



# Navigating the Joys and Challenges of Public Scholarship in Graduate School

An Imagining America Research Report

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## Acknowledgements

We want to begin by thanking the project participants for their thoughtful, stimulating, and significant contributions that they provided us during lengthy, in-depth interviews. These engaged scholars provided us with insightful commentary and critiques on the state of public scholarship within graduate school. We view all of our participants as co-producers of knowledge in this report. They put their experiences into conversation with the larger university setting, just as we have sought to do within this report and offered insightful analysis themselves. For this reason, we incorporated many long quotes in their own words. Unfortunately, the public scholars we spoke to are in precarious positions and we need to preserve their anonymity in the report, but we do view them all as co-collaborators on this project. This approach is in line with the IRB approvals which guaranteed anonymity for all interviewees of the larger Leading and Learning Initiative research project.

Next, we would like to thank the Andrew Mellon Foundation for funding Imagining America's Leading and Learning Initiative (LLI), whose support made this work possible. Erica Kohl-Arenas, the Faculty Director of Imagining America, provided helpful direction, feedback, and support that made this project possible. Christina Preston, a research associate with Imagining America, was a vital part of the project and continually met with us to engage in discussions of the graduate student experience and how our project fits into the greater LLI work. Kal Alston, Chair of Imagining America's National Advisory Board, provided valuable insight and feedback on the project's directions and supported this initiative. We would also like to thank Pepiro (Imagining America Communications Director) and Erin Syoen (Imagining America Operations Manager) for their respective design and administrative support on this project.

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## Disclosure

This work was funded by the Andrew Mellon Foundation through Imagining America. Both of us were Davis Humanities Institute Mellon Public Scholars before starting this project, Alana in 2017 and Lizbeth in 2019. We also applied to the positions to do this work through the Mellon Public Scholars program. We are both currently PhD Candidates at the University of California, Davis.

## Foreword

With funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Leading and Learning Initiative (LLI) was launched in Albuquerque, New Mexico, at the 2019 Imagining America (IA) Leadership Forum. At this event, the research team, Erica Kohl-Arenas, Kal Alston, and Christina Preston, shared the hopes and goals of the LLI and engaged in dialogue with members of a newly formed Leadership Cohort and Network Advisors group. The main goals of this action-research initiative include the following:

1. Produce and present original actionable research that holds institutions of higher education accountable to support public and activist scholarship that engages the methodologies of art, design, and humanities.
2. Connect and convene a national network of campus and associational leaders and graduate student scholars committed to activist and public scholarship to guide the research and build a collective multi-faceted voice towards advocacy and action.
3. Produce interactive guides, tools, resources, and media that students, scholars, and leaders can use to advocate for change towards greater support of public and activist scholarship, with compelling examples of how to do so.

From the very beginnings of the project, the research team has been aware of the importance of having input and partnership with graduate scholars. We dedicated part of our budget across the length of the project to supporting those contributions, centering reach of, by, and for engaged graduate scholars. We were incredibly fortunate to work with the authors of this Report, Lizbeth De La Cruz and Alana Haynes Stein, who undertook a challenging project and not only produced this report but also contributed methodologically to the broader endeavor. While this report focuses on experiences of graduate students at one large public research university, we concur with the conclusion that it hopefully will provoke additional research in other higher education settings. Even in its focus, the experiences discussed in the Report will (and do) resonate with public graduate scholars and their mentors across multiple domains, including those who have graduated, entered faculty positions or left academia altogether.

We acknowledge the hard, and sometimes, painful work of the colleagues who carefully designed and executed this project, asked exceedingly hard questions, listened deeply to their peers, and produced this Report. We look forward with great anticipation to both the uses that will be made of this work and the future work of these two deeply engaged scholars.

Erica Kohl-Arenas, Kal Alston, Christina Preston

## **Executive Summary**

### **Overview**

The following report provides an account of the graduate student experiences of activists and public scholars from the University of California, Davis (UC Davis). The report charts myriad themes that emerged during interviews conducted in the summer of 2020 by Alana Haynes Stein (Sociology) and Lizbeth De La Cruz Santana (Spanish and Portuguese), UC Davis PhD candidates who were Mellon Public Scholars on Imagining America's Leading and Learning Initiative (LLI) in 2020.

### **Motives**

This research on graduate student experiences with public scholarship was inspired by Imagining America's efforts to shift culture around how public scholarship is perceived, supported, recognized, and resourced within academia and across university community lines. The authors were contracted as research partners with Imagining America's Leading and Learning Initiative (LLI), which is focused on highlighting and designing strategies to shift institutional culture to better support public scholarship.

Over the past decade, Imagining America, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and many people within universities across the country have done significant work to create institutions that are more accepting of public scholarship. A growing body of research has focused on public scholarship in university settings (e.g., Bott, 2012; Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2020; Eatman et al., 2018; Ellison & Eatman, 2008; Gilvin et al., 2021; Kezar et al., 2018; O'Meara, 2008a; O'Meara & Jaeger, 2006; Post et al., 2016; Sandmann et al., 2019; Strum et al., 2011). However, public scholarship initiatives often just focus on the experiences of faculty and undergraduates, overlooking graduate students and their education (Mathis & Boehm, 2018). Existing scholarship on graduate student public engagement suggests that historically rooted structural and cultural barriers hinder graduate student public scholarship (Deeb-Sossa et al., 2022; Lanford & Tierney, 2018; Mathis & Boehm, 2018; O'Meara & Jaeger, 2006). As university demographics change, graduate students are increasingly pushing for public scholarship opportunities (Beck et al., 2016; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2016).

Graduate school is a crucial period for scholarly development. During graduate school, scholars learn to be, and become, professionalized within the culture of academia, developing their scholarly identity (Clark-Taylor et al., 2018; Deeb-Sossa et al., 2022; Dorcas, 2021; Eatman, 2012; O'Meara 2008a; O'Meara & Jaeger, 2006; Orphan & O'Meara, 2016; Ward & Miller, 2016). While the prevalence of, and support for, graduate public scholarship has progressed in recent years, much work remains (Jaeger et al., 2014; Morin et al., 2016; Sam et al., 2020). Graduate public scholarship in dissertation work varies by discipline, with the humanities and arts lagging behind disciplines like education and public health (Jaeger et al., 2014). So far, the graduate student experience has largely been missing from the written work on public scholarship by Imagining America. When Imagining America's LLI team began asking faculty and administrators when they first faced resistance to public scholarship, many replied that the resistant culture started in graduate school. This led us to explore graduate public scholars' experiences in more depth.

The interviews we conducted revealed many obstacles that scholars face when doing publicly engaged scholarship that is particular to and originates from their experiences in graduate school. These are obstacles that people face long before making it to the hurdles typical of the tenure and promotion process.

To truly achieve culture change that better recognizes and supports public scholarship within academia, we propose that greater attention be paid to the graduate school experience. We argue that change must occur in both the structures and requirements of graduate programs as well as the culture and meaning-making of how mentors and faculty interpret and engage with public scholarship. Furthermore, we argue for more attention to the tolls of public scholarship, particularly when scholars are not supported in their work.

## **I History**

Imagining America sought to deepen understanding of the experiences of public scholars in graduate school as part of the Mellon-funded Leading and Learning Initiative. To accomplish this, Imagining America collaborated with the Davis Humanities Institute to select two graduate students to work collaboratively to conduct original research during the summer of 2020. We were selected for this project and have since read current literature on public scholarship in academia, conducted original research, and participated in panel conversations about graduate student experiences with public scholarship. These activities have led us to create this report with recommendations for creating a university culture that fosters public scholarship.

## **I Findings**

In the following sections, we identify both the mechanisms through which graduate students experience barriers to public scholarship and those through which their public scholarship is supported.

The high-level themes that unite the interviews are expressed through ideas about how structures in graduate school enable discrepancies between the support, value, and sustainability of the scholarship and research public scholars carry out while in graduate school. Therefore, this report explores and plans to create meaningful contributions to a field of research that has so far lacked a focus on graduate student experiences. Generally, public scholars navigate traditional graduate school trajectories and milestones while fostering and cultivating relationships outside the university, which, in turn, often motivate their research along with their academic and career pursuits.

We begin by exploring central and noted structures that students navigate in graduate school. We find that there are disconnects making it difficult for graduate students to meet graduate school requirements, continue the practice of conducting public scholarship, and still establish productive relationships between advisers and mentees. We then explore graduate school culture and link antagonistic conditions in graduate school to conversations about legitimacy and value, false dichotomies, the meaning of knowledge creation, and tokenization. Next, we look at common faculty misperceptions of activist and public scholarship, focusing on misconceptions, misunderstandings, tensions, and the meanings of doing activist work. After that, we highlight the emotions that emerge when doing public scholarship.

Although the topics that emerged during the interviews are not exclusive to the high-level themes we have highlighted, our intention in presenting them is to provide a general overview of public scholarship in graduate school.

## **| The Structures of Graduate School**

We focus on the structures of graduate degree programs to illuminate the constraints of graduate programs and how these structures might be altered to improve public scholarship experiences. Our findings show that the graduate program requirements, the advisors, the committees, the available funding, and the job market each play an important role in shaping public scholarship. Although we identify many barriers to doing public scholarship, we also highlight the structures that graduate students rely on for support. Graduate students particularly appreciate spaces that provide financial support and initiatives that specifically target graduate students. Scholars' discussions of these programs show that these structural supports both provide assistance and legitimize their work in the academy.

## **| The Culture Surrounding Public Scholarship in Graduate School**

Our findings suggest that activist and public scholars frequently face pushback from faculty who consider their public and activist work a distraction from graduate studies, which leads to debates of legitimacy and value. Graduate public scholars face obstacles securing resources to sustainably support their projects. Simultaneously, graduate scholars reported

a lack of training from the university for scholars to equitably engage and collaborate with the community. Respondents also described an institutional culture that leads to the tokenization and exploitation of scholars. They expressed feeling only marginally valued especially when their department or graduate program, university, or discipline attempted to claim their work as part of their mission.

## **| Perceptions of Graduate Public Scholarship**

Graduate students navigate many tensions with how their public scholarship is understood by others. Respondents reported feeling constrained by academic norms as to which conversations they can engage with and with whom. Furthermore, we found differences in how public scholars are treated by faculty, administrators, and disciplinary gatekeepers as compared with those who do not conduct public scholarship. Scholars whose work is more activist-oriented tend to face more opposition to their work than other public scholars.

## **| The Emotions of Public Scholarship**

Respondents shared many different emotions that emerge in the practice of public scholarship. Scholars often identified the emotional connections to, and fulfillment from, the work as compelling and essential elements of their work. However, scholars also discussed experiencing complex emotions and fatigue from the additional emotional labor that is often an innate component of public scholarship. Many indicated a deep desire for support and training to help navigate complex community relationships. The emotional aspects of the work are particularly important as these sentiments do not necessarily end when their projects or work with the community finalizes. Respondents also reported that their emotionality and their emotional attachment to their work was used by mentors and others in their field to delegitimize that work.

## **| Recommendations**

- Broaden the dialogue on public scholarship to include graduate students
- Reimagine graduate program requirements
- Provide ongoing funding to support both public scholarship and public scholars
- Institutionalize support for the creation of community research ethics beyond Institutional Review Boards (IRBs)
- Provide instruction on diverse methods that can be used in public scholarship
- Recognize and provide support for the emotional labor that underwrites public scholarship
- Respect and legitimate collaboration
- Create job opportunities for public scholars within academia
- Hire, recognize, and support mentors who provide mentorship to public scholars



In what follows, we provide our detailed report with the findings from this research.

## Overview

This report provides an analysis of 31 semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted by the authors with UC Davis graduate students who do publicly engaged scholarship. This report offers an approach to better understand public scholars based on their experiences and offers suggestions for institutional culture change. Much of the report focuses on findings from the interviews. These findings have been organized thematically to help institutional leaders, faculty, and graduate students better understand and value public scholarship in their disciplines. We also offer recommendations for what needs to be done to positively change the culture around public scholarship.

## What Do We Mean by Public Scholarship?

What we refer to as public scholarship goes by many names—publicly engaged scholarship, engaged scholarship, community-based research, and scholar activism. Public scholarship can be understood as an umbrella term describing scholarship tied to community concerns and social justice concerned with equal access to, and involvement in, knowledge production. It is based on efforts that seek to democratize access to institutions or creating access, and it is focused on creating a more just world through eradicating inequities. In previous reports, Imagining America defined public scholarship as

Scholarly or creative activity integral to [one's] academic area. It encompasses different forms of making knowledge about, for, and with diverse communities. Through a coherent, purposeful sequence of activities, it contributes to the public good and yields artifacts of public and intellectual value. (Bott, 2012, p. xxi)

In this report, we also build on the work of Cann and DeMeulenaere (2020), who define activist scholarship as work with a more considerable ideological impact rooted in critical theories and approaches. They differentiate activist research from other public scholarship, and show that “not all action research is activist research. Activist research must have a critical edge. It must be focused on social justice work: it is about the pursuit of justice” (pp. 69–70).

In the context of ethical research methods for public scholarship, we also follow what Watson (2019) describes as disrupting “dynamics that perpetuate colonial relationships” (p. 72) as she considers the role of scholar-activist methodologies in 21st-century America.

Some widely shared notions of public scholarship focus on the community engagement and activism components. Although scholars incorporate a vast array of perceptions of public scholarship, their practices support identifying public scholarship as living in, inspired by,

and for community. We draw on all these conceptions of public scholarship in our work, including all scholars who fit into any of these definitions of public scholarship in the humanities, arts, and humanistic social sciences.

## **| Making Scholarship Accessible to Communities**

For scholars, a central motive that drives public scholarship is the intent for knowledge creation and scholarship to be accessible to the communities engaged. Knowledge production, accountability, and reciprocity with community are dynamics that emerged as essential for the best ethical public scholarship practices. Importantly, the descriptions we provide are not exclusive to the categories outlined but, instead, are in dialogue with one another.

## **| What Do We Mean by Community?**

The scholars we interviewed all work with a community in some way. However, definitions of community varied between scholars. Some scholars define a community as a group of people from a specific location such as a neighborhood or geographic area. Others work with communities based on common identities, such as ethnicity or religious or sexual orientation. Still others work with circumstantial communities, which are defined as people linked by the experiences that they share, such as immigration or material hardship. Some work with a broader public, seeking to do work with or benefiting people who experience inequities outside the university as well as those within the university.

## **| Knowledge Production with Community**

Many scholars described the approaches they consider and put into practice when seeking to conduct research and co-create knowledge with the community to humanize research and the data collection process. In this manner, scholars intend to undo patterns of oppression and misrepresentation and to follow Watson's call "to show up differently within and beyond the walls of the ivory tower" (2019, p. 74).

In "Liberating Methodologies: Reclaiming Research as a Site for Radical Inquiry and Transformation," Watson (2019) engaged in descriptive approaches to "disrupt dynamics that perpetuate colonial relationships" (p. 72). In the same manner, graduate scholars described ways they usually seek to disrupt, challenge, and transform the public university as they engage in public scholarship. Some scholars sought to establish a straightforward collaboration with the community in the development stages of projects when community input helps shape the project's needs and outcomes. Others shared their practice of having communities collaborate in academic and public written pieces. Some scholars shared that if a community member can read dissertation chapters that draw from the community's

knowledge production, they disclose that material to them before sending it to their dissertation committee.

Other creative approaches to knowledge production with community emerge in the classroom. In pre-COVID-19 times, some scholars mentioned inviting the general public—community members, including their students’ families—to their classrooms. During COVID-19, one scholar noted inviting their students’ family members to their virtual classrooms. One scholar specifically argued that since the public funds the University of California schools, the public should have access to its resources.

### **| Accountability**

Recognizing the importance of accountability is essential to community well-being and the ethics behind community-based projects. Public education in public institutions was a process that inspired public scholarship for many of the scholars we spoke to. Accountability, then, becomes essential in scholars’ public engagement and graduate education; it is a way to pay back their communities and the broader public.

Through our research, we found accountability to the community to propel many of the projects that scholars engage in. This leads to reciprocity, giving back the knowledge produced by the community and sharing resources that meet community needs. In some ways, accountability can be thought of as a moral compass that allows scholars to remain aligned to the relationships established with the community and the protocols they need to follow as researchers.

### **| Reciprocity**

Respondents shared that reciprocity was a driving force in their public scholarship practice. Although not all scholars were able to identify ways to engage in the practice of reciprocity, those who did shared feeling proud for pushing the boundaries of what public scholarship can accomplish. Be it by supporting the opening of community spaces, providing the tools for the community to document their history, utilizing their writing skills for grant writing, or supporting their preestablished projects, scholars communicated the importance of giving back in any capacity they could, allowing scholars and community partners to become creative in this process.

### **| Methods**

We conducted 31 in-depth qualitative interviews with graduate students and alumni during the summer of 2020 to better understand graduate student experiences with public scholarship. Interview respondents were current graduate students at UC Davis, or recent graduates, who had been involved in public scholarship in the arts, design, humanities, and

humanistic social sciences. UC Davis is a large, public, R1, land grant institution that actively promotes itself as a leader in public scholarship. The interviews covered a range of topics and lasted from 30 minutes to 2.5 hours with an average interview time of 1 hour and 19 minutes. Topics covered included graduate scholar views on public scholarship, descriptions of their own scholarship, and how their scholarship has been perceived, recognized, and supported by others.

## I Factors Influencing Research

We conducted the research between June and October 2020. We were based in California, but the entire project was conducted using conferencing software (Zoom) and other means due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both our research methods and the data were influenced by the historical moment and circumstances during which we did this project. Due to the pandemic, all our meetings and interviews were conducted online through Zoom's video conferencing software, which allowed us to engage with people throughout the United States and internationally. The pandemic meant that people in our sample were already familiar with and also fairly comfortable with using video conferencing software for regular interactions. In addition to distance, we also had to worry about our health and well-being, and that of our families, our respondents, and others we care about. The pandemic triggered an economic crisis with an insufficient government safety net that continues to threaten many lives and livelihoods, a threat that goes beyond the danger of contracting the virus.

While we conducted this research, large social uprisings gained momentum drawing attention to state and civilian violence and highlighting racism against Black people. The Black Lives Matter movement brought into focus the systemic oppression Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities have faced for centuries. These social movements led to unrest in the lives of many around us and in our own lives. In our cities, we experienced police and state surveillance as police and National Guard helicopters circled the areas we lived in. These also led to much more discussion about the systemic racism and police brutality embedded in institutions including the university. This enabled more open conversations about race than had been occurring in the time directly leading up to these events. These shaped our interviews, both in the questions we asked and, we suspect, in the answers we received.

California was also experiencing an unprecedented number of wildfires throughout the state while we were conducting this research. Several large fires began in mid-August, which created evacuation risks in both the Sacramento and the Central Valley areas and led to polluted, unhealthy air for a portion of the research period. These fires and the resulting smoke shaped the way we lived our lives (limiting time spent outside, for example) and also affected our health and energy even while we stayed indoors.

Additionally, this research was conducted while the 2020 U.S. presidential election was in full swing. The associated violence and white supremacy threatened (and continue to threaten)

the well-being of many. As we conducted this research, we had to contend with its effects on our own lives as well as of those we care about.

This research was certainly conducted in a unique and complicated time. As we embarked on this research, we had to process and work through the unique situations we faced as a collective and in our own personal lives. We have yet to meet each other in person, but we have formed a strong bond as we have worked together through very trying times; we have become a support network for one another. Certainly, if this project's success could somehow be measured given the situations outlined above, it would be due primarily to our collaboration, communication, and resilience.

It is important to note that the comradery that helped shape this first set of data is not only unique to its time but also a response to the bond we created virtually with the respondents. Although we framed the interview questionnaire and the model for the interviews in a way that minimized our interventions, our own identities as researchers who are also graduate public scholars and some of our relationships with respondents influenced the content of the interviews.

## **I Interview Sample**

We conducted 28 interviews with respondents we recruited and an additional 3 interviews among the Imagining America research team, all of whom fit within the sampling strategy. This gave us a total of 31 interviews. We have included some of the experiences and quotes from the project team in the analysis, although we have not included the research team in the sample demographics.

## **I Sample Selection**

Respondents were selected from the pool of registered UC Davis graduate students or graduate program alumni in the arts, design, humanities, and humanistic social sciences who were involved in work that was broadly construed as public scholarship either by the research team or the research participants. Although many scholars did not identify with this specific term, many identified with related terms, such as public engagement, scholar activism, public history, public sociology, and digital humanities.

Our sampling frame began with a selected list of Mellon Public Scholars and program applicants recommended by the Mellon Public Scholars Program Manager. We then added people from our personal networks who also fit the study's criteria. We also employed snowball sampling through respondents.

We purposely selected and recruited potential respondents from a range of departments as well as from varying demographic backgrounds. They were at different stages in their

graduate education, with varying experiences with institutional support (through the Mellon Public Scholars [MPS] program) and varying career trajectories.

In total, we contacted 52 people to request interviews, and we were able to interview 28 of them. This gave us a response rate of 54%. Given the complications inherent in asking people to participate in interviews that lasted for as long as an hour and a half, took place over the summer months (outside of the academic year) amid several overlapping crises (COVID-19, wildfires, ongoing killings of BIPOC people), and a tense political moment, we are confident that the response rate is fairly high.

### **| Who Might Be Missing?**

We did not interview anyone who told us they identified as a straight, white man. Given the dominance of this group in academia, this group can be deemed missing from the sample; however, based on our sampling methods, it is possible to conclude that this demographic is less likely to do public scholarship. We also did not interview many people who were interested in doing public scholarship but were not able to due to barriers they faced. We interviewed only one person who was a public scholar but left graduate school before completing their program.

### **| Interview Process**

We were interested in learning about the experiences of graduate students with public scholarship in the arts, design, humanities, and humanistic social sciences at UC Davis. To be included in the study, respondents had to be a current graduate student or have recently been a graduate student at UC Davis doing work in these fields. (While we never formally set a cutoff time, all respondents had been at UC Davis within the past 10 years at the time of the interviews.)

Before each interview, we put together a short biography of each participant from information available online.

We conducted interviews online through Zoom's video conferencing platform. Interviews were conducted using video calls, but only audio was recorded using both Zoom (which provided cloud transcriptions) and Rev software. With the exception of one interview that was conducted by both authors, all other interviews were conducted by either Lizbeth or Alana. Additionally, we took written notes during the interviews. The interview guide is included in the appendix.

## I Analysis

We analyzed the automated Zoom transcriptions along with the audio recordings and our written notes. The automated transcriptions are unedited. With the exception of the respondent characteristics and the word cloud, the findings are based on ideas rather than quantitative analysis of the data. We thematically analyzed the data in the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA, coding for themes that we saw emerging throughout the context of the research and in our discussions with each other and project staff. We each listened to all the interviews.

## I Ethics

We followed Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol to protect the confidentiality of all research subjects in the collection of data. We also know that this alone does not fully reflect the ethics of this work. Thus, we have endeavored to hold ourselves accountable to the community that we are working with and to protect the sensitive information with which they have trusted us while at the same time using that information to push for change within academia. We use they/them pronouns in many places to refer to scholars who may have identified with he or she pronouns to protect the confidentiality of all participants. We only use he and she pronouns in places that both reflect the pronouns the scholar uses as well as in moments where the gender distinction was salient but would not give away the scholar's identity.

## I Demographics

We interviewed people from 13 different departments and graduate programs. Importantly, all respondents (of the 27 for whom we have demographic information) identified as belonging to at least one underrepresented category from the following five demographic variables: gender, race, first generation, sexual orientation, and international student (see Tables 1 and 2).<sup>1</sup> On average, respondents belonged to 2.4 (n = 27) of the underrepresented groups. As can be seen in Figure 1, respondents most often belonged to two underrepresented groups. While our sample is not a representative sample of graduate students doing public scholarship, it is important to note that the graduate students involved in public scholarship tend to be from groups that are underrepresented in academia. This underlines larger trends that show that minority groups are more often involved in public

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<sup>1</sup> We considered respondents to be in underrepresented categories based on the following criteria: People were considered to be from an underrepresented gender group if they did not identify as "male," or "man," People were considered to be from an underrepresented racial group if they did not identify as only white. People were considered to be from an underrepresented group if they identified as a first generation student. People were considered to be from an underrepresented sexual orientation group if they did not identify as "straight" or "heterosexual." People were considered to be from an underrepresented group if they identified as international students. Note: Ethnicity was not counted as a separate underrepresented group because we only measured it by asking if people identified as Hispanic, Latinx, Chicanx, or Spanish, or none of these, and the people who identified as Hispanic, Latinx, Chicanx, or Spanish did not identify as only white.

scholarship (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2016). When we spoke with respondents about their public scholarship, their identification with communities that are underrepresented in academia often came up as part of the reason that they do publicly engaged scholarship and the reason why they sought to pursue a graduate degree.

Although we did not ask all respondents about it, another important group that emerged, which is underrepresented in graduate school, was that of parents. Mothers particularly talked about the challenges of balancing family commitments while completing graduate school and conducting public scholarship.

Table 1: Interview Respondent Demographics (N = 28)

Variable	Category	Count (n)	Percent (%)
<b>Gender</b>		27	
	Female/woman	16	59
	Male/man	8	30
	Other: including nonbinary and fluid	3	11
<b>Race</b>		27	
	American Indian or Alaska Native	2	7
	Asian	3	11
	Black or African American	2	7
	Middle Eastern or North African	0	0
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	4
	White	8	30
	(White only)	7	26
	Other	15	56
	Multiple Selected	3	11
<b>Ethnicity</b>		27	
	Hispanic	3	11
	Latinx	6	22
	Chicanx	3	11
	Spanish	0	0
	None of these	18	67
	Multiple selected	3	11



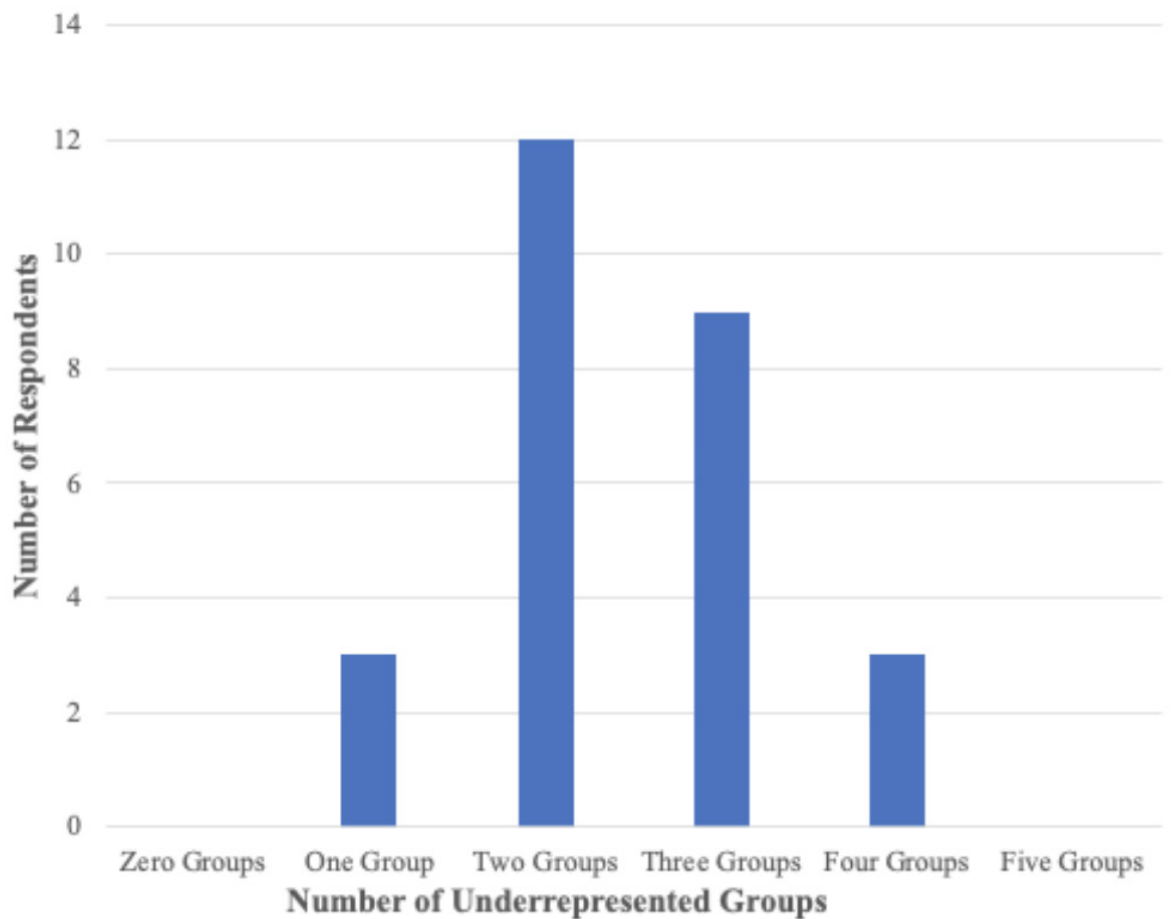
Variable	Category	Count (n)	Percent (%)
Sexual orientation		27	
	Bisexual	3	11
	Gay	2	7
	Pansexual	2	7
	Queer	8	30
	Straight or heterosexual	15	56
	Multiple selected	3	11
First generation		27	
	Yes	10	37
	No	17	63

Table 2: Interview Respondent Student Characteristics (N = 28)

Variable	Category	Count (n)	Percent (%)
Student status		28	
	Alumni	12	43
	Current student	15	54
	Left program	1	4
Years spent in UC Davis grad program		27	Average = 5
International student		27	
	Yes	5	19
	No	22	81
Highest degree program at UC Davis		28	
	PhD	25	89
	Master's	3	11
Mellon Public Scholar		28	
	Yes	11	39
	No	17	61

Having identities that have historically been marginalized seemed to affect students' interest in public scholarship. This often seemed to drive their interest in doing public scholarship, particularly as many worked with communities that they were a part of themselves. A theme that also surfaced from this group is the complex relationships and situations that emerge by doing public scholarship in their own communities and how they best negotiate these.

Figure 1: Number of Underrepresented Group Identities per Respondent (n = 27)



To determine first generation status, we asked people both what their parents' highest level of education was and whether they identified as a first generation college student. The answers and the resulting categorization could vary depending on whether people self-identifies as first-generation students, or how we categorized respondents based on their parents' education. The rows listing first generation respondents in Table 2 is based on their yes or no answer to being a first generation student.

People often did not feel like the racial and ethnic categories applied to them. We suspected

this might be the case but wanted to provide categories so that we could produce some reports on demographics without collapsing people into groups they did not identify with, and also without giving away people's identity through just their recognizable racial and ethnic identities. The categories outlined for race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation can be found in the appendix (see the list of questions in the Demographics section). In instances where respondents did not identify with the choices provided, some provided their own racial or ethnic categories.

## Discussion of Findings

In this study, we identify how graduate students uniquely navigate the difficulties of conducting public scholarship through our interviews with 31 public scholars. We trace the processes that graduate students go through as they engage with the public, and we locate common themes in the graduate student experience of public scholarship. Our interviews took place at one institution, which actively promotes itself as a leader in public scholarship. We are confident that the barriers we identify at an institution that is purportedly supportive of public scholarship are likely to be even more heightened at other universities.

We trace the structures that graduate students confront and the mechanisms they use to do public scholarship while in graduate school. By identifying these ways of being in, and navigating, spaces as a public scholar, we attempt to highlight those structures that public scholars face, the culture they both push back on and contribute to, and the toll that public scholarship takes on scholars. This toll is particularly important as all our respondents came from at least one group that is underrepresented in academia (see the methods section for demographic details).

While we interviewed several scholars who are now tenure-track faculty, we focus here on their experiences as graduate students because what they said about the tenure-track experience corresponded with the existing literature on public scholarship for junior faculty (see Ellison & Eatman, 2008). We also discuss the experiences of alumni who are now in positions outside of the tenure track and those scholars who are on the job market, as these have not been the focus of existing research but provide important context for the experiences of graduate public scholars.

In the following sections, we elaborate on our findings. First, we outline the structures that shape graduate students' ability to do public scholarship and to incorporate it into their graduate studies. Then, we discuss the academic culture within which graduate students engage in public scholarship. Next, we highlight the preexisting perceptions about public scholarship that graduate students must navigate. Finally, we delve into the emotions that often go unrecognized and undiscussed in the public scholar experience.

## The Structures of Graduate School

While the actual requirements and expectations of how to navigate graduate school differ by discipline and between types of graduate programs (master's and PhD programs, for example), we found commonalities among graduate students' experiences. For the most part, these structures do not accommodate public scholarship.

Graduate public scholars often do much more work than they need to as a graduate student; often, they do public scholarship that is not "counted" toward degree requirements in addition to the necessary work for their program requirements. Many respondents described their public scholarship as separate from their dissertation, coursework, and other program requirements. While some incorporate public scholarship into their dissertation, respondents said the dissertation itself was generally not focused on public scholarship or that public scholarship represented only a small component of it.

## Undergraduate to Graduate School Transition

Several scholars discussed doing public and activist-oriented scholarship during their undergraduate programs or in master's programs prior to coming to UC Davis. Generally, they discussed their success with and support for doing this type of work, although one scholar did mention beginning to confront hostilities to this work during their undergraduate years.

Scholars emphasized the disconnect between how activist, public scholarship, and community service programs are treated in undergraduate programs with how they are then treated in graduate school.

*I was an activist in undergrad and stuff. And so I always interacted with professors who were really active on campus. . . . When I actually got into grad school, I realized that most people are not like that. It was a really eye-opening experience.*

One scholar even described their first exposure to negative opinions of public scholarship during their undergraduate experience at an institution that had funded and otherwise supported their public scholarship.

*When I was in undergrad I had one advisor and she was advising me on my thesis and I really wanted to . . . do public scholarship. And she actually told me, "Your research should never be in relationship with the actual people that you interview . . . it ruins the objectivity."*

Overall, the interviews demonstrated how ideas about public scholarship often began before graduate school. Most frequently, scholars described bringing their activist roots into their graduate programs. However, as demonstrated by the quote above, some of the opposition to public scholarship began before graduate school.

## Coursework

Scholars often discussed the lack of coursework available to support their public scholarship. Students frequently expressed a desire for courses that taught the methods used in public scholarship and also for courses that really dive into the ethics surrounding this type of work. When asked about the support they need, one scholar expressed their desire for an ethics class and pointed out how this would also lead to greater changes in support for public scholars through the need to hire faculty with this expertise.

Funding for, say, an ethics class . . . that would also mean that we'd have to hire faculty who know how to teach about ethics. But you know what, maybe that'll help some of these publicly engaged scholars.

Thus, scholars express their understanding of how the structures of course offerings within graduate programs are intrinsically connected to the existing academic job market that many scholars seek to enter.

Beyond the additional classes that scholars would like as part of graduate course offerings, scholars also faced barriers as they took existing courses. Several students discussed the challenges of taking courses with professors who were unsupportive of their scholarship. These barriers seemed to come up most when they took courses outside their own discipline. For example, a scholar in a graduate group described their experience taking classes in more traditional departments:

*[W]hat's kind of been really tough is going to, for example, a . . . methods class in . . . [a] traditional department and if I bring up things around like: "What about using decolonial PAR?" And there'd be tensions there in terms of whether or not that's a real methodology. So luckily I found other spaces . . . But . . . I really had to dig . . . it's hard to find folks who have that same mentality around research.*

Scholars experience their coursework as a burden to public scholarship as both the existing and requisite courses are not supportive of public scholarship. This is in addition to a lack of course offerings that would teach them the ethics and methods that they would like to bring into their public scholarship.

## The Power of a Mentor and Advisor

### Supportive Mentors

The university, and particularly the world of public scholarship at UC Davis, is relatively small. In general, scholars expressed feeling content with the mentors they eventually found, either for gaining their unconditional support or for knowing that, to some extent, their mentors support their work. One scholar discussed their experience and how their mentor—

who shared a common background with them from an underrepresented group—supported them in graduate school:

*Working with [Professor Y]: [She] is an amazing mentor. Even from the very beginning she was like, hey, [we have this common background]. Let's work together, and she pulled us in to do that publication. She's been super instrumental in guiding my thinking with regards to how to make sure that the work that I do makes me a scholar-activist and not just a scholar. . . . She has helped me find the value in doing work within my own community. And I don't think any other professors have been able to integrate that in me as much as she has. And provided me with the emotional and financial and all the other different types of support that a student would need to get through grad school, right.*

Many students had the same advisors and described them as supportive mentors who have had an impact on the positive experience of graduate students at UC Davis. Three mentors were mentioned repeatedly as being positive supports for students doing public scholarship. All three are from underrepresented groups in academia. While graduate students highly valued their mentorship, we worry about the burden being placed on so few mentors to provide support for so many public scholars.

## **Unsupportive Advisors**

Although some mentors appear to be sympathetic to graduate scholars' public scholarship, some scholars mentioned that their advisor's approval of their public scholarship is conditional on their meeting academic milestones. In these cases, public scholarship work is labeled by advisors as extracurricular activities and as community volunteer work. The perception is that public scholarship is viewed as separate from their graduate work, which, as presented in this report, is not necessarily the case.

In extreme cases, advisors block and discourage a scholar's intended work. The following quote from a respondent illustrates the power dynamics many scholars navigate as graduate students.

*I did run into problems with my dissertation. I think I mentioned this earlier, but I had my chair of my committee [who] was very skeptical of the decolonial theory I was working with. . . . It got so bad. . . . So basically what happened is I kept giving him drafts, and he kept basically saying, "This isn't rigorous enough and that you need to add more. You need to add more data to support it or you need to add more theory," you know, theoretical ties or like citations or whatever. And I would do that and add more and I'd explain more and I'd explain more and he would be like, "It's still not rigorous enough. Blah, blah, blah." It became the cycle to the point where I was running out of funding and running out of time. And I was just like, fuck it, I'm not going to be able to pass. I'm not gonna be able to get out unless I cut all of it. And so I ended up having*

*to cut like all of it from the draft. Even though my other committee members were on board with it because he was the chair. He basically like nixed and censored all of the decolonial theory. I think I literally had to do like a “command find all” and like remove anything that was like talking about decolonization. . . . I cried. I cried like horrible . . .*

*I called my other advisor, the one who is the feminist person who is supportive, and I literally like sobbed on the phone because I was so anxious and freaked out about like not passing and then like so pissed that I had to remove all this stuff that was like this radical content. She reminded me that the dissertation is not the book, and that was very reassuring. I do think that when you’re at that stage where you’re a grad student, [advisors] have so much power over you. They can control your work so much more. And you’re not seen as legitimate yet enough to critique them or to argue against them, especially if they’re people with the most power like the chair. And it makes it really difficult to push through work that’s more radical, it tends to get watered down or it tends to be self-censored, which is usually a sign that your advisor censored it, or you have to change your topic entirely, whatever it might be.*

*Once you actually get out. Once you have the degree, like the people who are overseeing your work, you don’t have as much power and control, even with book drafts. Like you get to pick who reviews your book from a list of people that you recommend, and you don’t have to pick the person you know will hate it; you pick the person you know who will be supportive of the project and will give you good feedback.*

In this scenario, we see various facets of the advisor–student relationship and the differences in approach between the two advisors. We consider the intervention from the second advisor as an approach that comforts the scholar and provides them with clarity about how some aspects of the dissertation are not negotiable. Once the scholar earns their degree, they have the opportunity to choose the content they wish to make public to audiences. Although this does not make right the approach used by the first advisor, we do applaud the intervention of the second advisor, as it provides the scholar with the hope that the content they were forced to eliminate from their dissertation could still have a platform.

## **I Dissertations**

Particularly for PhD students, much of the degree centers around dissertation work. Yet many of the public scholars we interviewed did not feel that their dissertation was really a part of their public scholarship. Scholars were pressured to pick dissertation topics from which they were “emotionally removed” and encouraged to focus on the objectivity of their work, avoiding activism. Even within more traditional research designs, scholars discussed facing pushback from faculty for using more radical theories of anti-racism and colonialism.

A majority of respondents did not view their dissertation as part of their public scholarship work, which is striking given the time commitment that the dissertation requires from a

doctoral student. Others discussed the tensions they faced when trying to integrate the dissertation with their public scholarship. Public scholarship was often framed by advisors as a distraction from scholars' dissertation research.

*It was my advisor and she's like, pretty gung ho for a lot of weird projects. Um, I think that she was worried that it might distract me from finishing my dissertation or getting . . . traditional progress because . . . it's not like I was able to write about this project in my dissertation. I have kind of written about [it] in some of my publications, but I have not really published on the experience of the public scholarship work that I did . . . It's not that she didn't see the value of doing it, but she thought that it was kind of at odds with like a professionalism narrative and maybe the timeline that the university kind of stresses . . . but she . . . was pretty supportive I think.*

Additionally, the dissertation has to be produced as an individual project and much of scholars' public scholarship work could not actually count as "part of the dissertation." Thus, public scholars have to do more work to finish their degrees. Scholars discussed taking longer to finish because they had to do their public scholarship on top of their dissertation work because their public scholarship did not fit what was expected of the dissertation.

*I did a digital project that was supposed to be a kind of life on the web. I did the . . . neighborhood project, which is this collection of oral histories and kind of all of the stuff that went with documenting this neighborhood, then I did the dissertation. And all of that I kind of did on my own. So that's why it took me so long to finish.*

Still, even when scholars were not able to incorporate their public scholarship into their dissertation, they said that work still informed their dissertation. In some cases, scholars were able to make their dissertation more of a work of public scholarship. However, this integrated dissertation still came with the recognition that the dissertation was not traditional.

*They [dissertation committee members] were like, this is stunning. This is it . . . They said, "You didn't write a dissertation. You wrote a book. This is not written for us. This is not." And that was true when I was writing. I wasn't writing it for them. I was writing it for the people who I was interviewing and working with who kept asking me at the end of each interview, "So what's going to happen? What is this going to be?" And I'm like, "I'm writing your story. It's yours. I'm gonna give it to you."*

This example provides hope that the dissertation can be reimagined as something more meaningful and publicly engaged. With freedom to take new forms, the dissertation could become a more prominent site of public scholarship rather than a subject of competition.



## I Committees

While finding a mentor/advisor supportive of public scholarship can be difficult and may require some trial and error along the way, many graduate students doing public scholarship also reported issues with committee members. Finding even one supportive person in a scholar's area could be difficult, and finding 3–5 people who were experts in the area and also supportive of public scholarship became a significant barrier as graduate students sought to meet program requirements such as filling committees for theses, qualifying exams, and dissertations.

One scholar described the painful process of trying to find committee members to fill their master's committee. While they had identified someone on campus who would be a great fit, this person could not be on their committee due to their contingent employment status at the university.

*I was inspired by his project and I wanted him to be my advisor, but he couldn't because he was not tenure [track]. And he also said, "You know, as much as I would love to be on your committee, I also am not getting paid enough to do it." . . . It wasn't fair to put him in that role when he was already being underpaid and had no tenure at UC Davis. . . . He was a person . . . I really wanted to be on my committee. . . . I even have the intro of my project dedicated to him because his entire thesis was an inspiration for why I started looking down this way of wanting to find a similar type of project. And I thought what he had done was really fantastic. But he couldn't do it. And then in my own department, I couldn't find anybody. I would literally go and be humiliated. I would pitch my project. [My advisor] was an amazing support. I'd go and pitch my project. And then they would say, "I just don't have time for it." And so I'd say, "Why did you have me sit here and pitch it for an hour?" So it's like, it feels like I'm going to auditions.*

For this scholar, the university's reliance on public scholars in contingent positions coupled with the lack of public scholars in tenure-track positions made it difficult to find committee members.

When faced with choosing from such a limited pool of faculty in their area, scholars often ended up having to accept people on their committees who were unsupportive of their public scholarship. Therefore, scholars described having to deal with unsupportive committee members.

*She dropped from my qualifying exam committee, [just] before my exam. . . . Still to this day she has never even said anything to me about it and not even an apology, nothing. She let me think everything was fine and then . . . she emailed my advisor to say that she didn't want to be on my committee anymore, and I had tried to get her off my committee the quarter before because I didn't feel like she was supportive. And she was like, "No, no, I want to be on your committee," and then . . . she just dropped and never talked to me about it.*

When we followed up with another scholar about why they didn't feel like they could have a public scholarship-oriented approach in their dissertation, they said:

*I think it's kind of implicit. You know a lot of these cues that we get I think are just implicit. . . . I think there are members of my dissertation committee, who I think would not be happy with that approach. Specifically, like, I don't think [committee member X] would like that . . . she's very clear about the kind of scholarship that she values. She shows it in the kind she produces but also in what she assigns.*

Here, the scholar shows how the programmatic structures of filling a committee with people who may not be supportive of public scholarship combine with the culture within academia where the scholar felt that they could not even broach the subject with their committee members because one committee member had already demonstrated her devaluation of public scholarship through her own work and what she teaches. Through this process, public scholarship continues to be marginalized within the field.

## **I Employment and Material Conditions**

Most UC Davis graduate students depend on the university for their primary employment because they must be employed at 25% to receive tuition remission, a stipend, and health insurance. Many graduate students are teaching assistants, and some are also research assistants or course instructors. These positions do not pay a living wage and have been a focal point of graduate student labor organizing. The low wages and the university's knowledge of their inadequacy are apparent as the university regularly advertises CalFresh (California's food assistance program), the campus food pantry, and other basic needs programs to graduate students who are university employees.

Many graduate students spoke about their material conditions involving food insecurity, rent burdens, and difficulty paying bills due to low graduate student wages. For some graduate students, these concerns were linked with their involvement in the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) movement. Respondents also discussed how these material hardships impact their scholarship. These material hardships are not necessarily unique to the experience of public scholars but certainly have an impact on the experience of graduate students doing public scholarship.

## **I Cost of Living Adjustment Movement**

During the 2019–20 school year the University of California system was under pressure from a wildcat teaching assistant grading strike that began at University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC) for COLA. After the university's violent retaliation against strikers and its unfair labor practices, the COLA movement spread to other UC campuses. In addition to focusing on advocating for a cost of living adjustment, the UC Davis COLA movement also focused on

disarming UC Davis police, dropping retaliation against UCSC workers, and supporting ethnic studies programs.

## I Basic Living Needs

Securing funding and a livable stipend is vital to the success of scholars during graduate school. Unfortunately, as expressed by most of the respondents, basic living needs are yet to be met by their institution and hiring departments.

Scholars hired as teaching assistants and associate instructors only receive contracts for nine month positions, with some students only receiving employment for one quarter at a time. It is up to scholars to seek alternative means to meet their costs of living in the three remaining summer months. This additional employment may be within the academic sphere or may force graduate scholars to utilize nonacademic job opportunities; international students have even fewer options given their visa restrictions.

At the time of this research, the first paycheck for university-employed graduate students was being released on November 1. This causes distress for scholars because the work for the academic year begins in September, leaving them without paychecks for at least 2 months. Despite these dynamics, scholars continue to engage in their public scholarship because, for many, this was the central reason for their pursuit of higher education.

## I Disciplinary Boundaries

While public and activist scholarship often seeks to be interdisciplinary, graduate students are still affected by traditional disciplinary boundaries as they engage in this work. While traditional disciplines that have long histories in universities were characterized as more unsupportive to public scholarship, disciplines with activist foundations are described as spaces that foster public scholarship.

## I Traditional Disciplines

Students in departments with more traditional disciplinary backgrounds typically discussed tensions they had encountered in trying to do public scholarship, from their peers, their mentors, other departmental faculty, or the discipline itself. According to the respondents, the encounters ranged from lack of support to hostility.

*When asked "How is your publicly engaged scholarship understood or misunderstood by your home department?" one scholar replied: "It hasn't been shared with them, like my scholarship. I think my home department is pretty hostile to public scholarship. I get the sense that it's not respected. It's not valued."*

This scholar did not feel comfortable bringing up their public scholarship in front of their department. Instead, they chose to keep it private because they felt that their choice to spend time doing public scholarship would be questioned because the work did not fit into the department's conception of "academic research." These conceptions of what constitutes academic research vary by department but often revolve around notions of objectivity, positivism, and a clear distinction between researcher and "the research subject."

## I Disciplines with Activist Roots

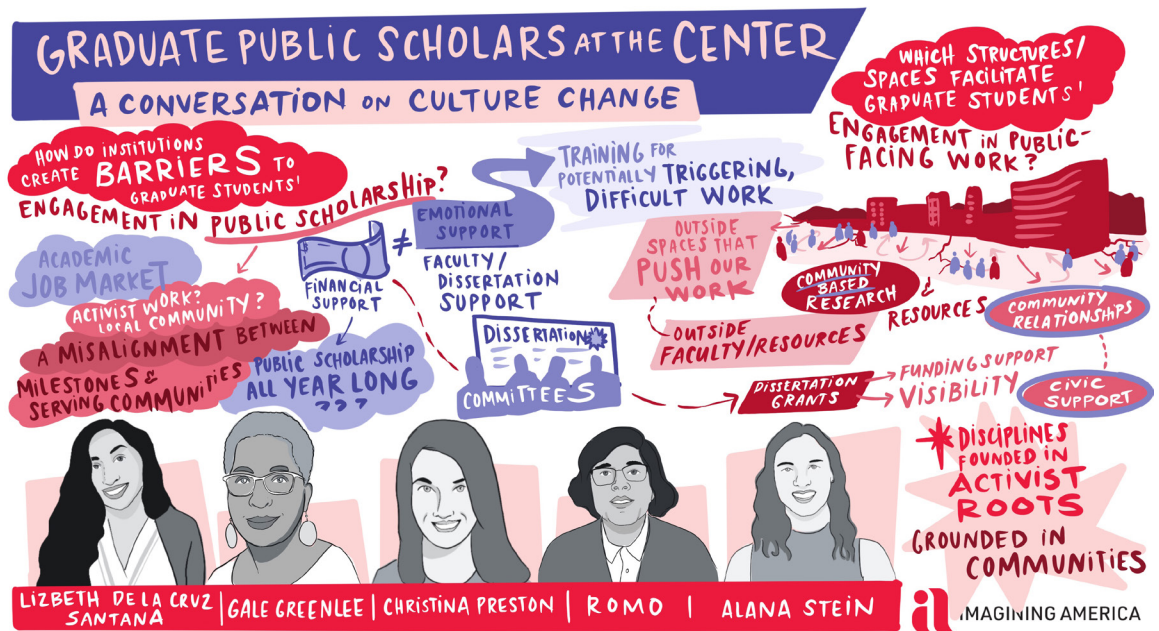
On the other hand, the place where respondents described the most support for public scholarship and the most positive culture from which to conduct public scholarship was within the Native American Studies department. Notably, this is the only graduate program at UC Davis in ethnic and/or feminist studies that also has its own department. Most departments with activist foundations at UC Davis do not have graduate programs, and the Cultural Studies PhD program is a graduate group, meaning it does not have a department. Other research on campus has also shown that graduate group students do not receive the same level of institutional support as students whose programs are parts of departments (Hoang et al., 2020). Graduate students enrolled in the Native American Studies graduate program described a very positive experience as they pursued public scholarship. They even described experiences nearly opposite to many other students—in their department, public scholarship was the only type of work viewed as legitimate scholarship.

*I guess if you talk about public scholarship you create this dichotomy with nonpublic scholarship, and for Native American Studies nonpublic scholarship is not scholarship. Like there's not an alternative to it. So that's the framework I've always operated with, and it's something that I feel really comfortable with.*

These differences suggest that disciplines and departments value a specific type of work. In these examples, as long as there is a dichotomy between "traditional scholarship" and "public scholarship," there may not be room for them to be treated equally. Instead, perhaps we need to consider the roots of the university and disciplines or what foundation we would like academia to rest on. UC Davis is a public university, and perhaps that could be a starting point for forging a new foundation for public scholarship in many universities. One scholar highlighted what those foundations mean for them:

*I'm very cognizant of the fact that I'm doing my PhD at a large public university being supported not only by the taxpayers of California but also by my community. There's an accountability to not just making sure that I am reciprocating and making sure that the privilege of doing research at a place like UC Davis those benefits go back to the community, but also recognizing that teaching, publication, relationships: These aren't mine, right. That this is a public charge.*

We may be able to ground public scholarship on foundations that center the public within larger university spaces rather than just ethnic studies departments. Embedding public scholarship in the principal values of universities and all scholarship can lead to reimagining academia. Given the experiences of respondents in programs like the Native American Studies Department, we can imagine a future where public scholarship is fully embedded within the university.



Graphic Facilitation Images by Abby VanMuijen for Online Engaged Grad Scholar Dialogue, 2021.

## I Funding Structures

Funding is a particularly difficult issue for many graduate students. Scholars lamented the disparities in funding between public scholarship and more traditional scholarship. Many traditional funding sources do not support public scholarship, and public scholarship funding opportunities were not comprehensive. Students expressed a desire for accessible funding that could support both the community work they were doing and their own livelihood as a public scholar throughout the year.

## I The Heightened Costs of Public Scholarship

Public scholarship is expensive. It requires scholars to budget according to their expected fieldwork while at the same time requiring funding for personal living costs. Scholars noted that in their experience, the funding available to scholars from the university limits how the funds can be used.

In cases when scholars do receive funding through a fellowship, in general, funds become accessible through a refund basis. Although students have the option of requesting cash advances, the expectation is that students submit reimbursement forms. This leads scholars to access their own money to invest in their projects. Respondents shared the perceived expectation that scholars have access to their own funds to invest in their projects, even when they have applied for and received funding.

Additionally, scholars who did receive financial support for their projects communicated that there were hidden fees when doing public scholarships. These include taxes on students' income, international travel conversion fees, and unavailability of receipts when engaging in fieldwork in certain locations.

Scholars who engaged in fieldwork communicated having to navigate bureaucratic channels to have their budget proposals approved, including the survey of materials, travel, lodging, and meal expenses that may be a part of their projects. In cases where scholars may need technical equipment to execute their projects, scholars noted that those materials become the university's property and must be returned at the end of their studies. This policy has an impact on the future accessibility of resources scholars purchased through the funding they were awarded.

Scholars widely shared that they felt morally obligated to share resources with their communities, but at the same time, they needed to find a way to support themselves. For instance, a community engaged scholar who left graduate school and academia shared:

*For some of us who come from underprivileged communities, we have that responsibility to also help out our families. And, again, the salaries and the income that graduate students are able to generate is not enough to, you know, to help elders in the family or our family. I think maybe I would have still been in academia if that wasn't a concern of mine. And also, we're reaching the age where we want to have families and people want to get married and stuff. It would be ludicrous to say that that's something that you can plan for with a graduate income.*

This scholar who left their program shared how the inadequate student funding and stipend directly affects others in a similar situation. Not only do scholars engaging in public scholarship have to face barriers while completing their graduate studies, but many also must consider family and personal circumstances that may limit their capacity to remain in graduate school and to pursue public scholarship. The case of this scholar shows how economic concerns can push public scholars, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, out of academia.

This specific case led us to wonder about the personal journeys of other respondents—how they managed to remain within academia and navigate graduate life's financial aspects while also engaging in public scholarship.



Scholars shared feeling tokenized and used in some cases where they received a degree of support from the university, the department, or the graduate program. These sentiments arose from receiving public recognition of their work yet no additional support for the project or scholar. That is, these entities would engage in sharing the work and credit its success to the institution, but in no instance was the highlighted project or scholar provided with resources or new possibilities to continue their work. Respondents who communicated this experience noted having to accept this dynamic as the price for the public scholarship they do.

Although scholars have their own set of financial limitations, they also consider the hardships that community members may face. As a response, scholars expressed a desire to engage with an ethics of reciprocity, including providing stipends to the community with which they engage to recognize the value of their labor.

*How are we not only engaging local knowledge but compensating them for that? How do we ensure that, again, it's not just a sort of social reciprocity, that it's a tangible investment in the community and make sure the money is available?*

## **I Whose Work Is Funded**

Scholars lamented the disparities in funding between public scholarship and more traditional scholarship. Many traditional funding sources do not support public scholarship, and public scholarship funding opportunities are not comprehensive.

A BIPOC scholar highlighted both the systemic racial inequities of funding within their graduate program and how the funding for public scholarship did not match the traditional funding that universities provide in research and writing fellowships.

*This has to do with the racial dynamics of my program. I just saw that a lot of white students were getting institutional support for their writing and research, and I was among the many students of color who weren't getting that. . . . With institutional inequity within UC Davis, well, first I had to find work . . . during the summer. And public scholarship work . . . might be called a fellowship or something, but it's different from investment in just your time to do research and writing. I wasn't getting that investment. So, I had to move toward where the money was for me. I feel in many ways my graduate program failed me. I was not supported by my grad program in ways that are systemic. . . I don't want to be treated like garbage.*

This scholar highlighted systemic racialized inequity in funding, which disadvantages nonwhite public scholars. They also highlighted how typical funding sources for public scholarship do not invest in the scholar but rather in the project, leaving the scholar to search for scraps to fund their own stipend and meet research and living expenses.

Most of the public scholars we spoke to were from multiple groups that are underrepresented in academia. By not investing in public scholars and their public scholarship, funding providers are reproducing inequities.

When asked about research and scholarship that are traditionally funded, many graduate students express the perception that financial support is linked to “scholarship that sells.” One scholar highlighted the outsized influence that Silicon Valley has in this Northern California university:

*[My research is] certainly not what gets attention in my department . . . where they put money. . . . It's like what Silicon Valley wants. . . . It's what it feels like.*

Scholars whose work did not fit in with ideals of popular work had a harder time obtaining funding.

## **I Technical Limitations of Funding**

Even when scholars do receive funding for their public scholarship, they face many burdens based on the technical and bureaucratic constraints of funding sources. Public scholarship funding is often inflexible and fails to meet the actual needs of graduate public scholars. Additionally, traditional funding sources seldom fund public scholarship in grantmaking programs.

Grants and fellowships are also often evaluated by committees, similar to exams, dissertations, and master's theses. Scholars thus face the same trials of trying to find a whole committee of people that would support their work. However, this is made even more difficult since scholars have no agency in selecting the committee that reviews their proposals. One scholar, in discussing their experience obtaining grant funding, said that they were only able to obtain funding because the program officer flagged their application. However, the review committee had been put off by their experimentation with a new method based on community participation.

Many graduate programs do not support scholars during the summer by offering job opportunities, scholarships, or stipends. Respondents expressed having to navigate additional financial hardships during the three unpaid months. To alleviate this, many sought research opportunities through fellowships. Still, they were confronted with the limitations of using funding awarded by the university, which only seemed to identify refundable expenses if linked to fieldwork. In these cases, scholars engaging in projects that require travel were confronted with having to continue paying living expenses (both in Davis and for fieldwork) that could not be supported through the fellowship awarded.



Lack of funding opportunities adds another layer of complications specifically for international students. A respondent shared:

*There's limited funding for non-U.S. citizens here in the U.S., and the country I come from doesn't provide funding for graduate studies that are not in what they call strategic fields which are usually like engineering, and that kind of stuff. . . . We mostly rely on funding from my department or try to find a funding agency. . . . But just like the social sciences and humanities, everyone's struggling for funding.*

These material hardships are further heightened by the demands of public scholarship.

*Working in the communities outside the U.S. have been funded for me, but they haven't been sustainable in a basic way of talking about money. I have run out of money every time I've gone to [location X] or [location Y]. There hasn't been enough, and it's not a stipend, so I'm not earning money, so I can't pay rent back at home. It really is discouraging for public scholars for being out there with communities. And if you think about people who aren't just me—a single, able-bodied graduate student—but who have families or have communities they have to support in some way, it would be almost impossible for them to go with just a stipend, just for them to live, but not earn to pay the rent, pay their families' rent. So that has also made me constantly split between how I am going to go out and to these communities and be able to pay my rent or come back and be able to have food for myself or medical bills or something. And so just from an economic level, it's really difficult to feel supported in that way.*

Scholars who received the Mellon Public Scholars fellowship were allowed to use funds as they deemed necessary, allowing them to secure their living accommodations while engaging in their projects. Scholars generally liked this practice of providing flexible funding and suggested that it should be considered and implemented when other research fellowships are awarded. However, one caveat with this form of funding is that the recipient can be burdened with much higher taxes.

Students in traditional departments also expressed how these types of departments are disinterested in what public scholarship is and how that affects the trajectory of a specific field or academic formation of scholars. Specific to some departments, scholars engaging in projects that require fieldwork to execute them successfully were indirectly punished for receiving fellowship opportunities by being disqualified from any departmental aid. Public scholars are forced to choose to fund their public scholarship or themselves, sacrificing what the department would have otherwise invested in the scholar. This alludes to the perception that this type of work is undervalued when being considered for summer fellowships. In this vein, departments that enact such policies tend to send the message that engaging in fieldwork and community-based projects do not necessarily align with their mission. In effect, funding opportunities become scarce or nonexistent for public scholars.

## I Academic Job Market

Many public scholars face the traditional experiences of seeking academic employment and negotiating additional issues that highly influence their choices. Considering the root causes that have inspired this report, the slow-changing institutional culture regarding public scholars' graduate education has a direct impact on the job market. This is specific to public scholars who decide to continue their pursuit of the professoriate. As we elaborate in the following sections, scholars consider myriad concepts when taking on this next milestone in their careers.

As we thought about our own future prospects on the job market while we conducted this research, we considered what the academic job market means for our own lives. We have been told that we have good chances of getting a tenure-track job—*as long as we are willing to move wherever that job may be*. However, for people doing community-based work, how does one just pick up and move?

Graduate public scholars often spend years developing community ties or work with communities that they are already a part of. Some scholars are located away from their communities during graduate school, while others have chosen graduate programs close to their communities or built new communities near their graduate school. To be told to be prepared to relocate for an academic job often means the scholar must move away from the community they are a part of and in which their scholarship is embedded. Furthermore, the current job market is full of many temporary jobs, such as adjunct positions, postdoctoral fellowships, and visiting professorships. How can a public scholar continue their work while in such a precarious position?

Central to thinking about the job market and options available to scholars, public scholars consider how their new venture may impact their relationship with the community. For public scholars, the idea of being away from the community geographically, as explored above, leads to sentiments of guilt and the fear that the community will feel betrayed. This idea of betrayal stems from long-rooted histories of scholars coming into communities, extracting knowledge, and leaving the community behind when other opportunities arise. Additionally, new job and career opportunities follow a set of further commitments that may impact the scholar's capacity to remain in contact with, and be able to support, the community.

Although negative sentiments are attached to moving, the move can also lead scholars to reimagine new ways to continue their relationship with the community. This can provide the opportunity to continue the work that brings them joy while advancing to a new phase of their journey. Indeed, this is a point that needs to be further explored.

## I Supportive Spaces

Our respondents identified several spaces that supported their public scholarship. As mentioned earlier, the Native American Studies department was characterized as very supportive of public scholarship. Scholars from many disciplines also discussed the support of the Mellon Public Scholars program, and some scholars found support in various campus centers. We focus on these here to identify places of support for engaged work.

## I The Mellon Public Scholars Program

From 2016 to 2021, the UC Davis Humanities Institute with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation ran the Mellon Public Scholars (MPS) Program. MPS provides support each year to a cohort of graduate students in the arts, humanities, and humanistic social sciences to do community-based research. The program annually supports a cohort of approximately 12 UC Davis graduate students who take an MPS seminar in the spring quarter and receive \$7,500 in funding to conduct a public scholarship project with a community partner during the summer. MPS also helps students find faculty mentors, often outside their own department, to provide support and receive \$2,000.

Scholars who had participated in the MPS program generally described it as a positive experience that helped push them to pursue public scholarship during graduate school. They described MPS as providing a valuable support system for graduate students doing public scholarship within the university. The program led one respondent to reshape their committee, helping them build public scholarship into their dissertation.

A scholar in Native American Studies described the importance of having a program like MPS, comparing it to their undergraduate experience:

*I came from a school where I didn't see any programs like [Mellon Public Scholars] or opportunities for public research for Black, Indigenous, people of color really at my old school. So coming here and having Mellon Public Scholars and just my own department, of course, is really supportive and just kind of the things that we learned with Mellon Public Scholars about scholarship, I think is really important for Native American and Indigenous work. I do think that it's a field that's kind of emerging like there's going to be like a huge wave of like us that are in school right now, or even before us, and after us that are really going to come and shake things up, you know, in all these different genres of academia, where we're inserting ourselves. Through like Mellon Public Scholars . . . it was really cool to see a wide array of different projects . . . within academia.*

This scholar described both the support that came from MPS and how they see programs like MPS acting as agents of culture change within academia, carving out spaces for a growing number of public scholars to flourish.

MPS fellows discussed how the program gave legitimacy to their work, both to themselves and others who may have been less supportive of public scholarship. The funding and Mellon name both carry an important value. One scholar discussed specifically how MPS helped legitimate their own self-worth:

*You know, I'm not an artist . . . I'm just a grad student, right, but people were very again invested in what I bring to the table. Yeah, and I think Mellon Public Scholars just verified that feeling I got . . . I don't have to be begging for scraps.*

Both the experience of doing the work with a community partner who was invested in them and being compensated with a substantial amount of money helped this scholar validate their own worth.

However, many students also lamented that the program's funding was not renewable, since the award was only available one time to fund one summer of work. A respondent shared the following about the limits of funding for public scholarship:

*I think, to be honest, it's been really difficult to get funding or faculty support or even just validation and recognition of the type of research that we do. . . . And so I think that's kind of been probably one of the biggest eye-opening things is how much I have to grind . . . in order to just get financial support and validation for the work that I do. And I'm really happy that fellowships, like the Mellon Public Scholar fellowship has helped me along the way, but what I'm finding is that the Mellon Fellowship is one of the very few institutions or fellowships that support research like mine, and I'm really hoping that there can be more sources of support in that way in the future.*

Also, scholars highlighted how this competitive fellowship was one of the only resources within the university to support graduate students' public scholarship.

*I haven't found tools in the university to help me with that except like the Mellon, maybe the Mellon Foundation Scholarship, where if you are selected as a Mellon Public Scholar, they provide you with some preparation. But I haven't heard of anything different than that.*

During the program year of 2021, 63 proposals were submitted to the program, and only 14 scholars received the award, demonstrating great interest and need for this type of support. However, this support is only available to a small number of students, and past recipients are not eligible to receive further support. Furthermore, the program is based on grant funding, which means the future of MPS, which has been such a support for graduate students doing public scholarship, is precarious.

## **| Campus Centers**

In addition to the MPS program, several campus centers came up as places of support. The Davis Humanities Institute (DHI), which operates the MPS program, came up more than any other center as a positive influence for public scholarship. However, it mostly came up in relation to the MPS program. The Feminist Research Institute also came up as a resource that graduate students used to support public scholarship. Imagining America was rarely mentioned by respondents, although it was mentioned positively. The Office of Public Scholarship and Engagement (OPSE) did not come up as a resource that graduate students had used to support their public scholarship, although a few people did mention that they knew it existed on campus. Respondents felt OPSE catered to faculty and not graduate students. A few other campus centers came up in interviews as well, but these tended to be more restricted to supporting students only in specific topical areas of study.

Students were most aware of and appreciative of centers that financially supported public scholarship, thus making it viable for them to pursue public and activist scholarship. Scholars were appreciative of cohort-based fellowship experiences and opportunities for training. The centers that scholars focused on were centers that provided programs specifically for graduate students.

## **| The Culture Surrounding Public Scholarship in Graduate School**

In the following sections, we explore themes that emerged regarding the culture surrounding public scholarship in graduate school. These themes play a substantial role in deepening our understanding of public scholars' graduate education experiences.

## **| Legitimacy and Value**

In the interviews, respondents shared sentiments that the lack of legitimization of public scholarship is couched within a university setting that already undervalues the arts and humanities. The following section explores how scholars had multiple concerns about their work being legitimized and valued within their home departments, the university, and in their discipline.

Respondents shared their sentiments about and experiences with how their work was often underestimated and not aligned with what their home departments or graduate groups consider scholarship. In many cases, their scholarship is perceived as aligned with public or civic service but not seen as research.

On this note, many students also used the word "distraction" to describe how their advisors viewed their public scholarship. Many stated that their advisors tolerated their public scholarship as long as it was not too much of a distraction from their graduate degree

completion requirements. Some respondents who were able to secure funding legitimized and demonstrated the value of their time spent on public scholarship through the financial compensation they received. A respondent said:

*I think they [some of my committee members] saw my time as a public scholar as like a distraction from my "real" writing and research, but when that came up, I'd push back. Well, I'm getting paid to do a lot of this work, and unless there's some other way for me to get this type of money doing something else, I'm gonna do it.*

In some cases, scholars noted feeling othered in their departments due to the work they engage in. This was communicated in the interviews, specifically when scholars expressed viewing their public scholarship as separate from (and in addition to) their dissertation and other program milestones.

As described in an earlier section, some disciplines with more traditional departments and graduate groups were also described as particularly antagonistic to public scholarship. These reflections came from scholars in those departments and scholars in interdisciplinary departments and graduate groups.

In terms of where the university puts its funding to support scholarship that is not public scholarship, scholars noted that budget cuts tend to be applied to the social sciences and the humanities. A respondent shared that public scholarship is

*not the research that they [the university] cite in how they make decisions in terms of policy and stuff. So I think the university is a brand, it's a company, and they want deliverables. They want data that they can put on a graph or something so I think they like it in terms of having a diverse portfolio . . . but it's not their identity. I think that would be like STEM.*

In that same vein, scholars shared their need for resources from the university and their departments and programs that would support and value the work they intended to do. In many cases, respondents shared their perception that the university does attempt to demonstrate that they care about publicly engaged scholarship to some degree. Some scholars shared that they see those attempts—like holding town halls and surveys—from the university, but that they simultaneously perceived these actions as structured, confined, and performative.

For some scholars, the root of this conflicting approach arises from disciplines that misunderstand public scholarship. Some scholars suggested this could be because of the propelling discourses and practices that public scholarship advocates for, specifically the redefining of a discipline. In that sense, some scholars described public scholarship as an interdisciplinary action and engaging with larger ethical and political projects that conflict with the histories of some disciplines. This speaks to the differences between traditional disciplines and disciplines with activist roots highlighted above.

Scholars also highlighted the difficulties of trying to publish public scholarship. A respondent described this process as follows:

*The channels for publication and the dissemination of scholarships still sort of fit that legacy model. I mean, they're getting better. We're getting better with every year. But still, the gatekeepers are real. And so how do you translate sustained community engagement into ways that are going to be legible to the powers that be?*

As this scholar communicated, the barriers scholars face when trying to publish their public scholarship are usually linked with the "gatekeepers" of publishing.

Other scholars mentioned not writing their dissertation on their engaged work or experiences doing this type of work but instead publishing about these in other mediums that still may be linked to academia:

*It's not like I was able to write about this project in my dissertation. I have kind of written about the [engaged art] in some of my publications, but I have not really published on the experience of the public scholarship work that I did.*

As this scholar noted, scholars are careful in their decision making when considering the topic of their dissertation as a proactive way to reduce the barriers of graduate education as a public scholar. Yet, this also means that many public scholars are pushed into doubling their workload to make academic progress while engaging in public scholarship.

## **I Centering Ethics**

A central theme that emerged in respondents' interviews was ethics. Respondents also shared a desire to have conversations, and learn more, about ethics. Within the sphere of ethics, the role of community and the benefit they may obtain from participating in research is put into question. A scholar communicated:

*We needed to have a real discussion on the ethical considerations, the ethical implications of doing public scholarship, especially when you look at the differential power dynamics that we have as people in various formations.*

A continuously shared point was the cost-benefit of having the community collaborate and participate in public scholarship projects. A respondent posed the question "What are they getting out of this?" to then reflect:

*Sometimes I felt like we were forcing our collaboration to be part of a project and not really taking into consideration their own realities of people being outside of academia.*

Considering this critical insight, in that same line of thinking, scholars also preoccupied themselves with questioning long-standing multidisciplinary practices of extracting information from the community and never returning the materials or knowledge produced by and with the community. As a response, an overarching approach expressed and desired by scholars was the need to establish and work through a reciprocal relationship with the community. As a scholar noted:

*If you want to come and tell these stories, the community recognizes that there are protocols for this knowledge. You just can't come in and make your career off of our history, our struggles.*

In this approach, scholars indicated that ethical protocols have to be in place to recognize the produced knowledge. As part of the participatory process, these findings and/or end product should return to the community in a manner that they can easily access. This includes consideration for accessibility.

The scholar went on to share an additional question:

*And then how do we have a reciprocal relationship where we're giving back?*

to which their response echoed the practice of scholars in their dissertation stage:

*It wasn't about what I wanted to do, it was about being able to be present, and orient the research questions I had in my dissertation based on what the community needed.*

Equally crucial in relation to ethics is the representation of the community. Scholars shared how they understand that communities can represent themselves. Communities are not solely people being talked about or discussed by others but are the ones in charge of representation and the dynamics in which this is done. In this sense, many scholars who touched on the topic identified their contribution to the community and their field of study as one bringing visibility to historically marginalized community collectives and recognized the community as collaborators and knowledge producers.

## **I Misalignment of Community Needs and Scholar's Project Needs**

Many scholars shared that their purpose in pursuing graduate education was to do research related to their community. Yet this process is not always straightforward. Research protocols that scholars are required to follow under institutional policies do not necessarily cater to community needs. In the following sections, we explore themes that provide insight into the misalignment of community needs and scholars' project needs.



Some people talked about experiencing a sudden realization that most academic work was not public scholarship during graduate school. A respondent shared:

*When I got into grad school, I think I had this image that like a lot of research was driven by activism and like had that goal, and I realized when I got in that was not the case. And I was kind of surprised at how bureaucratic and how emotionally removed a lot of people were from their work—or encouraged you to be—through methods training and things like this focus on objectivity, and it was very frustrating as a student in some ways.*

Despite these unexpected aspects of graduate education, respondents continue to engage in public scholarship. Along the way, they continue to identify dynamics of public scholarship that require additional modifications to best accommodate community needs. Accordingly, a respondent shared:

*Sometimes this production of whatever we do still is not something that is accessible to them [referring to community] or of interest. And I think that even when I was trying to put a project together I encountered that they weren't really interested in what I had first presented to them.*

Additionally, scholars expressed how, instead of having the community participate in their introduced projects, scholars supported the community on their own. But in these instances, scholars also questioned if this type of engagement could also be considered scholarship. A respondent shared:

*I supported them in their own process and their own agenda, but then like did that count as scholarship or not? And I think in academia, it generally doesn't count as scholarship. Because for instance I didn't write about that experience or I didn't produce something that is generally recognized or read by academics.*

In this case, not only did the scholar question the legitimacy of their labor, but they also raised critical questions about how scholarship is recognized within academic spaces. Here, knowledge production is considered as broader and not precisely defined by producing peer-reviewed articles, books, or conference presentations.

About positionality within the community, a scholar shared:

*I feel like communities could be a little bit more hesitant even if you're from that community just because the knowledge that we acquired [in the university] is very traditional. So I feel that there's always that issue of, well, [extraction] has happened in the past. What would make it different this time?*

Here, being from the university, regardless of whether they are a part of the community in which the scholars intend to work, sets community members on alert. They have previously

experienced encounters with researchers who approached their community to extract data. Then the researchers disappear and never communicate their findings with the community.

## **I Tokenization and Exploitation of Graduate Scholars**

Students whose work has been recognized publicly by departments' and the university's communications team express feeling tokenized for their work. They describe not having any financial support from the university for the project/work being promoted. Yet their work is branded as part of the university's initiative to support research for and by underrepresented communities and students.

One scholar exemplified this through his own experience of being tokenized after receiving significant external funding:

*We got that money from [large funding source], and I, ugh, I feel like to a certain extent these people do hold me up as like a token. And they're like, oh, look at this "Brown boy" that was able to get [significant] funding for his projects or look at this guy who got this fancy external fellowship. For me, I feel like my relationship with the department is at face value. To a certain extent, I've been tokenized.*

This example also provides the space to consider how the university claims scholars' collaborative projects with the community. In another example, a respondent expressed how their former dean claimed their work as diverse and used the scholar's work as an example. Although the scholar had no notion that the dean knew of their work, they identified this moment as their work being recognized. Yet, with other scholars who have experienced similar situations, they noted their awareness of being used to make their departments, colleges, and universities appear to value civic engagement. Yet, in reality, these institutions had not necessarily supported the work these scholars do.

## **I To Share or Not**

Many respondents discussed the level of support of their work by their primary advisor as a prevailing reflection. In some instances, as long as the scholar was meeting degree milestones, the advisor was supportive of the scholar's engaging in public scholarship although the advisor might not have seen its importance. This is especially the case when the scholar earned funding awards from prestigious fellowship(s), grants, and so on.

Sometimes scholars would not tell their advisors about their public scholarship work. A respondent communicated:

*And a lot of my activist stuff is done in spaces they [the department] wouldn't know about or hear about. Even though I'm doing research on it because it wasn't the stuff for my program. It was always outside of the sphere where the department had surveillance of it. They never got to see paper drafts, because, again, it was for fun. Even though it was definitely scholarship, but it's stuff I didn't have to be overseen in that way by them. So, again, they weren't really that involved.*

In the instances where scholars did not share their public scholarship work with their advisors or department, they thought that these groups would impede or be hostile to their work rather than approve of it.

## **I Objectivity**

Several people discussed how others did not view their public scholarship as "objective." We consider objectivity as defined by the authors in the book *Engaging Contradictions* (2011) edited by Hale. The authors suggest that the distinction between concepts of objectivity/subjectivity may not be useful, especially when considering public scholarship. Instead, the authors speak about the positives of bridging the divide between distant, objective science and a passive community. The intervention of collaborative research with communities by public scholars can serve as a methodological practice in which active collaboration can lead to more equitable relationships.

A respondent expanded on this point by sharing how there is a perception that scholars cannot be objective when working with communities they are also a part of:

*People that are sometimes interested in this topic that always asked me: "But you seem to be very good friends with the people you work with. It's like, don't you worry that you're not being objective about this or like that? This may bias your results for this and that. It's like you seem to be really close to the people, you seem to be defending them . . ." And I think that is one of the misconceptions about scholarship, which again, I think it's an export of U.S. academia, like this idea about objectivity and balance. When it comes to, like, to be honest, white supremacy. It's like you have to be objective and balanced every time you're working with a different community, but the thing is, I get that, too, sometimes. And people are like, "You may want to set a little back so you can be critical about the stuff." And I'm like, why can't I be critical about my group of friends. And my friends, like I'm critical with them because I love them. And I don't know, it's like, to me it sounds very silly. It's like thinking that your mom can't be critical, because it's your mom. It's like, I don't know. My mom was very critical of me. . . . So to me it's like being close to someone and having very deep connections . . . especially with your community and it pushes you to honor your relationship of reciprocity with your community. And that's what I'm looking for. But some people still don't see academia in that way.*

It seemed like the work was often criticized because people in academia did not feel that public scholars could be objective, and they believed that other scholars could. The varied understanding of public scholarship among scholars alludes to the false dichotomy between public scholarship and “real” scholarship. In many cases, and often in a positive hopeful note, public scholars would emphasize the importance of their work.



Graphic Facilitation Images by Abby VanMuijen for Online Engaged Grad Scholar Dialogue, 2021.

## Perceptions of Graduate Public Scholarship

When asked about the perception of scholars’ work by the university, their discipline, their home department, peers, and advisors, scholars raised a range of themes that led to their descriptions of feeling misunderstood, of noting a disinterest by others in their work, and in confronting limits in engaging in dialogue with others in their discipline. Furthermore, we noticed a discrepancy in how scholars were treated based on how their public scholarship was associated with activism, leading to varied experiences within public scholars’ experiences.

### Misunderstood

One of the most prevailing themes was feeling misunderstood at all levels of the institution. Many scholars noted that this sentiment comes from not following the traditional pathway

of graduate education. A respondent specifically vocalized this experience and marked clear boundaries between the perception others may have of their work, identifying whose input they see as noteworthy:

*This is not for them [referring to the institution]. This is for my community and me. And so there's that little bit of discrepancy. And like the one thing I can say for myself because I'm incredibly eloquent about this stuff . . . I'm verbose, and then I'm a good salesperson when it comes to selling my own research. So I think eventually people at face value like to understand where it's coming from, and think that it's valuable and they would agree with me, but at the outset when somebody looks at my stuff, a lot of it is just, "Why are you doing it? Why?" You know, because they just inherently don't value it, nor do they know enough to understand, and it's not my responsibility to teach them. Really, I don't care to teach my colleagues about the importance of my work. Because again, going back and circling back to that fact that, you know, it's not for them.*

Scholars continuously described how their work was misunderstood and misrepresented. Usually, others would describe their work in a way that replicated stereotypes and framed the work as out of the norms of academia or as community projects that are not legible within the ivory tower production of knowledge. These actions are problematic and perpetuate the culture of seeing public scholarship as foreign to the university.

We asked respondents how their publicly engaged scholarship was understood or misunderstood by their peers, advisors, home department, university, and discipline. When asked about the university, scholars repeatedly said that they didn't know. Many speculated that they did not think the university was aware of their work. Sometimes, after more thought, they would provide more of an answer. Still, for most graduate scholars, the university as an entity lacked meaningful engagement with their work.

Some respondents discussed centers on campus where the university understood their work. For graduate scholars, the most relevant spheres in determining whether their public scholarship was understood or misunderstood were at the micro level—in their department, among peers, and by committee members. Graduate scholars seldom referenced being understood or misunderstood at the level of the university.

## **I** Limits on Dialogue

Scholars described having spaces to share their work and engage in dialogue outside the university. When they had opportunities to share their public scholarship, they expressed feeling anxious about sharing their work in a manner that may not align with what conference organizers may expect.

A respondent spoke specifically about repeatedly submitting a conference paper that was continuously rejected:

*I guess I got a little frustrated about the scope of the discipline. I wrote a proposal and sent it. . . . But they [national conference organizers] didn't accept it. But I guess that's part of it. I'm kind of getting frustrated about this. And I just want to go somewhere and talk about it and create a discussion, but that's the kind of thing. I guess it would have been really cool, even if they disagree with me, just to have that space and talk about it, but then they didn't take it. So I'm like, okay, so what should I do? And that's kind of like where I struggle a little bit.*

The respondent went on to say that:

*I got really invested in the push to try to expand the field. Which I'm really excited about. But also there's some anxiety attached to that. I'm always excited about publishing something, like getting people to read them and talk about it. But then there's some established methods and academic communities, and I'm always wondering, am I doing enough for them to be interested in it or not?*

In this case, the disinterest in the scholar's work also led to limits on dialogue within their field of study, which, as described by the scholar, seems to have traditional roots on what scholarship should be and what topics should be engaged in conversation.

## **I** Negotiating Tensions

As noted throughout the report, scholars navigated various tensions linked to their public scholarship. The manner in which they managed these varied on a case-by-case basis, but their attempts to uplift their commitment to their practice and community prevails as a general understanding. On this topic, a scholar shared:

*I'm always nervous about the reaction to my work because I'm always navigating this line that I recognize that I'm in academia. It has its rules, and it has its conventions on how things are done in a specific way, whether we like it or not. In order to advance my research, I need to comply with the way academia does things, but that's sometimes not what I really want to do. And so I'm always trying to juggle this very fine line between doing something that's academically attractive, but at the same time, like I don't know, I tried to shy away from very technical language and those kinds of things. And that creates feelings of anxiety about how the academic world is going to react to my work.*

## I Code-switching

Graduate students also repeatedly discussed code-switching, where they had to talk to their advisors about their project in one way and the community in another way. In the words of a respondent, scholars are

*like a shapeshifter . . . you have to translate it and write it for them [referring to the community]. Once you execute it, you have to translate it to the community/academy—it has to make sense in these spaces.*

These practices of code-switching can have important implications on the culture around public scholarship. These are necessary for many public scholars to do, but how do we create a culture where people do not have to engage in these practices? What would it look like to have a university where people can be open and proud of their public scholarship and discuss their work in terms that are accessible to people both inside and outside academia?

## I Oh, You're an Activist? How Scholars Get Labeled as Too Radical

We saw a clear pattern among graduate students whose work was considerably activist-oriented throughout our interviews. They described the most damaging repercussions they faced due to their activist-oriented work. In contrast, students whose work was less activist-oriented generally reported more positive experiences doing public scholarship. Activist scholars seemed to face more barriers and stigma, showcasing the heterogeneity of public scholarship and the graduate public scholarship experience.

We define “activist work” as work with a more considerable ideological impact rooted in critical theories and approaches. We build off Cann and DeMeulenaere’s (2020) approach that “not all action research is activist research. Activist research must have a critical edge. It must be focused on social justice work: it is about the pursuit of justice” (pp. 69–70). Under the broad umbrella of public scholarship, we interviewed people with varying types of work. Cann and DeMeulenaere (2020) developed a scale for measuring different kinds of work and two axes—material impact and ideological impact—while also considering the number of people impacted. When we transfer this scale to our respondents’ work, we see that those whose work had more significant ideological impact tended to report more severe conflicts when discussing how supportive graduate school was of their work.

## I Contrasting Experiences

In our research, we frequently saw contrasting experiences related to how a scholar’s work was activist-oriented. We felt this was epitomized by the work of two scholars, who both did work related to their own life experiences and worked with the same advisor but were treated very differently.



Scholar 1 described an interaction with his advisor:

*'Why are you doing all this . . . stuff? You've got to go back to doing real [discipline name], real research.' [The advisor] acted as if the stuff I was doing isn't research, isn't [discipline name]. And for this person to come tell me the work that I'm doing . . . wasn't something that could be considered academic, frankly, it's bullshit.*

Scholar 2 had a contrasting experience with her advisor, who was very engaged and wanting to understand and know more. The scholar described her advisor as having an intrinsic interest in the research and the work she was doing.

While both scholars had done public scholarship under the mentorship of the same advisor, they received wildly different mentorship regarding their work. Scholar 1 self-identified as a scholar-activist, and Scholar 2 focused on addressing inequities through a nonprofit organization's framework.

After this experience, Scholar 1 was able to find a new mentor who "makes sure that the work [he] does makes [him] a scholar-activist and not just a scholar." However, having to switch advisors was another obstacle to overcome in the pursuit of becoming a scholar-activist.

## **I The Privilege of Activism**

Beyond the additional barriers that scholar-activists faced, the obstacles were even higher for students of color.

One BIPOC scholar described their interaction with their advisor around perceptions of their activism in their department as follows:

*My advisor was very much like "You're just an activist. Everyone in the department just thinks you're an activist, like nobody values your scholarship basically and you need to become professionalized."*

The scholar clarified that their advisor was BIPOC, providing advice to the scholar based on their race. The advisor said that as a minority:

*In this discipline, you either are a superstar and everyone is praising you for how awesome you are, or you're shit and you're not really a scholar. There's a lot more room for people who have various other forms of privilege to be mediocre in ways that as a [minority] scholar, you will not be allowed to sort of occupy that space.*

Thus, the advisor pointed out the additional cost of activism for BIPOC scholars. Yet BIPOC scholars often discussed the necessity of doing public scholarship and activist-oriented work to contribute to their marginalized communities.



## ■ Graduate Student Labor Organizing

We also saw a particular type of activist work among students—graduate student labor organizing. More than 20% of the people we interviewed discussed being involved in student labor organizing, either through the COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment) movement or other student worker union activities. Graduate students occupy a unique space of being both students and workers. We are financially dependent on the university that is our employer while also being in the university as students.

In the following quote, one respondent described their experience in the COLA movement and seeing it as connected to their activist-oriented scholarship.

*I heard from some fellow grad students at Davis that some other graduate students at UC Santa Cruz were striking . . . because they weren't getting a living wage, and all of the students leading it were BIPOC, some of them undocumented, and there were some international students. . . . At first I was trying to understand the movement as a movement beyond just a place in academia and like for us graduate students—in that realm. And then I had to understand “What does that mean?” because “graduate student” isn't our sole identities. You can be a graduate student and you are Black and you are coming from a low socioeconomic place; you are from Oakland. That is not separate and that in fact is above you being a graduate student. So the fight is also connected to communities beyond the elite community of the university. And realizing that and how their fight was not just about “we need more money to survive,” which is very legitimate, but it's also about cops off campus, no ICE around, changing the food system so everyone had access to food because students go hungry. That made me realize, whoa, like they're fighting for stuff that is part of a larger movement. It's all connected. It's connected to the [community I work with.] It's all fighting against the way certain people have to live quotidian violence and that violence is everywhere because of racial capitalism and colonialism.*

They later described how they could integrate their communities and activist work by crowdfunding within the graduate student organizing groups to support the community they work with in their other activist scholarship work.

*The response of the university to my research, it's not a “me” singular individual question, it's about “us” as people who are living in this institution and about my peers who are not white, and how together we hear the responses of the university toward their work, toward their lives, toward our lives that are basically reaffirming that we can be exploited and that we are only there to produce and to produce more academic capital for the university. And this has come through the COLA movement, which for me was also part of my public scholarship in a completely different way.*

The COLA movement was significant due to the many identities beyond “student” that graduate scholars hold. It sought to recognize the needs of graduate students who desired

financial security and a safe working environment. This activism was often tied to people's prior public scholarship or an additional activity that they took on to push for a university that supports graduate scholars.

## **| The Toll of Activism**

Ultimately, doing activist-oriented work while navigating graduate school and academia takes a toll on public scholars. One recent alum expanded on this:

*The actual act of trying to do public [scholarship] isn't supported. So they always have the lovely fancy things: "We love interdisciplinary work. We love public [scholarship]. We want to encourage it for people." And then the minute you actually do it, especially as a grad student, it scares the crap out of a lot of people. And I think it can ostracize you really quickly. It can make you a target in some ways, so like folks who do a lot of activism in grad school often are pushed—not pushed out, per se—but like they have trouble getting more connections with faculty who might have had bad interactions with them for being called out for things, let's say. And it can limit who you can work with and how that process goes, which can be problematic when you get to committees and the process of actually like doing the hoop jumping to get the degree. And navigating that can be really challenging, I think as a grad student especially. . . . There's like these fine lines you have to walk until you get the [tenure-track] job.*

This scholar described how being known as an activist becomes an additional barrier that makes it more difficult for activist scholars to navigate nearly every aspect of graduate school, particularly many of the graduate program and job market requirements based on interpersonal relationships and less concrete actions.

## **| The Emotions of Public Scholarship**

Here, we focus on the emotions of doing public scholarship and *being* a public scholar. While much of this section is not specific to the experiences of graduate students alone, the emotions of this work have been left out of too many conversations around public scholarship. We seek to bring them to the forefront so that public scholars will begin to discuss them more and so that we can create spaces that support scholars as they navigate these emotions. At the close of this section, we shift from emotions to focus on the needs and desires of the graduate public scholars that we talked to.

## **| Common Sentiments**

One of the most powerful questions we asked was about the emotions that emerge in the practice of publicly engaged scholarship. In general, scholars shared the importance



In the following sections we will center these emotions: responsibility, vulnerability, frustration, grief, pride, and joy. However, feelings of attachment, self-care, pride, conflict, pressure, overwhelm, helplessness, guilt, and shame also reoccurred. Finally, we discuss what scholars expressed as their needs and desires.

The emotions shared were compelling and an essential part of the work public scholars engaged in. However, respondents also described these emotions as part of what made people disdainful of public scholarship.

A scholar shared a specific moment in which a committee member told her to be less emotional when she was speaking of an experience doing fieldwork that reminded her of a traumatic part of her own childhood:

*I remember being outraged. Just livid and so confused sitting in a professor's office in my department talking about my research, my research interests, and just like how moving it was. I think I was preparing for my qualifying exam. And she said, "One day you're going to be in a room of male scholars, male professors, and they're going to eat you alive if you get emotional like this. So you're gonna have to learn to just separate your emotions and keep it together." And I just remember being so pissed and thinking: Why are you here? What are you doing here? And like, why is that the norm that we have to settle for? Why? How could you, how can we actually tell people to keep their emotions in check, when we're talking about these super fucked-up things that are happening to people?*

In some cases where scholars were directly linked to the communities they sought to collaborate with, they had not expected to face emotional tolls. Yet, as the following scholar described, that was not necessarily the case.

*Because I did come from a community or somebody that was very close to what I was researching, I didn't anticipate the emotional toll that that was going to have on the people around me and my mental health. So, yeah, we should have more resources for me to deal with that. Therapy was helpful, but my therapist didn't really know how to approach this. They didn't understand why this is happening to me because of my research, and how it was impacting me. So having more access to therapists of color, and people who might understand that a little bit more . . . The humanist approach, it does affect your emotional health quite a lot. I wish we had more guidance and help, and I don't know what that would look like, but I think this is a really good suggestion.*

## ■ Responsibility

Many scholars described feeling responsible for the ethics of doing research. As a respondent outlined,

*When thinking about public service and engagement and all that good stuff, you're always thinking, okay, how is my research benefiting the public? How is my teaching benefiting the public? Is whatever I'm writing, whatever I'm reading, how is this serving other people, other than my own kind of aspiration? So those emotions are kind of, I think, always running through your head. They're like emotions of responsibility . . . all kind of weigh heavy on you, and I think what I've done in order to deal with all of this is to go to therapy and also commit to doing work for the benefits of the public as well as yourself.*

In this reflective moment, the respondent also outlined critical questions to assess the value of their work to the community and how this work can support their needs. Notably, the scholar also considered their own well-being as part of their responsibility. Here, thinking of the self with care and compassion as exemplified in the community becomes a strategy to cope with the myriad emotions and experiences public scholars can confront.

## ■ Vulnerability

A noted sentiment that arises from public scholarship is the feeling of being vulnerable. Vulnerability is multifaceted and includes being comfortable with uncertainty and opening oneself to the community, as well as the process of learning and unlearning. Vulnerability allows scholars to gain a community's trust, understand their feelings, and best access them. Even when faced with limited resources, identifying what needs are not met is a crucial aspect shared by many of the respondents. Additionally, being vulnerable to circumstances that may be out of the scholar's limits and knowledge makes space for expanding their perceptions. This was precisely the case when scholars attempted to establish collaborations with communities that did not initially find their proposed project to be of interest. In this case, being vulnerable to accepting what the community needs versus pushing their own agenda is a learning experience for public scholar.

Often, when thinking about public scholarship, there is a preoccupation with the possible harms resulting from research. Yet there is little to no space to speak of or inquire about the same issues regarding public scholars. As previously mentioned, scholars who intended to do work with communities they belong to also noted the emotional toll on them. We suggest that the scholar's well-being should be considered as important as the community's well-being.

## ■ Frustration

Scholars often mentioned the frustration that comes from the structures of academia that limit the collaborations that can take place. These frustrations arose from having to complete degree requirements that may not necessarily align with scholars' work with community or from the structural boundaries that seek to shape what type of work is identified as real research.

Other aspects that cause frustration are the limited resources available to scholars to begin, continue, and sustain their work. Additionally, set research and funding guidelines complicate the process of engaging in reciprocal practices, making it challenging to provide stipends to community members for their labor or to financially support community members who perform as advisors and mentors.

## ■ Grief

One of the most heartfelt sentiments resulting from everyday experiences shared was having to deal with the loss of community members. Grief was one of the sentiments that allowed us to understand the relationships scholars have established with the communities they work within. In many cases, scholars mentioned the immense toll of learning of the passing of a community member who had had an impact on their scholarship.

*Folks who are friends, who I've shared laughs with have passed on. . . . So the emotional connection comes when you're making contact with people. And when you lose those people, when they pass on, you know there are changes in community governance structure. These are not just informers or research subjects, these are friends. And you become invested in that when you have dinner in someone's home and you meet their family, and then they're no longer there. And it happens so suddenly, right, you see it on Facebook and you're, you know, a continent away. . . . And once you're part of that community you feel that emotional attachment and you can't make your problems their problems. But it's deeply personal, and so I cherish those and I try to honor the memory.*

## ■ Pride

One of the positive emotions shared was pride. This emotion usually came up when speaking of how their projects have resulted in positive change or impact in the community. Respondents were also proud when considering their collaboration with community members and how these opportunities led to stronger relationships and further collaboration.

Scholars also communicated feeling pride when reflecting on their work, especially when confronted with not being understood, valued, or supported by their institution. The feeling of accomplishment also led to feeling pride, whether by concluding a project with community members or providing resources and support to the communities in collaboration.

## **Joy**

Scholars also expressed joy, which was linked to feelings of fulfillment, moments of learning with community, instances when they acknowledged their work was valued, and in being able to see the impact of their work.

## **Needs and Desires**

Overwhelmingly, scholars said they would like opportunities to create community and to share space with other people doing public scholarship. We think it is essential to create open spaces to bring together people doing public scholarship, particularly activist-oriented work, at UC Davis.

Many students expressed a need to sustain projects beyond their initial phase through long-term funding. This often came up around the MPS program, which was identified as a crucial point in the thinking and production process of projects. As such, some respondents identified the program as providing the seed money for projects that outlived the fellowship period.

Respondents repeatedly brought up their desire for public scholarship funding opportunities. When funding was not available, scholars sought alternative ways to support their projects, including obtaining additional jobs and using their student stipend.

The desire to urge the university to put into practice their intent to make the institution accessible to the community and establish collaboration links was evoked throughout the respondents' interviews. According to one scholar:

*I feel that the lack of resources and public scholarship also reflect the willingness and ability of academic institutions to shield themselves from the public from having a real conversation and a real hands-on project with marginalized disadvantaged communities that oftentimes do not have the material resources to access knowledge.*

Graduate students also expressed the desire to acquire new skills and learn about methods to enhance and support interest in, and the ethics of, doing public scholarship (as discussed earlier).



## Recommendations

Our recommendations are targeted toward people in positions of power within academia—university administrators, faculty, staff, disciplinary leaders, grant agencies, or even students collectively advocating for change. We provide a list of our key recommendations, which is followed by detailed descriptions of what each recommendation entails.

### Summary of Recommendations

- Broaden the dialogue on public scholarship to include graduate students
- Reimagine graduate program requirements
- Provide ongoing funding to support both public scholarship and public scholars
- Institutionalize support for the creation of community research ethics beyond IRBs
- Provide instruction on diverse methods that can be used in public scholarship
- Recognize and provide support for the emotional toll and possible trauma that may accompany public and activist scholarship
- Respect and legitimate collaboration
- Create job opportunities for public scholars within academia
- Hire, recognize, and support mentors who provide mentorship to public scholars

### Broaden the Dialogue on Public Scholarship to Include Graduate Students

The ongoing conversations around public scholarship should more often focus on and include graduate students. As graduate student scholars who have become involved in the wider conversation around shifting the culture of academia to foster engaged and activist scholarship, we have witnessed and taken part in many promising conversations around how the tenure and promotion process can be changed. These are important steps, but we call for a broadening of the imagination around which structures need to be changed. As graduate students, we would like to highlight the structures that scholars must confront before they are even involved in the tenure and promotion process—particularly the structures of graduate school and the academic job market. Graduate students doing public scholarship often find themselves doing twice the work to do engaged work and also meet their program’s requirements. The structures that do not allow for this type of work to “count” or be viewed as legitimate should be reformed, and funding and institutional support needs to be put in place to support graduate scholars as they do this work.

### Reimagine Graduate Program Requirements

Graduate program requirements should be reformed and reimaged so that degree requirements both permit and foster public scholarship. We have witnessed the spread of changing program requirements to streamline the graduate school experience. For example,



the three-article model of dissertations has spread within academia. Might it also be possible for dissertations to be reimagined in a way that accommodates and champions public scholarship?

We would like to see changes in degree requirements that allow more collaborative work, incorporate varied forms of media, and recognize the immense labor that goes into doing public scholarship. Public scholars also expressed a desire for coursework—on ethics and methods—that would facilitate their work. Creating room for public scholarship within degree requirements would help lift the burden from scholars doing twice the work and would also provide greater legitimacy to public scholarship.

### **I Provide Ongoing Funding to Support Both Public Scholarship and Public Scholars**

Public scholars need funding to support both the costs of the public scholarship work and their livelihoods. Public scholarship is expensive and time-consuming. Our respondents often struggled to obtain financial support for their work. When they succeeded, the funding often only covered a portion of the project expenses. Public scholars discussed feeling a responsibility to put money into the communities they worked with and compensate the community for their efforts. However, public scholars also need funding to support their own living expenses and to pay for their time doing the work, in the same way that many traditional academic fellowships support research and writing time. This is particularly important for public scholars who are from marginalized groups and from low socioeconomic backgrounds with limited financial support.

Furthermore, publicly engaged work does not and often cannot follow the cycles of the academic calendar. Therefore, public scholars need financial support offered year-round, rather than solely during the academic year or just during the summer months, and the funding needs to be renewable. Our respondents expressed a need for funding to support their regular living expenses in the high-cost area of Davis, California, and many needed additional funding to travel to the communities with which they work. Table 3 details some barriers to funding and our recommendations for addressing them.

These funding sources should be available to all graduate students. When funding sources are tied to departments, students who are in interdisciplinary programs or graduate groups do not have the same access to funding.

Table 3: Barriers and Recommendations for Funding Graduate Public Scholars

Funding barrier	Recommendation
Many funding sources predominately fund traditional disciplinary scholarship, leaving out public scholarship.	Public scholarship should be funded by the same sources that support traditional academic work.
Graduate students are only funded for 9 months of the year.	Support scholars throughout the entire year.
Public scholars bear expenses related to both their own living expenses and the cost of their work, but most funding only covers one of these.	Provide funding that covers living expenses as well as the cost of public scholarship projects.
Some funding sources provide funding through reimbursement, which places additional burdens on the scholar.	Provide funding upfront or provide institutional support that will pay for project-related expenses as they arise.
When scholars do community work outside of the geographical location of the university, they incur living expenses in both locations.	For this type of scholarship, additional funding needs to be provided to fund the living expenses in multiple locations on top of any project costs.
Some students faced issues where their department revoked funding they had already received to support their academic work because they received outside funding for their public scholarship.	Public scholarship funding needs to be set up so that it does not disqualify students from other sources of funding for living expenses and academic work that they already receive.
International students doing public scholarship faced even more limited funding sources, further compounding the challenges of public scholarship.	Funding sources should be set up to accommodate students of all citizenship statuses.
Scholars were told that the materials purchased with their funding become the university's property and must be returned at the end of their studies. This policy limits scholars' ability to provide resources to their communities.	Funding sources need to understand that community-engaged work requires community investment in ways that materials cannot be returned to the university after a scholar graduates.
Scholars reported hidden fees to funding sources. These included taxes on students' income, international travel conversion fees, and unavailability of receipts when engaging in fieldwork in specific locations.	Funding sources should be set up to account for these hidden fees by either working around them or providing additional funding so that they do not become a burden on graduate students.

## **Institutionalize Support for the Creation of Community Research Ethics Beyond Institutional Review Boards**

Graduate public scholars desire broader discussions and training on ethics that center community needs. Scholars whose projects were submitted to the IRBs and required IRB oversight expressed the desire to have these community needs considered. Scholars identified that under IRB processes the structure of proposals do not leave much room for accommodating community or context needs. Additionally, many scholars shared their concern about IRB not necessarily following or aligning with the protocols observed in some communities and contexts, such as with people doing participatory action research and with Indigenous communities.

## **Provide Instruction on Diverse Methods That Can Be Used in Public Scholarship**

Graduate students doing public scholarship desired more courses that provided practical instruction in the many methods that are used in public scholarship. These often differ from traditional methods in many disciplines or take different approaches, and scholars expressed a desire for more hands-on training in methods that they could bring into their public scholarship practice. Scholars that we talked to used newer and less common methods, such as digital storytelling, mapping, oral history, photo-ethnography, and participatory action research, which were not taught in most graduate programs. Furthermore, providing graduate-level instruction in these methods would help institutionalize a culture more accepting of public scholarship.

## **Recognize and Provide Support for the Emotional Labor That Underwrites Public Scholarship**

We identified a recurring need to support scholars when they confront the emotional labor that arises from public scholarship. This support could center on the dynamics that emerge when scholars establish close connections with the community/communities they collaborate with. Public scholars must also navigate potential immersion in the traumas facing the communities that they work with. As a starting point, the university could provide counseling services for scholars participating in this type of work. Although many graduate students have reported coping with mental health issues, public scholars often bear extra emotional tolls as they are simultaneously accountable to their advisors and their communities.

## **Respect and Legitimate Collaboration**

We need to create a culture and reform structures to legitimize and make room for collaborative work within the academy. Academia leaves no room for collaborative dissertations (with the exception of some areas in science). Additionally, academic

understandings of publishing and authorship norms do not leave room for work to be shared equitably. Collaborative work particularly faces significant pushback in the humanities as compared with other disciplines, such as the physical sciences and performing arts. Within and outside of public scholarship spaces, graduate student fellowships and grants are designed for individuals with no room for collaborative funding. Even in spaces supportive of public scholarship, scholars lacked access to opportunities to establish collaborations among multiple scholars. Fellowships that financially support public scholarship still fund individuals, and then require scholars to “individually” carry out the work with the community.

However, when we try to imagine a better version of scholarship that is thoroughly engaged, we must understand that the university is also a community. The premise that scholars should work with a community “out there” while just being an atomistic individual that inhabits the university is ill-founded. As scholars, we inhabit many communities both inside, outside, and overlapping with university spaces. Sometimes these internal communities seem to have weaker connections. Respondents repeatedly discussed how they desired more community networks with other public scholars. Public scholarship is inherently collaborative, and scholars repeatedly face barriers as they try to force their work into the individualistic criteria of academia. We need to alter existing structures to encourage and foster collaboration.

## **I Create Job Opportunities for Public Scholars within Academia**

Universities need to create secure job positions that support public scholars. This will both provide public scholars with viable career paths after completing doctoral programs and create support for public scholars who are still in graduate school. Scholars must turn their graduate studies into a career, whether in academia or the pursuit of alternative academic careers (alt-ac). However, public scholars are often redirected toward the alt-ac path rather than being encouraged to apply for or pursue a professorship.

Scholars interested in pursuing a career in the professoriate expressed uncertainty in the availability of job opportunities that emphasize or value public scholarship. These sentiments arise from lived experiences during a scholar’s graduate education. Much of the public scholarship work scholars engage in is undervalued and not necessarily considered an essential aspect of their degree. This sentiment is reflected in responses linked to desires to leave graduate school and pursue alternative careers.

A small sample of the scholars interviewed were recent alumni who were in junior faculty positions. They spoke about the reproduction of institutional culture that does not fully validate nor encourage public scholarship, supporting the findings of Ellison and Eatman (2008).

This recommendation coincides with our recommendation to create more ethics and methods classes in graduate programs, as many universities will need to hire new faculty who are qualified to teach these classes. This can also help reduce the burden on mentors.

## **| Hire, Recognize, and Support Mentors Who Provide Mentorship to Public Scholars**

As expressed by respondents, having supportive mentors is critical to the public scholar experience in graduate school. Most, if not all, of the scholars described having at least one mentor who has positively influenced their public scholarship practice. The degree of support varied, but overall, scholars who could identify a supportive mentor felt most compelled to continue their public scholarship while in graduate school. The most supportive mentors tended to mentor many of the scholars that we talked to, suggesting that they might be overburdened. The disparities in mentorship responsibilities were also evident in that all of the most frequently mentioned supportive mentors were from underrepresented groups in academia. In addition to hiring more public scholars to lessen the burden on these mentors, universities need to reward great mentors and support them in their work because strong mentorship truly does make a difference in the experience of graduate public scholars.

## **| Next Steps**

As we conclude this report, we are excited to share what we have found but know that there is still much work to be done. We hope that this report can be a starting point for a growing focus on graduate student public scholar experience and the important role that graduate school programs can play in changing the culture surrounding public scholarship within academia.

In addition to following the recommendations that we outlined, we hope to see more future scholarship around graduate student public scholarship experiences to better understand how to create programs and spaces that truly foster public scholarship while also clearly identifying the role that graduate school plays in the culture and structures that surround public scholarship.

Our research focused only on graduate scholars who attended UC Davis, a university that has emphasized public scholarship as the current host of Imagining America and other campus-wide commitments. From conversations with graduate students across the country and with UC Davis scholars who attended master's programs at other universities, we believe that the experiences we heard are likely also experienced across the United States. However, further inquiry into these experiences could lead to a more complete understanding of how graduate schools shape and foster but also inhibit public scholarship while also potentially identifying new ways to create culture change. As a start, and also as a part of the Imagining America Leading and Learning Initiative, Gale Greenlee and D. Romo are conducting national research about the experiences of graduate scholars doing public scholarship who have participated in Imagining America's Publicly Active Graduate Education Fellowship (PAGE) program.

programs and careers would allow a better understanding of what leads to the most positive experiences and what barriers make public scholarship most difficult.

We would also like to see a greater focus on why and when public scholars leave academia. As we were conducting this research, we discussed the theory of the leaky pipeline for minority disparities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). The metaphor suggests that there are many moments when minorities fall out of the STEM pipeline. This theory might be applied to the graduate public scholarship experience, specifically to explain the rates of attrition between entering graduate school and becoming a tenured professor. There are many moments during graduate school when public scholars can fall (or be pushed) out of the pipeline that leads to becoming a tenured professor. Not only are scholars forced out when they are denied tenure, but the job market encourages many people to leave academia. We interviewed only one scholar who had left graduate school before finishing their degree, but we heard from several people who almost left and have seen this happen in the university as well. To further understand this pattern, future research should examine the retention of public scholars. We would like to see more focus on the moments when scholars leave academia, what leads up to these moments, and the times when scholars stay but distance themselves from public scholarship.

Identifying successful positive culture changes within academia might lead to better ways to create more structural and cultural changes and widespread change in supporting the culture surrounding public scholarship. We identified one graduate program in which scholars discussed a change in how public scholarship was viewed over time, and scholars often reflected on the important role that the MPS program played in changing their own trajectories with public scholarship. By studying these sites of change, we can better identify how to change the structures and cultures of academia to support public scholarship.

## Appendix: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. What does public scholarship mean to you and your own work?
  - a. Have you encountered tensions in how public scholarship is defined by others?
2. Can you tell us a little bit about your own scholarship and methods - both your engaged work and any other scholarship you do?
  - a. What have you observed as the main impacts of your work?
3. How have specific experiences in graduate school informed or changed your thinking and approach to public scholarship?
4. What emotions emerge in the practice of publicly-engaged scholarship? How do you navigate these emotions?
  - a. Could you share a specific experience that shows these emotions?
5. How is your publicly-engaged scholarship understood or misunderstood by your peers?
  - a. How is your publicly-engaged scholarship understood or misunderstood by your advisors?
  - b. How is your publicly-engaged scholarship understood or misunderstood by your home department?
  - c. How is your publicly-engaged scholarship understood or misunderstood by the university?
  - d. How is your publicly-engaged scholarship understood or misunderstood by your discipline?
6. How does public scholarship fit into your career preparation and plans?
  - a. What resources are available to you in the University and Community to support your practice?
  - b. What kinds of resources do you wish are or were provided for you?
7. What dilemmas have you encountered while doing public scholarship that you need more mentorship or training on?
8. What type of work would you be doing if you could get support for it from the University?
  - a. What kind of support would you need?
  - b. Where would it need to come from?
9. How have the last few months affected or shaped your work, the context of both the COVID pandemic and the recent uprisings for Black lives?
  - a. What kind of expectations, responsibilities or roles have you faced in relationship to current events?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

11. Are there other graduate students at UC Davis or who are UC Davis alumni engaged in public scholarship in the humanities, arts, design, and humanistic social sciences you think we should talk to?

**I Demographics:**

12. What are your preferred pronouns?
13. What is your gender?
14. How old are you?
15. What is the highest level of education completed or the highest degree received by your parent(s) or guardian(s)?
16. Are you a first generation college student?
17. What colleges or universities did you attend prior to UC Davis?
  - a. What degrees did you get there?
  - b. If they say none, where did you get your undergrad degree?
18. What department or graduate group are you in?
19. How many years have you been in your current graduate school program (or if you have already graduated, how many years did you spend)?
20. What degrees are you working on or have you received at UC Davis?
21. Are you an international student?
22. From where have you received financial support while in graduate school?
23. What was your work experience prior to attending UC Davis?
24. How do you label your sexual orientation? (Select all that apply.)
  - a. Straight
  - b. Gay
  - c. Lesbian
  - d. Bisexual
  - e. Pansexual
  - f. Asexual
  - g. Queer
  - h. Questioning
  - i. Other, Please specify



25. Do you identify as Hispanic, Latinx, Chicanx, or Spanish, or none of these? (Select all that apply.)
- a. Hispanic
  - b. Latinx
  - c. Chicanx
  - d. Spanish
  - e. None of these
26. Which of the following best describes your racial background? (Select all that apply.)
- a. American Indian or Alaska Native
  - b. Asian
  - c. Black or African American
  - d. Middle Eastern or North African
  - e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - f. White
  - g. Other, Please specify:

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