NEH Humanities Connections and the Digital Community Engagement Pathway

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Overview

1. Humanities Connections
2. DCEP Overview
3. Institutional Support
4. Project Teams
5. Planning Practices
1. Humanities Connections
Goal of Humanities Connections

- To create innovative, interdisciplinary undergraduate programs at 2- and 4-year institutions
- Planning and implementation stages for projects
- Imagine programming that plays upon the strengths of humanities disciplines, such as valuing the interpretive possibilities of ambiguity.
2. Digital Community Engagement Pathway
The Digital Community Engagement Pathway

◆ Program to increase success rates for underserved students
◆ Interdisciplinary teams of students, faculty, and community partners research local manifestations of global problems
◆ Apply digital methods in research design, including data mining, mapping, storytelling, networking, and cultural analytics
◆ Example topics: nutrition and food access, intergenerational communication, poverty’s manifestations across rural and urban environments
Rationale

◆ Exclusion of humanities disciplines from discussions of global problems despite the importance of studying culture to understand systemic social and geopolitical issues

◆ Conversation on campus to expand availability of high impact practices (HIPs): activities including undergraduate research, community-based learning, and capstones

◆ HIPs improve personal and social development and increase deep learning, practical competence, and speaking and writing ability by more than 50% (AAC&U)
Project Components

1. Recruitment of incoming freshman with funding to participate in the program
2. Reciprocal, ongoing relationship with embedded community partners
3. One-week research summits each summer of the program
4. Shared courses each year that replace general education requirements with weekly work in small, interdisciplinary research teams
1. Recruitment

- Building Faculty Connections with Incoming Freshmen
- Advertising Program to and through Admissions Officers
- Offering Financial Support
2. Community Partnerships

- Representatives from community organizations will be embedded in research teams.
- Research team produce work each year designed to meet specific needs of community organizations.
3. Summer Research Summits

| Year 1 | Presentations by community organization to introduce problems; students attend break-out sessions to consider needs across diverse geographic, cultural, and social situations. Summit culminates in students forming interdisciplinary teams and choosing area of focus |
| Year 2 | Students participate in a one-week, intensive research experience |
| Year 3 | Students learn about digital research design and share concept map of their problem |
| Year 4 | Students share their collaborative project at the summit, begin preparing for Year 4 independent research, and attend sessions on grad school preparation |
4. Curricular Research Team Model

◆ Students collaborate with faculty mentor and interdisciplinary research team
◆ Integrate readings from diverse fields, including history, literature, anthropology, sociology, and the sciences to study the problem using critical thinking, writing, and qualitative and quantitative research
Example Research Team Curriculum

Food sustainability Research Team:

◆ Read essays from Wendell Berry’s *Bringing it to the Table*, bell hooks’s *Belonging*, and William Cronon’s *Nature’s Metropolis* to deepen understanding of the social and cultural implications of their problem.

◆ Work with Extension Service to create an interactive visualization about the encroachment of housing development on farmland with digital stories about its cultural, environmental, and socioeconomic impacts.
3. Institutional Support
Humanities Connections requires a letter from the institution and evidence that the planning will result in outcomes even if you are testing feasibility.

**Funding**
What kind of funding will you need beyond the planning period to make the project sustainable?

**Buy-In**
How will you convince faculty to participate in the program? What can administrators provide to help with that?

**Interdisciplinarity**
How will you successfully help faculty collaborate outside departments and colleges?
4. Devising Project Teams
Change efforts typically start with “high-participating faculty”—those who actively engage in initiatives to strengthen student learning and connect with other equally invested faculty (Dolinsky Graham, 2015)
## Stakeholders to Include in Planning Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>What departments are they coming from? What skills do they bring? Is there a mix of faculty who embrace change and those who are more sceptical?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
<td>How often will administrators be involved? How can they help with decision making and institutional support?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Services</td>
<td>How can you take a full institutional approach? Consider including Office of Retention, Student Involvement, Admissions, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Institutions</td>
<td>Could you partner with other institutions in your system? Community colleges in the region?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>How might you involve students in the decision making process? Should they serve on the committee? Should they be surveyed?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Members</td>
<td>How might the project impact the community? How can you involve community members in the decision making process?</td>
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5. Planning Practices
Consider the Whole Student

How will the program integrate into all aspects of the student experience:

- Housing
- Funding
- Mentorship
- Advising
- Major Requirements and Course Load
- Student Organizations
Meeting Interdisciplinary Challenges

◆ Confront disciplinary misconceptions head-on
◆ Work together to establish program goals early
◆ Discuss student outcomes that are discipline-specific and faculty concerns about how the program might compromise them
◆ Drive into the skid: when difficulties arise in the planning conversation, confront them directly as sites of possible innovation
Collaborating Cross-Institutionally

◆ Leave significant leeway to discuss each institution’s culture, structure, and needs
◆ Devise practices for students and not just project staff to collaborate
◆ Plan site visits to see work at all institutions in action
Consider Institutional Structure

◆ How will you reward faculty participation? Consider tenure and promotion in addition to creative methods for monetary compensation

◆ How will you balance general education and major benchmarks with the demands of the program?

◆ What funding structures are already available on campus for students and how can they be reimagined?
Include the Broader Institution

- Inform other faculty and administrators of the project early.
- Include multiple opportunities to receive feedback, including surveys, interviews, and institution-wide presentations of materials.
- Keep an up-to-date website with discussion forums available.
Collaborate with the Community

- Reciprocity is the key to successful community collaborations
- Establish wants and needs of the institution and the community organization up front
- Find meaningful opportunities for community members to embed in course work and vice versa
- Discuss issues of reciprocity and ethical responsibility frequently with students
Citations and Further Reading


Thanks!

Any questions?

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