

IN THIS ISSUE

- Introducing the Civic Humanities Incubator
- Generous Thinking with Lola Millholland
- "Touching Grass" Project Spotlight
- Building the Neighborhood Humanities, One Dinner at a Time
- Connecting Across the Generation Gap
- The Reading Hour: Tomorrow! W 12/3, 12:15-1:15, DB Lounge



Introducing the Civic Humanities Incubator

What can happen when you bring the humanities out of the classroom and into the world? That's the question we're working to answer with the Civic Humanities Incubator, launched this fall with the support of UP's first Mellon Foundation grant. We often think of the humanities as practiced in private: either individually, as in the case of solitary reading, writing, and thinking; or behind classroom doors, where

students and teachers come together for open-ended conversation and to practice thinking through new texts and concepts. But we believe those activities are precisely the ones that can be most useful in our current moment, one of unprecedented levels of polarization, loneliness, and isolation. We're advocating for a specifically *civic* humanities that doesn't just create individual understanding and self-knowledge, but also builds community bonds and strengthens our relationships to the places we live. To that end, the purpose of the Incubator is to spark ideas, partnerships, and projects that mobilize the practices of the humanities to create connection, conversation, and collaboration with our local neighborhoods, the city of Portland, and the wider public.

So what has that looked like in practice so far? It looks like PRF students working on [undergraduate research projects](#) that explore environmental issues through civically-engaged lenses (like [Dr. Sarah Weiger's project "Be Here Now"](#) profiled below). It looks like [supporting faculty in imagining and designing small projects](#) that help them gain a toehold in experimenting with civic humanities work. It looks like hosting dinner conversations with UP students, alumni, and campus neighbors to work toward building intergenerational Neighborhood Humanities courses where students and community members will learn side by side. And it looks like connecting with local folks doing cool work at the intersection of sustainability studies and civic engagement to help think about challenging issues from new angles ([Lola Millholland's UP visit](#), detailed next).

And there's more to come, as the Incubator seeds a variety of work that we expect will grow in exciting ways over the coming years. All of it is helping us build the Engaged Humanities here at UP, creating the infrastructure and opportunities for sustainable, long-term connections between campus and our local communities. Stay tuned and read on for more about what we've been up to.

Lessons in Generosity from Lola Millholland

Lola Millholland's early November visit to UP filled our quiet bookstore with more warmth and light than the fireplace flickering behind her. A Portland native, organic noodle-business owner, and author of *Group Living and Other Recipes*, Millholland read from her book and offered the audience of students, staff, faculty, and neighbors her thoughts on ways to elevate generosity in a time of seeming scarcity.



Milholland's *Group Living and Other Recipes* tells stories of her experiences of communal living as a means of offering alternatives to the traditional nuclear, single-family home. Her book and her talk illuminated the power of our daily, often unnoticed behaviors, rippling out to form the fabric of our society. "Generosity in community starts to build the texture of a culture," she said, a culture in which, she added, quoting Robin Wall Kimmerer, "all flourishing is mutual." From making your roommate's coffee or doing their dishes, to raising millions of dollars for free school lunches, living in generosity, according to Millholland, is a mindset, a ritual, and a daily practice. To live in a gift economy is to build a truly connected culture, where even the tiniest gifts become a form of relationship.

Milholland's book as well as her remarks on "Generosity and Scarcity" nicely showcase the themes of our Engaged Humanities work this year, ones that blend environmental issues with civically-engaged thinking. Her emphasis on sharing home space and building community through small stories and simple acts is an example of the civic humanities in practice. And her methods of fostering community—sharing meals, researching and supporting local farms, and just savoring delicious moments with friends—seems to us like the

Millholland shows us that we might best address the environmental challenges we face by building relationships in our communities.



Project Spotlight: "Touching Grass in the 21st Century"

We often associate new technologies with progress, and yet, in the past few years more and more of us report feeling tethered to devices and screens in ways that feel less like advancement and more like imprisonment. Research shows that one method for breaking the hold these technologies have over us is to spend more time in the natural world—sounds simple, but where to begin? PRF student fellows Norma Lopez Paz and Vinyet Lapuente are working with English professor Sarah Weiger to provide just that starting point. Their project, “Be Here Now: Touching Grass in the 21st-Century,” explores how environmental literature can help us imagine technology-free spaces. And as they've worked together this semester, they have become increasingly aware of just how invasive technology has become in our daily lives: while it provides flexibility and efficiency in school and work, those things have come at a steep cost. The team has been asking: how can we carve out time to disconnect?

Rather than advocate a complete ban on technology use, on the one hand, or total capitulation to its pull, on the other, the research team is exploring a middle ground; taking inspiration from the 19th century "camp cure" and the more recent "digital detox" craze, Lopez Paz says they "hope to showcase the value of natural, tech-free spaces to our

To do this, the team is designing two options to help people reorient their relationship to technology: first, they plan to design and produce an almanac that uses cues from nature across the seasons to help people connect to the natural world. (Imagine a sort of daily planner that provides day-to-day inspiration for how to engage with the world beyond the screen.) Second, the team is creating a tech-free immersion to give people another way to unplug. Working with Outdoor Pursuits, they plan to bring a group of students on a 24-hour tech-free excursion in a nearby camp-like setting.

According to Lopez Paz, both of these options will "integrate themes from environmental literature alongside purposeful reflection" to give people a new lens for thinking about the way they use—and are used by—the technology in their lives. Check in with us next semester for opportunities to get involved with this project as the team builds and implements their ideas.

Building Connection through "Neighborhood Humanities"



On October 30th, a group of sixteen UP students, alumni, and UP neighbors and business owners came together on campus to share dinner and conversation. This was our first attempt to host a "Neighborhood Humanities" gathering, a Mellon-funded initiative

[Subscribe](#) to our email list.

that's part of the Civic Humanities Incubator we launched this year.

Because *New York Times* journalist Eli Saslow was coming to UP later in the fall, we invited the intergenerational group to read one of his articles, [**“The White Flight of Derek Black,”**](#) which tells the story of how a former white supremacist was moved to change his thinking after being welcomed into dinner and conversation with others at his small college. The article offered a great springboard for a conversation about the power of conversation.

After a brief meet-and-greet over appetizers and drinks, we sat down for introductions and to dive into sharing—and listening—about our own experiences with conversations gone wrong or topics that are especially hard to talk about. Over a family-style meal, we dug into our differences and similarities around the challenges and rewards of genuine conversation. An older member of the community (an alum of the UP Salzburg program more than fifty years ago!) reminded us all to consider removing our “armor” and showing up to conversation with vulnerability and openness. One of the students in attendance made the important point that it's not any single conversation that can change a person, but a longer-term set of relationships built around a community's willingness to embrace diverse perspectives. A recent alumna dubbed the event “the most fun [she'd] had all year!”

Part of the work of the Mellon grant is to develop a course in this “Neighborhood Humanities” model—regular meetings that will provide credit for undergraduates and enrichment for UP neighbors. The late October pilot gathering offered a terrific opportunity to witness the powerful insights and warm connections that can come from bringing together mixed groups of students and community members to talk and to listen.

[**Interested in joining one of these dinner conversations?
Send us an email and we'll add you to our invite list>>**](#)

Connecting Across the Age Gap:

Intergenerational Interviews

Generational divides are nothing new, but like most divides, they somehow feel wider today than in previous eras. But maybe the gap isn't due to a lack of interest in the other side; maybe it's simply a lack of opportunity to connect across eras? In the spirit of our work building intergenerational Neighborhood Humanities conversations, we set out to explore this further, spending time in a nearby park and asking people of various ages: "What's a difficult topic that you'd be curious to discuss with someone from a different generation than you?"



Linda (78): "I'd want to discuss racial attitudes if one lived where there was little diversity compared to someone who lived with much diversity."

Jim (75): "I would say politics. That's difficult with anyone these days. Also, religion."

Leilani (22): "I'd ask [the generation younger than me] how they think my generation has failed them, or what we can do better."



Several respondents noted that it would be interesting to talk about the difficult topics of aging and death. Dana (48; left) replied that she'd like to discuss: "aging and that pre-death time when you need more care but are still alive...how do you plan for potential long-term care?"



Addie (22) replied, “A difficult topic I would like to discuss with someone from another generation is something they may have done to someone they had to take accountability for. Good people do bad things, and we all mess up. But how did they mess up in a big way? And what did they do to after: apologize or act like nothing happened?”



Turns out, all that talk of generation gaps might be obscuring the real ways that we are curious about each other and excited to learn from one another. There are *loads* of conversations that people want to have across generations; one goal of our program's work is to build spaces and opportunities for people to do just that.



READING HOUR

Can carving out an hour to read alongside friends and colleagues be a simple yet radical act of engagement? We think so! Now in its second year, the Reading Hour is an opportunity to reclaim our relationship to reading and break free from the tyranny of the to-do list at the end of the semester. Join us for this no-tech, low-key event tomorrow **12/3, 12:15-1:15 in DB Lounge**; bring a book, meet some new people, and enjoy holiday cookies and cocoa! All are welcome.



University
of Portland 

5000 N. Willamette Blvd.
Portland, OR
up.edu/prf | 503.943.7228 | prf@up.edu

Share this email:



[Manage](#) your preferences | [Opt out](#) using TrueRemove®

Got this as a forward? [Sign up](#) to receive our future emails.

View this email [online](#).

This email was sent to .

emma®