Meeting Minutes for Planning Theme 3: Inhabit the New Learning Ecosystem
Wednesday, 18 January 2017

This meeting was facilitated by Steve D’Agustino, Director of Online Learning at Fordham’s School for Professional and Continuing Studies, and was divided into two parts.

In the first part, participants went around the room and read seven quotations on higher education and the new learning ecosystem from the recommended readings for the meeting. For each quotation, they wrote a response on a Post-it note and posted it alongside the quotation.

In the second part, participants congregated in discussion groups based on their favorite quotations, then synthesized the main points of their discussion and shared them with the whole group.

Find below the minutes for the group discussion; those interested in reading all the participants’ comments on the quotations can find a full transcript starting on p. 9.

Part II: Group Discussion

About Quotation 1:

“The tendency to devalue teacher preparation in parts of doctoral education is at odds with the ever-growing national pursuit of effective teaching that can optimize student learning. Dedicated and well-prepared teachers are crucial to the strength of our society. Our doctoral students need to know about the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education in the United States – one that includes online learning – as well as the comprehensive community colleges that serve forty-four percent of all undergraduates in the United States and nearly half of all undergraduates of color.”


Lisa Holsberg (LH): The group had significant objections to the way the quotation is structured – it points to a set of values that are data-driven and implies that there’s a national move for this teaching (which is a suspect statement).

This call for community college teaching looks nice, but plays out differently in reality.

Fordham has a strong teaching practicum in many departments – perhaps smaller departments without the resources to do this could band together to form a joint, strong teaching practicum?

The group also considered philosophies of teaching:

- Learning for students
- Accountable bodies – the teacher, the student, the discipline
- Traditional set-up of a teacher at a podium that has stayed constant for over 100 years.
Focus on the value of teaching outside classroom context, for instance in non-profit organizations.

There were a lot of Post-its on this quotation that focused on Fordham’s strength in teaching, from its Jesuit foundation. But we should push to make teaching consistent across Fordham’s departments.

Eva Badowska (EB): I was very influenced by Cathy Davidson’s point of taking someone to a doctor’s appointment with you and each focusing on different elements when the doctor talks. In this meeting, I’m listening from the perspective of planning for the white paper: we can emphasize contributing new knowledge and maintaining tradition, infusing more teaching and more creative teaching into the curriculum.

Lenny Cassuto (LC): I’m paid to teach competently, but not well. There are few reward systems for good teaching.

John Drummond (JD): sees tradition as a handing down (that’s the teaching function). But we also need research to make it a living tradition.

Steve D’Agustino (SD): The conversation for the last few minutes highlights the teaching strategy of the “Fish Bowl,” in which several people have a discussion while others watch.

About Quotation 2:
…we should not lose sight of an equally ominous development: the extent to which doubts about the validity of the humanities in general and about graduate study in languages and literature in particular have permeated public discourse. The proliferation of responses from leaders in the profession underscores both the difficulty of articulating and the urgent need to articulate a convincing answer to the underlying challenge: why maintain doctoral study in the modern languages and literatures – or the rest of the humanities – at all?


The group struggled to come up with a single, definitive answer for why Ph.D.s in the humanities, especially in language and literature, are necessary.

If we focus only on functionality, then there is no purpose in going beyond an undergraduate degree to further study, and if we’re only focusing on transferrable skills, the Ph.D. is also not needed.

Several things could contribute to creating this answer – shortening the time to degree to better match the length of professional degrees like the JD or the MD could mean that the humanities degree is less singled-out, make the degree more possible/attractive.

One element that came up in discussion was the concept of the humanities as necessary for memory – they tell us how we got here. Moving to a new learning environment means forgetting the past but still maintaining a sense of historicity.

Humanities can serve as a “living archive,” provide historical consciousness which is not just a value, but a responsibility in the humanities.
Many problems today stem from a lack of awareness about history. People keep drawing on the humanities to shore up their positions, so they do still have value.

Humanities can also combat the mis-appropriation of the past, eg. use of medieval and classical history by the alt-right movement.

Humanities Ph.D.s also focus on learning; not just acquiring skills.

About Quotation 3:
Because change is our generation’s byword, [futurist Alvin Toffler] believes we need to add new literary skills to the old three Rs of reading, writing, and arithmetic. He insists that the key literacy skill of the twenty-first century is the ability to learn, unlearn and relearn . . . . The process of unlearning in order to relearn demands a new concept of knowledge not as a thing but as a process, not as a noun but as a verb, not as a grade-point average or a test but as a continuum . . . . And it means always relying on others to help in a process that is almost impossible to accomplish on your own.


Matthew McGowan (MM): was struck by some of the Post-It comments: can unlearning really take place? We already do this learning, unlearning, and re-learning in the classroom.

Unlearning can be a response to change. Focus on readjusting our mode of acquiring knowledge and reassessing how we do it.

Combined the discussion with that of Quotation 4, also from Cathy Davidson’s book –

About Quotation 4:
Is it possible for a whole society to have attention blindness? I think it is. We seem to be absorbed right now in counting the equivalent of digital basketballs: fretting about multitasking, worrying over distraction, barking about all the things our kids don’t know. We’re missing the gorilla in the room. We are missing the significance of the information age that is standing in the midst of our lives, defiantly thumping her chest. It’s not that we haven’t noticed the change. Actually, we’re pretty obsessed with it. What we haven’t done yet is rethink how we need to be organizing our institutions – our schools, our offices – to maximize the opportunities of our digital age.


Patrick Hornbeck (PH): What is this gorilla – sees it as the significance of the information age. We haven’t thought through the implications of it, so how do we learn to thrive in the new ecosystem? What practices challenge us? If we reframe change as a given, then we don’t fear the gorilla but instead try to work with it.
For an example, take the recent French law that states that workers no longer have to check their emails at home, and may be entitled to overtime if they do.

How do we link this quotation to the previous Davidson quotation (Quotation 3) – where do we teach people to navigate this new world: in the Ph.D. seminar, or earlier?

MM: We were struck by the appropriateness of these quotations for undergraduate education and expectations and how they are linked to what we do at the graduate level. The quotation on teaching (Quotation 1) highlights that undergraduate and graduate education are not so distinct.

Nicholas Paul (NP): The idea that instructors would share cultural assumptions with people in their twenties (their students) is less and less common. He finds himself forcing his students to use systems from his own age rather than theirs. What forms of communication should we be keeping?

Equally important is what technology should we adapt to – are we just conforming to product offerings rather than a tech revolution?

Lisa Holsberg (LH): Chasing after the next big thing could be a road to nowhere, as things are constantly changing. We’re serving goals that we don’t know we’re serving, but learning to unlearn and relearn could be very valuable for this.

JD: Addressing Patrick Hornbeck – you give a pretty generous frame of the quotation. A fundamental question is getting missed: information is not good or bad in and of itself, it’s what you do with it. If we focus on the significance of the information age, we’re missing the main point.

PH: This goes back to the tradition of method and content, with a pushback at information that we deem irrelevant. We’ve thought of tradition as “memory” or a “living archive,” but it varies from discipline to discipline. We have our own traditions of higher education, of the scholar and teacher, and we need to lift these up as well.

JD: Is worried about how information is used and for what purposes. There’s an explosion of information today and no sense of what it means and what it’s for. It’s like money – not inherently good or bad, but based on how you use it, and it’s dangerous when it becomes an end in and of itself.

Dewis Shallcross (DS): But this is a key question for the information age – who vets this information?

EB: The gorilla metaphor is very uncomfortable; it becomes the significance of the information age. I want to go back to the connection between the two Davidson quotations – what is the responsibility to the next generation that’s going to come to these programs with brains that have been transformed. The next generation will bring these skills with them; it’s us who will become the dinosaurs. There’s something to be said for our role in keeping tradition alive, but how do we engage the next generation?

JD: Eva’s new metaphor for the academy is the meeting ground between gorillas and dinosaurs.

Glenn Hendler: Cathy Davidson talks about how she was bad at certain kinds of learning, especially with pencil and paper. But there are different types of learning, so some digital technologies that freak some people out will actually make others learn better.

David Hamlin (DH): Gorilla perhaps does not represent the digital age, but a different type of person growing out of the digital age. We’re in a crisis of authority, flattening out knowledge and
making it more accessible. So what then is the point of getting a Ph.D.? What is the relationship between authority and this flattening regime – especially in the age of fake news (e.g. “Pizzagate”).

NP: It’s not a fixed moment of cognitive change – the cognitive model is now changing fluidly, forever. I don’t get the idea of stopping to understand it and relearn it – to say that new technologies represent one moment doesn’t take into account the rate of change.

Laura Morreale (LM): We’re still focused on the key skills of mastery and manipulation; we just do these things in different ways in the digital age. The desire to do both still remains. There’s no need for anxiety about change and what the humanities do – we’re still all about self-knowledge.

NP: So are those (mastery and manipulation) the “digital basketballs” that Davidson mentions?

LH: Our desire for self-knowledge functions as a constant, but education through contact with other people can awaken one’s assumptions about what one’s desires are.

**About Quotation 5:**

The profession must make a strong case to the public at large and especially to prospective employers that our doctoral programs prepare students for career paths throughout society, not only in higher education.


LM: Interestingly, none of the people who chose this quotation were members of faculty.

One of the group’s emphases was the way that Ph.D. graduates outside academia can act as ambassadors for academia, translating it for outside audiences. There’s so much “insider talk” in academia – specialized vocabulary, jargon. That’s fine, but we should be prepared to talk to others outside the discipline, too. Ph.D. graduates should be able to talk at different registers of interaction, being open to other people.

Fredric Nachbaur (FN): Has talked to graduate students about what they want. They want opportunities to work outside their departments to get new skills, but these opportunities are rare and not usually well-advertised.

We need to start having the conversations about what students want at the start of a program. We also need to remove the stigma of getting non-academic work, plus the emphasis on graduate placement only in academic positions.

Malkah Bressler (MB): We should also think not only about what we study but also the skills that we acquire through the graduate degree – we need to learn keywords for these skills.

LM: We need to remember that there are two sides to the equation when getting a job – the job seeker but also the employer.

Lisa Lancia (LL): We need to acknowledge that many Ph.D. students won’t get tenure-track academic jobs, so advisers should support them. Get students to reflect on what they learn to create a concrete skill set for different jobs – non-profit work, etc.
What do employers think when they see “Ph.D.” after someone’s name? We could create a focus group of potential employers.

DS: What does someone think when they see Ph.D. on a resume? We have to think about the language candidates use and how they present themselves. Anne Krook is a valuable resource for Ph.D. graduates who are thinking about going into jobs outside the academy.

LC: I like what I’m hearing. Back in grad school (when dinosaurs and gorillas roamed the earth…), I was the only one in my cohort who had worked between undergraduate and graduate school. It’s important to train graduate students, like undergraduates, on how to get a career. Maybe career fairs could be geared towards graduate students – just going through recruiting can be invaluable.

Erin McKenna: That sounds like a great idea, but I’ve gotten advice on preparing a CV, not a resume. The conventions are not the same for non-academic jobs, eg. K-12 teaching. Seeing Ph.D. on an application for a K-12 job means that the candidate will have less K-12 training and will have to be paid more.

Samantha Sabalis (SS): we need to teach graduate student to engage different publics. For instance, in museum work and K-12 teaching, experience working with children is often required, which many graduate students lack. We can encourage graduate students to pursue internships to learn about working with audiences outside the academy. There are also resources to help undergraduates with job searches (eg. Career Services for resume assistance) – can let graduate students know about these resources.

FN: Also have to think of changes in job searching – eg. there’s an expectation now that you’ll have a website that hosts your resume. Recruitment is moving more and more online.

DS: How do we get to the level of comfort – impostor syndrome among faculty about helping with non-academic job searches is a problem. Just because you don’t know everything about a non-academic job search doesn’t mean that you can’t help at all.

Jeannine Pinto (JP): Could help get students comfortable with “pitching” themselves – eg. in graduate school I had an annual lunch where a faculty member who was not your mentor would take you out and you would have to pitch yourself to him or her.

EB: At the Council of Graduate Schools conference, there was a good idea from another university – students were required to create a three minute video to convey complex ideas: who you are, what you do, why it matters. Students resisted, but they seemed like perfect training for the “elevator pitch” of a student’s project.

JD: We can achieve this through other means, too, like mock interviews with students. We ask them to create a 2-3 minute speech on their dissertation for non-specialist faculty members.

EB: The video serves many uses – it can be in students’ portfolios for the job market, but also on the university’s website or on students’ own websites.

GH: The English department does a lot for mock interviews, but focuses mainly on the academic job market.

LM: To bring the discussion back to the value of Ph.D. graduates in positions outside academia – we can benefit from Ph.D.s with similar training performing different functions in society. Not alternate jobs, as they’re equally as valuable.
MB: When we think of it in these terms, you’re not diminishing passion for what was studied, just providing another route to pursue it outside the academy.

PH: Pushing back at the idea that an academic interview can also prepare students for other jobs – it caters to the specific expectations of academia, not other careers. We need to prepare students for the different expectations of other career paths. For instance, a friend who got a Ph.D. got a job in the Foreign Office in the UK; the Ph.D. offered cachet in analyzing documents.

So what does a Ph.D. mean in other careers, and how can we help students flout negative expectations for a Ph.D. graduate?

EM: My next-door neighbor is the director of Multicultural Resource Center at Penn State University. He works as a mentor, and acts as an example of a job his students would want to do – could encourage them to get a Ph.D. to pursue similar positions, open up more diversity in graduate school.

NP: Is the NEH thinking not only about institutions adapting but also society adapting to more Ph.D.s outside the academy? Is that part of the conversation?

EB: Not really, but there is the idea that most Ph.D.s outside the academy could contribute to revaluing the humanities Ph.D. In webinars about this project, the NEH gives pointers about talking to government officials, keeping them posted about the project. There’s an awareness that this is also a PR campaign for humanities Ph.D.s.

MM: This project is deeply connected to the fate of the humanities, with a desire to get this information out to the public and to potential employers.

EB: I presented at a conference in D.C. on the project, focusing on how we’re creating a community of discourse, advocates for cultural change. We’re keeping the conversation alive.

About Quotation 6:
In how many courses do students feel a sense of community, a sense of mentorship, a sense of collective investment, a sense that what is being created matters?


NP: The discussion focused on creating community inside the classroom. Dewis brought up an interesting point of how communities of graduate students develop in neighborhoods around New York City.

DS: Graduate students are a transient population, and hand down apartments to new graduate students when they leave. Communities develop focused on “safe” areas that are popular with particular departments and have been recommended by other graduate students in that department.

DS: We started with the question of who builds community in the classroom – the onus is on the students, as the teachers can create opportunities but students have to take them. Eg. students in inter-disciplinary fields have to enter discipline-specific communities.
NP: But some interdisciplinary programs develop communities that are very strong. Ways to create a community include: team projects, projects which become focuses of group interaction and include an element of risk (eg. presentations, podcasts, projects with public audiences).

EB: Bass’s entire article is about undergraduate education, but he misses the idea that most undergraduate education uses a core curriculum – final goal based on many courses working together rather than individual classes.

GH: But the undergraduate core has few connections between courses.

LC: We also don’t have a community to talk about teaching a course together (eg. bring together all teachers of a particular course to discuss strategies).

JD: In graduate education there are many ways of developing community not tied to the classroom. Eg. graduate symposia run by other students.

LC: One post-it mentioned a good idea – to link graduate courses together to speak to one another.

DS: I think we focused mainly on ways to create communities within departments, but what about the Fordham-wide community?

Conclusions:

SD: The challenge for me in this activity was not saying anything. Cathy Davidson focuses on decentering, with the faculty member not at the center for teaching. What is left in the middle? What techniques did you see? Did you feel me as the facilitator in these discussions?
Part I: Quotations and Post-It Responses

1) “The tendency to devalue teacher preparation in parts of doctoral education is at odds with the ever-growing national pursuit of effective teaching that can optimize student learning. Dedicated and well-prepared teachers are crucial to the strength of our society. Our doctoral students need to know about the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education in the United States – one that includes online learning – as well as the comprehensive community colleges that serve forty-four percent of all undergraduates in the United States and nearly half of all undergraduates of color.”


a. How we respond to the trend of a two-tier system: teaching vs. research?

b. I think that revamping doctoral education could be the “demonstration” piece that is needed?

c. And the biggest challenge in teaching graduate students is to put the student first – graduate education could learn a lot from the good strides made in K-12 education.

d. Wow. Eye-opening – and raises the question: why aren’t our Ph.D.s serving these needs?

e. Yes, education needs to be available to a wider population in various formats. Flexibility!

f. “Doctoral students need to know...” True. But they need the approval and support of faculty to explore the “rapidly evolving landscape of higher education.”

g. What we are trying to teach in the humanities is almost impossible to teach online. Human interaction is essential.

i. But large numbers of people are taking online humanities courses and teaching them. Do we try to stop them? Or do we make this better?

h. To what extent do we teach Ph.D. students about the profession of higher ed – not just about their/our discipline but about the larger endeavor – its strengths, weaknesses, challenges, etc.? This goes hand in hand with “teacher prep.”

i. Another way to put this is to say that what we do as teachers of graduate students is not very practical in that it does little to prepare students for the realities that they will face after graduation.

j. Yes, but how can students at an institution in which most faculty have no experience teaching at a community college level get the skills for this audience?

k. Certainly preparation and dedication are important. But what really is being taught at the doctoral level? Is it not more a way of interacting with material and with our interlocutors than anything else?

l. An interesting feature of teacher education is that, even as we train teachers, our graduate students teach us a good deal about teaching – new methods, uses of technology, etc.
m. Is teacher preparation really de-valued? What would valuing it look like?
   i. Our entire value and reward system devalues (and subordinates) teaching!
   ii. MLA may be correct, but I think Fordham actually does value our grad teaching, and in fact does prepare them for action in the world (as teachers).
   iii. Yes! And I hear from chairs at teaching-focused institutions that our grads are more hireable as a result.

n. Teaching is part of good mentoring and can be connected to research. All three require ample time.
o. Though I would nuance the premises (“national pursuit”? “Devalue”?), I agree we need to give teaching more presence throughout the curriculum, not just in self-contained pedagogy training.
p. True. Of course this immediately relates to grad student teaching and is an example of wanting grad students to do more while also shortening time to degree.
q. Expand faculty teaching/learning resources. Provide opportunities for faculty to learn from students and from each other.

2) …we should not lose sight of an equally ominous development: the extent to which doubts about the validity of the humanities in general and about graduate study in languages and literature in particular have permeated public discourse. The proliferation of responses from leaders in the profession underscores both the difficulty of articulating and the urgent need to articulate a convincing answer to the underlying challenge: why maintain doctoral study in the modern languages and literatures – or the rest of the humanities – at all?


   a. Do we want to reform/adapt if what lies behind this is the more ominous attempt to discredit scientific knowledge/expertise?
   b. This is truly ominous – a dangerous challenge to the study of literature and language. But responding by saying we’re useful – as useful as physics – will not help and is an argument bound to fail. We need a better answer.
   c. I think that revamping doctoral education could be the “demonstration” piece that is needed.
      i. I agree that it can and should be one of them.
   d. This may be done by better educating those within and outside the academy as to how doctoral education (and Ph.D.s) contribute and can contribute to the greater good or world at large.
   e. I think the answer to the general question is more discipline-specific than we in the humanities sometimes like to admit.
f. What better impetus to reconceive our mission to add emphasis to public reaching out? We can’t bully, so we must persuade.

g. For the same reason we study humanities at any level – because humanities humanize us – and we need that!

h. “Ominous” is not a characterization one normally expects from the MLA.

i. Part of the problem here is selfishness and protectionism on the part of the “experts.” Passion for these topics exists. It is only by maintaining openness to the various registers in which they can be practiced that the humanities can survive.

j. It’s more important now than ever. We need humanities. Look at our incoming leader.

k. What can Ph.D.-trained humanists do, beyond their specific disciplinary expertise, that differently trained people cannot (or at least not as well)? What makes us distinctive as citizens?

l. I wonder how effective this “underscoring” is. Perhaps we need to change the rhetoric so that it attracts and entices the hordes of naysayers (however much we find this approach distasteful).

m. This is where both “public humanities” and “engagement” are essential. If humanities scholars are visibly present in public debates and engaged in their communities (however defined), that will help counter the skepticism better than yet another eloquent PR statement or manifesto.

n. Accessibility of knowledge and the training of people to disseminate knowledge in new ways are for me convincing answers.

o. Humanists are trained for depth and subtlety, not PR. It’s a challenge.

p. I feel like an elite understanding of this “why” already exists. We need an accessible understanding and argument for “why the humanities.”

q. Does there have to be a single answer as to “why”? I like the idea of a “proliferation of responses.”

r. Do we have a common/shared understanding of what “language” and “literature” are?

s. Is the traditional justification of the humanities tied to the “alphabetic self,” to older models of learning selfhood?

t. Change requires all to see beyond our certainties. “Haters gonna hate…” It is a difficult “place” and change also requires doing more than rebutting the challenge (defense vs. offense).

u. Addressing this problem involves visionary thinking (imagining a world without the humanities) and deep thinking (what is at stake for me, for the person next to me, for the person I have not met) about the values that are the ground of humanities thinking. Following this logic, one may well end up on the margins, subversive and prophetic.
3) Because change is our generation’s byword, [futurist Alvin Toffler] believes we need to add new literary skills to the old three Rs of reading, writing, and arithmetic. He insists that the key literacy skill of the twenty-first century is the ability to learn, unlearn and relearn . . . . The process of unlearning in order to relearn demands a new concept of knowledge not as a thing but as a process, not as a noun but as a verb, not as a grade-point average or a test but as a continuum . . . . And it means always relying on others to help in a process that is almost impossible to accomplish on your own.


a. Perhaps what we need to “unlearn” is the limiting terminology that defines education for so many.

b. Unlearning strikes me as the most challenging of these new literacy skills, and I wonder whether it’s truly necessary.

c. Is unlearning a new skill? Isn’t this something done every time we revisit old material?

d. Also, departments need to work together and talk to each other, collaborate, give students opportunities.

e. I don’t disagree with this in principle. But I do bridle at the way this line of thought converges with the “flexibility” demanded by neoliberal capitalism. One thing I want to teach is how to resist those demands, not just how to accommodate them.

f. But for the last sentence (which focuses concretely on collaboration), this assertion is, to put it most kindly, overly abstract. What the hell does “unlearn” mean anyway?

g. This resembles the difference between learning and credentials. Right now students are rewarded in the short term for the latter.

h. I appreciate the emphasis on process and collaboration. A key concept is TRAINING. How do we “reprogram” ourselves? Do we “program” others?

i. I am curious about what this process of unlearning looks like acted out by students and faculty.

j. Process is important, but so is mastery of certain topics, skills, even ways of learning.

k. I’m a bit confused by the assumptions underlying this passage. Isn’t the goal of asserting the value of a humanities education more than this? Critics of humanities are salivating…

l. So part humility and part openness to adaptation – a rhetorical skill as much as a cognitive one – this is achievable if not already in force.

m. I don’t know, every major scholarly controversy is an invitation to unlearn.

n. “Unlearning” and “unschooling” is a necessity if one wants to provoke and promote discovery, freedom, and agency. The history of American schooling
is something to be taken very seriously, to challenge one our own assumptions. See John Taylor Gatto.

o. Maybe it’s more about a purposeful and directed unlearning?

p. Not a new idea. Happens in classrooms all the time.

  a. It may, but are we conscious of it? Can we created the conditions for it to happen more frequently and/or lastingly?

  b. “Learning already incorporates the ideas of unlearning and relearning, but perhaps it’s helpful to spell it out.

  c. This has been the “key literary skill” since Plato.

q. My graduate training emphasized individual achievement over collaboration but my work does not.

r. Can unlearning be intentional? How is it done?

s. How do we break down existing barriers to encourage this focus?

4) Is it possible for a whole society to have attention blindness? I think it is. We seem to be absorbed right now in counting the equivalent of digital basketballs: fretting about multitasking, worrying over distraction, barking about all the things our kids don’t know. We’re missing the gorilla in the room. We are missing the significance of the information age that is standing in the midst of our lives, defiantly thumping her chest. It’s not that we haven’t noticed the change. Actually, we’re pretty obsessed with it. What we haven’t done yet is rethink how we need to be organizing our institutions – our schools, our offices – to maximize the opportunities of our digital age.


  a. The gorilla in the room is hard to see, but very active. In my view, her key feature is a disruption of hierarchy and an opening of access to all kinds of knowledge.

  b. Information is not knowledge; knowledge is not understanding; understanding is not wisdom. Thinking primarily of information age diverts attention from more important goals.

    i. How do we know when we know something?

  c. How do digital tools assist in “knowledge”? Why is Google (properly used) considered inferior to the index or the bibliography?

  d. Would be great to change institutions and policies to minimize certain distractions (i.e. overuse of email) so that we can (distractedly) pay attention to the constellation of things that matter.

  e. If it is inevitable that we multitask now in ways not possible before, what are the healthier and less healthy ways of doing that? I mean not just intellectually, but emotionally, psychologically, even spiritually?

  f. I wonder what it would look like to design university and classroom architecture radically differently in keeping with the new “ecosystem” instead of the old.

  g. I have not decided what “maximizing the opportunities” means.
h. I agree [with Davidson]. Yet – simply “including” digital tools is not adequate. What can university education do to engage the new information age yet also provide resources to think (and exist) beyond it?

i. We have also left behind one of the greatest reasons for learning – desire to do so. Desire trumps all attempts at distraction. That should be at the heart of our institutions.

j. I love my digital devices, and they’re very useful, but I do worry that the decline in my attention span isn’t only due to age.

   i. Perhaps attention isn’t declining, but our brains are changing => from linear patterns of reading to networked ones?

k. What is the gorilla? Is the gorilla that the ground HAS shifted or that we are failing to shift with it? How much of the shift is intentional? How can we unlearn the way we pay attention?

   i. I agree – what is the gorilla? Davidson’s writing is irritating in this way; it reads like a motivational speech rather than an analysis. I agree that we must attend to what technology can do, but I’m leery of reconstructing our praxis in a way that turns us into cyborgs with mechanical prostheses.

l. We’re doing that [organizing our institutions to maximize the opportunities of our digital age] right now!

m. Self-interest and self-regarding behavior are the hallmarks of academia 😎

n. It’s evolving and changing. We adapt and it changes again.

   i. But the “information age” is protean and has been around (as Davidson admits) for a long time. I think it is dangerous to assume that we can stop, look around and see “it” – the best we can do is be ready to adapt.

5) The profession must make a strong case to the public at large and especially to prospective employers that our doctoral programs prepare students for career paths throughout society, not only in higher education.


   a. Why isn’t an MBA or JD going to be better than a humanities Ph.D. outside the academy?

   b. So we’re fully on board with the capitalist project?

   c. Yes, but give them [Ph.D. candidates] skills and opportunities.

   d. Agreed – but how?

   e. I think this is known already.

   f. Data showing we’ve done this (or not) would be helpful.

   g. GSAS needs to sponsor career fairs for grad students – and that includes inviting prospective employers, an outreach project that will take work but bring value.

   h. Is this something the profession actually wants to do?
i. I would take the term “strong case” and replace it with “the profession must sell to the public” etc.

j. Should we be making an argument that we prepare people for many career paths, or should we focus on a smaller number we can really impact, like teaching.

k. AMEN. Those who work outside of academia are the most effective and knowledgeable ambassadors for those who work within. Reach out and include them in the discussion.

l. Not just working with employers – students should also engage public audiences during the Ph.D. to show their job flexibility.

m. They [the profession] don’t yet [make the case to the public], not 100%. Students need to have validated opportunities for non-course experiences, that count toward the degree!

n. Yes. But RISK – that the Ph.D. education becomes viewed as subsidiary to job outcome and managed according to utilitarian goals and values.

o. Amen to that, but the “prospective employer” piece of this seems to get hardly any play in the discussions of this idea.

p. What if they [the profession] don’t [prepare students for jobs outside academia]?

q. The key to actualizing this may lie in messaging that isn’t unidirectional and instead taps into real partnering with prospective employers.

r. FURTHER QUESTION: Following this logic, does the concern for adapting the Ph.D. program become simply a way of justifying the current jobs held by Ph.D.-training faculty?

s. This seems right to me but quite challenging for faculties that have by and large passed their whole lives/careers in education.

t. What do employers and the public think when they see the letters Ph.D.? How can we shape that?

u. But we also need to convince “employers” that we bring valuable things to the table.

6) In how many courses do students feel a sense of community, a sense of mentorship, a sense of collective investment, a sense that what is being created matters?


a. How would I [as a teacher] know?

b. My guess is, more [students] than you may think – but if you ask how many teachers consciously try to create this, then I would say, very few.

c. A good question, and if we want to increase the proportion where they do [feel this way], then we need to increase our resources.

i. Class size.
d. All to rarely – students are often approaching knowledge-building as a consumer exercise.

e. How can we create this feeling of “mattering”?

f. How is this determined? What do course evaluations ask that might reflect these “feelings”?

g. Less community is felt by students in interdisciplinary fields attending disciplinary courses.

h. The key in this quote is “collective investment” and, I would add, accomplishment and reward, beyond the individual but without excluding her.

i. In every class, some students feel this sense of community while others do not (this is reflected in evaluations). The challenge is to break that barrier, allowing students to find common group despite interests/abilities.

j. Are these things inevitably related – community, mentorship, investment, mattering? Which can exist without the others? When should we emphasize one more than others?

k. Depends on the material and how it’s presented; on the student and how he or she receives it. In my experience, there is consistently – even on the graduate level – this connection to community and collective investment.

l. The importance of this depends on 1) the course level and 2) the course goals.

m. How many [elements] is sufficient? It will never be all.

n. I love this quote, and the responses. How long can community last? How long does it take to build?

o. A sense of community can be encouraged with joint/shared goals, or discouraged by competition.

p. Get rid of “silos.”

q. Get away from the banking concept of education.

r. What about engaging in a service-learning project as a class?

s. The things on this list aren’t all equivalent – community, mentorship, collective investment, and a sense that things matter. Emphasizing one might de-emphasize another.

t. Yes – perhaps one step towards creating this type of continuous community is to encourage students in this type of environment to form writing groups during the course that continue afterwards.

u. Community can be created in a given course/class – the question is – how can that community be fostered and grown from one discrete course to another?

7) By using the phrase “post-course era,” I’m not saying that courses cannot be the site of effective teaching and learning. I will argue later how I think that can indeed be the case. On every campus there are committed and creative faculty whose courses are memorable and have impact for many students. What I am arguing is that we have reached the end of
the era of assuming that the formal curriculum—composed of **bounded, self-contained courses**—is the primary place where the most significant learning takes place.


a. I am not convinced that doctoral education has ever been best characterized by a “Formal curriculum” of “bounded self-contained courses.”

b. This is perhaps true, just as the traditional monograph or academic paper may not necessarily be the most effective modes for transmitting high level scholarship. I say “may not” because I’m not convinced.

c. Learning experiences can (and probably should) be bounded without having to conform to many of the traditions/assumptions associated here with “course.” The course can change.

d. I agree with this one strongly. I think we are terrible at thinking beyond the original course, and yet attached to the idea that students need X individual courses as their foundation before doing “independent research.” Sometimes I think students would be better off in courses **during** exams and dissertations, and taking fewer of them overall.

e. The “course” becomes the organizational platform—requiring a team of stakeholders—and an investment in how the “course” functions in the learning trajectory of the student.

f. I don’t find the “post” moniker helpful…it stands in contradistinction without really advancing anything innovative.

g. I doubt this. Precisely because it’s an effective means of resource allocation, courses will remain central and significant. How courses are taught and relate to other courses may change.

h. I think Bass is thinking primarily about undergrads—to what extent is this true of Ph.D. courses?

i. As with any humanities? The answer is “it depends.” Effective teachers and learners employ multiple ways of engaging with material simultaneously.

j. I can’t imagine we ever were in a place where the most significant learning took place primarily in such regimented conditions.

k. Linking courses together might also be helpful.

l. What is the role of “experiential” learning?

m. How to evaluate non-traditional informal “locations” of learning?

n. Launching creative projects (independent or group) within traditional course structures might be a way to coalesce the formal curriculum and high-impact learning.

o. In the context of Fordham then, maybe we need to start recognizing and identifying where else graduate student learning is taking place.
p. Until we develop coherent replacements, I have a hard time agreeing – in an institution as conservative as academia, eras can linger like hangovers.

q. I can’t see a connection to my discipline here.

r. That “era” has never existed in liberal education!

s. Contributions to construction of a “course” become more collaborative, less focused on what faculty wish to teach, more on what students need to know.