Manifesto for the Humanities

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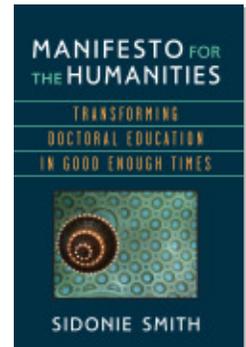Published by University of Michigan Press

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The Distributed University

Where will the university of the next decades be located? Let's start here, with an awkwardly stated, but nonetheless provocative question. This question invites those involved in higher education to think carefully about the complex institutional locus of higher education, and about the architecture and imaginary of its "thereness."

For some 200 years and more, students have settled into the niches of campuses across North America, whatever their size or geographical region, whether less than 1,000 students or more than 50,000, whether rural or urban, whether ivy, independent, or public. Those institutions have had their distinct identities, associated with historical luminaries, the cloak of ivy, land grants, the big name of the state flagship, the urban landscape, the small town, the benefactor. Students graduate certain of the place-based memories of transformative events, favorite or parodied professors, memorable parties or protests, and friendships intimate and transitory. Later, proud or curious alums return to that place, sometimes to join their generational cohort, sometimes to celebrate a child's graduation. They return as well to refurbish a memory palace filled with intellectual, social, and affectively charged recollections. At least this is the powerful mythology of the relation of alums to place-based higher education in North America. For many the myth comes close to the reality. And for many, the experience is different. They carry less than affectionate memories, or the visceral remembrance of alienation. Some secure their diploma and leave campus behind. But even then, the detachment is to place.

Increasingly, however, the place of higher learning is less an effect of geographical particularity than an effect of networks, relationships, and new kinds of academic sociality. The future of doctoral education in the humanities is imbricated in these new-model networks transecting dispersed global hubs. The ethos and sociality of the graduate experience is as well. So let's consider the various ways in which the "thereness" of higher education is shifting.

A number of public and private universities offer a swath of their degree

programs online, as Arizona State University does with over 70 undergraduate and graduate programs. Under the presidency of Michael Crow, ASU has expanded its online presence, including partnering with the nonprofit edX to offer to anyone around the world an online freshman year. Open to anyone, without application process, the eight credit-bearing courses will cost in total fees somewhere around $6,000. In such learning models, the campus is dually accessible, offline and online, and attachments mobilized through campus gates and campus portals. ASU is out front in its reach for inclusivity, accessibility, and innovation. As such, it draws applause from those who see its bold experimentation as a breakthrough to conceptualizing "the new American university," to cite Crow's coauthored book[1];and it draws jeremiads of condemnation from many who see it as the harbinger of the end of the university as it's been known and the apotheosis of the corporate university dependent on vast numbers of exploited contingent faculty and algorithmic teaching assistants.

Then there are the virtually placeless universities, the for-profit ventures offering online curricula and a virtual brand. The attraction of for-profits is the delivery of relatively low-cost education at the convenience of students, most of whom work and some of whom have little mobility or live in rural areas. For-profits are also attractive for the instrumental credentials offered to people seeking mobility in the workplace; and that includes graduate degrees. But trends in the recent past put the brakes on the pace of expansion of for-profit higher education, including graduate education. After a stunning expansion, the for-profit higher education sector is currently contracting, due in large part to the scandals related to admissions practices, graduation rates, and loan default rates. The lax standards of support for students and the voracious garnering of the federal government's student loan monies exposed the exploitative ethos of a for-profit sector that approaches students as moneymakers and the federal government as a source of cash investment and the route to profit. Further, the almost total reliance on a part-time faculty without the protections of academic freedom and participation in faculty governance exposes the increasingly exploitative conditions of instructional labor upon which for-profits are built. Nonetheless, for-profits remain a significant sector of virtually administered higher education.

There are also new ventures, nascent, hybrid, and ambitious in their aspirations to model new cultures of higher education through distributed locations and networks. The University of the People, founded by education entrepreneur Shai Reshef in 2009,defines itself as "the world's first non-profit, tuition-free, accredited online university dedicated to opening the gates to higher education for all individuals otherwise constrained."[2] A collaborative venture joining NYU, Yale, and nonprofit foundations, among them the

Clinton Global Initiative, the Haitian Connection, the OpenCourseWare Consortium, and sponsoring corporations, UoPeople offers associate and bachelor's degrees in the fields of computer science and business administration through a fee-based model.[3] Here, the curriculum is assembled through open courseware, and the pedagogical model is peer-to-peer learning.[4] Students are distributed across disparate locations; administrative gears of the enterprise move along global networks; and affective attachments trend toward aspirational horizons rather than retrospective memories of place.

A second model of globally dispersed higher education comes from Minerva Schools at Keck Graduate Institute. The Minerva project promotes a concept of elite, affordable for-profit education (at $10,000 per year), enrolling high-performing students from around the world whom the program grooms for leadership through flipped classrooms and high expectations of intensive in-class intellectual exchange and inquiry. Students and faculty spend each year in a different global city, beginning in San Francisco, moving to Buenos Aires and Berlin, Hong Kong and Mumbai, where in-person classes and access to online open courseware are offered in local space. The achievements of such alternative models to place-based institutions of higher education, the former expanding outward in the catchment of potential students but limited to education in computer science and business, the latter zeroing in on a highly filtered set of admissions criteria and going for small, remain to be seen. Academics and entrepreneurs in these and other ventures have yet to resolve pressing issues of accreditation, degree status, and a sustainable funding model that would make them scalable options.

Bricks and mortar also travel now. Research universities have opened campuses elsewhere around the world. New York University in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates) and American University in Dubai (also UAE) are but two of the 200-plus branch campuses awarding degrees surveyed in 2012 by the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education in Britain.[5] Universities have also established transnational institutes and training consortia, such as Georgia Tech Ireland, a translational research institute joining Georgia Institute of Technology with National University of Ireland, Galway, the University of Limerick, and corporate research divisions to advance basic technology in STEM fields. Some research universities have built entirely new kinds of institutions, such as Yale-NUS (National University of Singapore) College. This liberal arts college is housed on the NUS campus, coconstituted with Yale, but remains distinct from both institutions in its faculty, students, and common curriculum.

These initiatives in distributed higher education of well-known educational brands provide certain benefits for students and for institutions. For universities, the attraction of transnational campuses and programs is the

extension of the university brand, which ratchets up prestige factors central to international rankings; expands the pool of applicants and tuition dollars; creates access for students to transnational experiences and learning assets; and opens potential new funding sources deriving from partnerships with private corporations and national research bodies distributing grant support.[6] For receiving institutions, the attraction is the imprimatur of the global brand; access to more capacious research expertise; enhanced training opportunities for students; and the potential for transforming global cities into world-class knowledge economies. For students, in one place and of other places, the attraction can be proximity of educational resources, accessibility, flexibility in certification, and introduction to the practices, fields, and futures of a Western-model higher education and the cultural capital of a global brand.

The potential impacts on higher education of bricks-and-mortar universities building campuses and program collaborations overseas can be troubling as well. To suggest only one of the complex dynamics at play here, think of the promise of adapting prestige models of higher education to local sites, student populations, and cultural milieus. The potential upside includes the intensification of intellectual and research exchange; the preparation of students for the global marketplace and jobs of the future; and the greater diversity of perspectives needed to define, anticipate, and contribute to addressing grand challenges, such as the challenge of educational justice. The potential downside includes the increasing corporate footprint within research and learning environments; the erasure of local traditions of knowledge production; the privileging of certain models of higher education associated with elite institutions in the United States and Britain; the skewing of the concept of a liberal arts education to science, technology, engineering, and business degree programs; the erosion of academic freedom, the tenure system, and faculty governance when foundational values of the U.S. academy do not travel and when large percentages of the faculty are contractual employees; and the exploitative conditions for those laborers who build these bricks-and-mortar campuses.[7]

A more interesting and consequential model of distributed higher education from my point of view involves the consortial networks that join faculty and students across institutions. In Europe, the Bologna declaration brought Eurozone institutions into the European Higher Education Area, facilitating the movement of students from one country to another to pursue comparable academic degrees. In issuing the Salzburg Principles in 2005, the EHEA established a common discourse and a collective vision: "The intention is to allow the diversity of national systems and universities to be maintained while the European Higher Education Area improves transparency between higher education systems, as well as implements tools to facilitate recogni-

tion of degrees and academic qualifications, mobility, and exchanges between institutions."[8] In terms of graduate education, the Bologna declaration aims to enhance excellence through comparability and transferability and to realize opportunities for innovative cross-institutional joint degree programs.[9] In this way, students can imagine themselves as entering a far larger "higher education area" than offered by an individual campus and as bearing a credential as recognizable, consequential, and mobilizing as the common passport.[10]

In the United States as well, thought leaders have been calling for intranational research networks, as members of the National Research Council of the National Academies did in their 2012 white paper recommending greater collaboration among constellations of research universities across the United States.[11] That same year, James J. Duderstadt issued "A Master Plan for Higher Education in the Midwest." President emeritus of the University of Michigan, Duderstadt urged "midwestern states, governments, and institutions" to "develop a more systemic and strategic perspective of its educational, research, and cultural institutions—public and private, formal and informal— that views these knowledge resources as comprising a knowledge ecology" and to "shift from Balkanized competition to collaboration to achieve common interests, creating regional partnerships capable of responding to global imperatives."[12]

These trends in shifting the "where-ness" of higher education, by disarticulating teaching and learning from a singular home base, increasingly impact academic humanists. Humanities scholars have long found their intellectual compeers in other institutions in the United States and abroad; they have participated in and led scholarly societies that reach across the globe; they have started and supported scholarly journals and collaborated in large-scale projects of editing or translation; they have taught in study-abroad programs. What is different at this historical moment is the intensification of cross-institutional collaborative activity in the humanities and opportunities for modeling collaborative graduate education.

More or less elaborate, more or less formal transnational collaborations at the humanities program level have launched or are in the pilot phase. Some are "pop-up" programs outside the normative credentialing process requiring contractual arrangements, such as the Tri-national Summer School in American Studies joining students and faculty from Georgia State University (United States), the University of Mainz (Germany), and Beijing University (China) for intensive summer seminars. Some are consortial, such as the Mellon-funded collaboratories organized through the transnational Consortium for Humanities Centers and Institutes, founded in 1988.[13] CHCI has piloted several initiatives. The Medical Humanities Network connects six institutions around the globe "to contribute to the ways medicine and the humanities are taught and

practiced."[14] The Humanities for the Environment project designates a five-member partnership spanning the globe focused on "the role of the humanities in a period of planetary crisis and change." And the Religion, Secularism, and Political Belonging project tasks partner institutions to explore "new approaches to religious and cultural criticism and understanding."[15]

Then there are the inter- and intranational relationships joining scholarly inquiry and doctoral training through centerNet, the "international network of digital humanities centers." Linking humanities scholars and students around the world, centerNet provides a commons for "sharing and building on projects, tools, staff, and expertise" and serves as a clearinghouse for information about emergent methods of scholarly inquiry and modes of scholarly communication.[16] As well, the influential HASTAC (Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory), cofounded by Cathy N. Davidson and David Theo Goldberg, mounts innovative annual conferences; networks HASTAC scholars working in digital media; encourages blogging on topics of critical importance to innovative thinking about the future of higher education and the humanities; and administers the MacArthur Foundation Digital Media and Learning Competition.[17]

In the United States, regional initiatives in humanities programs and scholarship are pursuing the benefits of cross-institutional responses to the big challenges ahead in higher education and in the humanities. In the spirit of Duderstadt's call, the Mellon Foundation funded the Humanities Without Walls initiative, directed by Dianne Harris out of the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.[18] HWW brings together directors of humanities centers and institutes across 15 Midwestern universities—the flagship state universities of the new "Big Ten" plus Chicago, Notre Dame, and University of Illinois–Chicago—to model innovative cross-institutional collaborations in doctoral preparation and in humanities scholarship on the topic of the "Global Midwest." And, at a more local level, interinstitutional collaboration has begun to organize the delivery of graduate education differently. In the Research Triangle area of North Carolina, Duke University and the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill have built on long-standing collaborative relationships to initiate what they describe as "the first public-private joint venture in German graduate education in the nation," a venture that "pools" library and faculty resources.[19]

Networks of humanities institutes and digital humanities centers drive the distributed ecologies of advanced learning at the forefront of transforming doctoral education in the humanities. Here are the salient features of their contribution to change. They leverage relationships to offer alternatives to on-campus, course-based teaching and learning. In this way, they expand the number of potential faculty mentors and the size of the cohort of students

pursuing mutual interests in fields, topics, and methods. They enact a new mode of scholarly inquiry in the humanities, modeling the benefits (and the difficult work) of building collaborative relationships. They intensify the synergies, intellectual heft, motivations, responsibilities, and routes through which to achieve at once the aims of an individual scholar and the goals of a network of scholars. And they focus considerable intellectual firepower on contributing to the grand challenges confronting the world now: sustainability, the politics of testimony, and the effects of and responses to the radical displacement of peoples, to suggest only a few of them.

On a practical level, networks attract external funding from foundations seeding new modes of scholarly inquiry in the humanities, among them Mellon, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The grant-funded collaborative ventures provide financial support (travel funding, fellowship support) to graduate students involved in large-scale research initiatives, such as the Early Modern Conversions project organized by Paul Yachnin out of McGill University's Institute for the Public Life of Arts and Ideas, funded by SSHRC, and involving 15 partner institutions in North America, Europe, and Australia. Further, they pool resources of all kinds to offer training institutes that enable graduate students to gain new skills and hone competencies. CHCI's Integrative Graduate Humanities Education and Research Training project (IGHERT), for instance, joins faculty and graduate students at four institutions to "engage graduate students in a series of collaborative training and research activities," designed as models for scalable and portable professional development.[20] These initiatives multiply the effects of networking extended across institutions and transnationally. They secure students in expansive intellectual fellowship that can help keep them motivated and affectively grounded in a sense of common purpose.

Bricks and mortar are still the sine qua non housing the people, values, curriculum, and hardware that drive higher education; but they are no longer the only "where" of the university. Indeed, as Cathy N. Davidson observes in *The Future of Thinking*, "institutions" of higher education are better understood "as mobilizing networks."[21] And Rosi Braidotti talks of the university as "a hub of both localized knowledge production and global transmission of cognitive data," a condition that "need not necessarily result in either de-humanizing or disembedding the university, but in new forms of re-grounding and of accountability."[22] Release from a bounded location of higher learning; mobility of faculty, students, curricula, and ideas; interinstitutional sociality; multi-institutional networks of scholarly inquiry—all create what Dan Atkins describes as a "new ecology or culture of learning enabled by cyberinfrastructure."[23]

Given these trends in the multilocationality of institutions of higher education, humanists of the next several decades will find themselves entering a bricks-and-mortar classroom and, at the same time, participating in transregional or transnational activities. They will negotiate teaching and knowledge production in virtual learning spaces via all sizes of screens and formats of connection. Their students will find advising in face-to-face and one-on-one encounters and in face-to-face screenings across vast distances. Those students will share virtual classrooms with students from other universities. Graduate directors, chairs, and deans will imagine and implement new structures and evaluative protocols to seed, support, and preserve innovative programs and new scholarly ecologies.

I started out asking, "Where will one go when one goes to the 21st university?" The answer is multilayered. To the site of bricks and mortar. To a virtual portal. To a network of institutions in globally disparate locations. To a hub in a distributed array of partnerships. To a conjunction of brands. To a sociality of peers, mentors, and strangers. In this succession of answers, the relationship of the materiality of the university, its geographical location, and its named identity disarticulate and rearticulate in interesting, complex, and sometimes troubling ways.

At once here and elsewhere around the globe, mortar and code, structure and network; at once bounded and permeable, insular and collaborative, corporatist and socially responsible; the university morphs into a conjunction of distributed nodes and heterogeneous networks of scholar/learners. The university of today participates in distributed ecologies of inquiry. It is crisscrossed by heterogeneous cultures of learning and teaching. It is animated along interlocking infrastructures that condense time, reorganize space, and realign scholarly identities and relationships. It is entangled in capitalist logics and utopian disruptions.