

ENGL750: Humanities in the Community

Spring 2014, Thursday 12:30 – 3 pm

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Office hours:

Thursday, 10:30 to noon and by appointment

Course goals and format:

Policy makers, pundits, and academics have, for many years, debated the value of the humanities, both in the broad sense of how the presence of the arts and literature affects society and in the more narrow sense of how a degree in the humanities does – or more often, how it does not – prepare students for the so-called “real world.” In this course, we will take up those debates, discussing the claims made by various commentators, from advocates and critics of the social value humanities as well as from scholars who study social change and community organizing.

We will also pursue a practical approach by exploring strategies for using humanities-based knowledge in the public sphere and to advocate for social change. You’ll have the opportunity to explore the kinds of work you might do with an MA in the humanities, and you’ll learn how to apply your knowledge and skills to work that makes a difference.

By the end of the course, you will:

- Discuss contemporary debates about the role and value of the humanities in contemporary culture and articulate your own position
- Identify how the knowledge you’re developing in humanities content courses is relevant to community issues, social change, and public audiences
- Understand how non-profit community organizations operate, including both practical and broader political/theoretical concerns
- Plan and produce a public humanities project
- Strengthen your abilities as an organizer
- Write a proposal to seek support for a public humanities project

Required texts:

Contesting Community: The Limits and Potential of Local Organizing, by James DeFilippis, Robert Fisher, and Eric Shragge

The Creative Community Builder’s Handbook: How to Transform Communities Using Local Assets, Art, and Culture, by Tom Borrup

Standing with the Public: Humanities and Democratic Practice, edited by James F. Veninga and Noëlle McAfee

Additional readings will be posted on the course blog.

Assignments & Grading:

- 1) Course blog – 10%
Each week, one of you will post an opening blog, identifying key issues in that week's reading or projects and suggesting questions for us to discuss as a class. Those who are not posting will respond, taking one of two roles each week – first responder or synthesizer.
- 2) Project organizing: reflection and activities – 20%
Over the course of the semester, you'll work as a team to plan a public humanities event. As you collaborate, each individual will complete a series of informal writing assignments that will prepare for group work sessions and reflect on them. Each of you will also be responsible for some of the tasks involved in organizing the event. Your grade will be based primarily on your individual reflections and contributions, though I will also factor in the success of your event.
- 3) Organization study – 20%
During the first half of the semester, you'll conduct a study of a local non-profit community organization. You will interview key staff, observe organization operations and programs, and review the organization's public materials. You'll then write an analysis that will examine how the organization functions. Grading will focus on the clarity of your description, the quality of your analysis, and professionalism of your report.
- 4) Humanities manifesto – 10%
Before beginning work on your individual planning project, you'll write a blog that will be published on a joint website about the value of the humanities. Grading will emphasize the clarity of your position, its relevance to the contemporary debate, and the effectiveness of your writing for public audiences.
- 5) Project planning and grant writing – 40%
You will develop a plan and write a grant proposal for a public humanities project that you would like to do. This project will involve several short informal pieces and a formal grant proposal addressed to a real funding agency. Your grade will reflect the quality of your project planning, your analysis of the funder, and the professionalism and persuasiveness of your proposal.

Throughout the course, grading will emphasize critical thinking, effective use of ideas from the course, and professionalism. I will give you more detailed instructions for each project.

Advice and Policies:

- This course requires significant independent and group work. You should behave as a professional, taking responsibility for your own work, meeting deadlines, showing up where and when you're supposed to. Failure to do so will affect your grade, just as it would affect your evaluation on the job.

- Given the nature of this course, attendance is essential. If you have to miss a session, you may not have the experience or knowledge to complete the assignments well, and your absence will undermine the quality of your group’s project.
- Clear, persuasive, professional writing is an essential tool for community engagement work. I expect your work for this course to use a readable and professional style, geared to non-specialist audiences, to have few errors, and to include clear citations of outside information where appropriate. Work that does not meet these standards will be revised until it does, except for the final grant proposal. Time will not allow revisions at that point in the semester.
- Don’t plagiarize. Especially when you’re working the public sphere, plagiarizing puts you at risk of public humiliation or worse. People have lost their jobs for misrepresenting other people’s work and ideas as their own. If you use someone else’s words or ideas without attribution in this course, you will receive zero credit for the assignment in question and probably fail the course.
- Talk to me. This course requires you to use concepts and strategies that you may not have used before, but I’m here to help. If my office hours don’t work for you, I’ll find another time to meet with you. I’m also happy to “talk” via e-mail.
- Help each other. You each come to this course with significant strengths and knowledge. Share what you know, and don’t be shy about asking your colleagues to review your work, offer ideas, or help you figure out how to solve a problem. You will gain from other people’s help, and when you help others, you learn more yourself.

Course Schedule

Date	What to do before class	What we’ll do in class
1/9		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review syllabus ▪ Review Organization Study assignment ▪ Introduce community organizing skills ▪ One-on-ones & personal narratives
1/16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Personal assets inventory ▪ Consult with Sherry on your community organization ▪ Read Sullivan, McAfee, Zainaldin, & Veninga, from <i>Standing with the Public</i> ▪ Watch “The Heart of the Matter”, http://vimeo.com/68662447 and review the Humanities Report Card (pdf) ▪ Review the NEH’s website explaining why it matters, http://www.neh.gov/neh-matters ▪ Review the online wiki survey about the value of the humanities: http://www.allourideas.org/4hum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discussion: What do the humanities have to offer to democracy and community life? ▪ Team meeting: Promotional plan for Lannan Symposium and initial discussion of project possibilities ▪ Overview of project planning

	<p>anities/results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read this summary of critiques of the humanities: http://4humanities.org/2012/10/confronting-the-criticisms/ 	
1/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read through Ch. 2 of <i>Contesting Community</i> Read Ch. 1 from <i>The Creative Community Builder's Handbook</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: What are the key elements, conditions, and practices of community? First report on organization study: the public face Team meeting: define themes for public humanities programs
1/30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teamwork reflection Read Ch. 4 and skim Ch. 3 of <i>Contesting Community</i> Read Harris and Mathews, from <i>Standing with the Public</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: How does an organizing model shape the way we approach project planning and social change efforts? Team meeting: Refining your ideas, mapping project tasks
2/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teamwork reflection Read Chs. 5 & 6 of <i>Contesting Community</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: How does power shape practices of organizing, providing services, and advocating for change? Second report on organization study: interviews and observations
2/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Santos, from <i>Standing with the Public</i> Read Sanz and the three case studies, from <i>Standing with the Public</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: How do the arts and humanities contribute to social justice and social change? Team meeting: Complete project plan, assign tasks and deadlines Review manifesto assignment
2/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Part Two of <i>The Creative Community Builder's Handbook</i> Teamwork reflection Inspiring projects memo Online peer review of organization studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: What did you learn from your organization study about how to work well in a non-profit setting? Discussion: Elements of a good public humanities project Review individual project assignment
2/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization Study due by email Read Ch. 4 of <i>The Creative Community Builder's Handbook</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final report on organization study: key lessons Working groups: workshop project ideas
3/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Chs. 5, 6, 7, & 8 of <i>The Creative Community Builder's Handbook</i> Preliminary project description memo to Sherry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review models of action plans and stakeholder analyses Team meeting: promoting your project

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Post your manifesto 	
3/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Read Ch. 9 of <i>The Creative Community Builder's Handbook</i> ▪ Action plan ▪ Notes on stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Working groups: workshop action plans & notes on stakeholders ▪ How to find potential funders ▪ Team meeting: Coordinating final plans
3/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Read sample grants ▪ Review websites on grantwriting ▪ Team events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grantwriters & reviewers panel ▪ Budgeting
4/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bring print-outs from funder websites ▪ Teamwork reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Working groups: discuss and strategize based on funders' materials
4/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Budget draft ▪ Project description draft 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Working groups: workshop budgets and project descriptions
4/17	No class – Easter Break	
4/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Final reflections on event planning project ▪ Grant drafts due to working groups by 4/22 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review teams discuss grant drafts
5/1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Completed grants due 	Celebration!