

NCPH 2019 Working Group on Early Career Public History Academics: Questions, Issues, Resources

Facilitators: Torren Gatson, University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Jennifer LeZotte, University of North Carolina at Wilmington
Mary Rizzo, Rutgers University–Newark
M.J. Rymza-Pawlowska, American University

Discussants: Sarah Doherty, North Park University
Kathryn Lasdow, Suffolk University
Anne Lindsay, California State University, Sacramento
Mollie Marlow, University of West Georgia
Heather Stanfiel, University of Notre Dame
Jennifer Thornton, West Virginia University
Lindsey Wieck, St. Mary's University

*** this document was assembled from working group members' responses to the prompt: "If you were talking honestly to your dean, what would you tell them are the major issues they need to be thinking about in order to most effectively support public historians?"*

Fighting Assumptions

Public History is not, and cannot be, the solution to the perils of declining enrollment in History courses. (Or, the perils of believing "If we build it, they will come.") Though Public History can certainly assist by introducing students to an array of possible professional paths and academic avenues, the concentration itself is not a ticket to future employment

Public History is not just American History.

Positioning public history as a methodological approach that encompasses and influences historical practice across all subfields should be a key point in persuasive arguments aimed at securing increased funding, developing new training initiatives, and widening participation among both undergraduate and graduate students. Wherever there are people, there is public history.

Resources and Support for Faculty and Programs

Make public history faculty duties clear and enumerated upon entrance into the department.

Centralize information on University funding opportunities and resources.

For newcomers to the academy, figuring out the university's bureaucratic organization is as time consuming as establishing and maintaining relationships with community partners.

The University must channel its resources in funding, marketing, alumni

engagement, and student outreach to foster support for the Public History concentration. This cannot be left to the faculty alone to facilitate. Cultivating strong relationships with partner history organizations takes time, expertise, and money. The University should recognize this in determining how they will support faculty members tasked with overseeing the concentration.

Make course releases more predictably available based on set standards.

Overseeing a concentration requires that faculty have the time and the resources to teach, liaise with partnering institutions, and interact with the University and broader community. This takes time -- and should involve a course release.

For public historians, time is the most valuable commodity. Don't punish them for asking for it. Public history can't be successful if the faculty isn't given the time to pursue it. When we say we need time, we mean that our job can't be completed in the hours given. Many times our work entails after hours meetings with the community, or weekend outreach, field trips and travel, and meetings with stakeholders and advisory boards. These demands are outside of the normal realms of "service" and many public historians find themselves in a workload imbalance trying to do these things and teach and mentor.

Sometimes public historians will need to blaze a new trail. Help them to find their way. Public historians will probably ask for things that others in the college would not. Let's find ways to answer the need. The grants that work for other units may need to be tweaked a bit to fit our scholarship and teaching. The timelines given for collaborative work may have to be extended to make community partnerships possible. Instead of trying to force old systems to work we need to rethink how we can be more flexible for publicly engaged professors.

Dedicated Admin could be the difference between a nervous breakdown and effective growth. Public historians have heavy administrative loads. Some dedicated admin could make a big difference in this area.

Show up. Show support for public history faculty and students with your presence. It means a lot, when someone has poured their time, energy, and passion into a project, when others are there to see it.

Evaluation and Promotion

How can we, as new hires, ensure that the evaluation criteria used to determine a faculty member's tenure review is grounded in sound understanding of the Public History discipline?

Engaged scholarship and appropriate credit for effective community engagement. Instructors deserve credit for active publicly engaged scholarship that results in tangible public history products. While historically credit is given through scholarly publication, it limits the effectiveness of professionals whose careers are

dependent on working with and for the communities they serve.

Encourage, facilitate, and reward interdisciplinary and collaborative research and teaching.

Particularly for new faculty, it can be difficult to create connections with potential collaborators outside of the department. It takes time to learn the lay of the land and find like-minded people working on similar projects.

Value applied humanities research and community outreach.

Given the inherently interdisciplinary nature of our work, I feel that the discussion about how best to support public historians is inextricably linked to the larger conversation about how best to promote innovative humanities research.

Humanities research, like STEM research, should be supported and promoted at all levels in the university – from undergraduate students, to graduate students, to faculty. This support should be substantive, and include the dedication of funding and resources as well as publicizing and rewarding innovative humanities research.

Curriculum

We need different instruction models for Public History courses including credit for internships and independent studies; proseminars, team-teaching, institutional partnership, pass/fail, many semester courses.

There needs to be a sufficient balance in public history course assignments.

Understanding that the realm of public history is dynamic in its ability to inform, enhance and guide the public's views on a host of topics. If the goal of graduate education is to prepare students for the professional realm comprehensively; In order to effectively achieve this goal our public history programs should consider requiring both a major research assignment (thesis) and a capstone working directly with a community partner.

Consider expanding capstone practices to two semesters. I think it would be ideal for PH students to choose their capstone projects in the fall, create a timeline, and begin the related research.

Publicize the opportunity for Public History Internships outside of the Public History Program.

Students and Student Experience:

We need to find different funding models for M.A. programs—this is critical because otherwise, we will not be able to diversify the field—the only students who will come are the ones who can afford it. What kind of language do we need to develop *as a field* to take back to our individual administrators that help make the case for graduate education in public history as something other than a source of

income for universities?

How to ensure an inclusive and welcoming environment for students from underrepresented communities and cultures has to be a high note on the agenda of building and maintaining a program. The reality for most academic programs both within public history and traditional history programs and departments is that “privilege” not only exists but in many ways shapes the interaction and ultimate success of numerous professionals. It is my belief that a program must be intentional in securing an unbiased arena. This means that Research agendas aren’t the only prohibitors. There needs to be more funding, and the faculty and students should go through anti-racism training.

Higher Visibility/Access for Training and Professionalization Opportunities. How can we work toward ensuring that public history training is not only available to all in theory, but accessible to all in practice? It strikes me that one key element in the conversation should be developing strategies to assist latecomers to the field in becoming competitive applicants, whether for graduate school or the job market.

Doing Public History in a Vacuum.

Should graduate students find themselves in situations where no (or few) dedicated resources exist for the support of public history in their departments, how can they best position themselves for success on the job market?

We are missing opportunities to expand the number and quality of MA public history students by limiting the types of funding to Teaching Assistantships.

How can we move toward waiving tuition for promising master’s program applicants?

Create a more open-door policy and accepting environment of Public History students. From my understanding and my own experience in my department as well as out in the professional world in general, there is a rift between academic and Public Historians. Many academic historians seem to feel that working with the public is somehow beneath them, and there is a sense of elitism and entitlement.

Try to find affiliated sites and museums with paid internships.

Consider utilizing students in recruitment efforts. I think this is necessary because well prepared students are the best example for perspective students deciding on a graduate program.