

## OUR SPEAKERS RESPOND

We invited our guests to provide short thought pieces as introduction to their current work.

### Edward Balleisen | Duke University

In every discipline, both within & outside the humanities, doctoral training for the 21<sup>st</sup> century has to provide more than just grounding in core disciplinary knowledge & research skills. As I have noted in a recent post for the Versatile Humanities @ Duke Blog that describes the recent report of Duke's Committee on Reimagining Doctoral Education, "if our PhD recipients are going to be able to adapt to shifting intellectual currents & evolving careers/roles both within & outside academia, we need to provide core research training 'plus.' That 'plus' involves a set of complementary skills & experiences that will vary from student to student, but that entail leveraging resources across Duke, not just the superb professors & talented peers in a given degree program." In some contexts, supplementary workshops or short-courses (on public speaking; or policy engagement; or project management) may do the trick. In others, a substantive internship experience linked to a student's research agenda, or rather a sustained teaching apprenticeship, may be key. For some students, the right "plus" may be a joint degree. For a significant fraction of doctoral students, I see enormous value in exposure to team-based, interdisciplinary research teams, like those supported by Bass Connections. This more flexible, student-centered approach to doctoral training will require rethinking of curricula & experimentation with integrating faculty research & student education. It also will depend on encouragement for students to seize complementary opportunities beyond doctoral programs, & a team-based approach to advising & mentoring.

### Aiden Bettine | University of Iowa

Reflecting on my own graduate education, I've always worked hard at creating a "build your own degree" model even while completing the core degree requirements of my graduate programs. I was fortunate to intentionally enter an interdisciplinary master's degree program in Critical Ethnic Studies before my arrival at the University of Iowa for a doctoral degree in History. As an undergraduate history major, I recognized that pursuing graduate-level work in history would come with particular constraints on my ability to cross disciplines and engage other theories and methodologies, encouraging me to seek a graduate degree elsewhere beforehand. My master's work equipped me with the interdisciplinary competence, coursework, and honest confidence, to navigate a Ph.D. in History on my own terms. As a public historian working with marginalized communities and trained in both ethnic and black diaspora studies,

I knew that entering a traditionally academic history department offered a challenging road map. Without devoted curriculum on public history, furthering my education in the field alongside gaining experience working on public history projects requires extra time and work outside of my degree track.

I believe that graduate education in the humanities should be more flexible and reflexive. First, in response to the career goals of their enrolled students, second to the multiplicity of ways that doctoral level humanities work is valuable beyond teaching in the undergraduate classroom, and third to the opportunities that arise both across campus and externally that afford graduate students coursework, fellowships, assistantships, and institute and symposia attendance beyond their degree field and department. Community engagement is a primary avenue for changing how faculty and students alike see the value and relevance of their work for surrounding community members. Through the development of coursework, fellowships, and internships that allow graduate students to apply their skills in the humanities to work alongside community members, we are prepared for an array of careers both inside the academy and out.

### Margaret Brennan | University of Illinois

In these past few years on the Humanities Without Walls grant, I have contributed to programs that that apply collaborative and interdisciplinary models for graduate education which are aimed at preparing students for a variety of career paths, academic and non-academic. I believe that resources that prepare graduate students for doing "something else" ought to be accessible from the very outside of their doctoral training. This is of course crucial for future employment prospects—as an early modern European historian on the academic job market, I have been keenly aware of the declining number of tenure-track positions out there. However, exposing humanities graduate students to work experience beyond the professoriate is imperative far beyond the realities of supply and demand for desirable faculty positions.

Here I would like to reflect on just one of the many benefits to career diversity training in humanities doctoral programs. It is no secret that graduate students are at great risk for mental health issues, as several recently published studies have revealed. While there are myriad causes for these struggles, the external contributing factors cited in these studies are normalized features of life in graduate school. Job insecurity is a significant one, to be sure, but there are others: isolation, financial insecurity, poor work-life balance, problematic student-advisor relationships, lack of structure, and imposter syndrome. While getting involved with some kind of non- or para-academic work a few hours a week while pursuing a doctoral degree is not a panacea, it does have the potential to alleviate many of these pervasive issues. Working as a summer

intern for a local non-profit, or in an hourly position as an assistant editor for an academic press, for example, provides students with an opportunity to complete more immediate, straightforward, and less overwhelming tasks (vs. that immense project of the dissertation). It allows for an expansion of a social and professional network, and the cultivation of relationships with new mentors. Such professional experience can prepare students for other career paths, and knowledge of that has the potential to reduce anxieties about future job prospects. Even for graduate students who ultimately end up on a more traditional academic career path, career diversity training and non-academic work experience during graduate school has the potential to make future faculty more supportive advisors and equipped mentors to their own students. Initiatives like HPG and those mentioned above are essential because they not only have the potential to improve the lives of graduate students as individuals, but also to demonstrate the value of humanities scholarship both in the academy and elsewhere.

#### Kelly Anne Brown | University of California Humanities Research Institute

While creating Humanists@Work with graduate students across all 10 campuses, we articulated the following 6 values to guide our work: **Collaboration.** Deep collaboration, with faculty, campus career centers, departmental staff, professionals in the field, &—most importantly—graduate students, is an essential component of the effort to re-conceptualize PhD education & professionalization. **Experimentation.** Experimentation with content & structure of programmatic activities reveals key issues to address, new ways to reach stakeholders, & best practices for humanities PhD training. **Culture Change.** The pervasive attitudes toward non-professorial careers within the academy must change in order to transform how students approach professionalization, faculty members support graduate students, & institutions address the career challenges facing humanities PhDs. **Highlighting & Valuing Labor.** Humanities graduate students should recognize the work they do has value & be treated as professionals with lucrative skill sets. Wherever possible, their work should be made visible & remunerated accordingly. **Community.** A wide community of graduate students, faculty members, alumni, & other key advocates strengthens engagement in critical, yet challenging conversations around the role of career training for humanities PhDs. **Holism.** To acknowledge the many roles graduate students play in addition to being students & scholars (such as family members, activists, & teachers), professionalization activities must address the “mechanical” elements of thriving in the workforce & facilitate critical discussions about graduate student experiences. These values permeate all of what Humanists@Work do & how we work to achieve our goals.

#### Joseph Stanhope Cialdella | University of Michigan

I was very lucky to participate in several collaborative projects & experiences—including a museum studies certificate, internships, & public history research project—during graduate school that helped me clarify my professional values, career path, & importance of humanities research & skills inside & outside colleges & universities. I was also fortunate to have a supportive advisor, committee, & mentors on & off campus. Some has changed since then, but too often it still seems like too many graduate students interested in public humanities & expanding their career horizons are left to either figure things out for themselves or “add on” projects & internships to their degrees to cultivate the necessary skills & experience to have career options & be publicly engaged scholars. It is my hope that moving forward we can bring a more holistic approach to doctoral education in the humanities that integrates more deeply collaborative work, a bigger picture of the whole “humanities ecosystem,” & professional mentorship as a part of the formal & informal curriculum. No one should graduate feeling isolate & without options. There are models & viable options out there. With strategic & thoughtful retooling & restructuring, humanities departments & graduate schools can create graduates who might choose to be academics or practitioners in a number of professional contexts, but all will be better prepared to serve the field & society.

#### Stacy Hartman | City University of New York

Over the past several years, as my work on graduate education has evolved, one of the most disturbing trends that I have seen is how joyless graduate work is for so many people. There is no monetary reward for going to graduate school in the humanities (&, indeed, a lot of cost in the form of lost earnings & retirement savings), so one would hope that people who make that choice do so, in some sense, because of the joy they take in the work. By “joy” I don’t mean pleasure, though I think there are pleasures to be found in humanistic study; no work is pleasurable all of the time. Rather, I mean a much deeper & more lasting satisfaction that is capable with of withstanding setbacks & hardship. This satisfaction comes from different places for different people, but in general, I believe it is related to feeling like the work you do matters not just to you, but to others, & not only for reasons such as hiring & promotion. And this, I believe, is the source of the joylessness that is present in so much of graduate education in the humanities: the struggle on the part of students to see how their work really matters. This is what leads to existential crises, to floundering; coupled with often unsustainable financial situations & an uncertain future, I believe that this is what leads to the crisis in mental health that riddles all of graduate education, but especially the humanities. *Does my work matter? Will my work matter? What is all of this for, anyway?* These are the questions that graduate students ask themselves, & which graduate education too often does not help

them answer. Those of us who work in graduate education must recognize that many of our students are deeply mission-driven; they care about the world & their communities & they want their work to have impact now. They don't want to save the work that will matter for their "post-tenure project." And moreover, they should not have to.

#### Jenna Lay | Lehigh University

In my work on graduate education, I've spent a lot of time thinking about what programs & faculty can & should do to help students as they navigate their intellectual & personal development within an increasingly complex professional landscape. **First**, we must check our own assumptions: if we do not imagine a faculty career & the pre-professional training designed around it to be the inevitable or even most desirable focus of graduate education, we can better work together to create academic communities that recognize, welcome, & support students with a broad range of aspirations. **Second**, in welcoming students with diverse goals to our programs, we must communicate why we think pursuing a graduate degree in the humanities is a worthwhile endeavor. This necessitates a clear understanding of how the humanities matter to a broad range of publics: intellectual curiosity & rigor are increasingly important in our current political moment—as is the ability to read closely & critically, to research a focused topic with depth & precision, to craft & recognize rhetorically sophisticated (& unsophisticated) arguments, & to value empathy, diversity, equity, & community. We need more people who are able to do this work, whether they hold a faculty position or not. Advanced study in the humanities can offer the intellectual preparation necessary to do it well—especially when graduate programs are crafted to expand horizons rather than limit them. Which means that **third**, & most importantly, we must design programs that are responsive to students' intellectual & professional development. To give one example: in my home department at Lehigh University, our focus on literature & social justice helped us to initiate a series of conversations regarding the ethics & praxis of graduate education over five years ago. How might a social justice practice inform our work as advisors & shape the parameters & potential of our graduate program? At the department level, we agreed to maintain small cohorts in the PhD program to ensure an equitable distribution of resources, individualized mentoring, & continued post-graduate support for those students who struggle to find their first position. We've developed partnerships with other units on campus that enable students to pursue assistantships designed with reciprocal benefit in mind: students offer pedagogical & content-based expertise in a position that enables them to explore their abilities in a new context & develop new capacities. These assistantships led our department to endorse a broader conception of the dissertation, as students were eager to incorporate what they've learned into dissertations that more fully reflect their

holistic graduate experiences. In other words, our program continues to develop in response to our students' needs, aspirations, & leadership—and the future they help us to imagine for both humanities graduate education & for themselves.

#### Ryan McBride | Tulane University

One of the challenges of connecting academia to the larger world is finding ways to bring community leaders into the process. When we were designing our Mellon Graduate Program in Community Engaged Scholarship a central question was: how can we construct a program that allows graduate students & community leaders to develop meaningful relationships with one another? In the past we had regularly invited community leaders as speakers, but we found that we spent a significant amount of our time together just getting to know one another & just when we reached the point of understanding one another, the visit would be over. We had a similar issue with faculty, who also visited or seminars as guest speakers. Some graduate students would follow up with them, but that was the exception rather than the rule. Initially the pilot program I developed had a stipend for faculty or community leaders who would be mentors. We have kept that but we now realize that graduate students need advising from a wide variety of sources & they're not in a good position to find those advisors on their own. For the past year two years we have had a call for community leaders & faculty to apply to be part of our program. Their positions last for two years & they work with graduate students who are also in the program for two years—they are with them from for their entire experience & together they form a cohort. The backbone of the program is now our monthly group-of-five meetings (three graduate students, one faculty member, & one community leader). We found that scheduling a monthly meeting of five was more difficult than we first realized, so we instituted a meeting once per month at a venue that is off the main campus (easier to get to for community leaders) where we provide food & child care for everyone. We are now working with 24 graduate students, 8 faculty, & 8 community leaders. We're facing many challenges, but we're finding this structure to be working better than anything we've tried in the past.

#### Molly McCarthy | University of California–Davis

I am often asked how students can explore the benefits of public scholarship if they don't have access to a program like Mellon Public Scholars at their institutions. Students have begun to understand that they need to seek out more wide-ranging opportunities & get outside of their departments. Public scholarship is just one of many ways to do that. Public scholarship will position you well no matter your career track. Very recently, we heard from a PhD candidate who was interviewed for a tenure-track position & all the hiring committee wanted to talk about was her community-engaged research project.

For those interested in getting a taste of public scholarship, here are a few suggestions: Apply to be a [PAGE Fellow](#) through Imagining America; reach out to local cultural/arts organizations to see if there's a project you could help with; visit your state humanities council webpage ([California Humanities](#), for instance, has a Humanities for All quick grants program that is ripe for public scholarship collaborations with cultural & community organizations); find out where public scholarship is happening on your campus & connect with faculty or project directors.

### **Margaret Nettesheim-Hoffmann | Marquette University**

My introduction to formal career diversity planning and programming proved to be a transformative moment in my professional life. In 2017, I was selected as a member of the first national cohort for the Humanities Without Walls (HWW) predoctoral fellowship workshop. Each year, HWW hosts a group of thirty international and national PhD students in the humanities for a three-week intensive summer workshop in Chicago which introduces the fellows to the varieties of career paths available to them with a PhD. Sessions include a values and identity discernment workshop grounded in the methods of storytelling; a mechanics of career development session that teaches the fellows how to translate their academic CVs into professional resumes; a grant role-play site visit to a local Chicago based foundation that provides fellows with insights into how funding decisions are made at the institutional level. More importantly, the three-weeks I spent in Chicago in 2017 helped me to discern my strengths and talents as a scholar, to dig deep into the specific parts of what energizes me about the work we do as scholars, writers, and researchers. I learned that career diversity opens us up to the possibilities for careers based upon the application of our research methodologies, and that to be an historian means I can utilize the skills I have acquired over my years as a graduate student to many meaningful career pursuits.

Upon completion of the workshop, I spent considerable time contemplating how to bring the message and work of career diversity back to my graduate student colleagues at Marquette University. In 2018, the Graduate School at Marquette implemented a new project based on the methods of the HWW career diversity workshop, and this year, we will pilot a one-week career bootcamp modeled on the HWW method. HWW and career diversity gave me the confidence and the knowledge to advocate for the introduction of formal programming at my graduate school. Ultimately, in an environment of academic job scarcity, HWW and other national career diversity projects provides graduate students with hope. There are many meaningful professional pathways available to PhDs if we ground our career explorations in a deep discernment process rooted in understanding our identities and our values. I've learned that discerning ones

values is the first step towards a future career either inside or beyond the academy.

### **David Nugent | Emory University**

I am interested in exploring processes that would allow us to re-position the university with respect to the broader society of which it is a part. This would entail moving away from the model of the 19<sup>th</sup> century German research university, upon which contemporary university structures in the US are based. It would mean as well establishing pathways by which those who are involved in graduate education—students & faculty alike—can form novel ties with groups located beyond the university. This in turn would mean exploring new forms of knowledge & knowledge production by taking as a point of departure the concerns of disadvantaged & marginalized populations. It would also mean establishing mechanisms to ensure that academics are accountable to the populations they work among. Taking steps that would make it possible for universities to engage directly with non-academic social worlds & interlocutors would help establish a new role for universities in contemporary life. It would also help create new futures for students & faculty.

### **Jason Puskar | University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee**

I received my doctorate from what amounts to a vocational training school, for it prepared its graduates for only one career, the professoriate. In terms of the breadth of professional training—and despite its Ivy League credentials—my doctoral program (like most others) may as well have been a welding academy. Today, comfortably situated as a research professor, I often have reason to decry attempts to vocationalize higher education too narrowly, but it is impossible to deny that my entire field has been narrowly vocationalized already. The vocation just happens to be my own. My goal over the last few years has been to acknowledge this as the intellectual & practical impasse that is, & to persuade my colleagues here & elsewhere that the humanities will be better & stronger if we begin to reconceive our disciplines thoroughly, & to turn outward toward broader publics. Against those who object that doing so will endanger the humanities, I respond that the humanities already are in danger, but mostly from the inertia of conventionality. At UWM we concluded that bold strokes are necessary, & soon. We need far more than alumni networks or better career counseling, though those will help. Through our NEH Next Gen planning grant, we became convinced that meaningful change will only happen with changes to the curriculum, & not just in ancillary measures like optional certificates that add time to degree, but in the core coursework requirements for the doctorate. This can be a challenge, as some faculty perceive changes to the curriculum as an existential threat to the discipline. Fortunately, we have encountered surprisingly little resistance, so have felt emboldened to move rapidly. We are

fortunate that UWM has a long tradition of embracing new approaches. UWM helped create the field of film studies almost a half-century ago, long before it was the norm, & the term “postmodernism” was coined in our walls. When the tradition is a tradition of adventurous change, everyone is a little less afraid about what might be lost. So we have been working hard for two years to plan an interdisciplinary & publicly engaged doctoral program that includes Architecture, English, & History. Starting this spring, each of those departments will begin to develop special concentrations in what we are calling Public Humanities Doctorates (PHDs) that will leave no part of the curriculum untouched: new required & elective courses, required internships, modified language requirements, & even more flexible dissertation formats. Many of the details still have to be ironed out, but we already have begun implementing key components. Architecture’s “Field School” already involves students in collaborative neighborhood projects in which students work with local residents to better understand some part of our built environment. English recently created an innovative new PhD program in Rhetoric, Professional Writing & Community Engagement, which includes new courses & new faculty hires. And History has had been strongly committed to public history for many years, with almost a half dozen faculty working in that field, also including new faculty hires. On this solid foundation, we plan to build a more integrated, interdisciplinary, & innovative program that will preserve the very best of humanistic inquiry, make it more accessible to a broader public, & give our graduates more options in their careers. It all starts with curriculum. Faculty own the curriculum, & once implemented, the curriculum justifies other structures of support. Alumni networks, career services, data gathering initiatives, & closer institutional ties to the broader community will be easier to justify once we have a curriculum that demands them.

#### **Kathryn Temple | Georgetown University**

I will focus on what we can learn from “Quit Lit” about the need for structural change. Sharing information about possible job outcomes is a necessary & responsible way to manage a graduate program. But “quit lit” tells us that putting graduate students on notice about the job market is not enough. We must do more: specifically, we must change our problematic programmatic structures to reflect the actual (& excellent) array of positions our students attain. Otherwise we perpetuate a pernicious cycle of negativity around graduate education in the humanities.

#### **Maria LaMonaca Wisdom | Duke University**

The longer I am engaged in the work of graduate education reform, the more convinced I am that **empowering students & building community** are at the heart of every effective intervention we’ve made. There are many talented

faculty & staff engaged in this work, & as the NEH & Mellon projects show, there are many fantastic ideas out there. But nothing inspires & informs me more than what I see so many of our doctoral students at Duke already doing—through internships, interdisciplinary opportunities, pedagogy, public scholarship, the digital humanities. In so many cases, it is the students who lead the way, insist on what they need, & show all the rest of us what a graduate student can do & be. So often, graduate students are the best models & mentors for each other. Secondly, all of our best work has required community-building: collaboration & communication across university divisions, & empowering graduate students to identify & cultivate networks across (& beyond) the university. Too often graduate culture reinforces isolation, however, coupled with extreme dependency on a single advisor or subset of faculty. More intentional community building (& in more strategic ways) is needed.

#### **Glenn Wright | Syracuse University**

When I was a graduate student in English in the late ‘90s, I needed summer employment & supplemental income. So I signed on to serve as a reviewer of writing portfolios submitted by incoming undergraduates at my institution, to see if they needed to take the freshman writing sequence or not. On the referral of a grad student friend, I began writing author profiles for the *Contemporary Authors* biographical digest series. Having corrected approximately ten zillion undergraduate essays as an English TA, I aced several academic publishers’ editing tests & began taking on freelance copyediting (& later content editing) assignments. After two unsuccessful forays on the academic job market, I found myself in upstate New York, where my spouse had found employment. On the basis of my undergraduate writing portfolio assessment experience, I was able to get a temporary job as Chief Reader for the State of Massachusetts’ 8<sup>th</sup>-grade writing proficiency test (MCAS). I took a third & final run at the academic market, but was also looking for other jobs. With two campus visits pending, I was offered a job with the Assessment Unit at Regents (later Excelsior) College, paying \$12K more than a faculty job I had recently not gotten. And since it was within walking distance of my home, I didn’t even need to buy a car, much less relocate from my infant son. Farewell, faculty career! Two years later I was laid off, & had to reactivate my connections in academic publishing for freelance work. I dipped a toe in the academic market & was offered a job at a community college in New Jersey. But at the same time a job as Acquisitions Editor at Syracuse University Press opened up, & since my freelance activities had made me a strong candidate, I was again spared relocation. In the fullness of time I was able to position myself as the ideal candidate for a job with the Syracuse university Graduate School that combined my English language assessment experience & my publishing background. This quickly metamorphosed into a higher-level position, as I absorbed the duties of colleagues who left. At this

point, my professional career is pretty much on par, in terms of salary, respect, etc., with what it would have been had I landed a faculty job out of grad school, at the sort of institutions that were considering me. This is an encouraging tale for current PhD students, who have the opportunity to be more intentional about the process of providing themselves with varied career options than I was in my haphazard rooting about for a summer paycheck. Among the most elegant stairway designs is the cantilever stair, which allows one to ascend with the support of the preceding step, not any vertical foundation. It's an apt analogy for the kind of incremental professional development that worked in my case—a modest opportunity put me in the running for something a bit better, & in three or four steps to secure a meaningful professional position utilizing the skills I had developed in grad school. There is a lot of interest now in internships for humanities PhD students, & that is a terrific idea. But internships are hard to create; they require a lot of work up front to design them well, & unless there is funding involved, only a minority of PhDs will be able to prioritize such an experience over paid work. Departments, colleges, & Graduate Schools could be much more active in identifying & connecting PhD students with already existing or easily created work opportunities that touch, even if only peripherally, on employment sectors attractive to humanists. And we should encourage students to be strategic in pursuing a broad range of such experiences, especially in the context of their need for summer employment, from the moment they enroll.