Helping Students Prepare for Humanities Careers: Recommendations for Faculty Members

The following recommendations, applicable to faculty members working with students at any stage in their educations, were culled from the MLA’s “Doctoral Student Career Planning Guide,” created by the MLA’s Connected Academics project. The tool kit is available at https://tinyurl.com/faculty-toolkit.

1. **Make connections at the university career center.**

   Staff members at your university career center are there to help your students explore and plan their careers. Reach out and ask career services staff members to meet and talk about the skills and knowledge your students gain through their programs, the careers that students might be interested in, and the ways a department might partner with career services to bring students more field-specific career programming.

2. **Explore your local humanities ecosystem.**

   The humanities ecosystem is a vibrant place, full of smart people doing fascinating work. It includes the academic humanities as well as public humanities organizations, educational institutions, think tanks, foundations, and companies that do educational or humanities work. Many students don’t realize that this world exists. Reach out to organizations in your area and ask if they are willing to send someone to talk to your students about what they do; once a relationship exists, talk to them about starting a joint internship or fellowship program to help students gain direct experience.

3. **Track your alumni and ask them to talk to current students.**

   Program alumni are often articulate and persuasive about the value of their degrees, and they are your best resource for helping students imagine themselves in different types of careers. LinkedIn and Facebook groups are excellent ways to stay in touch with graduates. So that you can reach out to them, collect nonuniversity e-mail addresses from all program graduates. Ask program alumni to speak with current students about their careers, either in person or by Skype, or connect students to alumni in careers of interest to them.

4. **Advise students about a wide range of humanities careers.**

   Ask your advisees about what they care about (their values), what they like to do (their interests), and what they’re good at (their skills). Assure them that they have options and can exercise agency, but also make certain that they have all the relevant information necessary to make informed decisions. Undergraduate and graduate students will benefit from knowing as much as possible about the careers of program graduates. Giving students a greater understanding of the opportunities that exist and how they can take advantage of them is critical if students are to develop confident and secure professional identities.

5. **Diversify learning objectives.**

   Through conversations with career services, current students, and program alumni, articulate the kinds of skills your students develop in their programs. How might students develop those skills more intentionally and broadly through coursework? For example, could they practice writing in a variety of genres for a variety of audiences? Could they propose or implement a public or digital humanities project? Developing different types of work in your courses may involve collaborating with university colleagues, such as librarians, educational technology specialists, or museum educators.