Community Learning: A Public Humanities Approach to Teaching

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ABSTRACT
This workshop explores how teaching within the humanities is affected, challenged, or improved by public outreach. This question arises from growing concerns that the humanities has become disconnected from the general public or incoherent outside of a post-secondary institutional setting. Research suggests that in addition to the demands of their own research, scholars in the humanities are facing the added pressures of “policy-makers [who] are increasingly demanding that academics justify themselves in terms of the returns that result from investing in their scholarly domains” (Benneworth, 2015, p. 4). These concerns inform the public humanities movement which seeks to foster relations between scholars and their local communities in an effort to champion civic engagement/learning and accessible scholarship. The goal of this workshop is to consider in detail how teaching practices in the humanities might benefit from such community outreach, as well as to support and offer resources to instructors looking for new ways to engage students in this way. The workshop introduces participants to the public humanities movement, initiates debate on the relationship between humanities teaching and public outreach, and suggests strategies and resources for instructors to connect with local communities and outreach programs.

KEYWORDS
public humanities; accessible learning; community outreach

LEARNING OUTCOMES
By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- Discuss the advantages and challenges of incorporating community outreach and the public relevance of the humanities into post-secondary teaching.
- Self-reflect on their own teaching methods and how those might engage local public communities beyond a post-secondary context.
- Connect their teaching practices to a broader civil movement, imbuing their work as humanities instructors with new relevance.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY


This article is an introductory piece that contextualizes a series of articles published out of a forum on the Public Value of Arts and Humanities Research. The author outlined some of the challenges facing humanities scholars today in light of increased pressures to justify the social merits of their research, and suggested that this discipline-wide self-reflection can be beneficial. For the purposes of this workshop, this article should be drawn from to set the tone for the subsequent activities in the workshop—i.e., the urgency for humanities teachers to reflect upon their current teaching practices and the degree to which they are supporting civic engagement and education.
This article stems from the findings of a pedagogical case study conducted at an Oxford college to suggest that the practice of “close reading,” which is a standard practice in English literature, can be repurposed to enhance student learning and student-teacher engagement. This method—which highlights the student-instructor dynamic and creatively reimagines one discipline’s standard methodology as an interdisciplinary pedagogical tool—can be offered in this workshop as a key method of fostering critical inquiry, which is especially important in a community outreach context.


This is a discussion of the results of a survey conducted across institutions from the International Consortium of Humanities Centres and Institutes, which sought to gauge different institutions’ methods of engaging with and conceiving the public humanities. According to Elmer, the results of this survey reveal that while there is a general consensus on the importance of the public humanities, there is a diverse array of definitions and perceptions regarding what constitutes the public humanities and its effects. For the purposes of this workshop, this article should be drawn upon as the speaker shifts focus from describing the public humanities movement to the workshop’s concern with the logistics of applying these principles and mandates to enrich students’ engagement in the classroom.


This article discusses the importance and potential benefits of open access in the context of art history, tracing the field’s adoption of open-access principles as a means of addressing the declining publishing rate of humanities-based monographs and periodicals. Although this article is specific to art history and the academic publishing world, it offers a useful overview of the challenges that several disciplines in the humanities have faced (or have yet to face) in embracing accessibility as a core mandate of humanities research. For the purposes of this workshop, this article should be used as a specific example of the kinds of issues that arise in any attempts to bridge academic teaching with public initiatives.
### WORKSHOP CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DURATION (min)</th>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>The facilitator introduces the workshop and performs a quick survey of the room to gauge the disciplinary range of the participants. The facilitator might begin with a personal anecdote (perhaps from their classroom experiences) in which they encountered some difficulty in conveying the relevance of the course material to their students. During this anecdote, the speaker should involve participants by occasionally asking low-stakes survey questions (see Presentation Strategies below for suggested questions). The anecdote should end with a transition to the workshop topic, and a brief overview of the learning outcomes. <em>If possible, this workshop could be even more effective if the primary facilitator invited a guest facilitator involved in either the public humanities or a community outreach program.</em></td>
<td>Because this workshop involves context for issues such as the so-called “crisis of the humanities” or the public humanities movement, the personal anecdote serves to ease participants into the subject at hand without needing to rely on prior knowledge of the public humanities. By regularly checking in with participants, the speaker can also engage with them without prematurely demanding the audience’s familiarity with the workshop material. <em>To model to some extent the kinds of community outreach that they are recommending to participants.</em></td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>What are the Public Humanities?</td>
<td>The facilitator gives a brief introductory lecture on the context and key concepts of the movement known as the public humanities. The guest facilitator might have 5-7 minutes of this time briefly summarizing their experience with the topic.</td>
<td>To give participants time to absorb new contexts and information.</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td><strong>Teaching and the Public Humanities</strong></td>
<td>Based on the brief lecture, the facilitator invites participants to brainstorm for 10 minutes in groups of 3-4 their own ideas on how public outreach can help their teaching practice. This brainstorming session can take the form of several collaborative mind maps (see Appendix A). The facilitator and participants discuss altogether the results of their brainstorming session for approximately 10 minutes. The facilitator spends the remaining 5 minutes giving an overview of relevant and thought-provoking research. Where possible, the speaker should connect this overview with some of the ideas that emerged during the brainstorming discussion.</td>
<td>To allow participants to absorb the information that they have received, in addition to keeping them engaged as the workshop transitions into a focus on new teaching methods. The collaborative mind map can support those more comfortable with a visual style of learning.</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td><strong>Problems and Limits</strong></td>
<td>The facilitator outlines some of the problems or issues that teachers might face in incorporating public outreach or public humanities mandates into the classroom. The guest facilitator should have 5-7 minutes to discuss the challenges or issues they might have encountered in this respect. Participants should be invited to contribute their own concerns throughout this period.</td>
<td>To allow everyone time to consider, weigh, and address the challenges of restructuring the classroom dynamic to incorporate public/community outreach.</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td><strong>Teaching and Public Outreach—A Symbiotic Relationship</strong></td>
<td>The facilitator leads participants in a reflection activity such as a Post-It Parade (see Appendix B), a 10-minute individual reflection exercise, or in integrated form throughout this period (see Appendix A for a sample handout of discussion questions). The reflection</td>
<td>To remind the participants of key concepts as they have evolved over the course of the workshop.</td>
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activity should sum up the complicated nexus of issues that surround bridging teaching methods with public/community outreach.

During this activity, the facilitator should emphasize the need for cooperation between instructors and communities, as well as for a shared commitment to benefiting each other, in order for these methods to work properly.

| 5 | Final Thoughts and Questions | Provide time for any last thoughts, questions, concerns, suggestions, anecdotes, and/or feedback. | To allow questions and serve as a buffer in case any of the previous activities take more time than expected. |

Total Time: 90 minutes

PRESENTATION STRATEGIES

**General Recommendations:**

- If the speaker has invited a guest, the speaker should take up all opportunities to model and facilitate an informed dialogue with that guest (e.g., regularly turning to the guest and inviting them to offer their own input or experiences). The guest should not be left unsupported by the speaker during this workshop and should be incorporated as an essential part of workshop structure.
- The ideal number of participants for this workshop is approximately 25-30 people from a variety of departments within the humanities.
  - The number of possible participants can be higher if the speaker(s) choose(s) a brainstorming activity that does not require any craft. The collaborative mind map activity, for instance, requires enough space for each group to draw and hang up their mind maps, as well as enough time for each group to discuss their mind map at the end of the activity.

**Pre-Workshop Set-up:**

- Speaker(s) should ask participants to confirm their attendance by registering for the workshop, which in turn allows the speaker(s) to adjust the number of materials, room size, and number of desks to be used in the workshop, as needed.
  - If many more than 30 people register for this workshop, consider offering multiple sessions with smaller groups of participants. Certain brainstorming activities, such as the collaborative mind map, might not lend themselves well to large groups.
• The location for this workshop should be a small room that is able to comfortably accommodate 25-30 participants.
  o If possible, speaker(s) should find a room with moveable desks that can be pushed together in clusters of 3-4 desks before the workshop begins. This setup encourages participants to form small groups from the beginning of the workshop so that they do not have to get up and move their things halfway through the workshop in order to participate in the brainstorming activity.
• If doing the collaborative mind map as the group brainstorming activity, the speaker(s) will need to provide participants with coloured markers, large sheet-paper pads, and either magnets or sticky tack.
• If doing the Post-It Parade, the speaker(s) will need to provide plenty of post-it notes and enough pencils/pens/markers for all participants.

Sample Survey Questions:
• Examples of low-stakes survey questions for gauging the prior knowledge of participants might include:
  o How many people are from the Department of _____, _____, or _____?
    ▪ While the speaker(s) might already know the answers to such questions, they give the participants a sense of the disciplinary range of the room.
  o Has anyone heard of the public humanities before?
    ▪ Follow-up: (If “yes”) How have you heard it described?
    ▪ Follow-up: (If “yes”) Do you remember your impression upon first hearing about this movement?
  o Has anyone heard the so-called “crisis of the humanities” being discussed before?
  o Has anyone had students complain about the accessibility of course materials in your department?
    ▪ Follow-up: What kinds of complaints have you heard?
    ▪ Follow-up: What do you think was the exact cause of these complaints?
    ▪ Follow-up: If you addressed these complaints, how did you do so?
  o Has anyone had family, friends, or acquaintances make comments about the inaccessibility of what you teach?
    ▪ Follow-up: What kinds of complaints have you heard?
    ▪ Follow-up: What do you think was the exact cause of these complaints?
    ▪ Follow-up: If you addressed these complaints, how did you do so?
APPENDIX A: Reflections on Teaching the Public Humanities

As teachers, what are some of the issues that you anticipate arising in trying to integrate Public Humanities approaches in the classroom? Given the Public Humanities’ emphasis on moving education beyond academic institutions, is the classroom an appropriate space for such advocacy?

Are teachers in your department currently likely to incorporate a Public Humanities initiative into their courses? Why/why not?

How might your teaching benefit the public or local communities around you?

As an instructor, how would you approach a local community or public outreach organization in a way that respects their priorities, time, and resources?
APPENDIX B: Further Strategies, Resources, and Readings for Workshop Speakers

Brainstorming Activity: Collaborative Mind Map

- Activity Setup:
  - Speaker(s) should ask participants to form groups of 3-4 people. If they are not already sitting in groups of 3-4 people, or if participants are not evenly distributed across the room, the speaker(s) should actively request that some participants relocate until the groups’ numbers are as evenly distributed as possible.
  - Distribute one drawing paper, markers, and either magnets or sticky tack to each table, making sure that each table has more than enough markers and hanging materials.

- Introduce the Activity:
  - Ask participants to take part in a “Collaborative Mind Map,” which is a 10-minute group brainstorming exercise designed to encourage everyone to think playfully and creatively about the concepts introduced in workshop so far.
    - Assign each group a different word or phrase, which they will write at the centre of their mind map. Ask participants to respond to this word or phrase either in words, sentences, or illustrations.
    - Encourage participants to engage with their peers as much as possible—for instance, by providing written/drawn responses to their group members’ contributions to the mind map, perhaps by drawing lines to indicate that the one response has “branched off” into other responses, and so forth.
    - Include a gentle reminder to participants to be considerate of their peers by avoiding any inappropriate language or drawings as they develop these mind maps.
  - If the workshop room is PowerPoint enabled, project a version of the activity instructions on a PowerPoint slide so that participants might consult them throughout the activity.

- Sample Activity Instructions:
  - Each group is assigned a different word or phrase that stems from the workshop discussions so far. Write that word or phrase at the centre of the drawing paper given to you. This is the start of your collaborative mind map.
  - Have each member of your group write down or draw their responses around this starter word/phrase in whatever way you think best represents your response.
  - Respond to your peers’ responses; produce the most rich and interactive mind map that you can.
  - Be creative! Write diagonally or vertically, combine drawing and writing, and/or use a variety of colours.
  - Have fun! Remember that your responses may be clearer and more memorable if they involve something that genuinely interests you.
You have 10 minutes; at the end, assign one member of your group to hang up your collaborative mind map on the walls/chalkboards/whiteboards using the magnets/sticky tack given to you.

- **Sample Starter Words/Phrases**
  - Public Outreach
  - Crisis of Humanities
  - Teaching the Humanities
  - Learning about the Humanities
  - Community Learning
  - Collaboration

- **Monitor the Activity**
  - Walk casually around the room and occasionally check in with groups’ progress—e.g., letting them know that you are available for questions or help, or making encouraging comments along the way, depending on what feels most appropriate.
  - Help your participants keep track of time by giving them occasional reminders, such as at the 5-, 8-, and 9-minute marks. This will help keep the activity from going over time.
  - Take private note of particularly relevant responses that you can highlight afterwards when discussing the results of the activity.

- **Discuss/Follow up on the Activity**
  - Thank participants for engaging in the activity and take a moment to notice and highlight features from a few of the mind maps.
  - Ask each group follow-up questions such as:
    - Was there a single idea or key theme that emerged out of your group’s mind map?
    - Does looking at everyone’s mind maps collectively change how you see your own group’s mind map?
    - Did you learn anything new or unexpected from your group’s mind map?
    - Was this mind map exercise a helpful way to reinforce some of the ideas that we covered in this workshop?
  - Thank everyone for their participation (if you have not yet done so) and encourage the room to keep these ideas in mind as you move on through the rest of the workshop.

**Reflection Activity: Post-It Parade**

- **Introduce the Activity:**
  - Invite everyone to participate in a final activity designed to reflect upon the sum of new concepts, concerns, and issues that have arisen during the workshop. Ask participants to write one word or phrase per post-it note that describes what they have learned from this workshop, and then inform them that you will collect these post-it notes and see if any patterns emerge out of everyone’s responses.
• Let participants know that they will have 7 minutes for this activity.
• Let participants know that they can come up with as many key words/phrases as they can manage within the time limit.
  o Distribute post-it notes and writing utensils to all participants.

• During the Activity:
  o Give participants time-warnings, possibly at the 4- or 6-minute mark.
  o Because this activity is an individual one, less active monitoring will be needed.
  o If some participants complete post-it notes early, collect them and begin to sort the notes according to common motifs.
  o Take 2-3 minutes to sort and arrange the post-it notes on a wall or chalkboard after the time limit is over.
    ▪ If there is more than one speaker, perhaps decide beforehand whether one person will be responsible for collecting the post-it notes while the other sorts them.

• Discuss the Activity:
  o For the remaining 5 minutes of this activity, discuss the significance of the responses that you receive. Look continually for common themes or similar language in the post-it notes, and articulate the themes or patterns that you notice and what they suggest about the workshop topic.
  o Encourage participants to share their opinions of the collective results of the Post-It Parade.
  o Thank everyone for participating in the activity.

Follow-Up: Further Reading on the Public Humanities

• Reach out to participants after the workshop, welcoming feedback on the success of or possible improvements for the workshop.
• You may also wish to send via e-mail the following additional resources:
  o Public Humanities at Western (http://www.uwo.ca/publichumanities/)
    ▪ If you wish to learn more about a local Public Humanities initiative, or perhaps to get involved, contact the Public Humanities at UWO!
  o Scholarly Articles
  o Additional Resources