English 885 Humanities for the Public Good

Professor Jason Puskar

W 4-6:40

As early as Aristotle, the humanities have been seen as deeply devoted to the public good. But what does it mean for the humanities to be for the public good today? This course will investigate recent humanities work that is ambitious for more and deeper engagement with a general public, and for more direct contributions to the common good. Such work is often more popular or practical than traditional humanities scholarship, sometimes blurs the boundaries between teaching and research, and frequently confounds settled expectations about intellectual standards, scholarly productivity, or publishing success. And because the term “public” is complicated in its own right, the course will focus on different ways of engaging with the public or publics: popular writing, social and digital media, activism, community projects, and public facing institutions ranging from museums to governments to non-profits, among others. The course will combine scholarly readings on these topics with case studies of publicly engaged projects and visits by active practitioners in the field. Students will be encouraged to produce some publicly engaged final project of their own, by drawing on the contacts and connections that the course will help them make.

[NB: This course can count toward the 800-level MA seminar requirement and as a cultural theory course for PhD students]