

Virginia Humanities Conference 2026

Theme: Humanities for a Public Purpose

Date: Friday March 20 & Saturday March 21, 2026

Conference site: Christopher Newport University

Call for Papers:

Public humanities provide a way for us to make our scholarship accessible to a wider public audience, to demonstrate the relevance and importance of the humanities to the community and to decision-makers who have an impact on what we do. Public humanities also provide a way to mentor our students, and collaborate with them, on projects that reinforce practical career competencies, thereby helping our students articulate why the liberal arts matter.

Rationale:

During a moment characterized by fierce competition among educational institutions, budget pressures, and a changing student body, this conference proffers possible answers as to the centrality of the humanities in our colleges and universities. Artificial Intelligence offers both new solutions and novel difficulties in terms of enriching the life of the mind. Even as society leans into answers buttressed solely by STEM know-how paired with economic objectives, the humanities remind us of our own frailties, our voices, and our own strengths as a community. As stewards of the humanities, we must evince the public face of the humanities to show how artistic beauty, lively debate, and the nourishment of the human spirit can yet transform society for the better. Rather than accept the notion that “knowledge” is a collection of discrete “facts,” the public humanities attest to the fundamentally shared and engaged nature of knowing rooted in the lived experience of individuals and communities. By focusing on various truths anchored in specific places, stories, practices and artifacts, the public humanities draw attention to the many ways humanity creates the worlds of meaning that we inhabit daily. As such, work in the public humanities resists the dominance of contemporary techno-consumerist culture.

Examples of public humanities in teaching and scholarship (student projects as well as new outlets for faculty scholarship)

- American Philosophical Association: “The American Philosophical Association values philosophers' participation in the public arena. This includes work that engages with contemporary issues as well as work that brings traditional philosophies to non-traditional settings.... APA applauds philosophers' contributions to public policy, to consultation with government, medical, business, and civil society institutions, and to public opinion in general.”
- American Academy of Religion: “Technological advances and changing avenues of communication require creative engagement to maximize learning with a growing variety of publics.... “The forms and content of public scholarship in religion are dynamic and

expansive in nature; they include but are not limited to: Scholarship for specific contexts such as environmental reports, cultural heritage documentation, infographics, policy briefs, government consulting, and expert testimony; Multimedia and digital scholarship, such as museum, library, and online exhibitions, websites and web apps, databases, data visualizations, films and podcasts.”

- Modern Languages Association: “Outcomes of public humanities projects include varied forms of scholarship, such as the development of archives, podcasts, digital stories, exhibitions, and data sets.”
- American Historical Association: “This broader landscape of historical scholarship might now include (but is not limited to) … museum exhibitions, public lectures, congressional testimony, oral history projects, expert witness testimony, media appearances, podcasts, and historical gaming.”
- Classical Studies: "using digital tools to translate and annotate Greek and Roman texts, by embracing classical reception studies, and by 'decolonizing' the classics.

Possible Topics

Digital humanities projects that engage the public:

- Using Story Maps to engage the public
- Using virtual reality to engage the public
- Using oral history to engage the public
- Using podcasts to engage the public....
- Using data visualization to educate, engage the public
- Digitizing archival artifacts to engage and expand access
- Interactive art archives
- Wordpress archives

The public sphere and lived experience:

- Language surveys
- Community-Engaged learning
- Public-facing cultural studies
- Slam poetry and performance art
- Prison literature projects
- Installation art
- Manifestos (Hopepunk and otherwise)
- musical scores and performances
- “Living history” projects
- Local tourism (community memorials/trails, artisan trails, ghost tours...)
- Community-based environmental/historical restoration
- Reimagining the Human: Technology and the Future of Humanistic Inquiry
- AI, biotechnology, and digital media reshaping what it means to be human - and how the humanities can respond, reinterpret, or resist
- Humanities in a Changing World

- Migration, globalization, and cultural exchange redefining identity and belonging
- The Role of the Humanities in Civic Life
- Humanistic disciplines contributing to civic discourse, empathy, and democratic participation - particularly relevant to current debates in higher education.
- The Humanities in an Age of Uncertainty
- Art, philosophy, religion, and storytelling responding to social, political, and ecological crises.

Send your proposal to Kip Redick (kredick@cnu.edu) by **February 1, 2026**. Awards are given for the best paper in three categories: professional, graduate student, and undergraduate student.

There is a sliding scale of registration fees. The VHC relies entirely on registrations and institutional memberships to continue, so we appreciate your support!

- Institution fee: \$200 (covers the attendance of one delegate per institution)
- Faculty and Professional fee: \$25
- Undergraduate student fee: \$15

For more information about the Virginia Humanities Conference and registration, please go to the VHC home page at <https://vahumanitiesconference.org>.