

## Proposal to Establish and Fund the Public History Collaborative at the University of Arizona

Although many people love history, they rarely get to experience the excitement of discovering and creating it personally. They read books, watch documentaries, peruse museum exhibits, and listen to lectures – avid consumers but rarely empowered to produce history. We want to change this. We want to invite people in, to show them how to make history not just watch it, to let them feel the pleasures of the research quest, to democratize access to the past.

We propose a radically different and novel strategy to engage various publics with history: the Public History Collaborative, a makerspace in the heart of the History Department where all kinds of people with an interest in and love for history – students, members of the public, and professors, too – can come together under the sponsorship of the History Department to make history themselves.

The Public History Collaborative will promote not simply learning about the past, but undertaking historical projects. In the Collaborative people will collaboratively undertake the fundamental work of historians: gathering, processing, and analyzing the original sources of history (whether digital, printed, or manuscript texts, various sorts of images, or physical objects) and using these sources to create publicized narratives. These would include not only the books and articles that professional historians write, but displays for museums or schools, short films, lectures, podcasts, or websites – in fact, any medium that brings knowledge of the past to a broader audience and incites their curiosity.

Because defining the project and devising the inquiry are themselves important steps in the process of doing history, we hope that participants can bring their own ideas to the Public History Collaborative. The Collaborative will facilitate projects from the bottom up, not simply enroll people in centrally determined initiatives. A civic organization which wants to understand and preserve its own history, a group of neighbors who are curious about how their area was settled and developed, students who want to know the backstory of a current issue in Tucson – the Public History Collaborative will welcome these kinds of participants and projects. While the Collaborative will offer the chance to participate in projects to those who may not have one of their own, we intend that the bulk of the work undertaken here will reflect the interests of the participants.

Anyone with an interest in making history will be able to join in. We will urge members of the department to imagine ways that their research could be

made more collaborative – how they might, for example, engage graduate or undergraduate students as partners in their inquiries (as sometimes happens in other disciplines). We will solicit the many professors across campus with historical interests to make use of the collaborative possibilities of the Public History Collaborative. We will encourage students at the university to cultivate their own historical projects, whether under the auspices of a class or on their own. We will invite the residents of Tucson to discover and create their own histories – of their families, organizations, businesses, or neighborhoods. Finally, we will involve local high school students and history teachers in producing real history.

The Public History Collaborative will build on, consolidate, and extend relationships that the History Department and its members currently have with groups both on and off campus. The Department's extensive undergraduate internship program has established and works through a network of local community organizations engaged in history. Professors have built classes around research projects with both Special Collections in the library and the Arizona Historical Society. The Department has also worked with high school teachers and students, along with its involvement in southern Arizona's National History Day.

The Public History Collaborative promises significant benefits for the department, the college, and the university. It will function as a hub for outreach to Tucson, southern Arizona, and the greater Sonoran region as the department empowers residents to become their own historians, eliciting in turn their goodwill toward the university. It will help recruit local high school students to the university and to the history major, not only by bringing them to and familiarizing them with the university and its resources but also by enlivening their sense of history and developing their skill in it. The Public History Collaborative will serve as a nexus of fundraising, both by pursuing grants for specific projects and by offering donors concrete initiatives to sponsor and even participate in.<sup>1</sup> For students, the Public History Collaborative will offer a new kind of education, a kind of apprenticeship in history. It will promote experiential learning by undergraduates, and train them in a broader range of skills than ordinary classes, including, for example, the dynamics of working on team projects or training in software used in making history public (e.g., the Adobe Creative Cloud).<sup>2</sup> For graduate students, the Public History Collaborative will offer experiential training in public history and give them a broader range of

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<sup>1</sup> The mission and projects of the Public History Collaborative should be of interest to sponsoring organizations both local (the Marshall Foundation or the Arizona Humanities Council) and national (the Charles Redd Center at BYU or National Endowment for the Humanities).

<sup>2</sup> Following the model of the American Historical Association's *Tuning Project*, the Public History Collaborative will market to potential employers the importance and applicability of the skills, knowledge, and habits of mind that History majors and graduate students learn.

skills which should be helpful in securing non-academic jobs. Finally, the Public History Collaborative will increase the density of scholarly networks across campus by vigorously courting scholars in various departments to participate.

The Public History Collaborative will also benefit the greater Tucson community. It will invigorate the sense of the place and of the past for those who discover and create their histories, and for those, too, who learn from them. History is a kind of commitment – to collaborators in the work of history and to the ideas, places, and traditions that are the objects of historical investigation. The Collaborative will foster more widely the pleasures of historical discovery and creativity, of deep knowledge and expertise.

The Public History Collaborative represents a pioneering attempt to reconfigure how history is practiced and disseminated. Several universities are running programs in digital history,<sup>3</sup> and while the Public History Collaborative at the University of Arizona will inevitably rely on digital methods and produce digital products, it will not be limited to this. Rather, the Collaborative will effect a more fundamental double transformation. First, it will promote collaboration among professors whose work is often individual. Second, it will take the professional model of historical practice – projects based on research in original historical sources resulting in publicized results – and open this up to nonprofessionals, uniting the pervasive popular curiosity and interest in history with the expertise of academics. We believe there is nothing like this elsewhere.

Aspiring to create something novel and innovative, we have set an ambitious agenda. But we believe it's achievable with adequate support.

The collaborative work of the Public History Collaborative requires both infrastructure and staff. The Department has dedicated significant space to this enterprise, Chavez 406, an 868 square foot room in the center of the Department. We are seeking funding for a three-year trial for a full-time position of Director. The possibilities of the Public History Collaborative and the ambitions we have for it call for a full-time, energetic director: the Director will need to develop programming, maintain an intensity of activities throughout the year, cultivate and sustain relationships across campus and broadly in the Tucson community, and oversee a range of different kinds of responsibilities. The Department will also fund a graduate student to work as Assistant Director each semester.

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<sup>3</sup> These include George Mason (see the article in *Perspectives* at <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2009/intersections-history-and-new-media/pragmatic-as-well-as-prescient>), Michigan State University (<http://history.msu.edu/digital-work/>), the University of Southern Californian (<https://dornsife.usc.edu/hist/history-lab/>), and Georgia Southern University (<http://class.georgiasouthern.edu/history/home/history-lab/>).

The Public History Collaborative needs a full-time (1.0 FTE, 12-month appointment) Director – someone with the knowledge, skills, enthusiasm, and vision to make it a thriving success – for four reasons:

1. Intensity of activities. The growth and success of the Public History Collaborative will require an enormous amount of work, particularly in the first few years. Helping faculty and graduate students imagine research projects and teaching activities that use the Collaborative, pursuing external funding opportunities, cultivating relationships with people and organizations in Tucson and Southern Arizona, and creating and implementing innovative programming – all this requires consistency and focus, especially when those relationships and projects are new. Such a position would leave little time for the expected activities of regular faculty research and full-load teaching. In addition, it is important to maintain the Collaborative’s activities during the summer and winter breaks, when there would be opportunities to engage with area high school students and friends of history in the community in ways not possible during the school year.

2. Continuity of relationships. Ongoing projects require continuity of management and vision. Partnerships with various stakeholders at the University of Arizona, in Tucson and Southern Arizona, and throughout the United States and the world are best maintained with a stable liaison, someone in the position for years, not a couple semesters.

3. Range of responsibilities. Regular faculty tend to be specialists in research and teaching. This position requires someone who can also write grants, manage projects, and develop community relationships with friends of history as well as potential donors and employers. It requires an academic historian with training and experience in public and applied history.

4. Security. Because the room (Chavez 406) may contain valuable equipment and documents, the Collaborative needs a responsible supervisor.

We propose funding a full-time position of a Career-Track Assistant Professor as Director of the Public History Collaborative for three years, starting July 2019. We believe three years is the appropriate period to fund this position initially. On the one hand, this limits the commitment to an untested enterprise. On the other, this seems like sufficient time to develop and implement a full range of programming and to measure its success. While the Director will be able to start some of the Public History Collaborative’s enterprises quickly (e.g., outreach and recruitment to local high schools), others may take time to cultivate. We anticipate that fundraising success would accelerate after the Collaborative could demonstrate a record of accomplishments, and faculty may be able to fully exploit the potential of the Collaborative for their research and teaching only when they design its potential into their projects from the

beginning. If the Collaborative is successful, we would hope to make this position renewable.

The future of history is in collaboration, particularly collaboration between professional historians and citizen historians, people who want to help produce – not just consume – history. One form of this new way of studying the past is crowdsourced scholarship.<sup>4</sup> Projects like this could be part of what we do. But what we envision for the Public History Collaborative is something even more revolutionary and democratized. We will not just invite people to take part in the research of professional historians. We will enable professional historians and citizen historians to work side by side to create real histories, their own histories of their families, communities, and anything else that interests them. At the beginning of this proposal, we invoked the notion of the Public History Collaborative as a maker space. We intend this not as a trendy metaphor, but an accurate description of our goal: to bring diverse people together to ask questions and solve problems in new and innovative ways. The University of Arizona can help lead the way in this emerging way of studying the past.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the Holocaust Memorial Museum's Children of the Lodz Ghetto Research Project: <https://www.ushmm.org/online/lodzchildren/> as well as the history projects at the Zooniverse: <https://www.zooniverse.org/projects?discipline=history&page=1&status=live>.