

Connecting with the Community



An Institute on the Public Humanities for Doctoral Students



“Many of my own goals and thoughts about my connection to the community have been held in a separate and divided space—this gives me hope that I can formulate many of those aspirations within the context of this scholarly life.”

The *Institute on the Public Humanities* promotes connections between the academy and the community by providing twenty-five University of Washington doctoral students an intensive, week-long immersion in the questions, scholarship, and practices of the public humanities. Addressed to students who intend to devote themselves to teaching, research, and service in higher education, the Institute encourages them to develop the public dimensions of their work as a “fourth portfolio,” and offers them models for doing so. While the Institute thereby aims to reorient the next generation of faculty towards greater civic engagement, it also helps doctoral students recognize how their skills and expertise may work outside the academy to contribute towards a broader shaping and understanding of public culture.



Through the Institute, fellows find new networks of support and horizons of possibility. They value the theoretical and practical resources they gain through readings, discussions, and contacts with leaders and workers engaged in university-community collaborations. Sponsored by the Simpson Center for the Humanities and the UW Graduate School, the Institute is the first of its kind in the nation. The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation has recognized the Institute as one of the “Best Practices in Graduate Education” in its publication *The Responsive Ph.D.: Ph.D. Professional Development Assessment Project*, currently in press.



“The Institute has been such an eye-opener! I have become convinced that pursuing public humanities projects could become an academic asset as well as a way to provide personal satisfaction in following one’s passions.”



“We got examples of both theoretical and practical engagement. I became aware of how both are needed and useful....”



Through readings, site visits, and guest speakers, the Institute offers students a forum in which they can engage public humanities projects and the scholarship emerging from them. The Institute presents students with multiple models of campus-community partnerships created in the greater Seattle area and elsewhere, bringing architects of such initiatives to campus as well as drawing upon University faculty leaders. In 2004 Julie Ellison (American Culture, University of Michigan), founder and director of *Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life*, and Vincent L. Wimbush (Religion, Claremont Graduate University), founder and director of the Institute for Signifying Scriptures, led special sessions at the Institute, as did the newly appointed Simpson Professor in the Public Humanities, Katharyne Mitchell (Geography, University of Washington).

Student fellows are also introduced to new social spaces as well as cultural and educational institutions in site visits that take them off campus. This past year’s Institute traveled to a local church for a public lecture by Cornel West (Religion and African American Studies, Princeton University) and to the historic Panama Hotel in Seattle’s International District. The Institute’s coincidence with *The September Project*—a University of Washington initiative that stimulated civic dialogue about the meanings of September 11, citizenship, and democratic values through events held at public local libraries nationwide—allowed its fellows to experience firsthand how the public humanities can forge new and vital connections with local institutions and citizens.