

## **RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES AND THE HUMANITIES**

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Scholarship in the humanities and “soft” social sciences that is funded for the purpose of collaboration exists in a context significantly different from that of scientific research. Humanities also applies the term “collaborative” more broadly to mean projects that may be international (involving American scholars and foreign counterparts) and/or interdisciplinary (involving projects that draw on the various disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, professional schools, and occasionally the hard sciences). Despite the gradual increase in such collaborative and institutional efforts, the bulk of humanities funding remains based on individual projects and individual grants.

It makes sense to discuss humanities funding quite separately from science funding. There are some similarities, of course, but the humanities have different types of funding, different resources, different constituencies; moreover, different expectations and "mythologies" are at work in seeking money for the humanities. Science faculty come through the graduate school ranks knowing that their grant activity is forever a factor in their professional lives. Success will be rewarded and failure will have its inevitable consequences. The same has not been universally true of the humanities. Some humanities scholars have traditionally had contempt for what they perceive as the commercial marketing of ideas or an attack on their academic freedom by the granting agency. Humanities faculty may be unconcerned about the application of their research, or its value outside their narrow specialization, and may not care if it is ever funded.

More recently, many junior scholars and graduate students in the humanities have discovered that the realities of contemporary academic life will include grantsmanship, both individual and institutional. They are aware that institutional resources are becoming more scarce and competition for positions is becoming more fierce. For example, the ability to compete successfully for grant funding is viewed more and more often as an important hiring criterion. Humanities scholars increasingly also realize that only grant funding will subsidize release time for completing a major project, exploring new territory, and working on larger collaborative endeavors at their own institution and with colleagues elsewhere. Grant funding will also pay for international travel to conferences. Humanities scholars have reconciled themselves to this notion. It is a recent but important shift in attitude.

Ironically, funding for the humanities has not grown despite increased interest by the faculty in seeking grants. Funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities, for example, has remained more or less flat for the last five years. Nevertheless, institutions can position themselves to take advantage of opportunities that arise and stand ready to respond effectively. Those opportunities in humanities funding, however, are going to be of a very specific sort.

## **The Nature and Sources of Humanities Funding**

Humanities funding essentially comes in two varieties: individual and institutional. Most humanities funding remains individual; the scholar applies for a fellowship that offers release time, salary replacement, travel to research sites, and modest research costs. The individual advantages of such grants are clear: prestige in your field, career enhancement, national and institutional recognition. But the institution also achieves some advantages: a reputation for its research (racking up those Mellons, ACLSes, NEHs, and Guggenheims), proof of a nationally recognized, competitive, active faculty, and some small but not-to-be-disdained shrinkage funds.

Compared to the sciences, there is not a great deal of money for collaborative funding in the humanities; however, if one looks at opportunities not exclusively designated for the humanities, but rather involving broadly interdisciplinary approaches with a humanities component, the prospect improves somewhat. Primary funding agencies in this field remain the National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. Department of Education, both of which define the humanities very, very broadly and allow for projects that bring together humanists, social scientists, and professionals. The Hall Center for the Humanities at the University of Kansas, for example, defines its own mission in the same broad manner.

Relative to the sciences, little money is available to humanities faculty. To provide some context, compare grant awards by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Department of Education in fiscal year 1997. The NEH made 131 awards in their Collaborative Research Program with a total allocation of \$5,425,337. The Department of Education allocates just over \$30 million annually to its university projects that involve collaboration.

The NEH and Department of Education, however, are not the only games in town. Collaborative humanities funding comes from a variety of foundations, governmental agencies, and NGOs. \* But there are less well known entities that could be developed. These include: A large number of regional trusts, societies, and foundations, with flexible profiles and varied funding patterns.

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\* These include, but are not limited to, the American Antiquarian Society, American Philosophical Association, Educational Foundation of America, Carnegie Corporation, Council of American Overseas Research Centers, The Fulbright Program (American Council of Learned Societies and Center for the International Exchange of Scholars), Folger Institute, Ford Foundation, Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, Guggenheim Foundation, Huntington Library, Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, International Research and Exchanges Program, Mellon, National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Humanities Center, Newberry Library, Rockefeller Foundation for the Arts and Humanities (Bellagio), School of American Research, Smithsonian Institution, Social Science Research Council, Soros/Open Society Institute, State Councils for the Humanities, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Information Agency, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the various humanities research centers (Texas, Stanford, etc.).

- A variety of foreign entities that open their competitions to citizens and institutions from other countries. These may be embassies, chambers of commerce, heritage groups, international foundations (DAAD, von Humboldt, Korea Society, Japan-America Foundation, Research Council of Norway, etc.) and special research institutes, banks, ministries of culture and education that support institutional collaborative projects.

For the time being, most collaborative humanities funding remains in the hands of governmental agencies. (This, by the way, is the case in many European countries as well.) This may change, especially if the Congress continues to attack discretionary programs, but new foundations may appear to pick up the slack. The case of the humanities is not helped by the somewhat parochial public attitude toward humanities in the U.S. nor by the ineffectual way that humanities scholars make their case with the public.

### **The Problems with Humanities Grants**

The main problem with collaborative grants in the humanities and social sciences, from the university's point of view, is that such grants have:

- Low or non-existent overhead. The NEH Collaborative Research award, for example, which has a ceiling of \$200,000, limits IDC to 10%, but not to exceed \$5,000; the Department of Education IDC is set at 8%; the Social Science Research Council (which includes humanities in a number of its group and collaborative projects) usually awards none. USIA will at least negotiate, but has never given more than 25%, and then only for certain types of awards. Foundation funding in collaborative projects involving the humanities and social sciences also limits IDC.
- High cost-share, matching, or third party funds, in some cases up to 50%.
- Mandatory evidence, in some cases, of continued institutional support beyond the completion of the project.

So it would seem that most collaborative funding in the humanities provides relatively little to the institution. And if we consider only the short-term, bottom line in dollars and cents, that is absolutely true. There are, however, important, if less tangible, rewards. Such grants promote institutional visibility and prestige. That is important to the image of the institution as a major center of learning and research and should not be discounted. Such grants can also allow the university to meet particular goals articulated in its mission statement.

These might include, in addition to the traditional teaching and research mission:

- Internationalization of the curricula, faculty, and students in a meaningful, productive, and non-superficial way. If the mission of the university is indeed to “prepare our students for lives of learning and for the challenges educated citizens will encounter

in an increasingly complex and diverse global community,” as the mission for the University of Kansas (KU) states, then collaborative projects, which involve both students and faculty, are a good way to institutionalize this particular value.

- Outreach and service. Outreach is the dissemination of knowledge, public programs, and cultural enrichment to business, government, educational, or community constituencies. (This is central to the service mission of a state institution.) Outreach has pay-offs in three areas: publicity, recruitment, and development. Humanities, the "soft" social sciences, and the professional schools can generate considerable visibility, given very little support.
- Support for long-term program building by the university.

Collaborative funding can provide the "start up investment" for a special program the university may not otherwise be able to fund or maintain exclusively on the institutional budget. The international area centers (Russia and Eastern Europe; Latin America; Africa; East Asia) at KU are a good example of how collaborative funding in humanities and the social sciences was used to create and maintain the presence of area studies. As a result, KU has four nationally recognized area studies centers and academic programs to match, with a relatively small expenditure of institutional funds.

Collaborative funding can extend the strength of the base on which other programs can be built. Collaborative grants can provide resources to leverage other funds. For example, the KU area centers have had success in pursuing grants with the Business School because they were able to use their center grants as leverage, as an existing strength that gave credibility to the proposed interdisciplinary project.

Such funding can enhance teaching and research productivity in a number of ways by:

- 1) Providing additional opportunities and resources for faculty enhancement and development;
- 2) Fostering interaction among faculty members who would not otherwise work together; properly focused, this can create a sense of institutional unity, identity, and mission among participating faculty, particularly across schools; and
- 3) Attracting new faculty to an active and lively intellectual environment and retaining them at the institution.

Collaborative funding can also take some of the pressure off the institution by providing:

- 1) The cost of domestic and foreign travel for research and teaching;
- 2) Salary replacement for administrators and faculty, thereby releasing shrinkage to the institution;

- 3) Additional money for supplies, communications, library acquisitions, videos; and
- 4) Funding for workshops, conferences, and other reputation-enhancing events at the institution without using institutional funds.

### **Maximizing Results**

Given this reality, what should we be doing to get maximum results in the mid- and long-term? Some things to consider:

- Educate humanities faculty not only about what opportunities are out there, but also about why collaborative funding is a good thing for the humanities, for their institution, for their own departments, for their students, and for themselves. Along with this, be realistic about what is worthy of funding and what is not; not all humanities faculty are going to be doing fundable research and that is fine. Instead of expending energy to change their minds, put energy into supporting those who do research that can be funded.
- Assist humanities faculty in identifying funding opportunities and help them through the sometimes arcane process of application. With desktop access to Internet resources such as the Community of Science, Yahoo Grant Search, SRA Grantsweb, as well as access to information about writing proposals, this is a lot easier than it used to be. The University of Kansas is getting better and better at this. Less than a decade ago there was nothing. Now we have the Humanities Resource Center, housed in the Hall Center for the Humanities and partially funded by the division of Research and Public Service, and the support services provided by the KU Center for Research, Inc.
- Improve the reward structure for successful grantsmanship in the humanities by:
  - 1) Providing bridging funds for faculty on individual grants and recognizing that even with the expenditure of bridging funds, money comes back to the institution as shrinkage.
  - 2) Making start-up or matching funds available. One of the features of humanities funding is high cost share or matching. As institutions begin new development campaigns or reinvent research centers, it would be good to think about funds that could be used for a third party match. This does not involve a great deal of money, since the humanities are, on the whole, “a cheap date.”
  - 3) Rewarding success in institutional grant development and institutionalizing such rewards in tenure and merit evaluation.
- Encourage interdisciplinary cooperation among humanities and social science faculty within the institution and seek links among institutions. Many funding agencies specifically seek consortial projects that will have impact beyond a single institution.

Some of the most interesting opportunities, by the way, are coming up in agencies seeking collaboration among all three branches: humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, or between humanities and the professional schools.

- Find ways to overcome the anti-policy and anti-applications bias of those humanities faculty who tend to be overly theoretical and parochial in their over-specialization and who tend to look down on partnerships with local, regional, and national business, educational or government constituencies. This is easier to say than to do. Humanists sometimes resent the fact that most funding is basically applications-based. Abstractly “adding to the greater body of knowledge” in a narrowly-defined discipline is not the only compelling justification for research. There is middle ground. Many faculty members can meet their own priorities for scholarship and still contribute to specific outcomes and applicable results that fit in with the missions of foundations, government agencies, and NGOs. In the humanities, “outcomes” as they relate to higher education are likely to be strengthened academic programs and curricular development as well as policy recommendations and the training of specialists.
- Remove barriers (in terms of budgeting, payroll, bureaucracy, etc.) to inter-institutional or consortial cooperation.
- Do not waste time in pursuit of grant opportunities that are wrong for the institutional mission or profile. Build on institutional strengths and put resources, both human and financial, in the right places.