

School of Humanities and Sciences

# EMPOWERING SCHOLARS FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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Exploring the ideas, cultures, and peoples that shape the human experience helps us to understand the past, question the present, and imagine a better future. By advancing and amplifying humanities research, Stanford Public Humanities ensures that ideas generated by faculty and students reach a broad and diverse public—where they can have a larger impact on society.



# WIDENING THE CIRCLE

## About Stanford Public Humanities

The humanities, arts, and social sciences are wellsprings of critical and creative thinking about the human experience and the challenges we face today. Researchers in these fields cultivate our understanding of the world's diverse cultures, histories, languages, and experiences, but their insights do not always reach beyond academic circles. Stanford Public Humanities (formerly known as the Changing Human Experience initiative) funds promising research across these disciplines and teaches faculty and students how to share their work more widely to deepen public discourse on the issues of our time.

## Public Engagement Training

*Students and faculty who participate in Stanford Public Humanities courses and workshops gain the practical skills they need to share their expertise with the public—from writing op-eds and securing literary agents to recording podcasts. More than 60 faculty, representing 22 departments across four schools, have participated since the program launched in 2020. In addition, more than 200 graduate and undergraduate students have taken courses on pitching and publishing their work, resulting in more than 100 publications.*

## SHINING A LIGHT ON UNDOCUMENTED LIFE

“I’m writing this book because I need more people to try and understand this life,” Los Angeles-based artist Alix Dick once explained to her co-author, Stanford associate professor of education Antero Garcia. Dick and Garcia’s forthcoming book, *The Cost of Convenience: Accounting for Undocumented American Life*, recounts Dick’s experiences as an undocumented immigrant within a scholarly framework to illustrate the challenges of undocumented life. Garcia credits his participation in a Public Humanities trade book workshop for helping him and Dick secure a literary agent and the publishing contract that will make it possible for them to reach a public audience with their work. Public Humanities brings in top agents and editors at leading publishers, such as Random House and Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, to run workshops like the one attended by Garcia.

## INTERACTING WITH PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS

Who better to share practical advice with the next generation of public intellectuals than today’s thought leaders? The “What Is a Public Intellectual Today?” speaker series brings respected scholars, authors, and artists to Stanford for in-depth discussions with faculty and students. The talks are open to the entire Stanford community and the public. Recent speakers have included Wesley Morris, critic-at-large at the *New York Times* and a staff writer at the *New York Times Magazine*; Maggie Nelson, a scholar, poet, and essayist whose books include *The Argonauts*, *Bluets*, and *On Freedom*; and acclaimed author and scholar Cathy Park Hong, whose book of essays, *Minor Feelings*, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.



A faculty workshop on magazine writing with Joshua Rothman, ideas editor at the *New Yorker*.

## Humanities Research Intensive

*The Humanities Research Intensive provides first- and second-year students across the humanities a rare opportunity to develop research skills early in their academic journeys. Guided by an interdisciplinary team of humanities professors, the weeklong course gives students hands-on experience in a variety of university archives and collections during spring break. Students develop basic research skills, build close relationships with faculty mentors and other students, and gain the confidence to conduct future research.*

### THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY

Reading about history is one thing, but as Stanford students can attest, touching it, holding it in your hands, is another. During the inaugural *Humanities Research Intensive* course in 2019, Elaine Treharne—the Roberta Bowman Denning Professor in the School of Humanities and Sciences—and Caroline Winterer—the William Robertson Coe Professor of History and American Studies—led 15 students to the Hoover Institution Library & Archives, where they handled historical materials related to war, revolution, and peace. For Treharne, one of the most powerful moments during the week was when Hoover curators unveiled a series of documents, including the piece of paper that contained the order to drop nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. “I said to the students, ‘Can you imagine the human impact of these pieces of paper on this one table?’ And there was an absolutely resounding silence.”

### A BRIDGE TO FUTURE RESEARCH

It “can be difficult to approach humanistic research,” says Elijah Negron, ’25, a philosophy and religious studies major with a minor in classical languages. Negron took the *Humanities Research Intensive* course as a sophomore in 2023. A highlight for Negron was visiting Stanford’s David Rumsey Map Center and studying a map called “The Bridge to Total Freedom,” which depicts the spiritual journey of a Scientologist. “It showed me how, with a little elbow grease, you can pull an incredible amount of information out of a seemingly very straightforward item,” he says. Students who complete the course are eligible for research grants in the following year. Negron obtained funding for a project he hopes will evolve into his senior thesis.



Author Elif Batuman, PhD '07, in conversation with Professor of English Mark Greif.

## Humanities Seed Grants

*Stanford Public Humanities awards seed grants to faculty members who are interested in producing innovative research and sharing their findings with the public. To date, 52 faculty members from four schools have received grants. Their projects have contributed to the public discourse on a wide range of issues, from the cultural effects of climate change to the role that universities should play in society. Similarly, the Undergraduate Researcher Program awards seed grants to undergraduates.*

### CONNECTING GENERATIONS THROUGH HAIKU

Yoshiko Matsumoto, the Yamato Ichihashi Chair of Japanese History and Civilization at Stanford, wanted to know how communities could be more inclusive of older adults with dementia. She found a surprising solution in the form of haiku, a short poetic form in Japan. With the support of a Humanities Seed Grant, she showed that when students connected with older people and created haiku together, it fostered personal connections. “Haiku is like a snapshot of scenery or emotion,” explains Matsumoto. “So even if someone can’t really create a very logical sentence, that is actually a benefit rather than a detriment.” Creating haiku often sparked deeper conversations about other topics. The impact of this work inspired Matsumoto to create *Sharing Conversations Across Generations: The Magic of Haiku*, a course in which students explore issues of aging and inclusivity and meet with older adults to write haiku.



# IT TAKES ALL OF US, INCLUDING YOU.

We don't just measure success by what happens at Stanford—the Stanford Public Humanities initiative aims to create pathways for faculty and students to share their work far beyond the university and deepen public discourse on the issues that shape our lives.

Fostering a culture that values the humanities requires support from our alumni and friends alike. We hope you will join us in advocating for this important effort.

Stanford Public Humanities is an initiative of the School of Humanities and Sciences. For more information, please visit [publichumanities.stanford.edu](http://publichumanities.stanford.edu).

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