Humanities Unbound: Supporting Careers and Scholarship Beyond the Tenure Track
Executive Summary

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August 2013

As humanities scholars increasingly recognize the value of public engagement, and as the proportion of tenure-track faculty positions available to new graduates continues to decline, many humanities programs are focusing renewed attention on equipping graduate students for careers as scholars both within and beyond academe. To support those efforts, the Scholarly Communication Institute has carried out a study investigating perceptions about career preparation provided by humanities graduate programs. The survey results help to create a more solid foundation on which to base curricular reform and new initiatives by moving the conversation about varied career paths from anecdote to data.

The findings make it clear that there are a number of effective interventions that programs can undertake. Many of the skills that people working beyond the tenure track identify as crucial to their positions—things like project management, collaboration, and communication—are also highly beneficial to those working within the professoriate. Structuring courses and projects in a way that emphasizes the acquisition of these skills not only contributes to the success of students who pursue employment outside the tenure track, but also to the vibrant research, teaching, and service of those who pursue academic roles.

There is significant room for improvement in career preparation strategies within humanities curricula that need not sacrifice disciplinary rigor or depth. To that end, we encourage the following actions:

- **Evaluate and modify required aspects of graduate-level curricula** in favor of including courses that help students to prepare for the wide-ranging career paths that they may pursue upon completion.

- **Rethink standard methods courses** to structure them around a collaborative project in which students must apply a range of skills toward an end goal centered on methodological understanding.

- **Create one-credit courses that center on ecosystems** crucial to the academic landscape, such as academic administration and scholarly publishing.

- **Form more deliberate partnerships with inter- and para-departmental structures**—either within or outside their home institution—that are already engaging in this kind of work. Humanities centers are an excellent example.

- **Cultivate partnerships with the public sphere**, both to provide graduate students with valuable experience and exposure, and to make a clearer case for the public value of humanities education.

- **Encourage (and provide funding for) students to become members in relevant professional associations**, even if the students do not intend to pursue careers as faculty.

- **Work to expand the understanding of what constitutes scholarship**. Encourage faculty to develop collaborative project assignments that allow students to work together in a variety of roles and to communicate their findings to an array of audiences.

- **Critically examine the kinds of careers that are implicitly and explicitly promoted** to students, and consider ways to increase the visibility of the varied paths that scholars pursue.

- **Make a much stronger effort to track former students** (including those who may not have completed a degree), and to encourage current and prospective students to connect with former students.

With the availability of new data to work from and the recommendations above as possible guiding principles, graduate programs have a robust set of tools available that can help facilitate curricular assessment and new initiatives. As the importance of assessing the effectiveness of existing structures and considering potential benefits of reform continues to grow, humanities programs have a strong incentive to demonstrate the ways that their graduate programs contribute to the vitality of the university and the broader public sphere. Equipping graduate students with the skills and literacies needed for 21st century scholarly work—from technical fluency to an understanding of organizational structures—is critical to ensuring continued rigorous and creative research, scholarship, and teaching.

To Learn More

The complete report is available at http://libra.virginia.edu/catalog/libra-oa:3480. Links to the datasets are available from the same location.