Humanities Advisory Board meeting notes (9/5/13)


The Humanities Advisory Committee first met on September 5, 2013 with Dean Chaden Djalali and Vice President for Research and Economic Development Dan Reed. They opened by sharing their charge with the committee and expressing their enthusiasm about working on campus to support teaching and research in the humanities.

**Charge:** To advise the Vice President for Research and Economic Development and the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences on humanities issues including:
leveraging existing and future resources in support of scholarship in the humanities; raising the visibility of UI humanities programs in Iowa and beyond; and exploring new forms of scholarship and possible areas of interdisciplinary research among the arts, humanities and sciences.

Announcements: The committee members were encouraged to remind humanities colleagues of opportunities to apply to become OVPRED Faculty Fellows (next call coming soon), to take advantage of the annual grants offered by the VPRE and the Digital Studio for the Public Arts and Humanities to conduct and publicize their research when appropriate, and to read the recent article in *Iowa Now* entitled “Humanities gone spatial.”

The group had been asked to review two reports, the American Academy of Arts and Science’s *The Heart of the Matter* and the Harvard *Humanities Project*, that have generated national conversations about the future of humanities in recent months. In a lively, free-flowing conversation, the group discussed the following ideas and suggestions.

Desire to experiment with undergraduate teaching in humanities
- hiring additional faculty members who have interdisciplinary and digital humanities teaching experience, who might teach across departments, and who are a good investment given the relatively low cost (no need for expensive labs, etc.)
- a “why do you go to college?” course for all CLAS students, team-taught by a wide range of humanities faculty
- team-taught, cross-departmental core courses on the “big questions,” emphasizing communication and collaboration among faculty, students, and disciplines. Look at BYU’s Humanities College and the UI’s team-taught course on the origins of life for possible models.
- **Passport project**—a course that sends first-year students to twelve exhibits, performances, presentations, etc. and asks them to document their impressions online.
- a “common book” experience for first-year students or the campus more generally. Consider teaming up with the Center for Human Rights (One Community, One Book), the shared book project of the UNESCO City of Literature, and *On Iowa* (the academic
component of which could be strengthened). The common book could be read and discussed by faculty, staff, and students in colleges across campus.

- Have a common theme for the semester, as is done at the University of Michigan, with undergrad course offerings connected to a museum exhibit and to the scheduling of outside speakers. This could increase the UI’s national and international profile. Consider teaming up with ISU and UNI.

Graduate teaching in humanities

- Are we producing too many PhDs in humanities?
- Are we open to having different tracks for grad students? (e.g. a humanities PhD who completes some sort of business certification)

K-12 humanities teaching

- Propose an NEH summer institute for K-12 or college teachers or an NEH summer seminar for faculty (we have not offered any of these in many years).
- Work with the College of Education to improve our connections with K-12 humanities teachers and education statewide.

The public face of UI humanities

- Meet with Joe Brennan the new VP for Strategic Communications and Lin Larson, the Director of University Creative Services, to seek their advice. (We noted that VP Brennan has a PhD in English, and Larson is a UI alum with a Master’s in English.)
- Build a new web portal for UI humanities. See for example the site at Stanford.
- Put profiles of humanities faculty, students, and alumni/ae on the new website.
- Emphasize that humanities will help students in a practical/vocational sense, but also help them to be better prepared for life’s challenges, to engage more thoughtfully with their communities, and simply to have richer lives. Consider ways to address parents.
- Train faculty for media appearances (Ann Ricketts said the OVPRED piloted a media training program in FY13 and plans to enlarge the program in FY14.)

Questions for faculty and administrators

- How can we create the flexibility to pursue some of these research and teaching initiatives, so that faculty are still rewarded at the end of the year in salary decisions and in P&T procedures for work that enriches intellectual community across the humanities and with other disciplines and engages diverse audiences?

We concluded the meeting by developing a series of action items.

- Craig and Teresa will meet with CLAS and CLAS ITS staff to discuss options for a shared “humanities” website and will consult with Chris Merrill and others who helped developed the Arts website.
- At the next fall meeting, we will consider creating small working sub-committees to explore options such as a common book (with colleagues noted above) and cross-disciplinary courses, and to look at innovative programs in humanities graduate education across the country.
- Assess faculty interest in and administrative support for applying to host an NEH summer institute or summer seminar.
• Investigate options for facilitating discussion about humanities education across grades K-12 and colleges and universities.
• Craig and Teresa also welcome suggestions for visitors with whom the committee would like to consult, such as the new VP for Strategic Communications and former NEH Chair and now UI faculty member, Jim Leach.

Amended October 29, 2013: Rebekah Kowal reminded us that we neglected to mention in the minutes one area of concern raised at the September 5 meeting: the need to revisit the General Education program, which influences student enrollment in the humanities and also their choice of major, in order to provide students with a more coherent experience in the humanities.