

The logo for Public Research Fellows is an orange speech bubble with the text "PUBLIC RESEARCH FELLOWS" in white, bold, uppercase letters.

PUBLIC RESEARCH FELLOWS

Public Research Fellows 2024-25

Engaged Humanities @ UP: Everyday Democracy

Call for Student Fellow Applications (*with updated project descriptions*)

The Public Research Fellows brings students and faculty together from across disciplines to explore timely topics and problems through publicly engaged research projects that use engaged humanities approaches. This year, with the support of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the program will convene a working group of faculty and students to build projects and courses that engage Portland through the lens of civic life. In an era of increasing polarization and stress on democratic norms, how can we use the tools of the humanities to create hopeful and productive forms of civic engagement? And how might connecting the humanities to other academic disciplines in turn help us engage across difference and with our communities?

The 2024-25 working group faculty thus far include: Dr. Andrew Guest (Psychology); Dr. Molly Hiro (English); Dr. Jen McDanel (English); Dr. Sruthi Rothenfluch (Philosophy); Dr. Anne Santiago (Political Science & Global Affairs); and Dr. Shaz Vijlee (Engineering). (More may join during the academic year.)

If you're interested in a collaborative undergraduate research experience that connects scholarship to the wider public and the communities in which we live, check out the project and program details below and apply to be a Student Fellow by August 21.

What do Student Fellows do?

- Participate in small teams (at least 1 meeting per two weeks) to help develop projects, events, and courses by conducting research under faculty guidance and collaborating with other student fellows (students will enroll in one research credit per term with one of the faculty fellows in the working group).
- Enroll in a pair of 1-credit reading courses in both fall and spring semesters:

Fall 2024: CAS 391: "Engaged Humanities Fundamentals" (T 6:00-6:55pm)

Spring 2025: CAS 391: "Engaged Humanities Futures" (T 6:00-6:55pm)

The fall course provides background and tools in engaged humanities methods that will help students translate undergraduate research to wider publics and the spring course

helps students connect their academic work with their personal and professional goals after college using humanities mindsets and skills.

What's in it for Student Fellows?

- 4 credits total (2 credits for CAS 391 readings courses in fall and spring; 1 credit each in fall and spring for Undergraduate Research; together these can add up to an elective course toward your degree)
- Experience in undergraduate research and working closely with faculty
- The chance to collaborate with a close-knit, dedicated group of students from a variety of disciplines
- The opportunity to participate in a National Endowment for the Humanities supported project (a great line for your resume!) while helping to shape the future of the program and UP curriculum

What's the program looking for in Student Fellows?

We're looking for students who meet the following criteria:

- Creative, flexible, and works well with others
- Has a desire to learn about the engaged humanities and how they can help us build connections across disciplines and with civic life
- Has sufficient room in their schedule to dedicate time to the courses and their working group project research (~5 hours per week; will vary across the year)

How can you learn more about the program?

- Explore [PRF's website](#) and [Instagram](#)
 - See especially the [Program Archive](#) to learn about past PRF projects
- Email Dr. Jen McDanel (mcdanel@up.edu) with questions

24-25 "Everyday Democracy" Project Descriptions

Project #1: Conversation Projects - (De)Polarizing Ideas on Campus and in the Community

Faculty: Dr. Shaz Vijlee, Engineering (vijlee@up.edu); Dr. Andrew Guest, Psychology (guesta@up.edu)

This project will start in the Fall semester by investigating best practices in community-building conversations around big ideas and polarizing issues. This will include work with a new 'Core Dialogue' model of campus conversations through CORE 101: Anchor Seminar for all UP first-year students and also includes research on community-based programs outside of UP, such as [the Oregon Humanities Conversation Project](#). In the Spring semester, we plan to shift towards creating and piloting conversation toolkits based on best practices that can be used by and with college students on and off campus - ideally to create space for civil conversations around issues relevant to higher education (such as the value of scientific expertise and the importance of free speech).

Project #2: Democracy and Diversity: How does student understanding of “the other” change because of practice in deep listening and close conversations?

Faculty: Dr. Anne Pitsch Santiago (santiago@up.edu), Political Science and Global Affairs

Students will help design and carry out a research project focused on student assumptions of how their peers’ identities, experiences, cultures, and beliefs shape their political beliefs and civic engagement. The project will use a before and after design to assess student perceptions at the beginning and end of the Fall 2024 Pol/Core *Democracy and Diversity* course. The course will focus on understanding democratic norms, rights, and responsibilities in a pluralistic society while also giving students practice in deep listening and close conversations with their classmates. A similar model will be applied to numerous constructive dialogues facilitated across campus throughout the year, and the project will wrap up with an analysis of the data. There is the potential for a co-authored publication from this project. 2-3 student fellows are requested.

Project #3: Deep Divisions: Can polarized beliefs be justified?

Faculty: Dr. Sruthi Rothenfluch (rothenfl@up.edu), Philosophy

While political, religious and other types of disagreements have been part of our society historically, such divisions are highly salient at this political juncture. The distance between *us*, and those we regard as hopelessly misguided, even fundamentally flawed, *them* seems unbridgeable. In this project, we will start by gaining an understanding of different forms of belief polarization and identify potential causes, including psychological biases and political propaganda. Our guiding question, however, will not be descriptive, but evaluative: are there forms of polarization that are *justified*? In other words, is it rational, either from an epistemic perspective or prudential one, to maintain polarized beliefs? If so, what are the hallmarks of such justified polarization? During the first semester, we will read and discuss texts that explain different forms of polarization, explore the factors that drive them, and evaluate the beliefs and processes involved in belief polarization. We will also conduct studies that allow us to see how these phenomena are realized in the real world. In the second semester, we will draw from our discussions and findings to answer our question: depending on what we find, we will spend the second semester either co-writing an article which identifies the distinctive features of justified polarization or make the case that it cannot be justified, or develop a toolkit that enables individuals to determine whether or not their polarized beliefs and processes are ultimately justified.

Project #4: Portland and the Public Imagination: Building “Everyday Democracy” through Curriculum

Faculty: Dr. Molly Hiro (hiro@up.edu), English; Dr. Jen McDaneld (mcdaneld@up.edu), English

What if we thought about democracy not only in terms of voting practices and political parties, but through the ways we spend our daily lives and inhabit the place we live? This project will explore “Everyday Democracy” by building a new Core X-level course titled “Portland and the

Public Imagination” that aims to connect students to new ways of understanding the city of Portland and their relationship to its past, present, and future. The course, to be offered for the first time in Spring 2025, will investigate Portland beyond the headlines and pop culture references to instead develop interdisciplinary ways of looking at a place we may have thought we knew. In the fall semester, the team will research civically engaged curriculum at UP and other institutions and cultivate connections with local organizations and opportunities to help create the course. In the spring, the team will build on the work they did in the fall by developing a long-term civic-engagement project between UP and a community partner and assessing the outcomes of the course.

Project #5: Columbia Park: Weaving Narrations of Everyday Democracy

Faculty Fellow: Dr. Itzel Cruz Megchun, Business (cruzmegc@up.edu)

This project will delve into the ways in which community members exercise and experience everyday democracy while using, defending, and protecting Columbia Park here in North Portland. Our ultimate aim is to understand the compromises they make in participating, engaging, withdrawing, and disengaging as they attempt to establish civil dialogue to protect North Portland’s esteemed public spaces. We want to organize community engagements to collectively reflect on questions such as: what is democracy? and who is it for? In exploring these questions, we will showcase how the commons experience “everyday democracy” and how it might be distant from the description that emerges from institutional spaces. Therefore, in the fall semester, we will read topics regarding the city and its inhabitants to acquire conceptual structures, methods, and instruments. We will also research North Portland's history to understand community members’ relationship with City leaders. We will have our first community immersion at the end of the fall semester and a community engagement in the Spring semester. Project outputs will include designing and hosting an exhibition (either at the University of Portland or Columbia Cottage) in which we present, through storytelling, how community members experience everyday democracy when it comes to defending North Portland public spaces.

Project #6: Communicating about Climate Change: An Examination of the Impacts of the Local Shellfish Hatchery Collapse

Faculty: Dr. Paige Hall, Chemistry (hallw@up.edu)

This project will explore how climate change caused by anthropogenic carbon emissions has impacted industries in the Pacific Northwest, focusing in particular on the shellfish hatchery collapse in 2007. Using tools from chemistry, biology, and the humanities, students will prepare public-facing narratives that explain the intricate relationships between carbon emissions, ocean acidification, marine ecosystems, and the local economy. Project outputs might include story maps, videos, blogs, etc., intended for a lay audience. Students should equally incorporate both the scientific and human elements of the subject at hand, which may require conducting interviews, site visits to the hatchery, or other types of engagement with the local fishing industry and/or with scientists. Participating students should ideally have completed CHM 208 and 3 credits from BIO.

Project #7: Sustainable UP: Empowering Community Dialogue for a Greener Campus

Faculty: Dr. Ruth Dittrich, Economics (dittrich@up.edu)

This project is an effort to increase recycling and decrease recycling contamination on campus. Guided by the principles of everyday democracy, the initiative emphasizes inclusive and respectful dialogue to find common solutions to community problems. The project's specific goals include educating students about recycling practices and making UP a more sustainable place. Key activities involve creating campus-specific recycling posters, exploring composting options with student clubs, and identifying new ways to recycling more items like batteries. This project will likely involve interviews or surveys among students to gather insights and understand their recycling habits. A critical aspect of the project is developing strategies to ensure its permanence, particularly given the cyclical nature of the student population.

To apply to be a Student Fellow:

Send an email to prf@up.edu with the following:

1. Your name, year, and major(s)/minor(s). Also confirm that your schedule will allow you to enroll in CAS 391 fall and spring semesters (T 6-6:55). *Fellows must be able to participate in these courses.*
2. A response to the following questions in 1 page at most:
 - a. Why do you want to serve as a student fellow?
 - b. What academic interests, past experience, and personal strengths qualify you to participate in this year's working group in particular and/or as a PRF fellow in general (see criteria above)?
 - c. *Optional:* note which project(s) you are most interested in working on
 - d. *Optional:* If you have particular areas of interest or potential projects of your own in mind related to this year's theme, you can describe them briefly as well.
3. Your resume as an attachment.

Applications will be screened on a rolling basis throughout the summer; last chance to apply is Wednesday, August 21.