES, JUSTICE-CENTERED METHODOLOGIES, AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Stacie McCormick, Kelly Franklin, Lorenzo Casanova, Jason A. Smith, and Dallas Brister

“Theory without practice is just as incomplete as practice without theory.”—Assata Shakur

Given the recent and ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and what can only be described as DEI panic across the nation, this piece is both a meditation on navigating the effects of these events and how scholars do meaningful work in such tumultuous times. Being based in Texas, we feel especially close to the manifold attacks on LGBTQ+ communities, abortion rights and bodily autonomy, and anything advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in our institutions. These issues inevitably shape our teaching and our research as issues of academic freedom permeate our culture.

Questions that have been at the forefront of this work are inspired by Assata Shakur’s declaration that we must marry theory to practice if we are to enact true social transformation. Our questions are: How can we as scholars enact, model, and facilitate the turning of our scholarship (largely grounded in theory and that advances new theories) into practice (the active application of this scholarship in the world)? What does a justice-centered public humanities methodology(-ies) look like? What follows is a meditation on the above questions and some of the plans for public humanities projects that emerged from the class.

Research justice methodologies:

Research methods that center justice at the heart of the work, acknowledging the harmful histories of exploitative and unethical practices in academic research as well as being conscious of not reproducing such harms. Scholars approach community as partners and with the principle that how we do our work is just as important as the work itself. Such principles are mutual respect, collaboration, shared power, a recognition of the vast expertise within communities beyond the academy, and the aim to make a positive impact on the communities with which we work.²⁸

Crafting Public Humanities Pedagogies—Stacie McCormick

I enter this conversation as a student, teacher, and curator of projects that grew out of my work as a 2021–2022 Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellow. One of the elements of this fellowship that was most significant to me was the support we received to advance public humanities work on our respective campuses. I centered much of my efforts on the graduate class I taught in the post-residency phase of the fellowship—Contemporary African American Literature. Themed on the concept of Theorizing Livable Black Futures, we looked at various forms of public scholarship and creative work

²⁸ We are thankful to Ibis Reproductive Health and their “A practical guide for implementing a human rights and reproductive justice approach to research and partnerships” for informing our vision of research justice methodologies.

that interrogated barriers to Black livability and artistic resistance that enabled Black futurity. Key interlocutors were Saidiya Hartman, Nicole Fleetwood, Christina Sharpe, Therí Pickens, Treva Lindsey, and Kevin Quashie, to name a few. I list them here because they serve as models for the possibilities of public humanities scholarship pointing us toward how the arts impact social change. Also, I call up these thinkers because they help us think about the present-day issues we face. I utilized this work to ground my course as well as conversations I encountered on the critical work of public humanities pedagogies by scholars such as Steve Ruiz (University of California, Northridge) and the “Climates of Inequality and the COVID Crisis: Building Leadership in Minority Serving Institutions” initiative. Ruiz asserts that this kind of project “opens opportunities to reimagine public humanities pedagogies and practices as tools for shaping this new world and pursuing social justice.” My pedagogical approach for this course foregrounded various approaches to engaging and shaping a world moving forward in the aftermath of the onset of COVID-19 and the racial reckonings of 2020. The classroom presented great possibilities for this exploration.

The conversations I had with graduate students in this course yielded important insights that we feel should be at the heart of public humanities pedagogies. Drawing on critical perspectives in various fields such as community-based participatory research and reproductive justice, we discussed how to enact research justice methodologies to scholarly and community partnerships, which centers respect, mutual accountability, shared power, and making an impact on the communities with which we work. Moreover, we explored the ways public humanities scholarship offered the opportunity to engage various audiences and to envision the meaning of our work for individuals and communities beyond the academy. Envisioning different audiences became a central and empowering tool for students because it was an immediate form of breaking out of academic conventions and thinking on what their work might mean in the world.

What our work together has revealed is the critical role of preparation in terms of the process of learning ways to produce transformative scholarship and unlearning academic cultural norms that public humanities enable. We embraced vulnerability in order to carry out the work of crafting methodologies grounded in research justice, liberation, and community empowerment.

As demonstrated below, the students developed unique critical lenses for their work and utilized our shared conversations to inform their critical public humanities praxes.

Research Justice and Liberatory Methodologies—Kelly Franklin

This course has prepared me to amplify the need to recognize and honor Black girls’ embodied literacies and rhetorical practices. My work aims to build Black girls’ confidence and support them in responding to white supremacist logics that have undermined and endangered Black girlhood.

Reading scholars such as Saidiya Hartman and Treva Lindsey in Dr. Stacie McCormick’s Contemporary African American literature class during the fall 2022 semester began an important conversation among students about Black livability for Black women and girls. Hartman’s use of critical fabulation as a methodology in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2020) closely examines and uncovers the lives of Black women at the turn of the 20th century in Philadelphia and New York who were believed to be wayward and riotous. Hartman reconstructs their lives and reimagines Black girlhood in a way that “illuminate[s] the radical imagination and everyday anarchy” (xiv). Hartman’s voice made me deeply

consider what Black girl epistemologies look like in this modern moment. By the end of the semester, I was able to not only reimagine the futures of Black girls through new pedagogical and community-centered approaches, but also see ways I could position myself to do this type of work. After thinking through possible public-facing humanities projects and considering ways I can apply my classroom knowledge into a meaningful space, I decided to launch a school program I've titled the STILE Project (Storytelling thru Inquiry and Literacy Expression). STILE will be piloted during the 2023–2024 academic year with expansion plans at future sites. Using my own ethos as a Black woman insists on my ethics of care versus viewing the girls as objects of curiosity. My positionality as a Black mother studying and working in the academy is important because using “Stile-ology” as a method inserts Black feminist, womanist, and girlhood methodologies into a framework that places participatory research at its core while using ethnography for further insights, reflections, and critical examinations. Stile-ology sees Black girls as equal to their white counterparts, redeems girlhood, and establishes a safe space for girls to exist and learn the value of shared community.

By including scholars like Ruth Nicole Brown and Elaine Richardson, STILE seeks to co-create a rhetoric that insists on the importance of Black girlhood, Black girl literacies, and Black girl brilliance. Black feminists including bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Brittney Cooper, and Mikki Kendall all discuss multiple interlocking systems of oppression that Black women and girls must simultaneously navigate. Battling numerous “isms” that further oppress Black women and girls often makes their advancement efforts impossible. Intervening in a tradition that punishes Black girls at higher rates than their white counterparts in school settings means offering new “-isms” to combat the oppressor. STILE will provide “stile-isms” to help girls define themselves outside of pathology and legacies that have pushed them to the furthest margins. Using stile-isms as affirmations, girls will see their value and realize their stories are critical forms of resistance against dominant narratives and negative stereotypes. Stile-isms will help build girls' self-esteem and fashion an uplifting, supportive rhetoric around Black girlhood. Being a “stileologist” insists I honor a Black girl rhetoric that is ultimately defined by Black girls. Recognizing and honoring Black girls' embodied literacies and rhetorical practices will build their confidence and combat white supremacist logics that have undermined and endangered Black girlhood. STILE embraces multiple literacies and will teach girls the value of their other literacies, such as music, art, theater, dance, and more. STILE will help girls define themselves within an uplifting and caring environment. Using STILE's curriculum as one that invites reflection and participation, Black girls will become more STIL-ISH to (I)mplement new (S)ystems that resist (H)egemony.

Empowering Queer Communities—Lorenzo Casanova

Through skills gained through Dr. McCormick's course, I was able to deepen my thinking and approach to engaging with marginalized communities and presenting their insights to the public.

Our Contemporary African American Literature: Theorizing Livable Black Futures and Public Humanities course supported my previous research and supported students engaging with communities outside the academy—a pedagogy transformation. My previous autoethnography research included LGBTQIA+ communities in rural Michigan and South Texas. The autoethnography involves a researcher visiting the community and gathering data from observations and engagement. The autoethnography project engaged with queer of color voices in rural communities. Through skills gained through Dr. McCormick's course, I was able to deepen my thinking and approach to engaging with marginalized communities and presenting their insights to the public.

The course greatly aligned with my current research project, “Commute as Queer of Color Counterstory Praxis in Rural America.” The data collected is recorded audio and video interviews via Zoom and face to face. The data collected from the queer of color voices will be used to share alternative commuting methods in rural towns. The daily commute for queer of color participants includes a form of transformation through movements, for example, walking into a convenience store. They experience prejudice because of their race, identity, and gender. The daily experience contributes to a transformation queer people of color experience daily.

In the autoethnography, I reflect on entering a rural convenience store and experiencing certain glances, whispers, and discomfort based on my brown skin and being gay. The reflection focuses on one instance of entering a predominantly white community. I entered the store and witnessed and felt individual eyes piercing my inside with a wonder: Who is this brown person? Does he live here? Why does he wear those colors? This memory sits with me daily, and I reflect on how I commuted in rural America. From the recordings, the data can be used to research rural queer of color folks who commute in rural America. The ideal audience is those living in rural America and scholars interested in race, identity, gender, and survival in nontraditional regions. These intersectionalities are everyday experiences and a history that contributes to transforming our future.

The course and the research project were fused to engage scholarly frameworks that included queer theory and queer literature. The course’s content, such as C. Riley Snorton’s *Black on Both Sides* and Treva Lindsey’s *America, Goddam*, provided alternative ways of thinking of history and new terminology—transmisogynoir—for the abuse black trans women experienced. This alternative history framework informs my consideration of how queer of color folks commute in rural spaces. Their theoretical framework established a connection to history and how we survive and pass through space, along with thinking of the abuse from police and society that trans and queer of color folks experience. The research data that I gather from queer and trans folk will provide an alternative discourse inside the classroom and society to transform our future. The course supported my approach to engaging with communities outside of academia. The local Fort Worth, Texas, has several community support centers that are helping to advance my research in rural southern Michigan and explore it in rural Texas.

The course informed my current project with new frameworks and terminologies to incorporate into the research. The project includes engaging with communities outside of the academic institution. The community center in rural Michigan is located in my hometown—a population of less than 30,000 people. The center has a diverse group of participants of color. I continue to speak with the center’s president and share my research through flyers and conversations through Zoom and email. The community center printed and posted the flyer seeking volunteers on their bulletin and website, in order to locate rural queer of color participants to contribute their lived experiences to the research project.

Learning and Unlearning—Jason A. Smith

*Literature is a powerful tool that has shaped who I am and how I see the world around me. I’m who I am because of the books I’ve read. I wanted to become a teacher because I wanted to read and share those experiences with students. Thinkers like Saidiya Hartman and Garrett Felber’s *Study and Struggle* project showed me that I can use literature as a social tool to empower communities to have difficult conversations.*

My past research has centered around the dynamics of power in relationships. I’ve researched the dynamic between the state and various populations, including indigenous peoples, immigrants,

minority communities, and recipients of majority culture. Looking back on my time in Dr. McCormick's class, I was given a chance to think about power differently. When we read Saidiya Hartman's "Venus in Two Acts" and *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, ideas about the dynamics of power began to percolate, but I was still thinking in terms of literary analysis.

The concept of public humanities was new to me when the semester began, and I needed to learn to think beyond literary analysis. Hartman's archival research and critical fabulation forced me to think about the ethical responsibility associated with research when it comes to human subjects, to reference Institutional Review Board nomenclature. As a fledgling scholar in the public humanities, who has always dealt with fiction as a medium for discussing power dynamics between real populations of real people, I have always had an academic distance between myself and my subjects. I hold terms such as "human subjects" in productive tension as I navigate the protocols of the academy and the ethics of working with people who have thoughts, feelings, and lives outside of my research. Being in this course allowed me the space to grapple with these kinds of tensions. The academic distance created by language and my lived experiences is like a one-way mirror between me and the subject of my research. Hartman's work made me realize three things: 1) That mirror doesn't need to be there, 2) if I remove the mirror, I can have a tangible impact on my community, and 3) I must reconsider the ethics of my approach to research.

While Hartman's methodology swam around in my mind, Dr. McCormick had each student present on a public humanities project that had recently finished or was ongoing. I chose the Study and Struggle program (formerly hosted by the University of Mississippi). While their work with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people was interesting, the way they used nonhierarchical structures within the organization struck a chord with me. At the time, I hadn't pieced together how Hartman's ethics influenced my thought process; however, the deconstruction of power dynamics and bringing community members to the table as equals fascinated me. This was when I started to shift how I thought about my work.

Literature is a powerful tool that has shaped who I am and how I see the world around me. I'm who I am because of the books I've read. I wanted to become a teacher because I wanted to read and share those experiences with students. Hartman and Study and Struggle showed me that I can use literature as a social tool to empower communities to have difficult conversations. But I need to ensure I am ethical in my research and methodologies.

My current project puts these ideas from theory to practice. I plan to work with high school students in a pilot program where I can break down the unilateral power structure of the classroom to create community-based discussion groups with literature at their center. I still have much to learn about breaking down the academic distance and making an impact on my local community, but I am excited that the process has started, and I'm grateful to have found a community that I can lean on for guidance and support to ensure my work remains ethical and impactful.

Research Positionality and Advocacy—Dallas Brister

Disability studies is a main focus of my scholarly interests, and as I continue to explore this field, I want to further examine the ways race, disability, and gender continue to intersect with giving and receiving medical care. This course supported me in exploring lived experiences of Black women situated at the intersections of medical racism and disability.

During Dr. McCormick's fall 2022 class, I was inspired by Treva Lindsey's book *America, Goddam*, particularly her discussion about the medical industrial complex's racist history toward women of color and how this connected to the recent COVID-19 pandemic. As someone whose work centers on intersectional disability and medical humanities, I found this a compelling research topic that I could use for our final project, envisioning how this could work as a public humanities project. While I knew I wanted to use Lindsey's work to discuss the racism upheld by the medical industrial complex against women of color, I also wanted to look at how this intersected with other marginalized communities like the disabled community.

My positionality is informed by growing up with my twin brother who has Down syndrome. This has closely aligned me with the disability community because I witnessed firsthand as a sibling and caregiver the issues of access and ableism he and others like him have experienced. Disability studies is a main focus of my scholarly interests, and as I continue to explore this field, I want to further examine the ways race, disability, and gender continue to intersect with giving and receiving medical care. I remember my own family being worried over what would happen should my brother get the virus, knowing his disability made him more susceptible to complications.

Questions like "how should marginalized groups advocate for themselves?" and "what if someone can't advocate for themselves?" began to swirl in my mind along with other questions about how marginalized groups could and should get the proper health care they need and what this could look like. While I still don't have all the answers on how to fix the injustices within the medical industrial complex, I think a website is a good start to at least bring attention to some of these issues.

With my project being about the way disabled women of color are treated within the medical industrial complex and more specifically how they were treated during the COVID-19 pandemic, I originally saw this project as a class I could teach to TCU students who are going into the medical field. I then decided that a class wouldn't be as far-reaching for a public humanities project. I now envision myself creating a website that's purpose is twofold. First, I would like to interview disabled women of color about their experiences with receiving (or not receiving) health care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hearing other peoples' stories is a useful tool in teaching others about their own prejudices but also helps those who went through something similar feel less alone. Second, I would like to provide resources about how to advocate for yourself in a structure like the medical industrial complex that is historically racist and ableist.

Imagining Justice-Centered Public Humanities Methodologies

Collectively, we have worked to imagine what possibilities exist for us as scholars invested in justice and public scholarship. The classroom served as a space to co-envision our individual methodologies, which is an ongoing task. Key principles that emerged for us are being critical about how to meaningfully incorporate public humanities in our work, elevating those who are marginalized in our society and doing this work in partnership with them; being mindful of the way academia can be extractive in terms of taking knowledges from communities without citation or devaluing such scholarly work in general while performatively celebrating diversity, equity, and inclusion; and putting our work in conversation with epistemologies that are rooted in justice, such as Black feminisms, queer studies, disability justice, and more. In many ways this is more than public humanities work; it has the potential to transform academic ways of knowing and being. Victor Hugo notes that "Being good is easy; what

is difficult is being just.” In our work, we seek to define what justice work looks like for our scholarship as individuals and as a part of a collective. We aim to enact the radical work of imagining that adrienne maree brown, Mariame Kaba, Ruja Benjamin, and Robin D. G. Kelly affirm. Most powerfully, we are driven by Lucille Clifton’s adage “We cannot create what we can’t imagine.”

Dr. Stacie McCormick is a Mississippi-raised Black feminist scholar and writer. She is an associate professor of English, chair of Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies, and core faculty member of Women and Gender Studies at Texas Christian University (TCU). Her work takes up a number of subjects, such as Black body politics, land, sexuality, and the ongoing resonance of slavery in contemporary Black writing and performance. She is the author of *Staging Black Fugitivity* and co-editor of the special issue of *College Literature*, entitled “Toni Morrison and Adaptation.” Her manuscript entitled *We Are Pregnant with Freedom: Meditations on Storytelling and Reproductive Justice* (focusing on Black critical engagement with gynecological and obstetric medicine) is under advanced contract with The University of California Press. In 2021–2022 she was a Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellow in residence with The Afiya Center, a Black-led reproductive justice organization in Dallas, Texas.

Kelly Franklin is a doctoral student in English Rhetoric and Composition at TCU. After graduating from UCLA with a degree in American Literature, she taught English at the K-12 level in California and eventually Texas. Kelly later earned a master’s degree in English Literature from Boise State University, where she focused on ways the Gothic mode became a vehicle for oppressed groups to story tell, including the enslaved and formerly enslaved. Her current work at TCU centers around Black feminism and Black girlhood studies. With the support of fellowships, including ACLS and Albert Schweitzer, Kelly is establishing a public-service project called the STILE Project, Storytelling thru Inquiry and Literacy Expression, where she will support Black girls as they navigate their social worlds.

Lorenzo Casanova is a current PhD in English with a graduate certificate in Women and Gender Studies at TCU. His primary interest is in Latina/x and queer of color literature focusing on race, gender, sexuality, and resistance movements in rural America. He received his BA and MA in English literature from Texas A&M University–San Antonio. Lorenzo enjoys spending time with his two dogs, walking, and bicycling regularly.

Jason A. Smith is a doctoral student in English at Texas Christian University. He graduated from Valdosta State University with a Bachelor of Arts in English in 2015 and a Master of Arts in English in 2018. His interests include multiethnic American literature, contemporary American literature, post-colonialism, Marxism, and ecocriticism. His master’s thesis focused on multiethnic American literature post-1945. Specifically, his thesis focused on the concept of American identity by using ideas such as panopticism, othering, and superstructures. After graduating in 2018, Jason worked for Valdosta State University for two years, teaching composition, world literature, and journalism. Additionally, Jason was an award-winning journalist for The Valdosta Daily Times.

Dallas Brister earned her MA from Texas A&M in 2020 and her BA from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 2017. Her research focuses on how aesthetic representations of disability connect with the sociological issues that inundate literature that features such characters and their intersecting identities like race and gender. Her master’s thesis explored the effects genre scripts have on portrayals of disability. She would like to continue her research on stigma and delve deeper into how narration plays a large role in stigmatization, particularly the limitations of an author’s idea of disability and its importance in shaping and influencing typical readers’ understanding of disabilities as well as the repercussions of how people with disabilities internalize a typical author’s views on disability.

COMBAHEE TAUGHT US: CARE AND COLLABORATION IN BLACK FEMINIST PEDAGOGICAL PRAXIS

Tyiesha Radford Shorts, LC Johnson, and Treva Lindsey

One of Tyiesha's fondest memories is of pretending to teach in a classroom. As a child growing up in the 1980s, she and her peers entered learning spaces during a very particular technological era. Latchkey, floppy discs, and Walkman portable cassette players introduced new ways to imagine the practice of teaching and learning. Young learners were increasingly introduced to what we now refer to as asynchronous instruction—capable of watching videos and listening to modules recorded in other parts of the world. And, as one who spent almost a decade of her life as an only child, this meant that her Teddy Ruxpin and Cabbage Patch dolls would serve as her first pupils.

She continued imagining classrooms as she developed into a community-engaged student and performance artist and, in 2012, was introduced to her first public learning community. By that point, political scientist and historian Paul Jawanza Cook Sr. had been offering courses that were open to the public and held in a state university classroom for several years and had shored up a space that fostered curious inquiry and rigorous study among attendees. These 16-week learning communities were free to all, and Cook himself was not offered compensation for facilitating these spaces, officially titled the African History in America Learning Collective. She soon found this a welcoming space where she could continue scholarship on citizenship, race, political movements, and art. At the time, she had recently been dismissed from her graduate program and was eager to be back in a space where she could be immersed in local discussion about global events.

In the short weeks of the learning communities, we labored over both the delivery of the curriculum as well as the administrative side to organize a community-facing effort. Who would secure the space? What is the best way to market the learning communities to the public? How will this effort be funded? As Cook's health declined, those of us who took on the mantle of the learning communities began to look toward historical examples of community education for both motivation and inspiration.

The African History in America Learning Collective was immediately drawn to the Black Supplementary Schools Movement in the United Kingdom. Originally developed in the 1970s, Black Supplementary Schools (or Saturday Schools, as they became known) were designed to combat xenophobic education policies against Caribbean and African school-aged children whose families had migrated to the United Kingdom. Many of the parents recognized the race-based limitations that stifled their children's academic success and established a supplement to their formal education as a critical and meaningful response. The Black Supplementary Schools Movement became particularly significant because of its example of cross-collaborative organizing and self-determinant efforts.

The search for examples of community learning within the United States also yielded a rich and sustained history, including Sunday Schools within several free Black communities following the end of the Civil War and Emancipation. We learned of the Bookmobile Program (a precursor to some library systems throughout the United States) implemented and coordinated by the women of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Once we learned about the Freedom Schools of the Children's Defense Fund and the Liberation Schools of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, we understood community learning

projects among communities of color as not only sites with tremendous educational value, but also as sites of safety for attendees and educators alike.

When LC, then director of Zora's House, which is community space for "women and gender-expansive people of color to dream, connect, and create; to shine bright and inspire change," and Dr. Treva B. Lindsey, professor in the Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at the Ohio State University, invited her to co-host one of the sessions of the Black Feminist Night School, Tyiesha was closing out the first semester in her new Art Education graduate program. LC and Treva weren't aware at the time, but Tyiesha was nervous when they pressed record on that session. By this time, she felt dread and apprehension when thinking about the academy. The scholarship that she had been introduced to seemed to deprioritize her research interests. She had begun to feel inadequate.

She, as well as LC and Treva, were also introduced to a new and increasingly frequent phenomenon: Zoom pirates. These were anonymous people who obtained access to private Zoom gatherings and would antagonize those on the call. We preemptively understood that a space dedicated to the study of Black feminism, and more pointedly, of Black women and femmes, would be targeted. Historically, when Black people and other marginalized communities come together for the purposes of dignity, love, and self-determination, those spaces are surveilled, restricted, and—in the worst examples—met with violence. The Black Feminist Night School session that we co-facilitated was no exception; however, the three of us were able to quickly diffuse a barrage of vile and disgusting comments in the chat because we actively created a space of safety. Safety not in the sense of carceral terms—which is often "achieved" through targeted and punitive surveillance and criminalization of minoritized individuals and communities—but in the sense of liberation and transparency. What we attempted to create was:

A space of kindness.

A space of fierceness.

A space of courage.

A space that was defiantly our own.

The collaboration between Dr. Lindsey and Zora's House to form the Black Feminist Night School continued in much of the tradition of the community learning spaces that preceded it. There was a need that had gone unmet among a group of self-identified women and femmes of color spanning the globe. A need to feel seen and hold space of safety and unbridled joy. Our time building the Black Feminist Night School affirmed the participants, reinforced Tyiesha's value and self-worth as a scholar-activist, and emboldened all of us to continue the necessary movement work of creating the futures the world needs.

From the Academy to a Community Learning Space

Treva didn't always plan to create a community learning space focused on Black feminism as part of her 2020–2021 Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellowship. This program sought to support scholars who wanted to endeavor to engage in humanistic inquiry outside of the academy through substantive and equitable partnerships with community organizations. She had already identified Zora's House as a potential site for collaborating on the development of programming that reached beyond her campus and into the communities to which she felt accountable. She knew she wanted to build something rooted in community and indebted to the tremendous legacy of Black feminists who forged theory,

methods, methodologies, paradigms, epistemologies, world-marking practices, pedagogical tools, and resistive and transformative strategies around kitchen tables, in crawl spaces, at literary salons, and on their literal bodies. She also knew some of the students she encountered at Ohio State and on other campuses she visited might want to engage with her outside of the hallowed walls of the academy and deepen their study of Black feminism. For the decade she had been in the academy, every time she taught her graduate and undergraduate courses on Black feminism, they quickly filled with eager students. And because she could only offer her graduate course on Black feminism periodically because of the curricular needs of her department, she knew whatever she helped to build would be open to and in collaboration with graduate students.

While the fellowship explicitly called for scholars committed to expanding humanistic inquiry beyond the academy, that call always anchored the project of Black feminism(s). Treva and LC had a long discussion about the institutionalization of Black feminist thought within the academy. Although we know the academy is better because of concepts such as intersectionality and critical fabulation, as someone working within the university, Treva often wondered if this institutionalization served Black feminism(s)' best interest. She wasn't alone in this trepidation—scholars such as Joy James and graduate students such as Tyiesha articulated similar concerns and anxieties about the integration of Black feminism into the neoliberal university.

And then, COVID-19. Treva could not be physically in residence at Zora's House in Columbus, and LC and she had to quickly reimagine her fellowship year. We didn't want to pretend people weren't grieving, scared, feeling disconnected, and trying to survive a plague. We also couldn't ignore the uprising that took place in the wake of the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Tony McDade. The walls were closing in and yet we both longed for connection, solidarity, spaces for rage, pleasure, love, intimacy, and world-making.

It wasn't long before we began designing a virtual community learning space. We knew the power of these spaces. We both had colleagues and friends such as Tyiesha who regularly led community learning groups centered around Black life and resistance. It was in our need of life-affirming spaces that we launched Black Feminist Night School. Our very first session garnered hundreds of registrants and immediately felt like *home*. We had slides with information and co-led via conversation with one another in which we could easily integrate comments and questions coming in from the chat. When we debriefed after the first convening, Treva could feel tears of joy forming. Several of the folks who attended were graduate students—especially Black women. They immediately sent feedback to us and expressed interest in becoming part of the community not only as participants but as facilitators who could share with a community interested in Black feminist inquiry. Our format provided a unique opportunity for these graduate students to sharpen their pedagogical practice and reflect on to whom they feel their research and pedagogy are accountable. Those graduate students, such as Tyiesha, helped us make a safe, brave, and liberatory learning space. We know something special came into existence. We erupted.

What we came to understand over the course of the inaugural year of BFNS was that we were engaged in a form of collaborative pedagogy—we were learning and unlearning together. Although we shared the duties of co-facilitating and opened facilitation opportunities to graduate students to be co-facilitators as well, every person attending operated as a teacher and a learner. We welcomed this, built resource wells, and made lasting connections with one another. It was in the spirit of the Combahee

River Collective and the Kitchen Table. In the classroom, we welcomed collaborative interruption—a practice in which we invite everyone in a session or virtual classroom to contribute with their ideas in ways that bolster the flow. In a particular session when we reflected on the history of abolition in Black feminist spaces, participants virtually “shouted” out sources, their trepidations about a world without carceral institutions, and their own visions of what “safety” could look like. We didn’t speak over one another, we spoke in chorus, in concert, in community. Treva still attempts to create space for collaborative interruption in her classes since those sessions proved so fruitful during the night school. We held space—warm, inviting, invigorating space—for one another. We all learned something about liberatory pedagogy because we invited folks with different levels of expertise and “teaching experience” to be facilitators. What became clear is that despite the challenges of Zoom pirates and people entering the space with varying levels of knowledge about Black feminism, as co-facilitators we didn’t want to be authoritarian in delivery but understood our roles as conveners of a dynamic space for humanistic inquiry.

We needed new tools for learning and teaching, and we found them as we grew. We let go of fixed intentions and embraced the possibility of collaboration in a more robust and fulfilling way. We engaged our respective expertise but refused a teaching/learning mode that wasn’t premised upon shared investment and collective genius. How refreshing it felt.

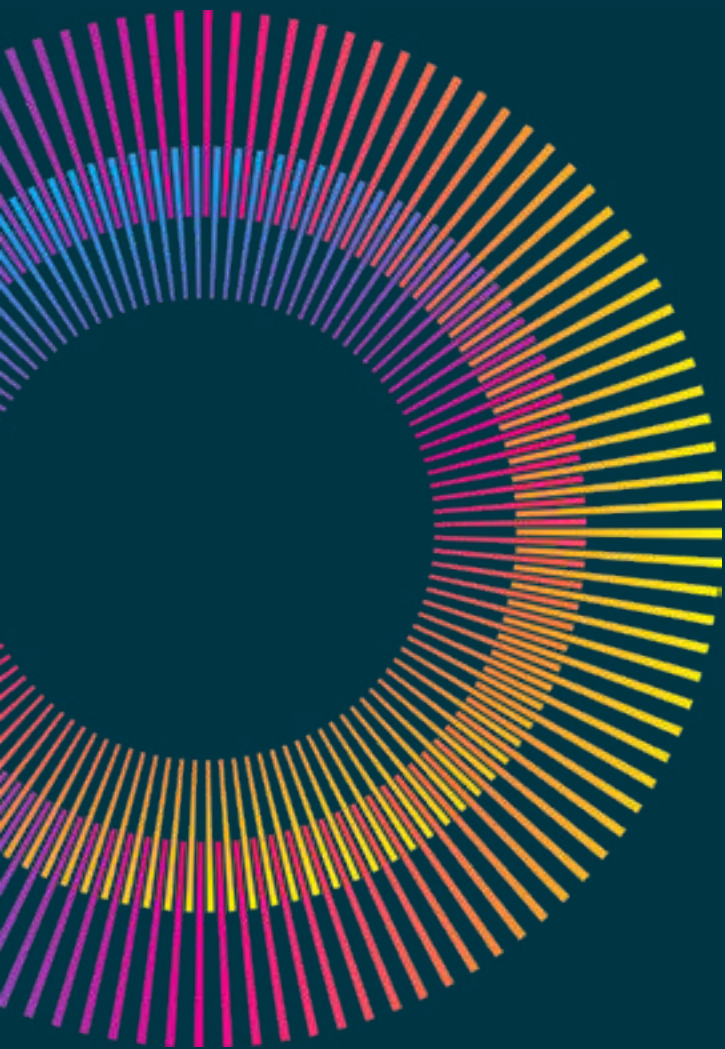
Tyiesha Radford Shorts is a writer, educator, and arts and community advocate. A history enthusiast, Tyiesha is excited about all the lessons art can teach us about the world we live in. She builds critical competencies in Columbus’ Bronzeville neighborhood with her husband, Marshall, and their dog. She is a graduate student at The Ohio State University.

LC Johnson is the founder and CEO of Zora’s House, “a sanctuary for women and gender-expansive people of color to dream, connect, and create; to shine bright and inspire change.” She’s the co-founder of Black Feminist Night School at Zora’s House.

Treva B. Lindsey, PhD, is a professor of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at The Ohio State University, an award-winning author, founder of the Transformative Black Feminisms Initiative, and the co-founder of Black Feminist Night School at Zora’s House. Her most recent book, *America, Goddam: Violence, Black Women, and the Struggle for Justice*, was described as “required reading for all Americans” in a starred Kirkus review.

Zora’s House identifies as “A workplace. A haven. A happy hour. An incubator. A community for women and nonbinary people of color committed to transforming themselves and the world around them.” Named after Zora Neal Hurston, Zora’s House “embraces: empowering women of color to reflect their realities and enact their creative power, so they are fully seen and heard in the life of their community.”

Section Three: Supporting Students' Selves and Futures



WEAVING A WEB TOGETHER: HOW TO CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

LC Tosaya, LT Irwin, and RL Joseph

The Center for Communication, Difference, and Equity (CCDE) at the University of Washington was founded on women of color feminist principles of interrupting privilege: we, writing as CCDE graduate students (Lando and Laura) and faculty founder/director (Ralina), unapologetically rescript traditional academic practices of scholarship and community in order to thrive together. We strive for collaboration in all forms, including in mentorship. What this means is undoing the scholarly practices that so many of us have been disciplined into; we partner together to acknowledge our myriad experiences of racism and sexism, and to create solutions to not just combat these forces but take care of ourselves in the process.

The methodology we use here is one the CCDE participants in our Interrupting Privilege racial dialoguing program have co-created: We record and showcase too-often-unheard voices through the process of radical listening. In a radical listening session we hosted between graduate students, Lando and Laura, and advisor and professor Ralina, we talked about how the CCDE's support structures, or as we call it, "web," keep us from falling. Ralina welcomed in Laura and Lando as a cohort accept,²⁹ whereby students of color are brought in as a group to increase experiences of inclusion and belonging. Laura and Lando joined a vibrant community of other students who together created a multiyear community of students of color studying race. By utilizing radical listening, we attempt to right the wrongs of power by amplifying the stories that are often overlooked and unheard and forcing those in power to actively listen (Joseph and Briscoe-Smith, 2021). Current research suggests that cohort approaches that pair students together can "contribute to interdependent and mutually supportive relationships and reduce feelings of anxiety resulting from social isolation" (Matthews et al., n.p.). Following the methods of radical listening, we co-crafted questions and collaboratively facilitated our discussion. What follows is a look into a model of how graduate programs can implement **co-mentorship practices**, or what Laura and Lando call "accountabilibuddies."

Lando: It's basically a friend who holds you accountable. Who is there, and always with you every step of the way. And it's like someone you trust who's close, and you can tell them if they're doing something wrong, you can tell them but it's like that gentleness where it's like you are all allowed to speak your truth, and they won't take it personally, because they know it's coming from love and just concern...like your academic best friend, almost.

Laura: I can turn to Lando for unconditional support about stuff like, 'Hey, am I crazy? Am I crazy thinking that this is happening right now?' And it's like, no, not at all crazy, or actually let's unpack it. Let me think it through with you. There's just unconditional support.

29 We'd like to acknowledge the other students who are part of the CCDE, such as Meshell Sturgis, Dr. Marcus Johnson, Seonah Kim, Julie Feng, Jen Zheng, Jenny Lee, Dr. Victoria Thomas, Jas Moultrie, Dr. Anjuili Brekke, and so many more who make up the web of support that is the CCDE.

In this form of camaraderie, the accountabilibuddies help develop an interconnected friendship and support structure, where either party holds the other accountable. Mainly occurring in a duo, the accountabilibuddies stay with each other through every step as graduate students. This particular pair of accountabilibuddies began by vulnerably sharing their truths, which included their personal experiences of racism and sexism within academia and their new department. Later, Laura and Lando would continue to share with each other on what was later labeled as “microaggression walks.”

Ralina: You all turned your CCDE experience into a very woman of color, feminist, Black feminist kind of an iteration. To be so collaborative with each other. And to be lifting each other up week by week...hearing about your microaggression walks makes me so happy. That you have to have them also breaks my heart.... We can't erase racism, right? We can't erase sexism. We can't erase microaggressions. But what you all are doing for yourselves with the space is figuring out how do we combat it? Right? How do we combat these daily effects with each other? I think that you all are also creating, really putting your own stamp on all of the work and running with it, right, soaring with it.

Accountabilibuddies commit to a level of openness and trust with each other. They confide in one another without the threat of harsh judgments and also a gentleness that is constructed from the love and concern for a fellow student who is experiencing similar challenges. Laura describes this relationship as a form of “unconditional support” to address her concerns and combat her self-doubts.

There are many ways that graduate school can feel isolating and leave the student feeling invisible and unheard. This is due to students noticing that other members of their department are not experiencing their research and talents being ignored. Naming what Black feminists have described as the paradox of “hypervisibility” and “invisibility,” Lando describes how the department highlights them as a face of optimistic diversity and yet overlooks her simultaneously for her research (Matthews et al., 2020). This invisibility/visibility matrix is the hallmark of tokenizing, or what communication scholar Subrina Robinson (2013) calls “spoketokenism” (spokesperson/token). Laura and Lando are constantly reminded that if it were not for the web that the CCDE had formed to safeguard students of color and outside of their accountabilibuddy, they would slip through the cracks.

Laura: You're constantly being reminded that outside of our advisory circle and stuff of just how devalued this place can make you feel and trick you into thinking that you are so I shudder to think where you could, if you would still even be here, if not for having this web.

Lando: If it wasn't for the CCDE, my accountabilibuddy, my amazing mentor, I would have been out a long time ago.

Ralina: That's not because you aren't brilliant, or that you aren't meant to have a PhD. It's because of racism. It's because of racialized sexism and anti-blackness, and all of the ways in which it infiltrates our world. So that's why we need these spaces. That's why we have to continue to legitimize space as an inclusive [space] that is just for us, that is actually just for us. Because it is different. Acknowledging the structures of continued hate that are out there, not pretending that they're gone, but realizing that we have enough to be able to continue to combat them. But we have to be vigilant.

Located on the first floor of the Communication Department, the CCDE is both a physical and

symbolic space of resistance against the institutionalized invisibility of students of color. This form of resistance continues to legitimize inclusion and aids in the retention of students of color who might have otherwise abandoned their academic dreams. The CCDE and the accountabilitybuddies are forcing an unlearning of what has been thrust on students of color. The CCDE helps students and faculty unlearn the idea that we take up too much space, talk too loud, or seem too aggressive in order to be taken seriously and register as legitimate scholars. Reflecting the value of public humanities, CCDE does not just reside within the gates of the University of Washington, but extends to the greater Seattle communities, including the community partner of the Northwest African American Museum (NAAM). In fact, when Laura and Lando visited for their recruitment visit, they participated in a racial dialogue session with Black community members ranging from high school students through grandparents. From this pre-enrollment period they understood that their graduate lives would always be engaged with our community, and that scholarship wasn't bound exclusively to academia.

Academia is designed to be isolating. Graduate students often compete for limited grants, fellowships, positions, and opportunities, resulting in academia becoming a place where everyone is out for themselves. This is only exacerbated by the push toward hyper-specialization and researchers who make unique contributions to scholarship and research. We are told we need to stand alone to justify our place in the academy and prove that our research is worth funding, let alone noticing. Rather than start from a point of competition and isolation, the CCDE makes community the foundation for graduate students to build upon from the moment they're accepted, which is why it was so important for Ralina and other CCDE faculty to implement cohort acceptances. In order to combat the isolation and messages of institutional invisibility, CCDE faculty not only fought for cohort acceptances but set time aside for cohorts of graduate students to meet together during the campus visit. Laura and Lando describe this meeting as offering a lifeline.

Laura: Having that initial lunch meeting became a lifeline. I remember in that big space of talking to all these people who are also, you know, trying to perform and trying to prove, and all that stuff I just knew that I could turn to [Lando] and we had already started breaking through those masks, and cracking those walls and those barriers and stuff because we'd gotten that moment beforehand to talk to each other and just you exude that sort of like "I got you" energy.

Lando: We're sticking together because those other people were out for themselves...and that's it. I hadn't felt that way. And I was like, no, I'm here to get an education. And actually build a community.

By starting with community, Lando and Laura created a default sisterhood of belonging. Knowing that academia wasn't built for or intended for students of color, isolation is magnified and intensified for us because we feel so lucky to have been accepted. We labor under the false illusion that not only do we not belong, but we need to continue proving ourselves worthy of taking up space. Within academia, institutions play a key role in cultivating a sense of community; all the while, "higher education scholars exploring a sense of belonging often use the concept of social connectedness as a measure of belonging" (Potts, p. 215). This yearning to belong within the academic community oftentimes manifests itself through the notion of "feeling different" or out of place for many students, and can often be partially mitigated through immediately making social connections within a predominantly white institution (Potts, 2021). Additionally, white supremacy would have us believe that there isn't enough space to begin.

The competition is compounded because there are so few of us in a space that was not built for us. So, accepting minoritized graduate students as a cohort creates a deliberate challenge to these mentalities. Laura and Lando describe that they were made to feel like they belonged because there was room for all.

Lando: We don't compare ourselves to anyone in our CCDE. Because the collective support and the tools provided in the meetings that we've had...we've gotten to that comfortableness with each other, where you're not in competition.

Laura: There's room for all of us.

This is the foundation that kept Laura afloat, and it was this community that she turned to when the isolation of graduate school began to take its toll and rear its head as she prepared for her qualifying/comprehensive exams. Lando, although boisterous and confident on the outside, had a place to turn to during their most insecure times of self-doubt and when needing reassurance from her accountabilitybuddy. Graduate school doesn't always make the very normal feelings that arise from surmounting obstacles such as exams—including feelings of isolation, insecurity, or self-doubt—transparent, nor does it provide ways to address these feelings. There were moments when the dreaded imposter syndrome that many students, including Laura and Lando, internally suppress repeatedly reared its ugly head, making the students reflect on their own abilities and knowledge. Edwards (2019) argues that imposter syndrome is a phenomenon to describe feeling like an academic or professional fraud due to self-doubt that one's success is legitimately deserved. While this community is our safe haven, the CCDE and Dr. Joseph's mentorship couldn't always shield us from the effects of grad school and how it can feel designed to isolate graduate students.

Laura: Being a part of the CCDE doesn't mean that those moments won't automatically disappear...Those moments will still exist. But it's that net. It's whether or not you will be caught and be met with compassion, support. Obviously, it's still scary to be able to speak it out, but I feel like I was in an environment where I could say, "Hey, I'm really scared. And this is happening," and [be met with immediate support].

Laura and Lando see every conversation as a form of encouragement. By discussing their shared experiences, and talking through their issues, the cluster of confusion and self-doubt within graduate school begins to untangle. By supporting one another and offering vital reminders of support and encouragement, Laura and Lando created academic and personal boundaries.

Lando: Everything's a conversation. This past quarter and last quarter I had Laura on my shoulder saying, "Lando, that's not your job. Lando, you can say no," and that kept me going like this past quarter. It's a constant effort and work, and not in a bad way, but it's always a growing way. I've never walked away going, "Oh, man, I can't do this," like I've always walked away with the thoughts of "I can't wait to spend more time with her."

Laura: I've always felt lighter...We carry a lot by ourselves and stuff. And then, whenever we've connected and stuff, it's not only like an opportunity to be like, "Oh, man, someone else is feeling the same things as I am, and so I feel less alone." But I also feel like we can share these sorts of experiences, and these burdens, and then being able to speak to someone else and talk through it together, and like untangle all these things together. I just feel lighter, and everything is just a little bit sunnier.

With all that we have learned through the CCDE, this paper was written collaboratively to ensure that every voice is heard, and none are muted or rendered invisible. The CCDE is not only about academic successes, but through the mentorship of Dr. Joseph, many students feel as though they have become a member of a family that connects us all. Other students may have had this feeling of connectivity throughout their academic lives, yet at the CCDE these relationships are new, and the academic family continues to grow. With the support of faculty members, Laura and Lando have co-authored media analysis articles along with critical pedagogical manuscripts.³⁰ The growth of the CCDE does not halt when veteran students leave; there is simply a new branch on the family tree for newer students to blossom from. This family tree allows students access to the knowledge of others, and continuous support from the faculty and their peers. The tree continues to blossom and branch out to all students who seek out guidance or just need a place to be shielded from the downpour that can sometimes accompany academic and nonacademic life.

We end this piece with gratitude. Gratitude for our scholarly ancestors, Black feminists and other women of color pavers, who are the initial links in the chain that has created our net. Gratitude to these spaces that offer respite and safety from systems mired in white supremacy. Gratitude for the connections we've made with one another and the opportunities that we've been given and earned. As we've learned from the spaces that have been made for us, we will make space for others in our own work and network. Lando and Laura constantly imagine their future careers and who their future students will be and how they'll lift them up together in the way Dr. Joseph did for them. Lando and Laura's links connect with each other, creating another link in the family web and stitching in the net that works to keep us safe and seen.

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30 Laura and Lando have worked with faculty affiliated with the CCDE and faculty associated with various academic departments within the University of Washington. Through the support of the CCDE and veteran students, Laura and Lando have been introduced to various faculty whose research aligns with their own. Those works are listed within the reference section of this paper.

Tosaya, L.C. and Joseph, R.L. (2021). "A Look into Digital Blackface, Culture Vultures, & How to Read Racism Like Black Critical Audiences." *FLOW*.

Lando Tosaya is a fourth-year PhC in the Department of Communication at the University of Washington. Lando received her first master's in Interdisciplinary Studies, from California State University, Los Angeles, and their second master's in Communication at the University of Washington. Their research interests are in Afrofuturism, Black feminist media studies, Indigenous futurisms, digital misogynoir, representations of race in Westernized societies, rhetorical criticism, and visual culture.

Laura Irwin is a fourth-year PhC in the Department of Communication at the University of Washington, Seattle. She received her master's in Communication from the University of Washington and her BA in English Writing and Rhetoric from St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas. Her research interests include dialogue-based practices of restorative and transformative justice; Chicana, Indigenous, and mixed-race identity, embodiment, and representation; and teaching rhetoric, rhetorical listening, and argumentation.

Ralina L. Joseph is professor of Communication at the University of Washington, Seattle. She received her PhD and MA in Ethnic Studies from the University of California, San Diego, and BA in American Civilization from Brown University. Dr. Joseph is the founding and acting director of the University of Washington's Center for Communication, Difference, and Equity (CCDE) and associate dean of equity and justice in the Graduate School. She is a scholar, teacher, and facilitator of race and communication.

During the 2019–2020 academic year, Ralina Joseph was a scholar-in-residence at the **Northwest African American Museum (NAAM)**. NAAM has been a central community partner for the CCDE since the center's inception, and with the Scholars and Society support Ralina brought the Interrupting Privilege racial dialoguing program to the museum as a Black-community version of the intergenerational, skills-building, anti-racism class on dialogue and critique. While the COVID-19 pandemic moved the group online beginning in the early spring of 2020, they continued their work together and even extended it through the next school year with a focus on "Quarantining While Black."

ENABLING COMMUNITY-ENGAGED AND PUBLIC-FACING PHDS

Jonathan Anjaria and Moriah King

When graduate students and faculty are asked to introduce ourselves in professional settings, the assumption is that we will share two pieces of information: our name and research topic. The research topic signals to our colleagues the subdisciplines and disciplinary debates we engage with and the academic communities we are writing for. But what if graduate students and faculty were encouraged to introduce themselves in other ways? What if we were asked things like our intended audience, hoped-for impact, personal connection to the project and community collaborators? Focusing on process rather than topics would expand the possibilities for how and why we do research, as well as the communities we hope to engage.

This essay is a collaboration between Moriah King, a PhD student at Brandeis University, and Jonathan Anjaria, a professor at Brandeis and Moriah's advisor. In this essay, we attempt to synthesize a conversation about the PhD we have been having over the past four years—conversation about topics like the academic ritual mentioned above, as well as related topics such as the role of the experiences people bring to PhD programs and how those experiences shape the research process—including community collaborations—and the outputs that result from it. This conversation is shaped by our different positions in the academic hierarchy as well as some recent professional transitions. Notably, Moriah transitioned from a career in federal government to doing a PhD in Anthropology, while Jonathan shifted from solely focusing on traditional academic research to combining research, graduate career development and PhD reform. What follows is a series of questions that we feel get to fundamental issues in graduate education. The answers we offer show how we have been trying to figure out, together, a new vision of a PhD as we navigate our coinciding career transitions. This would be a vision for the PhD that values students' previous experiences and encourages research that is collaborative and responsive to communities' needs, and that leads to research outputs in languages and formats that are meaningful to people outside the academy.

If the goal is research that is more public facing or engaged with community needs, what does that even mean? And how can doctoral students do this work when it often means challenging disciplinary norms for designing research questions and carrying out and communicating our research?

Moriah: I think of community-engaged research as a period of intensive study together. It means asking questions together and choosing to obligate yourselves in pursuit of such questions. It involves moments of converging and diverging learning. Because the truth is, we need different forms of study and collaboration to strategize and produce the deliberative actions we often espouse. We need theory-builders as much as we need research-practitioners and cultural workers. These are not mutually exclusive categories or academic identities per se, but they do point to different overarching goals and purposes of conducting research.

My dissertation research is based largely on how a group of primarily Black women in Georgia are creating farms while participating in a USDA-funded beginning farmer development program. I am exploring how participants in the program plan and design their agricultural landscapes, as well as what their journeys can tell us about the political, economic, and social dynamics at play in Georgia's agricultural landscape. I am looking at how Black farmers engage different production systems (e.g.,

small-scale intensive growing, aquaponics, ranching, etc.) in a way that is defined by their personal histories and interests and not by the priorities of governing entities.

Doing this work requires a flexible research design framework. This requires maintaining a methodological openness to data collection, such as using arts-based research methodologies alongside semi-structured interviews. And most importantly, this involves me willingly taking on different roles, such as actively serving as a co-farmer. Flexible research designs have their challenges. Yet, prioritizing the rhythms and labors of building community and “doing the work” on the farm is an integral part of my dissertation.

Jonathan: Community-engaged or public-facing research means looking outside the academy—for research questions, outputs, and audiences. It means going beyond the traditional model of scholarship in which the goal is moving disciplinary debates forward. It doesn’t mean rejecting theory—Moriah’s research, for instance, is deeply theoretical—but it does mean making collaboration with nonacademic partners central to the project.

I am new to doing research in nonacademic contexts, so it wasn’t until recently that I learned what would enable community-engaged PhDs. In 2019–2020 I received a Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society fellowship to do research in an applied setting and then use that experience to rethink doctoral education. During the fellowship period I collaborated with staff at Cambridge Community Development (the city’s planning office) on community outreach for a new city-wide bicycle plan. Doing research based on questions developed in collaboration with nonacademic partners and resulting in an output that would be useful for those partners taught me important lessons about doctoral pedagogy. For instance, I saw that there is a gap between the norms and writing style valued in my discipline and what organizations find useful. Whereas the PhD tends toward creating hyper-specialized researchers who can impress specialists with lengthy expositions on the related literature, the world outside the academy wants rigorous and sensitive researchers who can communicate their findings clearly and succinctly in order to solve specific problems.

In conversations on higher ed, there is a growing sense that research needs to be less “insular”³¹ and more relevant to people outside of academia. Even faculty in departments that had a traditional, non-applied, academic focus are experimenting with new ways of doing research (such as in collaborations with community members) and new ways of communicating that research beyond the academic journal article or monograph. However, I rarely see that willingness to experiment and embrace new research practices or formats affect the structure and curricula of PhD programs. In most departments, the model of the solo researcher doing work that addresses disciplinary questions and culminates in a proto-monograph persists.

PhD curricula often assume students have similar backgrounds, motivations for doing research, and career goals. How can PhD programs account for and value the varied experiences people bring to PhD programs?

Moriah: Every doctoral student enters graduate school with an array of desires, dreams, and ambitions stemming from their past experiences. For instance, if I were to consider what led me to enroll in graduate

31 Karin Fischer, “The Insular World of Academic Research,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 23, 2023, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-insular-world-of-academic-research>.

school, I would go back to fall 2018 when I began drafting doctoral applications. At the time, I was working as a program associate for the Corporation of National and Community Service based in Washington, DC, and I hoped to find some way of bridging my emerging professional experiences in community-led qualitative research with my international experiences living and teaching in China. I wanted to explore the ways food and farming cultures on the fringes of the metropolis spoke to contemporary debates about notions of the home, family, and urbanization. I also did not want to abandon my growing passion for collaborative research. Ultimately, from my experiences as a research assistant collaborating on a set of community participatory qualitative research projects, I was encouraged by three people with a PhD in the corporation's Office of Research and Evaluation to get graduate training.³² Were it not for the relationships I built while being employed in public service, I may not have understood that it was possible to conduct collaborative research in meaningful, impactful, and ethical ways.

My personal story is not exceptional. Doctoral students often bring a diversity of previous experiences in community organizing, nonprofit management, and public service. Bringing together my previous experiences with what I am learning in graduate school has enabled me to design a research framework that is flexible, responsive, and appropriate for my community-engaged dissertation. However, despite an increase in conversations about community-engaged dissertations, support for collaborative research can vary, depending on factors such as disciplinary traditions, departmental cultures and expectations, and external funding sources.

Jonathan: Graduate school can be intensely normativizing. As PhD students pass through the milestones of coursework, comprehensive exams, and dissertation proposal defenses, the openness for the possibilities for academic research that they initially brought to the program often narrows. My hunch is that this is because, as students progress through PhD programs, they are pressured to read, cite, research, and write a specific way. They are also encouraged to abide by certain ideas of what counts as theory, argument, and analysis. This impacts the audiences they might want to speak to and the nonacademic communities they want to engage or collaborate with in their work.³³

Valuing the varied backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives people bring to PhD programs requires being open to multiple forms of knowledge production, formats for communicating research, citational practices, and post-graduation career outcomes. It also means creating a PhD culture that values multiple motivations for why people do research in the first place. At Brandeis, I do this by discussing anthropologists who work in a variety of professional contexts and produce research for nonacademic audiences. I designed new courses on applied and practical ethnography in order to teach students things like presenting research for a client. I also started a new speaker series that highlighted the social science- and humanities-oriented work people do in industry, nonprofits, and government. And I worked with the graduate dean to enable students to get internships, to acquire practical skills useful for community collaborations and start new campus conversations on alternatives to the proto-monograph dissertation. I hope that these changes expand what people can do with the PhD and make it work for them. I increasingly find myself saying to PhD students, don't conform yourself to what you think anthropology is, make anthropology work for who you are.

³² For examples of the collaborative qualitative research supported by grants from the ORE, see [“Snapshot of AmeriCorps’ Research Grantee Activities.”](#)

³³ See Alpa Shah (2023) for an excellent essay on how the professional pressures to write only for other academics limits the potential impact and creativity of scholarship.

How can doctoral students and faculty members in the humanities and social sciences work together to make enduring changes to support community-engaged and public-facing dissertations?

The suggestions we outline below emerge from Moriah's journey doing a community-engaged dissertation and Jonathan's journey trying to foster a PhD culture at Brandeis that enables dissertations like Moriah's. However, these suggestions are meant to demonstrate how it is possible to make the PhD more open to the many things people might want to do with a PhD. Likewise, the suggestions to doctoral students are meant to help people continue doing community-engaged research, however they conceive the term. Jonathan's message to faculty is that our suggestions are meant to strengthen scholarship and enable people to reconnect with why they were attracted to the PhD in the first place, whereas Moriah's message to students is to encourage them to honor the ways their doctoral work is shaped by the relations, curiosities, mentors, and texts that travel with them before, in, and beyond graduate school.

Advice for Departments Working to Enable Community-Engaged Dissertations

- 1- Make practical skill-building part of the curriculum.** Very often, practical skills are what first enable collaborations outside the academy. For instance, being able to quickly shoot and edit a video or design a survey are skills that more interpretivist and humanities-oriented graduate students can offer the organizations or people they hope to collaborate with.
- 2- Re-evaluate what “knowing the literature” means.** Examine when students are pressured to feel they need to know everything published on a topic, rather than knowing the research that is relevant to their project. Faculty should ask ourselves, are students being encouraged to know the literature that is often cited in the discipline, or are they encouraged to know literature most relevant to community concerns or that is informing the work that people in that community are doing?
- 3- Make the dissertation proposal about process in addition to the research topic.** The proposal guidelines should be open to the student saying, “I will develop the research question in collaboration with the people I meet.” The student should go in with a proposal focus, but the questions should be open-ended enough so they can be guided by what people their project engages find meaningful. Faculty should ask, as Moriah writes below, “to whom is your scholarship accountable?”
- 4- Allow students to produce dissertations in formats other than the proto-monograph.** That could include a portfolio format that includes a mix of academic and nonacademic articles, essays on pedagogy, and other formats that are useful to the people who are part of the research project.
- 5- Regularly invite alumni working in a variety of professional contexts to present at department colloquia.** This gives students practical benefits—alumni can share advice on how to make their research relevant in contexts outside the academy and how to navigate research collaborations—as well as showing students that multiple career paths are valued. This also provides benefits to faculty. For instance, four years ago, I (Jonathan) had little knowledge about where anthropologists work outside academia. I learned about the many professional contexts anthropologists work in, and the kind of research they do there, *after* organizing dozens of career seminars.

Advice for Doctoral Students Completing Community-Engaged Dissertations

1- Recognize how you start is not how you will finish. New experiences and relationships forged in graduate school will change and transform what you aim to accomplish with the sum of your doctoral work. There is no need to hold yourself to a firm line when the dynamism of who you are becoming collides with the manifold interests of the communities you're involved with. Making a radical change to my dissertation proposal occurred because I (Moriah) chose to accept the ways new research interests emerged from my community work with a healthy food access organization during the COVID-19 pandemic. I could not, nor did I want to, shake the questions that were produced by collaborating with farmers on their small-scale, diversified farms.

Sit and draft an intellectual biography each year of your doctoral journey. Write down what brought you to graduate school, reflect on your term papers and the personal projects you undertake, and articulate the interplay between your community work and emerging intellectual interests. Do this often as a guidepost for yourself but also as a form of encouragement when aspects of graduate school seem unbearable.

2- Seek community. I (Moriah) am deeply inspired by the scholarship of Ruth Wilson Gilmore³⁴ and other feminist geographers for how they model the ways activism, community organizing, and networks of care create the conditions for rigorous research and public scholarship. Some doctoral students begin their graduate studies already entangled in webs of communities outside and inside their universities. Others find their communities while pursuing graduate study. I have been the latter. The key is not to get hung up on labels, but to consider your relationships and commitments.

Ask yourself: How have you come to build relationships with a group of people working around a common purpose? To whom is your scholarship accountable? Is it apparent the ways you are collaborating with others? Is it apparent how you are allowing your relationships to define your work as much as you also allow yourself to transform communities?

3- Find different sources of mentorship. Mentorship will look different for doctoral students completing community-engaged dissertations. Sonya Atalay and Alexandra McCleary as well as Linda Tuhiwai Smith remind us that the community-based PhD problematizes long-held research paradigms, shifting forms dynamically with the concerns, practices, timelines, and projects of various social movements, institutions, and self-organized communities.³⁵ Community-engaged dissertations, then, will often require you to continuously cultivate interpersonal skills like negotiation, teamwork, and conflict resolution while you also navigate the general uneasiness of learning how to *do* research.

Work to communicate first to yourself what intellectual, technical, financial, and emotional support you need to do the work you have planned. Check in with yourself often. This will guide the spaces you move in to find mentors. Think of mentorship not as an individual but

³⁴ Gilmore (2007).

³⁵ See Atalay and McCleary (2022) and Smith (2012)

as a support structure—a set of folks bringing different perspectives and emotional strengths to your doctoral and community work. Then, sit down with your advisor and mentors each academic year to discuss how your community-engaged research is developing and how they can support you moving forward.

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Moriah King is a PhD candidate in the Department of Anthropology at Brandeis University. Her research is situated at the intersection of environmental anthropology and critical food studies, exploring the ways beginning Black farmers in Georgia fashion agricultural landscapes as sites of environmental stewardship and familial regeneration.

Jonathan Anjaria is a researcher, teacher, and graduate career professional. His current roles at Brandeis University are associate professor of Anthropology and faculty director of professional development for the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. He researches, teaches, and writes on topics related to public space, mobility, and sustainable transportation. His most recent book *Mumbai on Two Wheels: Biking, Urban Space and Sustainable Mobility* will be published by University of Washington Press in the spring of 2024.

During his fellowship year in 2019–2020, he worked in collaboration with the **Community Development Department**, which is the planning agency for the City of Cambridge. He helped design and implement a project that collected community members’ mobility stories. This work consisted of interviews and conversations with a variety of Cambridge residents about how they moved around the city, obstacles to using different forms of transportation (such as bicycles), and how they made transportation choices. This work was done in conjunction with the revised Cambridge Bicycle Plan.

A CANOE CONCEPT TOWARD SUSTAINED INDIGENOUS CONNECTIONS

Malia Baricuatro, Annie Fay Camacho, Gabriella Colello, Jonathan U. Guerrero, Johansen Pico, and Tiara R. Na'puti

ars pasifika

by Craig Santos Perez

*when the tide
of silence*

rises

say “ocean”

then with the paddle

of your tongue

rearrange

the letters to form

“canoe”

Wayfinding & Addressing Erasure in Higher Education

As Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) and non-Indigenous scholars, we reflect on our collective approaches for thriving through Indigenous research informed by shared values with Indigenous community partners. From multiple universities in different locations, we cross a broad spatial arena (University of California Irvine, University of Alaska Anchorage, and University of Guam) and are working together to co-create with and beyond these land-grant higher education institutions. Situated on stolen and unceded lands, our universities are deeply implicated in interconnected structures of settler colonialism and militarism. The Pentagon boasts the biggest military budget and most bases and installations worldwide; it also operates a military-academic complex providing financial incentives for higher education.

NHPI populations also remain an “invisible minority” in the US, and at the graduate level they are among the lowest numbers of enrolled students, underrepresented in sustained programming, curricula, mentorship, and resources in higher education. Such outcomes are influenced by the legacies of the US military in the Pacific. To unsettle and challenge dominant colonial and unjust structures, we apply Indigenous-led approaches to decolonial and relational systems change through land-based education and critical Indigenous pedagogy. Land-based pedagogy addresses the powerful ways that global histories and broader ideologies shape the local. Combined with critical Indigenous pedagogy, these approaches teach how to explicitly analyze territoriality and colonization, and to critically address how educational systems reproduce relations to *place* that are foundations of settler colonialism. Indigenous ways of knowing and relating to land

- offer paths to transformative action in pursuit of healthy lands and peoples on a planetary scale;

- provide alternative approaches for PhD education that explicitly challenge these structures and attempted Indigenous erasure at the very sites of knowledge production; and
- invite scholars and practitioners to act in solidarity with Indigenous groups whose creative practices and research are rooted in resurgence.

SUPPORTING & SUSTAINING INDIGENOUS CONNECTIONS

Given that NHPI graduate students and Indigenous approaches belong in the university and community, this work must be supported. Without universalizing, some specific actions may include:

Reciprocal relationships that deepen support for Native American and NHPI students in collaboration with communities:

- For example, University of California Irvine's Department of Global & International Studies provides support for Indigenous students and organizations that may take the form of faculty advisory roles advocating for Native American, Indigenous, and NHPI students; connecting NHPI students to campus and community resources; facilitating mentor-mentee relationships between NHPI students, connecting newer and older cohorts, and connecting NHPI graduate students with undergraduates;
- Providing material support for academic success of Indigenous scholars through grants, scholarships, and mental health care; engaging with surrounding NHPI community groups; compensating community members for their time and labor.

Programs (e.g., global studies, nursing, clinical psychology, etc.) that advance intellectual community committed to NHPI may require students to complete Indigenous Studies courses and participate in community activities focused on issues relevant to Indigenous Peoples.

- For example, University of Alaska Anchorage's clinical-community psychology program requires first-year graduate students to complete a "Native Ways of Knowing," course on Indigenous approaches to values, spirituality, health, and Indigenous healing. Students are also required to participate in at least 20 hours of cultural experience focused on Alaska Native Peoples and culture.

Other actions may include recognizing the work of Indigenous scholars on syllabi and in classroom discussions, making space for Indigenous knowledge by inviting guest speakers, fostering community building, valuing information shared outside of traditional academic literature, etc.

These approaches provide elements for our canoe concept, a transdisciplinary framework that is straightforward and powerful. Canoes are vessels that function as connectors among waterways, land formations, environments, and peoples. They are like Indigenous knowledge systems that are integrated with the land they come from and Indigenous peoples' self-determination in knowledge generation, decision-making, data collection, and implementation. Curriculum that adopts the interconnected approach of Indigenous ways of knowing and methodologies can utilize this canoe concept to tackle real-world challenges of our time—such as climate change, militarism, and sovereignty. The canoe concept helps center Indigenous Studies perspectives, training, and programming as integral to all disciplines and value-added to doctoral experience beyond the academy. The canoe challenges structural issues at our PhD-granting institutions and enables us to imagine a future doctoral education that is leveraged toward actions for decolonization.

The canoe is a core element of many Indigenous communities; it is not just a metaphor but a central focus that engenders life skills and education through place-based perspectives where understandings of

place, memories, and stories are interconnected, with islands and ocean guiding cultural practices and relationships with environments. Below, we share intersectional practices to reflect on the canoe concept and offer some possibilities toward sustaining Indigenous connections.

Tiara: As a Chamoru scholar and faculty member at UC Irvine, I approach Global Studies pedagogy through the canoe concept along with the cultural principle of *inafa' maolek*—a continuous effort to make good, an ongoing process of reciprocity. Working to make good is very embodied, involving deep ties to land and relationships. The canoe orients my engagement with place, particularly UCI as a land-grant institution situated upon the unceded lands of the Acjachemen and Gabrielino/Tongva and peoples who are the ancestral and traditional land caretakers. I begin my classes with readings and stories about the movements for Indigenous land stewardship and need for land return from the perspective of Acjachemen and Tongva (Cleaves & Sepulveda 2021; Sepulveda 2018; Sepulveda & D'Arcy 2021). I also acknowledge how as taotao tãno, I share Indigenous practices with peoples from this place. The canoe ensures this land-based pedagogy intervenes toward sustained institutional commitments rooted in prior and informed collaboration with local Indigenous populations and issues.

Malia: A glance at a world map shows how Pasifika people are represented as fragmented, insignificant, and even nonexistent, failing to capture the expansiveness of the ocean, its peoples, and its teachings. The canoe represents the interconnectedness of the ocean's islands, histories, languages, and cultures. Our ancestors traveled by canoe to gather, share, tell, and retell, a form of embodied research that is skilled, rigorous, and dedicated to centering community and care. When I reflect on my research, doctoral training, and pursuit of decolonial scholarship as a Kanaka Maoli scholar, I think of my ancestors journeying the islands of the Pacific by canoe. I think of their resistance and struggles navigating troubled waters.

Gabriella: I write from the positionality of a woman who grew up in New England, far from any shore that touched the Pacific. The terrestrial expanse between myself and the Pacific mirrored the distance I felt from my identity. Detached from elders, community members, and access to genealogy, I spent years seeking to *know of*, to *know about* Oceania in different ways. Thus, I address the violence of higher education not from the position of a connected Ma'ohi woman nor as a complete outsider. Rather, I speak to experiences as someone existing in the in-between, floating adrift in murky waters. I remember waiting patiently for a mention of Oceania in school as early on as second grade—it never came. My thirst for information and representation intensified over the years. For college I chose to study International Relations—what I thought was the best chance of encountering the Pacific and her peoples. Yet, my thirst remained. College offered rough seas that battered the hull of my canoe. Despite navigating lectures and courses on militarism, imperialism, nuclearism, colonialism, philosophy, and environmentalism, Oceania seemed submerged beneath the waves. She was omitted from the geographic expanse of higher education, visible only when I veered off course to find her.

Decolonial Praxis & Land-Based Education

The canoe connects us. Working together we all have responsibilities to learn and to share our knowledge and skills. The canoe offers graduate students a way to find value in their university education, where they are trusted to embrace knowledges not privileged by academic traditions and are encouraged to embody cultural practices of reciprocity and care. Teaching through principled actions and mentorship also helps graduate students, as the canoe metaphor means ensuring that students are

situated in the front and given the opportunities to find a collective rhythm while working with others for a collective cause that prioritizes decolonial practices rooted in reciprocity.

Malia: As an Indigenous doctoral student, dedication to a decolonial praxis in a PhD program necessitates centering global Indigenous perspectives. This means welcoming and respecting Indigenous knowledge systems that include, but are not limited to, uplifting Indigenous scholarship, land-based education, and community engagement. Community-engaged scholarship means first participating in spaces as a community member, a sister, a daughter, an aunty, a dancer, a musician, a farmer, as a student to our kupuna, and as a kumu to our keiki. Being in community necessitates a foundation of care, a commitment to lifelong learning, and an embodiment of trust to both share and receive our presence. University scholarship is in direct contradiction to this practice. Navigating these contradictions as an Indigenous scholar means asserting the validity and necessity of these research practices and attempting to translate aspects of ‘ike, or lifelong learning in my community, to the language of the university.

Gabriella: As a PhD student in International Relations, a new leviathan is on the horizon, an ivory tower rising out of the shorebreak. In the ivory tower, the West positions itself as the sole arbiter of knowledge, justifying its control of cosmological and ontological “truth” by which worlds are then dominated and ordered. This self-anointed power (Jetñil-Kijiner 2018) fuels the violent erasure of Oceanic knowledges and robs us of rich, alternative ways of knowing, being, and relating. The ivory tower fears voices with the power to make waves capable of washing away its foundation, that rise from “the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still” (Hau’ofa 1994, 160), who roar loud enough to threaten the integrity of all ivory institutions. Voices spoken from mouths wet with saltwater, capable of corroding the very structure of colonial arrogance.

In graduate school, I have created my own spaces to listen and learn mainly from taking actions to create independent studies with readings focusing on relationality and pluriversality (see references)—that is, the capacity to nurture a world of many worlds and to recognize and empower diverse cosmologies while critically considering power relations. Higher education can foster new relations through heeding the call of many Indigenous scholars to center Indigenous, place-based voices (Smith, Tuck, and Yang 2019). Providing Indigenous Studies curricular content, facilitates reimagining and deconstructing structures and assumptions about what has been considered normative or “best practice” in higher education. Faculty and administrators can also look to the ways in which Indigenous students actively practice alternative ways of knowing and being.

Johansen: I am a Filipinx American, a settler-scholar, with commitments to move toward a decolonial future: a position filled with contradictions. However, it is only through this self-reflexive act of wading through these contradictions that makes a decolonial future possible. This is not to suggest that settler-scholars should lead decolonial movements, but rather, I propose that settler-scholars must adopt a *decolonial praxis*, or a set of actions and practices that are informed by (but not subsumed by) decolonial theory and literature. The canoe—a necessity to navigate toward decolonial futures—is only as strong as the passengers aboard. Both settlers and Indigenous peoples alike must build the canoe together, and by adopting nonhierarchical, relational, and decolonial practices toward knowledge production, a dismantling of US imperialism and anti-Indigenous sentiment abroad may yet be possible.

To demonstrate a decolonial, self-reflexive praxis, I point toward personal feelings of hesitancy and resistance as I advocate for a decolonial academy and world, acknowledging that my position as a

PhD student in the US depended on my admittance to a land-grant university on stolen Tongva and Acjachemen lands and waters. Moves toward a decolonial future require *action* in the present, and decolonizing one's praxis and worldview is an active process that must begin within. It begins with reclaiming the agency of land, nature, and all peoples. This reclamation of agency is an active and relational process that extends to all living things. It is our responsibility to take this commitment seriously. It is a consistent set of actions, both learning and doing, which push the canoe forward.

Annie Fay: As a student in the US colony of Guam (Guåhan), I have spent all my life learning in the walls of the Western education system. From outdated textbooks to standardized testing, I've learned how to be an informed US citizen. It wasn't until I was a graduate student sitting under a hut I helped build, looking out to our canoe dancing in the water, that I realized the power of the Indigenous education I was experiencing through the Micronesian Studies program at the University of Guam.

I've taken courses in traditional seafaring, taught by master navigator Larry Raigetal, whom I am now an apprentice under. Raigetal's courses focused on Micronesian seafaring systems, traditional navigation, and Micronesian canoe building. I had a community of teachers. Being at the canoe house meant that one day I'm with *palu* Larry in the water learning about wind patterns, then the next day I'm sitting with a circle of women teaching me how to weave food baskets. The canoe house is like a university place but filled with Indigenous knowledge, and I had the honor of being one of her students. Expanding the meaning of a classroom or curriculum empowers both the student and teacher. It reminds them of the strength, wisdom, and courage that comes with being a keeper of generations of knowledge—a knowledge that provides the world with a critical perspective on issues facing our communities and planet. Being a part of a university that acknowledges the wisdom of Indigenous masters and gives them the same respect and resources as any other academic has empowered me to believe that I have a future in academia where my work is a valued part of the solution and not merely historical reporting of “ancient societies.”

Indigenous peoples are more than the subjects of research. We are the researchers. We hold knowledge and perspectives deserving of a voice. Our voices and worth have unfortunately been diminished under colonialism and hypermilitarization. Academia, and the world, would benefit from empowering these voices with the respect and humility deserving of their generations of knowledge.

Toward Sustained Connections

Malia: Land-based education also means participating in local efforts for land and food sovereignty. Our ancestries, connections to food we eat, the soil we walk on, and ability to share and absorb knowledge provide all of us with entry points to this form of land-based education. For me, this looks like working directly with the 'aina (land) and kupuna (elders) to learn how to sustain ourselves not only through food, but through wellness, community, and education. Through facilitating and participating in community waste redirection, permaculture workshops, reading groups, and conversations with fellow land cultivators at [CRECE Microfarm in Santa Ana](#), California, and the [Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs](#), I learn how decolonial praxis functions materially through a just transition to community food systems and reasserting interconnected perspectives that prioritize reciprocity. These spaces provide the groundwork to manifest an education beyond the limitations of the walls of university classrooms.

Jonathan: My family and I are temporary settlers living on the traditional lands of the Dena'ina People, also known as Anchorage, Alaska. I lived in Guåhan my whole life and a few years ago decided to

pursue a doctoral degree in clinical-community psychology with the mindset of returning home and serving my community. What drew me to Dena'ina lands was my program's emphasis on Indigenous and rural psychology, which unfortunately is the only one of its kind in the US. Reflecting on my journey, I can see that my growth as a psychologist and as an Indigenous human being has been largely shaped by experiences as an outsider/temporary settler working in tribal health care, helping improve the well-being of Alaska Native Peoples. This opportunity was only available because of the long-standing relationship my program has had with the organization and its commitment to community and place-based work. As an Indigenous Pacific Islander from a homeland that is still under US occupation and is highly militarized, it has been a healing experience learning how Alaska Native Peoples through their sovereign rights decide what health and wellness means to them and the types of services they want to provide for their people. The Tribal Health Consortium's vision statement is, "Alaska Native people are the healthiest people in the world." I am always wanting to share this with my fellow Chamorus as an example of how health can be prioritized but is disrupted by colonialism. Being in these Indigenous spaces and learning about Alaska Native peoples' Ways of Knowing and Living are lessons I hold dearly as I wait to return home with my family to share what we all have learned in our journey. Being good temporary settlers is part of the process of being a doctoral student too, and is something that my wife and I strive for and teach our two daughters. As a family we talk about the importance of respecting the Alaska Native people and their lands, and prioritize learning about their histories, values, and culture. My doctoral training in psychology is strengthened by the partnerships that my program has with the Indigenous communities in Alaska. The knowledge that I have gained and the opportunities for me to contribute back to the communities here are important lessons for myself and family.

As we write, Indigenous Peoples worldwide are challenging colonial structures of power in communities and throughout higher education systems. Thomas Joseph (Hupa Tribe, Hoopa Valley, California), an Indigenous Environmental Network representative, reminds us that, "Indigenous Peoples have a knowledge-based system that predates any university on the globe, that allows us to maintain those lands in a manner that all things living can survive..." Our canoe carries this wisdom and guides our relational commitments to prioritizing Indigenous Studies and land-based pedagogy within doctoral programs. The canoe concept ensures our wayfinding through academic institutions is toward collaborations with Indigenous community partners that are rooted in reciprocity and decolonial praxis. As Craig Santos Perez' poem also reminds us, there is power in connecting with land and "ocean" and we can wayfind our voice and stories in rearranging higher education to collectively form "canoe."

Malia Baricuatro (they/she) is a second-year PhD student and Global Indigenous Research Fellow in the Department of Global and International Studies at the University of California, Irvine. Their research addresses indigeneity, food sovereignty, decolonization, and education directly relating to their position as an indigenous person of Kanaka Maoli descent and contributions outside of the academy working in urban agriculture and K-12 education. Malia is a founding member and co-president of the Pacific Islander Student Association at UCI and an active member of the Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs Youth Council.

Annie Fay Camacho (she/her) is a Chamoru and Filipina graduate student in the Master of Arts in Micronesian Studies and Master of Science in Clinical Psychology programs at the University of Guam. Fulfillment for her comes from service to her people of Guåhan and the greater Micronesia region as well as creating meaningful connections through community engagement and creative arts. Other aspects of her life include being a traditional seafaring apprentice under master navigator Larry Raigetel, a core member of Independent Guåhan, and lifelong trivia night enthusiast.

Gabriella Colello (she/hers) is a second-year PhD student in the Department of Political Science at the University of California, Irvine, where she studies International Relations and Political Theory. Her approach to the study of “planetary politics” is informed by relational cosmologies, pluriversal onto-epistemologies, and critical/post-positivist methodologies. Gabriella strives for her science to be de-/anti-colonial, intersectional, pluriversal, and in relation with others “doing the work” inside and outside of the academy. In doing so, Gabriella seeks to contribute to discussions related to moments of power, resistance, and “worlding” while prioritizing the engagement of Indigenous voices in/of Oceania.

Jonathan U. Guerrero, MS (he/him), is an indigenous Chamoru from Guam and is a rising fourth-year PhD student in the clinical-community psychology program at the University of Alaska Anchorage. He specializes in decolonial and indigenous psychology and behavioral health program development and evaluation for indigenous and rural communities. Jonathan is a core member of the community group Independent Guåhan and helps organize education and outreach activities focused on decolonization and political self-determination. When not at work, Jonathan enjoys quality time with family, teaching the Chamoru language to his children, and spending time outdoors fishing, hiking, and playing fútbol.

Johansen Pico (they/them) is a second-year PhD student in the Department of Global and International Studies at the University of California, Irvine. Their inquiry advances interdisciplinary, trans-centered approaches to address the consequences and implications of the 2022 Philippine presidential election, thrusting Ferdinand Marcos Jr. into office. Johansen’s current projects theorize the relationship between trans Filipinx/a/o subjectivities and possibilities for building alternative futures through rhetorical acts of life-making. By centering the everyday acts that allow trans life to persist (in an otherwise transphobic world), Johansen advances solutions that address the ongoing settler-colonial threat against non-cisheteronormative and Indigenous lives.

Tiara R. Na’puti (she/her), PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Global and International Studies at University of California Irvine. She is a Chamoru (familian Robat & Kaderon) scholar whose work addresses Indigenous movements, colonialism, and militarism in the Mariana Islands archipelago and throughout Oceania. For over a decade, Na’puti has worked with community groups advocating for sovereignty and Native and Indigenous Pacific Islander populations. She has published in *American Quarterly*, *AmerAsia*, *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies*, *Environmental Communication*, and the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, among other public scholarship and book chapters.

Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society residency: “Independent Guåhan empowers the Chamoru people to reclaim our sovereignty as a nation. Inspired by the strength of our ancestors and with love for future generations, we educate and unify all who call our island home to build a sustainable and prosperous independent future.” From this mission statement, the work of Independent Guåhan involves community building and deepening relationships, bridging the educational divide to make thinking about sovereignty accessible to everyone. Our activities are wide-ranging, including community art and murals, organizing general assemblies, decolonization forums, teach-ins, producing educational materials about political status, Hale’-ta Hikes (cultural hikes) to connect the public to our lands, environmental impact research, and supporting other local organizations working for climate justice. More information about our activities can be found at <https://independentguahan.org/>.

More information about the Mellon/ACLS residency can be found at [Humanities for All, “Sovereignty and Climate Change in Guåhan.”](#)

Resources for Community Engaged Scholarship

In Orange County, California, USA Indigenous communities:

- [Association of Hawaiian Civic Club](#)
- [Pacific Islander Health Partnership \(PIHP\)](#)
- [CRECE Microfarm Santa Ana](#)
- [Magnolia High School PI Club Farm](#)

Mariana Islands Archipelago:

- [Independent Guåhan](#)
- [OurCommonwealth670](#)
- [Micronesia Climate Change Alliance \(MCCA\)](#)
- [Protect Guam Water—Nihi Indigenous Media](#)

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EXPLORING DIVERSE JUSTICE-DRIVEN CAREERS FOR PUBLICLY ENGAGED DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Sandra Ristovska and Nandi Pointer

In 2022–2023, we organized [a career diversity series](#) on visual media, justice, and human rights for faculty and graduate students at the University of Colorado Boulder.³⁶ Described by one PhD student as “eye opening and expansive,” the series featured talks by eight national and international experts with doctoral degrees who work across the private and public sector, leveraging their work with visual media into various domains. From human rights advocacy to archiving and preservation, the speakers reflected on their career trajectories and highlighted recent projects they have been working on in organizations like Amnesty International, Library of Congress, Missouri Humanities, and the Smithsonian Institution.

The series stemmed from a Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellowship that enabled Sandra Ristovska to conduct research on video evidence with the Scientific Evidence Committee of the Science and Technology Law Section of the American Bar Association. Through her fellowship, she was able to identify new areas of work in visual media, law, and policy for which there are increasingly more employment opportunities but for which there is not yet appropriate training. With the help of Nandi Pointer, a graduate research assistant, and in consultation with faculty in her department, Ristovska thus identified speakers whose humanistic doctoral training and existing work with video authentication, archiving, preservation, and human rights investigations could speak directly to the skills needed for the emerging jobs in visual media, law, and policy. Together, the panelists, attendees, and series organizers discussed how doctoral training in the humanities and humanistic social sciences can be translated into diverse justice-driven careers in publicly engaged scholarship. In the words of one PhD student, “through the presentations of [the] speakers’ personal journeys, these [career] options became much more tangible.”

To provide hands-on training on how to plan and conduct a successful job search for careers beyond the academy, we also featured a two-hour workshop with Cathy Hannabach, founder of Ideas on Fire and host of the podcast *Imagine Otherwise*. Hannabach spoke about the importance of keeping an open mind, enlisting a support network, and translating one’s knowledge base into concrete skills as part of the PhD training.

In this article, we reflect on our experiences and the feedback that we received to demonstrate ways career diversity series can be leveraged to:

- strengthen the broad potential of humanistic doctoral education;
- create possibilities for innovative partnerships with professionals working in domains with • • underlying human rights and social justice concerns;
- highlight some benefits and perceived challenges in applying humanistic doctoral training to sectors beyond the academy as well as potential ways to overcome the challenges;

³⁶ Our series speaks to the growing academic recognition that doctoral students in the humanities and humanistic social sciences are better served when they are prepared for diverse career pathways. For comparable series, please see Humanities Without Walls’ [Career Diversity Summer Workshop](#) as well as various events organized by the Georgetown Humanities Initiative, GradFUTURES: The Professional Development Hub at Princeton University, and the professional development series at Brandeis University organized by former Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellow Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria.

develop curriculum recommendations, based on the series, for long-lasting impact.

We conclude with some practical tips for those interested in organizing a career diversity series.

Strengthening the broad potential of humanistic doctoral education

The overall objective of the series was to provide models and inspiration for graduate students interested in doing justice-driven, publicly engaged work and for faculty interested in supporting such students. The overwhelming response from both graduate students and faculty was that the series helped them step outside of the normative tropes of daily academic life. “It was refreshing to hear about the different opportunities those holding PhDs can pursue, and it took some of the anxiety out of searching for jobs,” stated one graduate student. One faculty member commented that “the breadth and width of the career foci and accomplishments of the invited speakers provided students and faculty with a sense of imagination into the ways that humanities and humanistic social science degrees can be leveraged outside of traditional academic careers.” Another faculty member highlighted how the series “opened up entire new ways of speaking about and advising PhD students in nonacademic career trajectories.” This feedback was echoed by the speakers themselves. When asked to provide suggestions for how to better prepare graduate students for diverse career pathways, one of the speakers told us that our series may be a valuable model: “Providing students with a survey of the types of employment available outside of academia to which their skills would translate would go a long way in helping students understand the pathways available to them that they can further pursue with more digging and online research.”

Creating possibilities for innovative partnerships

Because collaborations based on mutual respect, reciprocity, and ethics of care are vital to publicly engaged work, *the career diversity series inevitably facilitated discussions about partnerships with communities and stakeholders working on issues related to human rights and social justice.* Presenting on his work on exposing human rights violations committed by governments and companies in their usage of AI-driven surveillance like facial recognition technologies, Matt Mahmoudi of Amnesty International provided strategies for how scholars can engage with human rights organizations and legal practitioners to expose and hopefully disrupt the ever-increasing digital infrastructures of violence. Specifically, he offered a roadmap for bridging academic rigor and pace with the reactive approach of human rights organizations. Relatedly, Jeff Deutch, a co-founder of Syrian Archive, presented on his work with activists, media workers, human rights attorneys, and archivists to use images and videos from social media to investigate human rights abuses in Syria, Yemen, and most recently in Ukraine. Their presentations got at the heart of the feedback received from one of the speakers that publicly engaged work could provide “more opportunities to engage with and build trusting relationships with people most directly impacted by human rights abuses.” It is not surprising, then, that in the view of one graduate student, “the speakers gave me a sense of how theoretical work can be put to practice.”

An important aspect of the career diversity series was the facilitation of informal networking. A different group of graduate students had lunch with each of the speakers to engage more deeply in conversations pertinent to their research interests and career visions following each of the presentations in the series. The graduate students were able to choose which lunch session they wanted to attend beforehand. The lunches thus provided a space for generative conversations that resulted in three graduate students pursuing other opportunities and collaborations, such as consulting with a speaker’s research team and

securing access to relevant archives in addition to learning about existing internships and fellowships. Faculty members who attended the series and had dinners with the speakers spoke about the importance of expanding professional networks as well. According to one faculty member, “networks are among the most important tools for mentorship, and we can only be as helpful as our networks enable us to be. That is why speaker series like these are so important—not only do they model certain options to students, they give faculty opportunities to form new relationships.”

Benefits and Challenges

Our career diversity series highlighted the following interrelated benefits in applying humanistic doctoral training to sectors beyond the academy:

- Amplifying diverse voices and histories;
- Working directly with the communities that our academic research is intended to serve;
- Engaging larger communities and stakeholders for public good;
- Shaping policies, products, and services that promote justice and human rights.

Drawing from a diverse range of personal and professional experiences, each presenter highlighted the perceived benefits of publicly engaged scholarship. A recurring theme was the ability to *amplify diverse voices and histories*. “How do you amplify voices that never made it to the pages of history?” is the underlying question that informs the work of Guha Shankar, a co-director of the Civil Rights History Project at the Library of Congress. Reflecting on one of his projects that video-recorded and preserved the oral histories of some of the participants in the Black Freedom Struggle, he argued that “memory nodes become how we understand ourselves and what it means to be a citizen of the world.”

Motivated by the power of storytelling and her passion for engaging with Indigenous knowledge and media, Amalia Isabel Córdova spoke about her experiences as a filmmaker, curator, and scholar specializing in Indigenous film at the Smithsonian Institution. A co-director of the Mother Tongue Film Festival, a project of the Smithsonian’s Recovering Voices initiative, Córdova discussed the importance of *working directly with the communities that academic research is intended to serve*. She iterated the need to create and sustain transnational networks of activists, scholars, filmmakers, and nongovernmental organizations that produce, support, study, and circulate Indigenous-language media projects. As part of her talk, she told us: “I’ve spent a lifetime in museums and educational spaces that engage Indigenous knowledge production. It is important to see the world through the eyes and distinctive cultural perspectives of native filmmakers.” To do so, Córdova has a proactive approach to curation, actively attending Indigenous film festivals, screenings, and other art events where she meets Indigenous filmmakers.

Erin Whitson of Missouri Humanities has developed community-based archaeological approaches to visualizing Cherokee removal in her home state. *Engaging larger communities and stakeholders for public good* is central to what she does. Whitson has worked to build trusting relationships with tribal chiefs, the national forest services, and the larger community to document and confront the human rights abuses against Indigenous people. Inspired by her talk, one PhD student told us that Whitson’s presentation provided tangible ways in which doctoral research could entail meaningful community engagement, leading to valuable public-sector work.

Mapping her career trajectory from academia to human rights and then the tech industry, Anna Banchik of Meta spoke in a personal capacity about the growing possibilities in civic technology where PhDs can *shape policies, products, and services that promote justice and human rights*. She has long been interested in how social media platforms facilitate and constrain human rights investigations, so her goal is to raise awareness about the inequities generated by platform design. One of the graduate student attendees singled out this session for the practical tips, approaches, and tools it provided for those interested in pursuing civic technology projects to promote open government and community action.

There are numerous benefits in applying humanistic doctoral training to sectors beyond the academy. To sum it up in the words of one of the speakers, “public engagement allows us to flip the ivory tower style of history-making on its head. By going to communities to talk and learn with them about the past, we can hopefully start to deconstruct some of the long-standing issues related to who ‘gets’ to have control [of the stories we tell—and how].” Because visual media like video can both alleviate and exacerbate the disparities faced by marginalized communities, our career diversity series highlighted the ethical and practical concerns involved in doing justice-driven publicly engaged work and its relevance to law and policy.

Conducting publicly engaged research also presents challenges that cannot be easily addressed. Our faculty and graduate students spoke about *funding* and *curriculum development*. “Public work needs to be incentivized, and critical and practical training must be provided so that students are able to not only experiment with public research but make that type of work a meaningful use of their time,” stated one faculty member. They added that our “series pointed to how this would be possible.” In other words, *by showing the value of this work, a career diversity series can kindle a departmental conversation about how to best support graduate students interested in publicly engaged work both inside and outside the academy and how to think about criteria for evaluating such research pursuits*. An overwhelming majority of the graduate students and faculty who attended the series, as well as the speakers themselves, expressed *desire for structural changes* so that publicly engaged scholarship “counts for tenure and promotion, becomes part of graduate classes and graduate program requirements, gets funding, and is part of the hiring process.” We thus hope to galvanize the excitement about the series into a set of proposals for institutional reforms at the departmental level as a necessary first step toward properly supporting publicly engaged work.

Curriculum recommendations

Our series raised discussions about curriculum development. Based on the feedback that we received, we have three recommendations for long-lasting impact:

- Incorporate career diversity training as part of regular departmental colloquia and events;
- Develop appropriate methodological training;
- Integrate publicly engaged scholarship into the graduate program requirements.

It is important to note that our recommendations are certainly not exhaustive. They are offered here as an entry point into a fascinating conversation that to our delight inspired many at our home institution.

Though our series sought to highlight diverse justice-driven careers as a goal in itself, the precarity of academic labor and the decreasing tenure-track employment options in the humanities were often part of the conversation. In the words of one of the speakers, “Given that most PhDs will not have careers

on the tenure track, it is vital to train graduate students in diverse careers. This should not be optional. Series like this are a great start and I would love to see hundreds more of them. But not separating this work off as different is also critical.” As a result, *including speakers with PhDs who work both inside and outside the academy as part of regular departmental colloquia and events* would be an important signal that a unit values such work and considers it inseparable from academic research, training, and teaching.

Our series illuminated the need to develop appropriate methodological training in publicly engaged research. One faculty member stated, “I think one potentially valuable action that could be undertaken might be to conceptualize ‘public engagement’ as an epistemic practice, and, as such, develop methods-level coursework that appeals to students across the college/university.” Relatedly, one of the speakers wished they had been better trained on how to speak to different audiences, how to problem solve collaboratively, how to listen actively to the needs of community members, and how to make sure all stakeholders are at the table at the beginning of the project, as uncomfortable as that may seem. We recognize that graduate programs around the country are increasingly developing coursework in the public humanities more broadly, and some of our fellow Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society colleagues have been at the forefront of those efforts (see Friedman & Son; Lindsey et al.; McCormick et al. in this toolkit). We encourage broad adoption of such coursework and training.

Our graduate students were vocal in expressing their desire to *integrate publicly engaged scholarship into their program requirements*. Even faculty acknowledged this need: “The best way to teach community engagement is to expect it, and to accompany students carefully through the inevitable challenges.” There is no easy way to change program requirements. The speakers in the series broadened the scope of what is possible, and we are encouraged by faculty’s feedback that they are willing to mentor graduate students who embark on this journey. As an immediate next step, Ristovska and Pointer will lead a session on publicly engaged scholarship in February 2024 as part of a college-level methods series to underscore the need to make this type of work integral to the doctoral training at our institution.

Practical tips for organizing career diversity series

As a way of conclusion, we offer several practical tips based on our experiences for those interested in organizing career diversity series. Our suggestions center around the following set of concerns:

- selection of speakers and formats;
- campus partners;
- faculty and graduate student involvement.

Tapping into the professional contacts of faculty and the alumni network of the program can aid with the selection of speakers who are more likely to participate in a career diversity series. We decided to feature individual presentations throughout the academic year to encourage more in-depth discussions on each topic. Other formats could be explored as well—especially when resources are limited—such as a roundtable or a panel discussion on diverse career pathways with a few speakers or an individual presentation as part of existing colloquia and events in the department.

Involving multiple campus partners can help communicate and better advocate for the broad potential of publicly engaged work in the humanities and humanistic social sciences. In addition to our College of Media, Communication, and Information and our Department of Media Studies, we partnered with the Brakhage Center for Media Arts, the Center for Humanities and the Arts, the Department of English, the Department of Ethnic Studies, and the University of Colorado Law’s American Indian Law

Clinic. This approach was welcomed because of its ability to show the broad value of the humanities, not just of publicly engaged research. In the words of one colleague,

This series opened up a world of novel, humanities-based approaches to problems that seem to be most commonly evaluated through narrow, discipline-oriented approaches. The humanities, not just for media/cultural studies PhDs, offer several advantages for both individuals and institutions. The humanities are a toolbox for lateral/systems thinking...they enliven and enrich the overall scholarship.

To ensure attendance, we advertised the series through our regular channels of communication (e.g., email listservs, social media, online event calendars). The campus partners were critical for helping us promote the series to wider audiences, bringing in graduate students and faculty from across campus. Ristovska also integrated the series into her graduate seminar on visual epistemology to encourage graduate students to attend the events. Faculty from across the college, as well as the Dean and the Associate Dean of Graduate Programs, were tasked to moderate the sessions. As an additional incentive to attend the events, we asked graduate students and faculty to sign up for lunch and dinner with each speaker ahead of time.

Many of us came to the humanities and humanistic social sciences because we believe in their transformational power. We owe it to our students and ourselves to do our part in helping to create and sustain the institutional infrastructures needed to support publicly engaged research that advances positive societal outcomes. A justice-driven career diversity series is just one small way forward.

Sandra Ristovska is an assistant professor of Media Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder. She studies how, under what circumstances, and to what ends images shape the pursuit of justice and human rights in institutional and legal contexts nationally and internationally. She is the author of the award-winning monograph *Seeing Human Rights: Video Activism as a Proxy Profession* (MIT Press, 2021) and co-editor of *Visual Imagery and Human Rights Practice* (Palgrave, 2018).

Nandi Pointer is a PhD student in Media Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her multimodal research focuses on Black American male identity formation and its rearticulation in Black expats. She holds an MJ from the University of California at Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism and has produced content for Netflix, MTV, Fox, and TV One. Her written work has been published both in academic journals like *Jump Cut* and news magazines like *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *Essence*, and *Upscale*.

Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Residency: Founded in 1878, the American Bar Association (ABA) is committed to advancing the rule of law across the United States and beyond by providing practical resources for legal professionals, law school accreditation, model ethics codes, and more. The mission of the ABA's Science and Technology Law Section is to provide leadership on emerging issues at the intersection of law, science, and technology; to promote sound policy and public understanding on such issues; and to enhance the professional development of its members.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We hope readers have found inspiration and companionship in this guide, whether for work you are currently doing, work you hope to do, or work you hope to support. Please explore our [online list](#) of resources for some further suggestions. Graduate students, faculty, administrators, and community members who want to engage in this work continue to face challenges: reckoning with the historical (and continuing) damage universities and individual researchers have done in communities; navigating institutional rules that hinder equitable compensation for community partners and graduate students; dealing with community and organizational politics; understanding how the structures of graduate education limit student involvement in this work; and engaging recent PhDs working outside of faculty positions, who until recently were usually ignored by graduating departments focused on a narrow vision of success for PhDs. There is also much exciting progress among individuals and institutions. The work will continue, and graduate students are its future—whether from within universities and colleges or in workplaces and activist spaces across the country. Here are eight recommendations to help make that work happen.

1. Graduate students are collaborators

- This guide begins with the premise that the perspectives of graduate students are essential to improving curriculum, degrees, projects, and fellowships. It is essential to involve them in the activities of reflection and design.
- Value the experiences, skills, interests, and connections that graduate students bring *to* their studies and their research, not just the ones they will develop along the way. “Build Bridges, Not Walls” (Boehm, Salas, Salas Crespo, and Walls) shows how the previous employment and life experiences of both undergraduate and graduate students are invaluable to community-engaged projects and can lead research in interesting directions. In “Enabling Community-Engaged and Public-Facing PhDs,” Anjaria and King remind us that students’ previous experiences and interests are what bring them to the program. Do not require them to leave those behind.
- Make space for collaborative pedagogy, as seen in “Combahee Taught Us” (Radford Shorts, Johnson, and Lindsey). This requires occasionally letting go of top-down control, in order to learn together and build shared goals. Consider including what Tosaya, Irwin, and Joseph call “radical listening” in their piece “Weaving a Web Together.”

2. Multiple forms of relationship building are key to successful engaged research

- ACLS has found that cohorts are of great value in our programs, especially when participants are doing something a little out of the ordinary. Scholars and Society fellows were able to share work, experiences, and strategies because of the space made for cohort connections.
- Graduate students also benefit from peer connections, as is especially visible in “Weaving a Web Together” (Tosaya, Irwin, and Joseph). Nurturing connections between students can help build “webs” to work against racism, sexism, and some of the isolating tendencies in academic programs. Cohort admits are one way to create space for those connections. Beyond peer connections, connection with communities and community knowledge can be sustaining for Indigenous students, as argued in “A Canoe Concept Toward Sustained Indigenous Connections” (Baricuatro, Camacho, Colello, Guerrero, Pico, and Na’puti). All students should connect with multiple mentors and sources of support and guidance (see also Anjaria and King).
- Consider how the connections you can make across your campus can support graduate students, provide a multiplied voice, and share resources. In “Exploring Diverse Justice-

Driven Careers for Publicly Engaged Doctoral Students,” Ristovska and Pointer describe how they drew on multiple campus partners to support their speaker series. Pooling resources across disciplines and departments can also be a productive way to support graduate students.

- Building connections with community partners is how the work gets done. Prioritize reciprocal relationships and foreground ethics of care. “Caring for Stories in Community-Engaged Research and Coalitional Work for Justice” by Bloom-Pojar and Koepke reminds us to build those connections without requiring them to immediately lead to a project. “Putting a Human Face to Public Humanities through Digital Storytelling” by Gudis and Romano shows how community partners themselves understand how to make connections.

3. Publicly engaged work benefits from flexibility and openness to discovery

- The path of community-engaged work can be unexpected, as Bloom-Pojar and Koepke discuss in “Caring for Stories in Community-Engaged Research and Coalitional Work for Justice.” Both students and faculty need flexibility (of time and project planning) to follow promising directions. But they may also need to be flexible in their hopes for any community-engaged project and consider what aspects would require too much flexibility from the doctoral program. Both stepping into a project to pursue a promising direction and stepping back to prioritize other goals may be necessary. As Anjaria and King put it, students, as well as faculty, need to “Recognize how you start is not how you will finish.”
- As Gudis and Romano discuss in “Putting a Human Face to Public Humanities,” publicly engaged scholarship often involves outcomes other than academic articles and monographs. Departments and institutions need to recognize this in their tenure and promotion guidelines—both to support the current faculty doing the work and to show graduate students who want to do this kind of work in academia that there may indeed be a place for them.³⁷ Departments should also consider additional flexibility in what “counts” as a dissertation, as Anjaria and King argue.

4. Supporting faculty in their publicly engaged work is necessary for the health of publicly engaged graduate education

- Faculty who have the time and resources to conduct publicly engaged work are best placed to bring graduate students into the work, teach the courses that give space for students to develop ideas and projects, mentor students, and serve as a model for one kind of future employment.
- Faculty need additional time and resources to implement good reporting and relationship-building practices with alumni in their departments, which is essential for connecting current students to PhDs pursuing non-faculty careers.

5. Funding must flow to both graduate students and partnering organizations beyond the academy

- One obstacle to engaging graduate students in publicly engaged work is the structure of doctoral funding, wherein graduate students usually depend on teaching assistantships for their funding and thus may not have time to pursue other kinds of work. Funding graduate work on engaged projects (whether through research assistantships, internships, or other) enables them to do that work and develop those skills. In “Caring for Stories,” Bloom-Pojar

³⁷ See the online resources for examples of these guidelines.

and Koepke discuss how Koepke was able to build the website emerging from the community writing class (and otherwise contribute to the project) because she was getting paid and could stop her writing center work.

- Just as community-engaged work requires time from faculty and graduate students, it also requires time from partner organizations and community members. Compensating participants and partners is a key feature of reciprocal and equitable research relationships. It helps scholars avoid the trap of extracting data or material while failing to produce something valued by the community. This can also help to build trust and foster positive relationships between communities and future researchers.

6. Incorporate publicly engaged work *within* the structure of graduate programs

- Requiring training in publicly engaged methods of research, writing, and teaching, or incorporating it as core curriculum, demonstrates that these skills and projects are valued and helps graduate students participate. Optional or additional training in these methods in the context of an already demanding program can become a burdensome and, in many cases, untenable extracurricular activity.
- This training can be incorporated through a specialization, an internship or practicum, a course, or (outside of curriculum) in a talk series. “Teaching Public Humanities in Practice” (Friedman and Son) and “Public Humanities Pedagogy, Justice-Centered Methodologies, and Community Empowerment” (McCormick, Casanova, Smith, Franklin, and Brister) explain how public humanities courses can be valuable to graduate students and faculty, while Friedman and Son survey the landscape and give examples of the shape those take nationally. After returning from her Scholars and Society residency, Son began teaching “Public Humanities in Practice,” a seminar-based practicum in publicly engaged research. Three years later, that course now counts as one of the six required core courses in Northwestern University’s Interdisciplinary PhD in Theatre and Drama (<https://iptd.northwestern.edu/requirements/>). As “A Canoe Concept Toward Sustained Indigenous Connections” (Baricuatro, Camacho, Colello, Guerrero, Pico, and Na’puti) argues, programs with a commitment to supporting Indigenous intellectual communities may wish to require students take Indigenous Studies courses or pursue a certain number of community experience hours. Finally, as the pieces by Ristovska and Pointer and King and Anjaria argue, incorporating speakers holding positions outside the academy into regular departmental talk series (rather than solely as a separate series) is one way of demonstrating the range of career directions and intellectual conversations.

7. Adequate professional education requires faculty to be explicit about intended outcomes for students, including specific skills and expertise developed in the course of study

- Both the pieces by Bloom-Pojar and Koepke and by Friedman and Son argue that graduate students should be explicitly engaged by faculty and community partners in naming the skills and expertise they are developing through both their coursework and their involvement in projects. Both Anjaria and King and Ristovska and Pointer also argue that this skill building may need to be an explicit part of the curriculum. These skills can range from those traditionally considered “humanities” skills, such as close reading, to those that may be essential for the implementation of publicly engaged projects, such as audio editing.

8. Designing publicly engaged education for doctoral studies requires engaging with racism, colonialism, and other structures of inequality

- Both “Combahee Taught Us” (Radford Shorts, Johnson, and Lindsey) and “A Canoe Concept” (Baricuatro, Camacho, Colello, Guerrero, Pico, and Na’puti) demonstrate how some community-engaged education has been formulated by educators and practitioners in response to structures of racism and colonialism, both inside and outside the university, and as part of an effort to build communities against it. “Weaving a Web Together” (Tosaya, Irwin, and Joseph) shows how connections between students can help mitigate the impacts of racism and sexism. All of the pieces show how publicly engaged work must consider how to collaborate ethically in the context of ongoing societal inequities.

All of the contributors are urging faculty and other decision-makers to take graduate students’ professional and scholarly aspirations and ambitions seriously. Graduate students come to the university to learn something they believe will be important to them in the future and in the now. Let’s make sure that happens.

APPENDIX—FULL LIST OF MELLON/ACLS SCHOLARS AND SOCIETY FELLOWS AND HOST ORGANIZATIONS

Anderson, Jennifer L.; State University of New York, Stony Brook; 2020; Preservation Long Island

Anishanslin, Zara; University of Delaware; 2021; Museum of the American Revolution

Anjaria, Jonathan Shapiro; Brandeis University; 2019; City Council—City of Cambridge, Massachusetts

Barnes, David S.; University of Pennsylvania; 2019; Puentes de Salud, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Bloom-Pojar, Rachel; University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee; 2020; Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin

Boehm, Deborah A.; University of Nevada, Reno; 2019; Freedom for Immigrants, Los Angeles, California, and Oakland, California

Brown, David Sterling; Binghamton University, State University of New York; 2021; The Racial Imaginary Institute

Bryant, Sherwin Keith; Northwestern University; 2021; African American Heritage Foundation of Southeastern North Carolina

Clement, Elizabeth Alice; University of Utah; 2019; Utah AIDS Foundation, Salt Lake City, Utah

Coleman Taylor, Ashley; University of Texas at Austin; 2021; Counter Narrative Project

Corbett, Eric; New York University; 2021; Queens Public Library

Duck, Leigh Anne; University of Mississippi; 2020; New Orleans Video Access Center

Escudero, Kevin A.; Brown University; 2020; Guam Museum

Fattal, Alexander L.; University of California, San Diego; 2021; The AjA Project

Feder, Helena; East Carolina University; 2019; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, North Carolina

Foltz, Mary C.; Lehigh University; 2021; Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center

Gauderman, Kimberly A.; University of New Mexico; 2019; Women's International Study Center, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Gudis, Catherine; University of California, Riverside; 2019; Los Angeles Poverty Department's Skid Row History Museum and Archives, Los Angeles, California

Harris, Donal; University of Memphis; 2020; Memphis Public Library, Cossitt Branch

Hoffnung-Garskof, Jesse; University of Michigan—Ann Arbor; 2020; Michigan Immigrant Rights Center

Johnson, Matthew; Texas Tech University; 2020; American Friends Service Committee

Joseph, Ralina L.; University of Washington; 2019; Northwest African American Museum, Seattle, Washington

Kheshti, Roshanak; University of California, San Diego; 2020; William Grant Still Arts Center

Kuenzli, Elisabeth Gabrielle; University of South Carolina; 2021; Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame and Museum

Lindsey, Treva B.; The Ohio State University; 2020; Zora's House

López, Marissa; University of California, Los Angeles; 2019; Los Angeles Public Library

Maira, Sunaina; University of California, Davis; 2019; Arab Resource and Organizing Center, San Francisco, California

McCormick, Stacie E.; Texas Christian University; 2021; The Afiya Center

Mirzoeff, Nicholas D.; New York University; 2020; Magnum Foundation

Na'puti, Tiara R.; University of California, Irvine; 2021; Independent Guåhan

Perez, Craig S.; University of Hawaii at Manoa; 2020; Pacific Writer's Connection

Rapp, Rayna; New York University; 2019; Positive Exposure, New York, New York

Ristovska, Sandra; University of Colorado Boulder; 2021; American Bar Association

Son, Elizabeth; Northwestern University; 2019; KAN-WIN: Empowering Women in the Asian American Community, Chicago, Illinois

Suchland, Jennifer; The Ohio State University; 2020; National Underground Railroad and Freedom Center

Williams, Bianca C.; City University of New York, The Graduate Center; 2021; Well-Read Black Girl





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