

Arts and Humanities Plenary Session Town Hall Meeting Report

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Developing and Promoting Undergraduate Research in the Arts and Humanities

Friday, February 19th, 2016 CUR Dialogues

This CURAH Plenary Session led by Maria Iacullo-Bird (CURAH Chair-Elect) and Joe Trimmer (CURAH E-Board Representative) featured 104 participants from a range of disciplines and areas both faculty and staff within higher education. Arts and Humanities (A&H) attendees were few and the largest concentration of faculty participants were from the sciences. After a brief introduction to CUR and the A&H Division, participants were asked to answer a series of 4 question sets with each table assigned one of the four and asked to record responses by a designated scribe. The varied responses reflected a thoughtful grappling with the questions and there was some overlap across the question responses. Discussant content suggests where CURAH educational efforts and advocacy work can focus next.

Q#1 What is undergraduate research in the arts and humanities?

Responses suggested there is much to be done to inform and clarify what defines research in the humanities and in the arts. The most varied and extensive responses were to this first question.

Discussants questioned whether it is more difficult or even possible to have original student work in the humanities? In fact, some even suggested that undergraduate research norms for other disciplines may not apply for the A &H and questioned if peer mentoring is possible in the humanities. Referenced was one institution where A&H faculty opposition to the term “undergraduate research” was addressed by the creation of Division of Mentored Inquiry @Ithaca.

This first question asking to define undergraduate research in the arts and humanities led to conversations about the need for “better” definitions such as what is culture and practice and called for an A&H definition of Undergraduate Research (UR). For some “research”--is not pursued in the A&H which practices instead “creative-scholarly activity.” Discussants asked, what counts as research in the humanities? Where do creative works fit in and how can an “organic, internalized research process be made explicit.” Also, is the research of background material for creative writing not considered “research?”

The *process* of research also was addressed. Some asserted the humanities are not as collaborative as other fields but more individualized and suggested a “digital element maybe changing scholarship” and offer a gateway to collaboration.

Also discussed was how undergraduate research in the arts differs from the humanities, how arts and humanities research compares with the sciences, and best practices recommendations. The latter included student presentations “but that is not the standard of many humanities disciplines. They need to be able to distill into words and images the core pieces of their scholarship. They need to articulate their entry point (the why), process (the how), and outcome (the what) and make scholarship visual in some way.” Experiential and services elements were addressed along with community-building, team-based collaborative interdisciplinary research and digital methods, and engagement with a larger A&H community beyond the university.

Discussants also noted that “since it takes *longer* to train and work with a student, than to do research and publish on their own, faculty can’t be penalized for their humanities scholarship taking longer. There need to be incentives (stipend, promotion/tenure) that value the UR. It is easier to work with junior faculty--to

help them see the potential of their scholarship in a new way.” Undergraduate research allows faculty and students to work together and students are given opportunity to see a validation of research.

Q#2 Why is undergraduate research in the arts and humanities important? How can it be assessed and directly tied to workforce development and the public good?

Importance: The benefits of undergraduate research as a best practice in American higher education were applied to the arts and humanities in evaluating its importance for developing the student self and enhancing critical thinking, supporting high-level cognitive processes, synthesis of information stretching outside of their disciplines, and holistically seeing other perspectives and the starting point for original creative work. Discussants considered how A&H UR offers an opportunity for experiential learning, collaboration and interdisciplinary work and more ownership of these experiences by arts and humanities students.

Workforce Development: A strong connection was made between undergraduate research experiences and the workforce through the lens of the arts and humanities emphasizing the development of good citizenship/ democratic values and job readiness. Discussants acknowledged the close connection between the humanities and our world—how we got here and where we are going—all closely tied to our understanding of society and key elements of a liberal arts program. They discussed how A&H-mentored inquiry and scholarship viewed as “problem solving,” can focus on innovation and how connections to workforce development helps validate humanities and arts on campus.

Some discussants widened their conversation to the liberal arts, not just A&H asserting workforce development requires critical thinking, debate and arguing a point, strong communication—and research in the liberal arts requires all of these skills. Referenced were the CEOs mentioned in the earlier CUR Dialogues plenary talk having liberal arts degrees.

Some called for examples of humanities in the workforce; others recognized A&H students have a harder time imagining how their class work will apply to a career after they graduate and that the creative/research experience helps them see how their skills can be applied and how they can apply their knowledge in ways that they may never have imagined as an undergraduate student. The “soft skills” of the liberal arts were valued with reference made to the Georgetown Center for Higher Education and Workforce Development in 2012 predicted 40% will be freelancing in the “gig” economy.

Discussants considered how A&H UR could be directly tied to workforce development by finding ways to communicate and document the benefits of arts and humanities education for the workplace. Suggested were surveys of potential employers to explore what they value in employees. Likely liberal arts values and skills are crucial plus experiential learning, communication skills and problem solving related to executive research. Also recommended was funding for “innovation incubators” that attract students, faculty across disciplines to demonstrate problem solving/experiential learning impacts. eg, State Farm Education Program.

Q#3 What are the existing funding opportunities for undergraduate research in the humanities?

Discussants noted the major federal sources--the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)--and recognized the need for more overall A&H funding.

The Stanford University Design School with design/psychology intermixed through other disciplines was suggested as a model for funding agencies. This structure promotes creative thinking (STEM) through space design/creation to encourage the creative behaviors desired by STEM. Also referenced was the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's funding of summit on school space design to promote creative /STEM-focused learning (by focusing on the space students are in.) and might do this for A&H.

Other private funding sources cited included Mellon, Teagle, Gates, Lily, the Awesome Foundation, McNair Scholars, community foundations and links to social projects, crowdsourcing, and local state and municipal funding.

Also referenced were multidisciplinary projects that tie in with STEM (STEAM), working with museums and exploring alternative funding creatively--thinking outside the box. Internal funding was thought to be "best" with results of initial work communicated to the public to build an endowment within the university. Critical is the building of relationships with donors so they become invested in success of A&H student research program. Collaboration was emphasized as is the key to meet broader impact goals with A&H contingencies linking smaller departments with larger ones to maximize success across disciplines.

Q#4 How can we obtain more opportunities to fund undergraduate research in the humanities and how would these opportunities be structured?

In addressing federal funding sources, participants discussed the need for a visible campaign for NEA/NEH much like NIH. They noted A&H UR is perceived as less important than STEM so there is little federal funding but clearly more funding opportunities are needed for the humanities. To avoid the continuation of a STEM vs NEH mentality a hybrid federal funding source was suggested. Structurally STEM-related designs and technologies were recommended for use in arts and humanities service learning projects and for A&H animations and game creations.

It was recommended that institutions of higher education recognize the value of humanities and commit more institutional funding to research. Again collaboration was urged both across disciplines with STEM fields as a way to tap into more funds and within institutions to include A&H component in NSF grants.

Funding could emerge from partnering with local organizations both for profit and non for profit with community involvement demonstrating the impact on society

Discussants emphasized that to obtain more funding for A&H UR support we must show the value of the A&H in society and professions and engage in assessment. In making the case for A&H funding the assessment could be drawn from course-based data collection to facilitate research projects. Assessment also could be based upon both quantitative and qualitative data to provide evidence of impact and demonstrate how A&H research has an impact on society reaching broad audiences and underscore the importance of liberal arts education. Here again collaboration across fields especially STEM and community involvement to engage both public and private funding was recommended for funding A&H UR.

In outreach to the public sector, use of Social Media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram was suggested to fund A&H research, increase visual literacy and disseminate research outcomes and impact.