Manifesto for the Humanities

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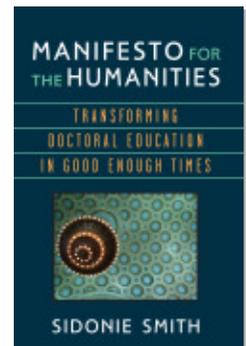Published by University of Michigan Press

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Manifesto for a Sustainable Humanities

Anxieties about the vitality of the humanities within higher education run high. So, too, do anxieties about the evolving conditions of working as academic humanists. For some, talk of change, with its rhetoric of urgency, becomes a trigger for holding fast to certain understandings of the life of the academic humanist. For others, it is a conundrum and a headache. I see it as an occasion to think purposefully about how to meet future challenges and how to calibrate the potential upsides of transformation.

So here is my manifesto for a sustainable humanities, one that can meet the Grand Challenges facing the university in the next decades.

- *Preserve the intimacy of the small*, and steward the distinctiveness of the local while recognizing the attraction of global networks and the new configurations of "thereness" in institutions of higher education.
- *Forge a new ethics and praxis of scholarly communication*, simultaneously sustaining commitment to the long-form argument, and recognizing and pursuing myriad alternative forms and media for communicating our work.
- *Reconceptualize the scholarly ecology as a flexible collaboratory*, one that positions the scholar as singular producer of knowledge, and also as a member of a collaborative assemblage involving students, colleagues, computer engineers and graphic designers, project managers, and strangers of the crowd as well as algorithm, code, platform, and protocol.
- *Rethink the relationship to scholarship*, loosening the hold of an ownership model of scholarly work and closed system of communication by appropriating the best that open-access promises.
- *Relish the commitment to teaching* through innovations in the classroom, among them explorations of participatory and project-based humanities inquiry, adaptation of interactive technologies, and mobilization of flipped classrooms, hybrid classrooms, and cross-institutional learning collaboratories.

- *Commit to being here, there, and everywhere* that policies are being made, new e-research initiatives placed on the drawing board, codes and architectures affecting humanities research discussed; or call attention, insistently, unabashedly, to the absence of humanists at the table.
- *Remain self-reflexive about* the complex dance of singularity, networked relationality, and adaptive technological extension that complicates the self-understanding of what it means to be a humanist now.
- *Encompass in discourse, project, and vision all members of the humanities communities*—graduate and undergraduate students, non-tenure-track faculty, humanists in our libraries and institutes, our digital labs and administration, tenure-track faculty, associate faculty, full professors, and humanists who are administrators[1] and seize opportunities to build networks with professional and lay humanists in local communities and around the globe.
- *Transform doctoral education to realize this 21st-century agenda.*

Reconceptualizing doctoral education is critical to meeting the grand challenge of sustaining the centrality of the humanities to a liberal arts and the centrality of the liberal arts to the university and society. Let me turn, then, to my vision for, and argument on behalf of, a posttraditional doctoral education in the humanities.