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Beginning at the End: Reimagining the Dissertation Committee, Reimagining Careers

Amy J. Lueck and Beth Boehm

In this article, we forward a perspective on interdisciplinarity and diversity that reconsiders the notion of expertise in order to unstuck discussions of graduate education reform that have been at an impasse for some forty-five years. As research problems have become increasingly complex so has demand for scholars who specialize narrowly within a discipline and who understand the importance of contributions from other disciplines. In light of this, we reimagine the dissertation committee as a group of diverse participants from within and beyond the academy who contribute their knowledge and skills to train the next generation of scholars and researchers to be members of interdisciplinary teams. Graduate students, then, are not expected to be interdisciplinary themselves, but to work in interdisciplinary and diverse teams to discover new insights on their research areas and to prepare for careers interacting with a range of academic and non-academic stakeholders.

In May 2014 the Modern Language Association (MLA) Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature released a report of their findings on and recommendations for improving doctoral education. Responding primarily to the realities of a constrained academic job market, the task force recommended changes to doctoral education that centered around “recognizing the wide range of intellectual paths through which we produce new knowledge” and “the wide range of career possibilities that students can pursue” (MLA 1). The authors argued for increased opportunities for doctoral students to work interdisciplinarily, collaboratively, and with a range of individuals across and beyond the university community, in part to prepare students for work outside the academy. Additionally, the report suggested that while “an extended research project . . . should remain the defining feature of doctoral education,” programs should “expand the spectrum of forms the dissertation may take and ensure that students receive mentoring from professionals beyond the department as appropriate” (14). The MLA report garnered a great deal of attention among English faculty, of course, but the concerns about doctoral education raised in it are not new. Indeed, studies supported by the Carnegie Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trust, the Council of Graduate Schools, and the National Endowment for the Humanities have addressed similar concerns for years.

As early as 1973 a report from a Panel on Alternative Approaches to Graduate Education commissioned by the Council of Graduate Schools identified academic job market constriction as one serious threat to doctoral studies and proposed reforms to graduate education that would entail preparation for an expanded array of careers beyond the tenure track. The report urged that in every discipline, “graduate training should include, for all candidates who do not already possess such experience, a deliberate and significant component of discipline-related work outside the university walls” (40). Part of the impetus for this recommendation, of course, is the belief that “work outside the university walls” will provide graduate students with professional skills and networking opportunities useful for careers outside academe. But skills training is not the primary reason for the panel’s imperative. From its title, *Scholarship for Society*, through its final recommendations, the report advances the argument that doctoral study should not exclusively aim to create more faculty in the mold of students’ mentors in research universities, but rather, graduate education should also support socially oriented research in order to close the gap between knowledge and society and to create a well-educated citizenry with strong training in problem-solving and analysis who will make valuable contributions to “society as a whole” (28).

Since that publication in 1973, we have heard similar refrains across academe and within our own field. Rhetoric and composition scholars have been particularly sympathetic to the emphasis on public engagement, as suggested by articles in this journal, several recent monographs, edited collections, and conferences focused on public engagement and public work from organizations such as NCTE, CCCC, and WPA. The emergence of the Conference on Community Writing at Boulder similarly signals this turn. But while the “public turn” in composition is widely acknowledged and aligned with an interest in community-based learning and civic engagement, we have less often discussed these trends in terms of how they might shape our approaches to graduate education and training. More specifically, as a discipline we have done very little to encourage the idea that the public turn—the focus on scholarship for society—can develop dispositions and skills in graduate students that will prepare them for careers outside of academe.

Though one may not need a doctoral degree for the majority of positions outside of academia, surely humanistic training and specialization is valuable to a wide range of careers and social questions. As MLA director of research David Laurence points out: “The discussion becomes muddled when it fails to distinguish occupational destinations that directly depend on the advanced forms of humanistic expertise acquired in the course of doctoral study [from] the much broader array of occupations that programs need to make it possible

for students to be open to considering, and to consider openly, without fearing that they are placing their chances for an academic career in jeopardy” (5).

The publication of collections from within and outside of our field has laid important groundwork for this discussion of how the public turn can help us begin to imagine changes to graduate education and careers. For example, the edited collection *Collaborative Futures* (Gilvin, Roberts, Martin) discusses publicly engaged graduate education across disciplines, and work by composition scholars is included. Also, Cindy Moore and Hildy Miller’s *A Guide to Professional Development for Graduate Students in English* provides practical considerations for graduate students to prepare for jobs on and off the tenure track, considering issues of dissertation reform along the way. Most notably, perhaps, *Rewriting Success in Rhetoric and Composition Careers* (Goodburn and Leverenz) focuses on increasing the visibility of non-traditional or “alt-ac” careers and pathways into them. A kindred project to ours, that volume “concentrates attention on the interrelation of three points—career training, knowledge-making, and disciplinarity—to examine both how rhetoric and composition literally ‘disciplines’ itself via its assumptions about what constitutes its work (materially and intellectually) and how such assumptions manifest themselves in our graduate training and career advice” (x). Bringing together personal accounts from individuals across academic appointment types and those beyond the university, the collection is a valuable addition to the conversation about graduate education and alternative careers for rhetoric and composition degree holders.

Featured as the subject of such edited collections and addressed in professional venues like *Inside Higher Education* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, alt-ac jobs are increasingly a part of our local programmatic considerations. Still, the alt-ac movement remains under-addressed in our discipline’s major journals. Little has changed in terms of cultures, structures, or metaphors for imagining or enacting doctoral education differently.

This is, of course, understandable: Those of us comfortably tenured or in tenure-track positions within the academy may find it difficult to conceive of how our skills can be deployed outside of the academy. As the “10 humanities scholars” who responded to the MLA report note (all but one of whom seem to be tenured associate professors), the recommendation for “new career training places increased burdens on graduate program directors.” They criticize the report because it “somehow expects faculty to provide training for students in areas where faculty themselves may not be adequately trained” (2).

While we recognize that, like most who hold English PhDs, we have not ourselves been trained explicitly for work outside the academy, we see the public turn and non-academic job preparation as an opportunity. To this end, we follow Sylvia Gale and Evan Carton in their call toward “reorienting—if

not dissolving entirely—the expert’s stance” in public scholarship, producing a shift in how we think about expertise, specialization, and training that might move us forward ever so slightly towards addressing the needs of students in our programs (42). We draw on the work of economist Scott Page, who theorizes the benefits of diversity, to demonstrate how disciplinary and career diversity (including an expanded understanding of expertise) might be harnessed as a productive force on dissertation committees.

In short, we are exploring how to reconfigure the dissertation committee as a structure capable of supporting a wide range of future careers both inside and outside of the academy for degree recipients.¹ As the “pivot point for change in doctoral education,” the dissertation is a productive place to begin reimagining both the means and the ends of doctoral education (MLA 14). MLA past president Sidonie Smith claims that we “redefine the mission of the humanities doctoral degree by reimagining the dissertation” (“Beyond”). The Dissertation Consortium group that drafted contributions for a 2001 Interchanges section of *CCC* used the same language of “reimagining” in their own title, “Challenging Tradition: A Conversation about Reimagining the Dissertation in Rhetoric and Composition,” while the edited collection *The Dissertation and the Discipline* identifies its own transformational purpose in the subtitle, *Reinventing Composition Studies*. Many others have likewise suggested expanding the form of the dissertation over the past several decades, to include digital and multimodal dissertations as well as a suite of essays, as alternatives to the proto-monograph (see Cassuto and Jay; The Dissertation Consortium; Lang; Olson and Drew).

Building on these contributions, we focus on mentorship provided by a diverse dissertation committee rather than on the product or form the dissertation takes. Our logic is as follows: Models of expertise and mentorship are not compatible with current understandings of interdisciplinarity, public work, and alternative career preparation for graduate students. As we will demonstrate, current models of dissertation supervision in composition and rhetoric—and in the humanities generally—underemphasize the power and importance of groups and collaboration and perpetuate myths about individual expertise. Patricia Sullivan argued twenty years ago that the idea of the independent scholar is an outdated myth, and the notion of apprenticeship that undergirds it is similarly outdated.

So perhaps we are not encouraging innovative, tradition-challenging dissertations because we have not developed the theoretical and material structures to support that work on dissertation committees. Sullivan argues that dissertation committees already offer a space for collaborative work, even as we obscure this group knowledge construction and continue to promote the notion of the individual scholar. To address this issue, we are imagining a committee

that insists on collaboration, diversity, and interdisciplinarity—one that has members with different kinds of expertise, including different academic and practical/professional expertise, and one where all members are fully involved in the project from its early stages.

We begin in the next section by describing our model of interdisciplinarity before discussing what an interdisciplinary dissertation committee might look like in practice. We close by considering the possible implications of such changes to the dissertation committee, reflecting on the need to proceed dialogically—to consider appropriate changes without getting mired in either-or propositions rooted in suspicion or oversimplification.

Beyond Apprenticeship: Diversity, Interdisciplinarity, and Collaboration

We argue that one reason the apprenticeship model remains so persistent in doctoral training is that we do not have an adequate model for understanding collaborative, interdisciplinary research and its relationship to expertise. Economist Scott Page's research on diversity helps us theorize a model of interdisciplinarity and collaboration that could harness the power of groups and diversity to create new approaches to doctoral mentorship that may better serve students, communities, and disciplines. We follow Page in thinking of diversity as signifying not only social categories of race, gender, sex, socioeconomic status and so on, although this type of diversity is necessary and brings valuable perspectives to a doctoral committee, but also intellectual differences produced through disciplinary training, attendance at different types of schools in a range of geographical locations, and the variety of perspectives generated by different life experiences, including work experiences.

In *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools and Societies*, Page argues that collections of people with diverse perspectives and experiences usually prove better at problem solving than those with homogeneous perspectives and experiences. This argument is not a particularly radical or new idea; the belief that people with different disciplinary training and heuristics will bring different perspectives to scientific and social problems also underlies recent calls by the National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health for proposals from interdisciplinary research teams and undergirds much interest in digital humanities scholarship. However, Page offers a more surprising claim: A collection of diverse individuals with average abilities will prove *better* at solving problems than a homogenous collection of individuals with superior abilities.² This claim fundamentally challenges the mythos that continues to underlie the apprentice model of doctoral education in the humanities. Namely, that the best scholarship is the work of individual

genius, that individual genius can be modeled and cloned, and that such cloning is the best way to produce the next generation of scholars.

Instead, Page's research suggests that groups and diversity are key to innovation. As Page demonstrates through mathematical proofs, individuals who bring different perspectives, interpretations, heuristics, and predictive models (or what Page calls diverse "tools") build on one another's insights to advance their collective thinking. While people employing similar heuristics and perspectives when attempting to solve a problem will get stuck at the same "local peaks," or local optima, Page argues that "cognitive diversity improves performance at problem solving and predictive tasks" (314).

Some may be skeptical about the language of "problem solving," but we see value in Page's broad definition of problems and solutions: "Solutions are not just answers to math questions. They're also status quo points. What you are wearing is a solution to the problem of getting dressed" (55). Although Page's discussion of solutions to problems may seem more relevant to the sciences and to business and industry than to the humanities, his insights have broad application for thinking about the wide range of problems represented by English research. For example, problems such as interpreting a literary text, understanding the rhetorical effects of a suffragette's personal essays, or theorizing genre change are better addressed through multiple, diverse perspectives, interpretations, heuristics, and models.

In particular, Page's insights suggest the potential value of interdisciplinarity and other forms of diversity to the training of the next generation of academics and public scholars in our doctoral programs. If, as Page argues, the benefits of diversity kick in when we face difficult and complex problems, then dissertation research is a prime context for applying his insights, as the ideas students grapple with and the process of writing a dissertation are both difficult and complex. Page explains,

People with different disciplinary training naturally bring diverse understandings and tools to problems. That diversity of tools can lead to breakthroughs that would not occur, or would occur more slowly without interdisciplinary research. . . . This book provides a logic for continuing to break down the barriers that separate the disciplines. (16)

But diversity is not limited to disciplinary differences. Rather, the diversity we outline below refers to heuristic and methodological differences that may well exist *within* disciplines. It also encompasses work outside the disciplines, among non-profit leaders and other community-based specialists. As Page notes, "Being different, as should be obvious, is not the property of an indi-

vidual in isolation but a property of an individual relative to others” (168). Difference is contextual, so an economist appears different when joining a group of English professors, for whom mathematical modeling is a rarity. As much as we all contain multitudes, a person by oneself cannot be diverse.

We believe relational difference is a key point for considering how to integrate interdisciplinarity into graduate training. When we locate difference in the individual, it is difficult to imagine effective graduate programs that are both interdisciplinary and sufficiently specialized to prepare disciplinary agents who are well grounded in the discourse of several fields. Mastering the disciplinary frameworks and heuristics of multiple disciplines is both time consuming and work-intensive. However, if we locate interdisciplinarity not in the individual but in the group, the requirement for individual expertise in multiple disciplines shifts. Focus on the diversity of the group or committee allows us to (re)configure interdisciplinarity not as the individual student mastering or working in multiple disciplines but as harnessing different disciplinary perspectives and heuristics embodied by the dissertation committee and offered collaboratively by multiple mentors.

Other scholars have similarly advocated multiple mentors based on a broad understanding of intellectual community (Damrosch; Rose and Weiser; Walker et al.). As George E. Walker et al. propose in *The Formation of Scholars*, we might consider “a shift of prepositions: from a system in which students are apprenticed *to* a faculty mentor, to one in which they apprentice *with* several mentors” (91). That is, we might dispel the myth of the independent scholar—and, perhaps, the notion of “original,” “independently produced,” and “individually owned” scholarship—and the traditional apprenticeship model it undergirds, and instead embrace the power of groups and intellectual community to train future scholars for a changed and changing intellectual landscape, one more collaborative and future-oriented.

The incorporation of additional perspectives requires that faculty mentors understand their roles differently—as Walker et al. suggest, faculty should shift from mentoring “to” to mentoring “with.” Such a shift is already underway in organizations such as the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity, where Kerry Ann Rockquemore has promoted a model of networked mentoring for new faculty that acknowledges the role of collaboration and interdisciplinary support in the development of junior faculty. Working against the idea of what she calls the “guru” mentor, Rockquemore instead encourages us to see mentorship in terms of developing a network of people who each support discrete aspects of professional development and personal needs.

This call for diversity is not an argument for making all projects, much less all students, interdisciplinary. We would do well to craft flexible program guidelines that make room for different experiences and products, even as we

preserve more traditional forms of inquiry and delivery, as not all committees should be different in the same way. Indeed, as Page acknowledges, “Successful organizations...maintain balance if some people move slowly, if they do not leap to the next new idea along with everyone else” (369). But we would do well to expand the available professional development models, as the intellectual and institutional contexts around us continue to shift. In what follows, we supplement Page’s model by outlining a few examples that demonstrate how interdisciplinary and community collaboration has catalyzed doctoral research experiences in our field, preparing students for a variety of careers following graduation.

Reimagining the Dissertation: Focusing on the Process rather than the Product

In order to describe graduate education as a collaborative enterprise preparing students for a diverse range of career outcomes, we focus on the working processes of the dissertation committee to emphasize the perspectives, heuristics, interpretations, and models learned by being part of a diverse team—lessons that apply to both academic and non-academic appointments.³

Recent recommendations from Smith are one place to start. Smith has been at the forefront of the conversation about rethinking doctoral education and the dissertation in English, and we align with her vision of this process as intersecting fruitfully with conversations about public scholarship and alt-ac careers.⁴ And, though she tends to focus on the form of the dissertation, Smith’s recommendations actually underscore the importance of a shift to process as we think about doctoral work in our field. For example, in “Rethinking Doctoral Education,” she outlines a series of “other forms” for the dissertation, which include “[u]ndertaking a collaborative project with other students or a faculty adviser” and “[p]ursuing a project of public scholarship, as sketched by Julie Ellison and Timothy K. Eatman, possibly undertaken in a community external to the academy or addressed to issues of public policy” (24). As Smith points out, the models of public engagement in the arts, humanities, and design provided in Ellison and Eatman’s “Scholarship in Public” could readily support diverse doctoral projects and committees. Similarly, recent collections and other volumes dedicated to community-engaged scholarship are awash with examples of innovative projects that draw on a diversity of perspectives to prepare students for a wide range of careers. See, for example, the projects featured in the volume *Collaborative Futures*, which posits publicly active graduate education as a path to diverse careers. This collection includes work from our own field, including a chapter by Linda Bergmann, Allen Brizee, and Jaclyn Wells. But we wanted a better sense of how publicly engaged research was being taken up in the discipline.

To find additional models of innovative dissertation work we reviewed approximately four-hundred of the rhetoric and composition dissertations published in the last five years and found (with a few notable exceptions) little evidence of alternative dissertation uptake or publicly engaged scholarship. However, this apparent absence could also be a function of the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database limitations. To get a more localized picture of the work being done, we solicited examples from networks of publicly engaged scholars like Publicly Active Graduate Education (PAGE), the Higher Education Service Learning listserv, the journal *Reflections*, and the CCCC SIGs for Community Literacy, Service Learning and Public Rhetorics. We sent emails to these various groups and listservs requesting current and recently graduated students or mentors involved in publicly engaged research projects to contact us to tell us about their work. We received about a dozen responses to this request and arranged Zoom meetings with those individuals so we could learn about their experiences and projects.⁵

The informational interviews we conducted with students and faculty who had engaged in this work in graduate school provided insights that help us to address the concerns and hesitations mentors in the academy have voiced about transforming the dissertation process. Without a lot of programmatic support, the transformative practices we uncovered were a result of students' own drives to engage: These scholars brought varied interests and commitments with them to graduate school and saw engaged public work and the prospect of alternative careers as a given, and they believed the work they were already committed to doing would lead to significant scholarly products. The comments of these trailblazing scholars provide insights into the kinds of work students are already doing so that we can better understand how we might build on existing models and structures that support the diverse intellectual practices to which we aspire.⁶

For instance, one current student with whom we spoke, Sarah Moon, described her non-profit background as providing the foundation for her scholarly ambitions. Moon recognized that a PhD was necessary for the kind of research she aspired to do, though she also remained open to the idea of doing such scholarship from outside the university upon graduation. She described her experience as "moving between worlds" and expressed fear of getting sucked into the "other world" of academe entirely (personal interview). At the intersection of these "worlds," though, Moon was consciously drawing on the diverse experiences and perspectives of a range of faculty and community partners to think about her work; Moon had what Page might call a diverse "toolkit." For example, her community writing and performance project, Write Your Roots, was a collaboration with a sociology professor who was co-founder and board president of a community kitchen organization. This collaborator's perspectives

were foundational to Moon's developing understanding of food justice issues, even though she did not serve on Moon's committee.

Within her own department at the University of Connecticut Moon found faculty support for this work, constituting her committee with a faculty member who does community writing scholarship, a supportive chair with a background in rhetoric who does not have community engagement experience herself but "sees what [Moon wants] to do and supports it," and an ethnographic researcher (personal interview). Nonetheless, for Moon the dissertation did not appear to be a space where her two worlds could be brought together, and thus the work she conducted with the sociology professor and her other community partners remained outside the scholarly work she was doing in her dissertation. If the dissertation and the dissertation committee were more flexible, she could have built upon the different perspectives brought to bear by the sociologist and by practitioners in the community. Thus, while students can (and do) make connections between their scholarly work and their personal commitments to social issues, the lack of institutional recognition for the expertise that such community members bring to a project sends a message about the value ascribed to work outside of the academy.

The stories of recent graduates with community engagement experience echoed Moon's, both in terms of the importance of collaborating with experts outside the academy as well as with departmental faculty and the difficulty of integrating community-based commitments with degree requirements. Take, for example, Allen Brizee, a 2010 graduate of Purdue University's rhetoric and composition program and associate professor of writing at Loyola University Maryland. At Purdue, Brizee wrote a dissertation on building college-community partnerships through the Online Writing Lab, with Linda Bergmann as his director. Brizee describes his dissertation work with the Purdue Online Writing Lab and local community literacy organizations as a collaborative experience informed by insights from a wide range of stakeholders (personal correspondence). In a recent book on the experience, *Partners in Literacy*, Brizee and coauthor Jaclyn Wells, who also worked at the lab, discuss the integral role of community members to such research, and each discusses at length the previous experiences that informed their commitments to community work in graduate school. In their preface, Brizee and Wells write, "The relationships fostered were just as significant, if not more so, than the products created" (xi).

Brizee notes that his faculty mentors were supportive of the impact these community partners had on his project, particularly on the iterative design process of the research (personal interview). In this way, Brizee's project was deeply informed by diverse perspectives and knowledge domains. This diversity produced a big, complex project that did not conform easily to the standard dissertation product and was, according to Brizee, a "mess." Such messiness may

characterize the work of heterogeneous groups working together on complex research tasks. But the important thing for him was the process and what he learned through this big messy project where the non-faculty contributors played a significant role, even if they were not on his actual dissertation committee. Thus, though he did ultimately compose a fairly traditional dissertation as a point-in-time product of this work, the collaborative intellectual project far exceeded the dissertation product (as it so often does) and involved many collaborators and stakeholders whose work may well be obscured by the dissertation signature page. How might we reimagine the dissertation, process and product, in order to encourage the diversity of perspectives that Brizee obviously benefitted from as he began his scholarly career?

Sylvia Gale's scholarship on publicly engaged projects and partnerships helps us further explore this question when she emphasizes the messiness of publicly engaged work and the desirability of that mess. During her time in graduate school, Gale developed the Free Minds Project, a partnership between University of Texas at Austin and local organizations to offer college-level humanities programming to low-income adults. This work remained largely separate from her dissertation work, which examined the historical intersections of literacy education and vocational education in the United States. In an article on her own professional "trajectory" (a term she resists) as a publicly engaged scholar, Gale expresses a sense of being divided and overwhelmed, referring to her graduate experience as a "crazy-making muddle of projects, programs, and plans" (315). But she also emphasizes the positive synergies produced by her historical scholarship and her publicly engaged work during graduate school and encourages publicly active graduate students and their advocates to "relish the engaged and artful multiplicity of our roles" (327). Perhaps it is true, as she argues, that "innovative public scholarship resists integration and unification" (323). Perhaps innovative scholarship of any kind resists integration and unification.

Instead of a unified professional identity or project, Gale suggests a model of multiple roles to understand the work of public scholarship in and beyond graduate school:

As a graduate student with public roles and commitments, I acquired the skills I needed to carry out the projects at hand as I needed them, learning from and with those around me. Commitments and projects unfolded one from the other. . . . All of this involved less a progression from one phase or stage of engagement to another than a constant shifting of the weight among the various concurrent roles I inhabited. (320)

The way Gale picks up on this idea of multiple roles, or what she calls “roles thinking,” resonates with our notion of diversity; just as the “juice” of “roles thinking . . . lies in the intersections themselves” and “in the spaces between roles,” innovative dissertation projects might similarly take shape in the intersections between diverse individuals and their expertise (322). In this way, then, we might follow Gale’s observation that “perhaps the highest goal of the engaged public scholar—the end state of the professional trajectory—is not the integration of roles but an ongoing and dynamic multiplicity” (322).

Gale’s experience raises the question of how we might build on the many roles experienced by graduate students by embracing “an ongoing and dynamic multiplicity” in our conception of expertise. Brizee and Wells, too, mentioned the importance of drawing on diverse, community-based expertise, particularly about “adult education and local literacy issues” that the students and their university faculty advisors lacked. “If necessity is the mother of invention,” they write, “it’s perhaps also the mother of collaboration” (128).

These multiple conceptions of expertise lay the groundwork for diversifying our dissertation committees to include community experts, and they also model a variety of career outcomes for our students. Gale herself serves as an example: Building on her publicly engaged work during graduate school, she secured an alt-ac job as associate director (now director) of the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement at the University of Richmond. In a more traditional academic career himself, Brizee acknowledged that he had likewise considered applying for a range of other positions, including non-academic jobs in information architecture and usability studies. Thanks to his intensive work with a range of mentors and collaborators within and beyond the university, he felt confident that he would have been successful in a non-academic job search and happy doing that kind of work (personal interview).

Each interviewee has worked with faculty from different disciplines and community partners whose perspectives have informed the students’ projects fundamentally, although the intellectual contributions of these non-disciplinary experts are not recognized by the academy’s structures. As Ellison and Eatman suggest, such projects ultimately ask us to “[enlarge] the conception of who counts as ‘peer’ and what counts as ‘publication’” as part of “the democratization of knowledge on and off campus” (Ellison and Eatman iv). Though Ellison and Eatman are discussing this shift in relation to tenure requirements, their points invite us also to reconsider the dissertation committee in this regard—its constitution and its work. The fact is, even as students have found their own ways to make their research collaborations successful, our current structures too often ask students to keep their worlds of experience apart, as Moon describes, and devalue the expertise of community contributors. This failure to acknowledge the expertise of those not in the academy impoverishes

our scholarship and limits our audience to those in our own disciplines. Expanding our conception of expertise allows students to engage with multiple professional role models and mentors who can shape their scholarly identities and research questions, leading to rich and innovative research in and outside of the academy. And that research, in turn, serves the needs of those community stakeholders who benefit from the research to which they contribute. Reciprocity is a key consideration, one for which these examples and others provide a strong model.

But these examples, of course, represent individual projects, not ongoing initiatives with the sustainability needed for wide-ranging reform. If we were really interested in harnessing the power of groups and diversity to disrupt the apprenticeship model of graduate education, we might go further to refashion the dissertation committee. One conception might be to think of the dissertation committee as equivalent to a lab experience, with several students focused on similar problems or projects working in a team with faculty members from different disciplines and professionals from outside the university, as appropriate. Borrowing the educational model of the sciences, these labs would be working towards the same research and programmatic goals that we already pursue but would be doing so with a conscious foregrounding of the necessity of collaboration and a recognition that this work can enable research projects for our students. Such a team could work to map the necessary research, to carve out different parts of the project for each student, and to meet regularly to comment on drafts and share progress; when one student is “stuck,” to use Page’s term, the team could bring its diverse perspectives to the issue to suggest ways of moving forward. And the diffusion of labor within the collaborative structure of a lab setting makes space for a diversity of contributions and models of expertise.

Even if such team-based work is not prevalent in the humanities, there are a few models for such work. Linda Flower’s Community Literacy Center serves as a notable and successful example of community-based work supporting dissertations and career development for a great number of graduate students. Brizee pointed out that the Online Writing Lab in which he and Wells worked was specifically termed a “lab” to suggest this association of research labs on campus as sites of research collaboration (personal interview). As Bergmann and others have persuasively argued, writing centers serve as spaces of interdisciplinary and extra-institutional engagement that can support the development of publicly engaged research. Such projects, Bergmann notes, are an effective way of “establishing and maintaining long-term relationships between university programs and community institutions, because research projects can last for a long time, drawing new faculty and graduate students into the work” (171). Because of longevity (for faculty) and turnover (of graduate students), the lab

model could prove particularly effective not only for community partners but also for the graduate students who wish to pursue community-engaged or social action research with faculty members from their institution.

This lab model is similar to the many “collaborative, publicly oriented research centers” that Brian Gogan and his coauthors have reminded us “do exist in the humanities and in our own discipline” (338). Gogan et al. identify more than 50 research centers that they argue “function as change agents by emphasizing collaboration and conducting research focused on publics” (336). These are organizations—“centers, laboratories, studios, institutes, collectives, and environments”—that allow “faculty and their associates from varied backgrounds and expertise to come together to solve common problems that could not otherwise be addressed” (qtd. in Gogan 338). These centers institutionalize the interdisciplinary lab model and are thus a powerful (if often overlooked) model for interdisciplinary and even extra-institutional collaboration mobilized in the humanities to produce excellent research—and, significantly, excellent researchers—for a variety of publics.

Stacey Pigg, Kendall Leon, and Martine Courant Rife discuss Michigan State University’s WIDE center in this regard. Building on their own diverse experiences there, they argue that “[g]raduate students whose professional training is centered in the work of a functioning research center are well prepared to work outside of typical academic research models,” in part because they “acquire practical experience in collaboration and group dynamics, navigating institutional structures, and working contextually across multiple rhetorical situations” (192). Through their experience working with a multiplicity of projects and partners, students “shap[e] their own diverse career paths and their learning for future work within or outside the university” (192).

Applying this lab or research center model to the dissertation committee pushes against the apprenticeship model in that the doctoral candidate is expected to synthesize diverse perspectives and ultimately learn different tools from other members of the committee, tools not part of the primary mentor’s kit. Collaboration is central. But the resulting dissertation, whatever form it takes, is the student’s unique response to and distillation of the committee’s diverse disciplinary and professional expertise. The resulting researcher is not a clone of any one member of the committee but has successfully learned from all of them and incorporated various heuristics and perspectives into her mental toolkit. Likewise, being accountable to a team through regular meetings to share progress will help graduate students avoid long periods of unproductivity and will prepare them to collaborate with other researchers and community members in their post-graduate careers. And whether particular students are focused on entering academe or exploring alternative careers, all team members are likely to learn to think of the ways in which their knowledge and research

skills could contribute to the world outside academe. Unlike current faculty who say they are not prepared to help their students imagine alternatives because they were not trained to think this way, graduates who have such team-based experiences are likely to be far more able to prepare their own students for multiple career outcomes.

Conclusion: Reimagined Committees for Reimagined Careers

Although we begin with the end—with the creation of more diverse dissertation committees—we know that changes to the dissertation committee would also very well entail a transformation of other aspects of doctoral education, from recruitment to the dissertation product and beyond. We assume a curriculum flexible enough to allow students to pursue some interests outside English, a curriculum that would allow them to take a public policy course, for instance, or a finance or entrepreneurship course, or to participate in a social action research project, or to travel abroad as part of an international, interdisciplinary service learning team. To take just one example, Lara Smith-Sitton and Lynée Lewis Gaillet describe an innovative internship program that operates as an “alternative classroom” that “prepares students for a range of academic and mainstream employment” (211). We need to take seriously the proposition of expanding these opportunities within our graduate programs, as such flexibility allows students not only to explore their own extra-disciplinary interests but also to begin thinking of how their disciplinary work could contribute to those areas outside of the discipline (see also Krebs). The particular courses, structures, and requirements must be determined by each program to suit the needs of their institution and their students, but we can imagine curricular changes that would make programs more flexible and better able to serve the needs of students, not all of whom want to be carbon copies of their mentors.

Helping our graduate students imagine the various contributions their research can make to society is key to them discovering the possibility of a fulfilling future outside of the academy. While the value of the humanities should not be judged by its practical utility to society, it remains true that humanists *do* have much to offer in this way, and our perspectives as advanced disciplinary specialists might provide the diversity to enrich other intellectual endeavors across sectors. We believe the dissertation process is a good place to address academic labor issues and the future of humanistic study.

This should not be seen as demoralizing or capitulating to market forces. Rather, we should imagine doctoral study as leading to both academic jobs where PhDs are required and to careers outside academe where PhDs are an advantage—where scholarly thinking is engaged in public contexts. In this same way, some students might constitute committees more clearly aimed at

disciplinary work, while others might more purposefully incorporate community or public engagement, while all are harnessing the benefits of diversity to forward their thinking. And, ironically, we believe that students who are urged to think of how their advanced training can be applied outside the academy will actually have an advantage on the academic job market as well, as they are likely to help future students—undergraduates and graduates alike—think of how they can contribute to diverse teams to improve our future. These graduates, who can teach classes on professionalization, build community connections, oversee internships, etc., will build the pipeline for future work of this kind. That is how change happens—not necessarily with those of us already in the field, but through our students: the faculty of the future.

A major part of what holds us back may be our own skepticism and resistance. If, as faculty and as a discipline, we are averse to changes to doctoral education, such changes will necessarily fail to gain momentum. While we can't control a great many aspects of our institutions, we might follow David Laurence in recognizing that we *do* have control over our academic cultures and our definition of success for graduates (6). As Page points out, "If we want diverse groups to work better, it helps to believe that they do. . . . There's still hard work to do: belief in diversity's benefits alone is not enough. . . . But we need to believe in the value of diversity. Belief may be a necessary condition" (352). Knowing there is a long way to go, then, we are choosing to believe in the possibilities of a reimagined dissertation and a broadened future for humanities doctorates.

Notes

1. Scholars in technical and professional writing have also explored the notion of expertise and distributed expertise, particularly in connection to activity theory. We envision rich intersections between our arguments here and that disciplinary conversation.

2. In Page's model, an agent's problem-solving ability is represented by coordinates representing her perspective and heuristics. The agent's expected performance on a problem is what is referred to as her "ability." While this mathematical modeling necessarily flattens the complexity of ability in real human agents, it remains a useful model for thinking about ability and diversity in complicated real-life scenarios as well.

3. See Isaiah Simpson's 1987 article in this journal for an early, kindred exploration of using team teaching to prepare graduate teaching assistants.

4. See, for example, the MLAs Connected Academics website. Note: We come at the areas of public and community engagement somewhat from the side. That is, as we considered the value of rethinking the dissertation committee and its processes and products, we found that publicly engaged scholarship was a space where this conversation was already well underway. While we draw on this robust and valu-

able foundation, we simultaneously see the significance of rethinking the dissertation processes and products as transcending existing publicly engaged and alt-ac conversations.

5. Thanks to Keri Mathis for these suggestions.

6. Because we did not seek the generalizable knowledge about the field that a full research study would offer but instead sought anecdotal examples to illustrate our argument, the IRB representative at our institution advised us not to pursue IRB approval for this research. Though we did not conduct a full IRB study, we obtained permission to quote from and discuss these anecdotal conversations with each participant, each of whom also read and approved a draft of this article prior to publication. All names are real names, and opinions and experiences are shared in their capacity as scholars in the field. We spoke to a number of other students as well and, though we could not include all of their responses here, we are grateful to each interviewee for their generosity and interest in this project.

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