

Connecting with the Community



An Institute on the Public Humanities for Doctoral Students



“It really helped me imagine concrete public scholarship projects. I think I had many grand intellectual ideas — but now I have a better image of how to *enact* them.”

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. Launched in 2003, the Institute is the first of its kind in the nation.

Addressed to students pursuing careers within and beyond higher education, the Institute encourages participants to integrate public scholarship into their teaching and research. It aims to cultivate new skills and orientations in future faculty even as it highlights how such skills and expertise might cut across the boundaries of the academy to contribute toward a broader shaping of community and culture. Through the Institute, fellows find new interdisciplinary networks of support, gain familiarity with contemporary policy debates about the humanities, assess models of academic scholarship that engage diverse publics and community groups, and hone their ability to imagine collaborative cultural work at different scales.



Students of the Institute value the theoretical and practical resources they gain through readings, discussions, and contacts with cultural workers actively engaged in university-community partnerships. Site visits and workshops present students with multiple models of collaboration and invite them to consider how they might better connect academic and community-based cultural work. Leading public intellectuals and policy shapers such as Cornel West (Religion, Princeton University), bell hooks, Robert Weisbuch (Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation), and Julie Ellison (Imagining America) have contributed to Institute discussions as guest speakers.

Sponsored by the Simpson Center for the Humanities and the UW Graduate School, the Institute has been recognized as one of the “Best Practices in Graduate Education” by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation’s *The Responsive Ph.D.: Ph.D. Professional Development Assessment Project*.

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“This experience has reinvigorated my hope in academia... I’ve made some friends this week to encourage me (and receive encouragement from me) in future projects.”



“I gained knowledge about institutions, procedures, and strategies that will help me reach the community as a public scholar.”

Co-directed this past year by Miriam Bartha (Assistant Director of the Simpson Center) and Bruce Burgett (Interdisciplinary Arts & Science, UW), the 2005 Institute began by situating the “crisis” of the academic humanities and the academy’s turn towards public scholarship. Community leaders and university faculty then led students through hands-on experiments in collaborative project development. Julia Reinhard Lupton, director and founder of Humanities Out There, an educational partnership between UC Irvine and a local K-12 school district, grounded students in some of the institutional and programmatic questions attending such initiatives.

Visits to regional cultural and educational institutions were coordinated to engage students in site-specific practices of collaborative knowledge-making. A full-day site visit to a community-based writing center— the Richard Hugo House—introduced students to the multiple ways that this place supports the craft of writing, and the crafting of civic conversation carried through in writing,

art, and performance. In site visits to the International District’s historic Panama Hotel and Wing Luke Asian Museum, students considered the relations among built environments, urban development, community activism, museum curation, and historic preservation. They also participated in group curation processes that used art and culture to support community building and social change.

These experiences enabled students to imagine how collaborations with diverse cultural workers refigure the conventional aims and practices of both scholarly research and community engagement. A roundtable discussion with campus administrators allowed students to pursue the implications of these insights for the structuring of graduate education and exchange ideas about how the University of Washington might better support engaged scholarship.

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