

**What is *working*—
in helping to expand the possible “uses” of humanities graduate education?
Katina Rogers**

The career preparation I find most successful often emerges as a side effect of other reforms—and that is something that brings me a lot of hope. This may be surprising coming from someone who is rather known as a career diversity person (with only myself to blame, having published *Putting the Humanities PhD to Work* in 2020 and edited the now-dormant #Alt-Ac online publication for several years prior). But it makes me think that, while we absolutely need to be talking about the material realities and labor conditions of scholarly work, the way to expand engaged humanistic inquiry and meaningful careers for graduate students may in fact be to look at the question at a slant.

What I have noticed—through that writing, my consulting work with universities across North America, and my work at CUNY Graduate Center and other institutions—is that the application of humanities training to a wide range of fields tends to follow naturally on really interesting, vibrant, creative research questions. When departments find ways to encourage students to really dig into the areas that spark their curiosity and commitments, the resulting research tends to crackle with insight and unfold organically in unexpected directions.

As one example, consider the remarkable graphic dissertation of Kay Sohini, [Drawing Unbelonging](#). Dr. Sohini earned her PhD from Stony Brook University's English program in 2022. She didn't create this beautiful, brilliant dissertation in order to find a job; she created it because her research led her this way, and because drawing and writing is how she expresses complex thought. But the dissertation has already had an impact on her career; her work has been published in *The Washington Post*, *The Nib*, and the NYC Department of Education, and she has a book coming out this year (*This Beautiful, Ridiculous City*; Penguin Random House 2024).

Dr. Sohini may be an outlier—very few people could hope to create such a project!—but it's the principle behind her work that is so exciting for what humanities graduate education could be. Rather than push her work into a predetermined form, she was able to let it be expansive, exuberant. I have found the same thing to be true on a smaller scale in the classroom with students at all stages. In 2023, I taught a graduate course called *Power, Precarity, and Care* in the Digital Humanities. Students had a great deal of freedom in deciding how to shape their final projects; I invited them to create a project that would help them toward their own goals, whether those were academic in nature, community-oriented, artistic, or professional. Students did archival work to shine a light on voices that had been erased from their disciplinary discourse; they created analytical tools to support their day job doing assessment work for the university; they created teaching supports that would make it easier for new graduate students to step into the roles that were expected of them but not always clearly defined.

The biggest takeaway for me in this is to trust students. When students—having been provided with tools, scaffolding, and necessary supports (like funding!)—feel they have space to truly explore, everyone benefits. The best work I've seen has been when students are encouraged to let

their work surprise them, and to surprise us all. That, to me, is how we advance the field, support student careers, and bring scholarly work into unexpected contexts all at once.