

PRF 2024-25 • EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY

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Defending the Humanities in a Time of Federal Defunding

Alongside more than 1,200 scholars, universities, and state humanities councils, the program directors received a termination notice last week cancelling the National Endowment for the Humanities grant we had received for a 3-year project to bolster connections between the humanities, other disciplines on campus, and our wider communities. Part of the widely reported budget cuts happening at every level of federal government, NEH took a particularly [large hit to its budget and staffing](#). In the face of these devastating cuts, it's important to be clear about why the humanities matter—and as our NEH-funded Civic

Humanities Working Group has been demonstrating all year, they matter because they are the bridges for building vital civic connections across our campus and in our local community. While there's a sad irony in our grant project being terminated just as we explored this year's theme of "Everyday Democracy," we're more convinced than ever that it's the practices of the humanities—things like open-ended conversation, careful reading, and thinking historically—that are what we most need in this challenging moment. So: onward! Read on for details on our upcoming [Everyday Democracy Showcase](#) and our plans for continuing the work we do.

[Want to show your support for the humanities in challenging times? Drop us a line for ways to get involved>>](#)

PRF AND THE CIVIC HUMANITIES PRESENT



THE EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY SHOWCASE

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23 • UNIVERSITY OF PORTLAND • DUNDON-BERCHTOLD HALL

Everyday Democracy Showcase

Preview: Wed., 4/23, DB Hall

Join us for our year-end showcase, highlighting the civic humanities and how things like poetry, dialogue, and the study of philosophy might help us engage with the city around us. The event will include:

- **The Civic Humanities at Work in Portland: A Roundtable**

(4:00-5:15pm, DB 133) Join for a conversation with Portland civic leaders in law, government, and nonprofit fields to explore how humanities ways of thinking show up as they engage with the city. Panelists include: An Bui (Multnomah County), Kathleen Holt (Holt Consulting), Lorelei Juntunen (ECONorthwest), Laura

Lo Forti (Vanport Mosaic), and Susan Russell (career public defender).

- **A Reception alongside Exhibits of 2024-25 PRF projects (5:15-6:15pm, DB Patio)** After the roundtable, come by the patio for drinks and appetizers while browsing student-led exhibits of this year's "Everyday Democracy" projects.
- **An Evening with Anis Mojgani: Poetry as Civic Engagement (6:15-7:30pm, DB Lounge)** We'll head into the lounge for a talk with Anis Mojgani, former poet laureate of Oregon and creator of the ["Poems at sunset out a window" project](#). Mojgani will combine readings from his work with thoughts on how we might locate the poetry in everyday city life, and the changes this might bring to ourselves and our communities.

All events are free and open to the public; join for any or all!

[Check out the event flyer here>>](#)

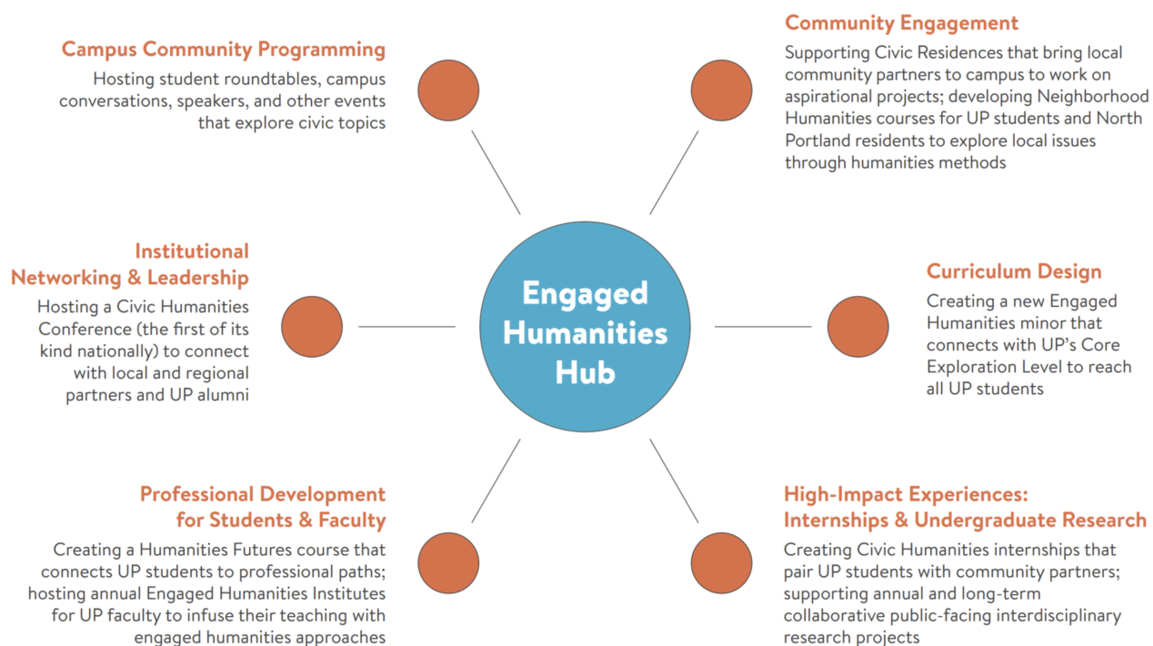
From PRF to an Engaged Humanities Hub: Program Update

The Public Research Fellows was founded in 2019 as an undergraduate research program connecting students and faculty to wider communities through publicly-engaged projects. Since its inception, we've supported 75 students and 40 faculty in the development of 34 interdisciplinary projects with outcomes ranging from online toolkits and resources, to public conversations and exhibits, to podcasts and op-eds. But we've also expanded into many other areas, hosting panels and professional development workshops, developing new curriculum, and creating connections with the local community. Five years later, and with the support of major grants like the one we just received from the Mellon Foundation, the program is ready to officially institute these facets of our work through the creation of the Engaged Humanities Hub. The Hub will continue the work of PRF and undergraduate research, while also formalizing the additional "spokes"

of campus/community engagement, curriculum building, and professional development for students and faculty. The path to a Hub includes highlights such as:

- **New engaged humanities curriculum, including the development of an Engaged Humanities minor or pathway:** we're building new engaged humanities courses that overlap with the Core and help students connect humanities practices to local communities, timely issues, and everyday life
- **The creation of a Civic Humanities Incubator:** through a \$500,000 Mellon Foundation grant, the program will build connections with the wider Portland community, including the creation of a Neighborhood Humanities curriculum that connects UP students with our North Portland neighbors to learn about civically-themed topics using humanities approaches
- **Expanded humanities-based experiential learning opportunities:** the program will continue to support publicly-engaged undergraduate research projects while expanding opportunities to put the humanities to work through the creation of Civic Humanities Internships and a Civic Residency Program that brings community partners to campus to work on local issues with UP students

[There's much more to the work ahead; learn more about these projects and the future of the program >>](#)



New Course Highlight: Engaged Humanities Futures

Last spring, PRF piloted a "Humanities Futures" workshop to help English, Philosophy, and History students use humanities mindsets and practices to imagine their own personal and professional futures.



This year, in its second iteration, the course has evolved to engage a broader cohort of liberal arts majors with the same humanities-minded professional development. Sofi Davidson, a POL and ENV major, described the usefulness of the course for her: “Taking the Humanities Futures course and integrating engaged humanities practices into both of my disciplines has strengthened my understanding of interconnectedness in addressing environmental and political challenges.”

The course’s assignments enable students to think in concrete terms about their post-grad lives. While such thinking can sometimes produce dread among college students, senior Stephanie Vasquez has found the course to offer something else: “The course is structured in a way where everyone feels comfortable sharing their post-grad plans (or lack thereof), and it’s not awkward or weird... it forces me to think about my plans in a way that is less stressful and more manageable.” As 2024 grad and participant in the original course, Lilly Grey Rudge put it, the course not only gave her confidence to search widely for her first post-grad job, but also “helped me realize that I wanted a career that aligned with my values and the things I was interested in more than I cared about the specific job title.”

[Check out the Spring 2025 Engaged Humanities Futures syllabus>>](#)



Project Spotlight: Deep Divisions

Ever found yourself facing a difficult conversation around the Thanksgiving dinner table? Dr. Sruthi Rothenfluch and student fellows Sam Lugo and Caden Robertson are on the case! Their PRF project [**“Deep Divisions: Can Polarized Beliefs be Justified?”**](#) aims to better understand political polarization and develop a toolkit to help people determine whether their own polarized beliefs are ultimately justified.

A central discovery that the “Deep Divisions” team has made is that worsening polarization is connected less to political disagreement and more to the ways we consume media today. As Lugo put it, “A key focus of our work has been analyzing shifts in media consumption, especially the rise of platforms like TikTok and their influence on voter sentiment... Through this research, we’ve become more aware of how media narratives shape public perception and have developed a more critical approach to political discussions.” For Lugo, the realizations have been transformative, “fundamentally chang[ing] how [she approaches] discussions on polarization and democratic integrity” and “reinforc[ing her] commitment to fostering media literacy and independent thinking, whether through education, policy work, or further research.”

[**Scan the QR code below to take their survey>>**](#)

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The Reading Hour: A New Tradition

For the second time this year, the program hosted "The Reading Hour" in DB Lounge. This new event aims to help us reclaim our relationship to reading and casual conversation as an act of resistance in an era that seems increasingly defined by productivity, optimization, and the devices that tether us to those practices. Students, faculty, and staff alike brought a book and read alongside each other in a simple yet profound act of slowing down in the midst of the semester's daily grind. Want to join? Be on the lookout for future Reading Hours next year.



Bringing the Humanities to Big Ideas: Portland and the Public Imagination

What is a city? A metropolitan center, of course—but it's also a series of ideas, stories, perspectives, and stereotypes that circulate within and beyond the community of people who live there. This is one of the premises that spurred PRF co-directors Jen McDaneld and Molly Hiro to launch a new Core Exploration course this semester, "Portland and the Public Imagination," one of the concrete outputs of the Civic Humanities Working Group this year.

As one of four "Big Ideas" courses that have been developed in recent years, Portland and the Public Imagination has a big enrollment (nearly 70 students!) and offers a broad series of perspectives on our city. Faculty from disciplines as diverse as Environmental Studies, Engineering, and Performing and Fine Arts visit as guest instructors to lead students through interactive lectures on topics such as Portland's cycling culture, the replacement of the Burnside Bridge, and DIY culture in the city as it shows up in the fiber arts.

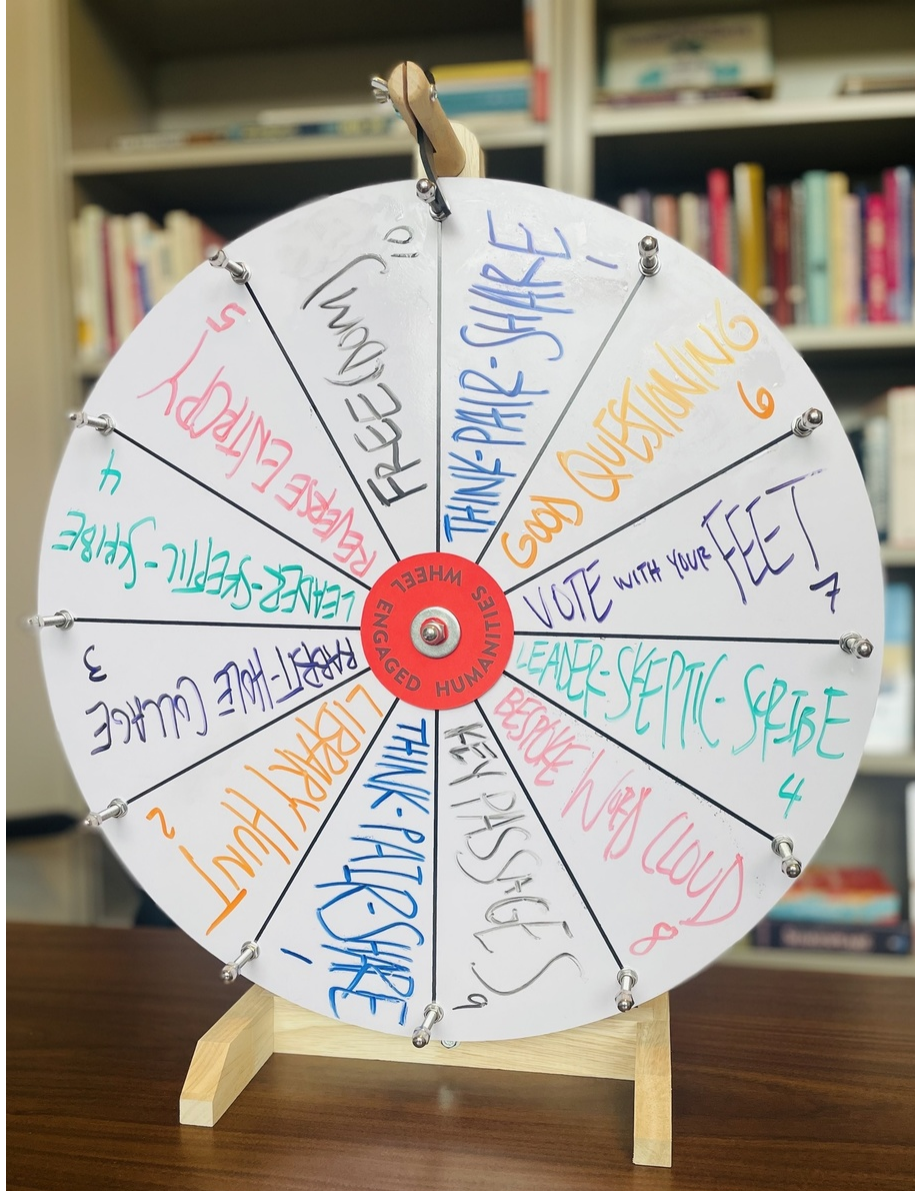
The course—a product of a PRF project by Drs. McDaneld and Hiro and two UP seniors, Sofi Davidson and Miriam Hamtil—was originally designed with an experimental bent: while all previous Big Ideas courses have been at least partially asynchronous, what would happen if we reimagined the basic structure and made them not only fully in-person but also centered on the practices of the engaged humanities? To test this, the team introduced the Engaged Humanities Wheel, an actual game-show style wheel that includes 12 different humanities-based activities, such as "Text Mining," "Library Hunt," and "Rabbit-Hole Collage"—activities that rely on practices like close reading, contextualization, open-ended conversation, curation, and reflection. On Wednesdays, a student spins the wheel at the beginning of class and then McDaneld and Hiro use whatever activity the wheel lands on to delve more deeply into the guest lecture of the week. The goal is to

use humanities ways of thinking to help the class engage with the interdisciplinary content of the course and with the city around them.

Interested in learning more? Be sure to come by the Everyday Democracy Showcase on 4/23 where the research team will be featuring material from the course.



Dr. Blair Woodard joined the class on 4/14 as guest instructor to lead students in thinking about "Global Portland." Here Woodard guides the class in thinking about the history of the Port below the bluff.



The Engaged Humanities Wheel—spun at the beginning of class every Wednesday—determines which humanities activities students will engage with that day. The wheel adds a touch of whimsy to the course but on a more serious note, also helps to codify key practices of the humanities for students.



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