

UCOP 20th Anniversary Grant Proposal

Submitted by UC Davis Humanities Institute and UC Merced Faculty Partners

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Environmental Humanities: Anchoring Science Collaborations in the Humanities

We are at this moment at a crossroads in humanities research. In the twenty years since the founding of the UC Humanities Research Institute, the separation between the humanities and sciences has become notably more permeable. With the rise of new humanities scholarship in technology, medicine, food and nutrition, animal studies, and, particularly environmental studies, humanists are finding themselves presented with a unique opportunity to partner with the sciences and bring cultural, historical, and theoretical knowledge to bear on the issues and questions posed by lab-based research. Humanities Centers like the DHI are increasingly aware of the need to match-make between the humanities and the sciences, to locate collaborative funding opportunities, and to ask how the humanities might best inform scientific practices.

These collaborations present tremendous opportunities for humanists. And they are already generating cautionary tales. “Environmental Humanities” would bring together humanities faculty at UC Davis and UC Merced with a small group of leading environmental studies scholars to begin to develop a set of best practices for humanists who collaborate with scientists on real-world environmental concerns. This would strengthen collaborations between two neighboring campuses with complementary strengths, and it would offer a starting point for either a UCHRI residential research group on the same topic or a multi-campus research group on the place of the humanities within science inquiry in general. Most importantly, it would allow us to get a bird’s eye view of the collective work being done at this moment. Through peer-to-peer conversation, dialogue with colleagues in the sciences, and input from senior scholars in the field, participants will begin to develop a set of best practices for science-engaged humanities research.

The Davis Humanities Institute is proposing this conference because it is the right time to consider what factors enable this kind of collaborative work to produce the best outcome for *humanities* research. To put it bluntly, it is easy for humanists to find themselves a “sprinkle on the cupcake” when they partner with the sciences. The complex structure of grant proposals in the sciences and the need to meet the new cross-disciplinary requirements of grantors like the National Science Foundation encourages scientists to write projects with humanities scholars added on, rather than integrated into the core questions being asked. Humanities scholars often have higher teaching loads, and lower research budgets, thereby putting them at a disadvantage with time and resources to contribute to collaborations. Even within their own colleges, it can be difficult to determine how to value such collaborating humanists. There are not clear rewards for the repeated grant proposal writing, lengthy cross-disciplinary conversations, and co-authored articles that are required for humanists working with scientists.

At the same time, there is a convergence between scientists who value the humanities and humanists who are interested in applied research. This is particularly true in the fields of environmental humanities/environmental sciences. At UC Davis, the Environmental Justice Project within the John Muir Institute on the Environment, directed by Julie Sze, an American

Studies scholar, trains graduate students in the humanities, social sciences, and the sciences to work collaboratively with community groups to identify problems such as pollution, transportation, and development *and* to consider the place of race, class, gender—indeed *culture*—in arriving at sustainable solutions. The head of the EPA-funded Air Quality Center at UC Davis is working with cultural studies scholars and anthropologists to frame the renewal application for the 40 million dollar project. Most humanists who work on environmental issues have been approached to collaborate with scientists who increasingly see the relevance of considering history, race, class, gender, literature, and art in their problem solving. And there are increasing numbers of faculty producing scholarship on the environment that intersects with scientific inquiries. Faculty and graduate students from English, History, Art History, American Studies, Landscape Architecture, and Community and Regional Planning have come together to create the Environmental Humanities Research Cluster at the Davis Humanities Institute (http://dhi.ucdavis.edu/?page_id=13#eh).

Environmental issues are also central at UC Merced, a campus that was deliberately planned and designed as a model of physical sustainability and sees environmental stewardship as part of its mission on campus and in the broader community. In laying claim to being the first American research university of the 21st century, UC Merced seeks to draw upon the scientific expertise of its faculty to provide intellectual and policy leadership on environmental issues in the Central Valley, the state and beyond. This commitment has been reflected in hiring priorities at UC Merced, where faculty in the sciences far outnumber those in the humanities. At the same time, however, small numbers of faculty in the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts are producing strong, humanities-focused environmental research. This conference presents an opportunity to support that humanistic work at moment when UC Merced is defining its campus priorities. It also invites us to consider whether humanities contributions to an issue like the environment are distinct from those of social scientists and if so, how their value can best be articulated within science and social-science focused administrative environments on our campuses.

We have to be careful, from a humanities perspective, in equating partnerships with success. We have yet to determine the degree to which humanities approaches are actually influencing scientific practice. We know anecdotally that humanists can feel outnumbered at the table when framing projects with scientists and that humanities scholars often feel the pressure to justify why literature, culture, or theory might be useful tools for applied problem solving. What we need at this moment, on these two campuses, in the field of environmental studies/environmental humanities, and, we would argue, across the UC where humanities are increasingly being asked to dialogue with the sciences, is a clear sense of what factors enable these collaborations to produce *humanities-informed questions and answers*.

Thus, we propose a one-day conference in Davis in the spring of 2008 that brings together faculty from UC Davis and UC Merced, as well as leading environmental scholars and writers from outside the UC system, for a conversation framed by humanities scholars but that reaches out to and draws in scientists who are willing to listen. We envision a series of panels featuring humanities faculty from the two partnering campuses. Participants from UC Davis would include Ari Kelman (History), Timothy Morton (English), Michael Rios (Landscape Architecture), Julie Sze (American Studies), Simon Sadler (Art History), Cecelia Tsu (History), Louis Warren

(History), and Michael Ziser (English). From UC Merced, we will feature Jan Goggans and Gregg Camfield, both literary critics and faculty in the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts. Panels would also include the perspectives of scientists who have experience working collaboratively with humanities scholars, like Deb Niemeier who heads the John Muir Institute of the Environment and Anthony Wexler of the Air Quality Research Center at UC Davis. Appropriate counterparts from UC Merced would also be invited to participate.

Core questions addressed would include:

- What are the best practices in intellectual collaborations between humanists and scientists in environmental research?
- What is the role of administrative support or oversight in these projects?
- How can humanities centers best support humanities faculty undertaking such collaborations (campus and multi-campus matchmaking? Pro-active grant support? Interdisciplinary research group support?)
- How can humanities scholars maintain the integrity of our disciplines within a science-driven climate that demands science-driven deliverables?
- Can and should humanities scholars critique the methods or conclusions of their science partners in collaborative research?
- How can we train graduate students in the humanities to take advantage of funding and co-authoring opportunities in the sciences?

Keynote speakers might include Linda Nash, author of the award-winning *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge*, or William Cronon, whose 1986 book *Changes in the Land* helped launch the new environmental history. Other possibilities are public intellectuals or journalists who work on environmental issues such as Jennifer Price, Mike Davis, or Rebecca Solnit, and renowned poet, environmental activist and UC Davis professor emeriti Gary Snyder.

We are requesting \$5,000 to fund space rental and tech support at the UC Davis Alumni Center (\$750), refreshments for the conference (\$250), travel, lodging, food and honoraria for the two featured UC Merced faculty (\$1,000), travel, lodging and honoraria for two keynote speakers (\$2,000), and publicity materials for the conference (\$1,000).

This conference would be supported by the UC Davis Humanities Institute. We would provide support staff for the planning process, facilitate and promote the event on both campuses and beyond, and ensure that this conference results in a system-wide program for the following year (residential group at UCHRI, broader conference, and/or Multi Campus Research Group). To guarantee the event's success, the DHI has also secured a verbal commitment from Anthony Wexler, director of the EPA Air Quality Center at Davis, to augment UCHRI funding were we to receive it.

We at the DHI, along with our UC Merced faculty partners, thank the committee for considering this proposal. We are very enthusiastic about the impact such a conference would have on our campuses and, at the next phase, on our ability to advocate for the importance of the humanities in scientific "partnerships" system-wide.