

Developing and Establishing an Environmental Humanities Initiative
at the University of Kentucky

DRAFT (incomplete)

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(an analysis of benchmark institutions)

Environmental Humanities Research Data

<https://www.uky.edu/~rsand1/environmentalhumanities>

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INTRODUCTION

(to be written in collaboration with faculty cluster)

- humanities defined
 - [1965 National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act](#):
 - "The term 'humanities' includes, but is not limited to, the study and interpretation of the following: language, both modern and classical; linguistics; literature; history; jurisprudence; philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics; the history, criticism and theory of the arts; those aspects of the social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods; and the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life."
- a definition of EH
 - <https://web.colby.edu/environmentalhumanities/scholars/>
 - EH is both "critical" and "imaginative," bearing on analytical and creative aspects of humanities work. "Critical" is any method or approach that reveals and questions the conditions under which knowledge and practice bearing on human/nonhuman nature relations is produced, whether these conditions are institutional, historical, technological, cultural, ideological, social, symbolic, economic, or conceptual. The plurality of critical approaches within the humanities can provide constructive contrasts that reveal assumptions not available to those operating with the methods of a single isolated discipline. Secondly, the imaginative storytelling, narrative, and sensory experiences the arts can provide generate powerful ways of reckoning with the madness of our current situation, stitching together pathways through it, and imagining alternative futures in human and nonhuman collectives to come.
- COVID statement
 - Over the past two years, nature has imposed on humanity a new order in a way that we have not in our lifetimes experienced. Parts of the world are opening again after a global lockdown. In other parts of the world, recovery seems stillborn. In the Global North, universities and colleges are holding in-person classes, while aggressive variants of the Coronavirus continue to threaten even vaccinated individuals. No matter where in the world one finds oneself, any progress we have made confronting the myriad problems forcing themselves upon us feels, at best, tentative. To help us to understand what we have been through – what we are going through, how we can survive and, even, flourish in the new normal before us, the Environmental Humanities are more important today than ever before. Faculties, students, people everywhere are both exhausted and traumatized by the impact the pandemic has had on their mental and physical health. The virus has had such a universal impact on the peoples of

the world, no singular discipline is capable of truly addressing the human situation we are living through now. The trans-disciplinary approach that defines the Environmental Humanities provides the most robust and necessary means by which to analyze, to imagine, even, the moral and natural landscape ahead of us.

ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES AT UK

(to be written in collaboration with faculty cluster)

- The Promise of EH (see <https://www.uky.edu/~rsand1/environmentalhumanities/>)
 - faculty enrichment
 - Faculty Cluster
 - amplify strengths at UK
 - CHSS
 - Gaines Center
 - Faculty Sustainability Council
 - Sustainability Programs
 - A&S
 - ENS
 - CAFE
 - NRES
 - Sustainable Ag
 - Chellgren Center
 - Research:
 - EH Journals
 - EH Book series
 - Bridges
 - Association for the Study of Literature and Environment
 - Philosophers for Sustainability
 - pedagogical opportunity
 - develop curriculum
 - undergraduate certificate
 - graduate student development
 - teaching across disciplines and methods
 - integration with UK Museum
 - community engagement
 - land-grant mission
 - model: agricultural extension
 - KY Humanities
- Granting Sources
 - Andrew Mellon Foundation
 - NEH
 - Planning Grants

ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES AT UK'S BENCHMARK INSTITUTIONS

Benchmarks defined

The benchmark schools as defined herein are taken from two distinct lists. First, the UK Office of University Assessment (OUA) lists eleven schools as UK Benchmark Institutions. In order to provide the richest resource for this study, we have also included the list of UK Benchmark Institutions as defined in the 2012 Environmental and Sustainability Studies program proposal to the UK Senate. The inclusion of this list allows us a deep but focused review of EH programming at UK benchmarks. Indeed, review of these institutions EH initiatives provides especially fruitful insight into the creative, intersectional, and robust curricular, research, and engagement opportunities afforded to an institution like UK which promotes the Environmental Humanities at their own institution.

University of Kentucky Benchmark Institutions		
List as defined by UK's Office of Univ. Assessment	List as defined in the ENS proposal to UK Senate*	<u>SEC Academic Conference</u> (for sake of comparison)
1. University of Arizona	1. <i>University of Arizona</i>	a) University of Alabama
2. University of California-Davis	2. University of California - Los Angeles	b) University of Arkansas
3. University of Florida	3. University of Georgia	c) Auburn University
4. University of Iowa	4. University of Illinois	d) University of Florida
5. University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	5. <i>University of Iowa</i>	e) University of Georgia
6. Michigan State University	6. University of Maryland	f) Louisiana State University
7. University of Minnesota-Twin Cities	7. <i>University of Michigan-Ann Arbor</i>	g) University of Mississippi
8. University of Missouri-Columbia	8. <i>Michigan State University</i>	h) Mississippi State University
9. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	9. University of Minnesota-Twin Cities	i) University of Missouri-Columbia
10. Ohio State University-Main Campus	10. <i>University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill</i>	j) University of South Carolina
11. University of Wisconsin-Madison	11. North Carolina State	k) University of Tennessee - Knoxville
	12. <i>Ohio State University-Main Campus</i>	l) Texas A&M
	13. Pennsylvania State University	m) Vanderbilt University
	14. Purdue University	
	15. Texas A&M	
	16. University of Virginia	
	17. University of Washington	
	18. <i>University of Wisconsin-Madison</i>	

* Italicized entries in ENS list are schools listed in the UK Office of Assessment list of benchmark institutions.

Survey of Benchmarks - Types of Initiatives

Proposal: An Environmental Humanities Initiative (Sandmeyer)

Review of the UK Benchmark Institutions uncovered 5 distinct types of EH initiatives undertaken by these schools.

1. the faculty cluster,
2. project-based EH initiatives,
3. program-based EH initiatives,
4. the curriculum approach to EH
5. and multi-modal approaches

The Faculty Cluster

In 2008, UC Davis inaugurated an EH faculty supercluster funded internally by a \$5,000 grant from the 20th Anniversary-UC Presidential Humanities Initiative Program. This first grant resulted in a two-day conference on May 7th and 8th, 2009 titled "California, the University, and the Environment."¹ In 2012, ostensibly led by faculty involved in this supercluster, the University inaugurated the UC Davis Mellon Research Initiative titled "Environments & Societies" This initiative sought "to undertake the broad rethinking of human-nature interactions that are critical to meeting the environmental challenges of our era."² The primary deliverable of this initiative was an especially active colloquia series that continued through spring 2017.³ Meetings centered around the work of faculty from diverse disciplines across the country. Papers were submitted in advance and workshopped with UC Davis faculty and graduate students.⁴ Since 2017, no organized programs or initiatives appear under the Environmental Humanities rubric at UC Davis. At this time, the faculty supercluster appears to exist in name only.

The Project-Based EH Initiative

In 2019, four land-grant colleges, the University of Florida, the University of Georgia, Louisiana State University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill partnered together with an alliance of regional stakeholders to establish the "Coasts, Climates, the Humanities, and the Environment Consortium (CHECC)." Funded by a two-year \$150,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, this initiative began by establishing two clusters associated with the land-grant mission of these universities: "Coasts, Archives and Climates" and "Coastal Futures and the Public Humanities." CHECC through the office of The Wilson Center for Humanities & Arts at the University of Georgia hosted its first member meeting of September 26, 2019, titled "Coastal Thinking: A Conversation." Two other meetings have taken place, but the planned series of partner conversations was interrupted by the Coronavirus pandemic. During their first years, CHECC has undertaken two regional public humanities projects. The first, the "Atlas of Meaning" sets out to map the geography of the Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana as defined by local experts in the communities living and working there. "This atlas of meaning will expose the neglected but fundamental humanities elements that can provide vital clues for culturally situated adaptive pathways in a perilous environmental

¹ <http://environmentalhumanities.ucdavis.edu/conference/about.htm>

² <http://environmentsandsocieties.ucdavis.edu/>

³ <http://environmentsandsocieties.ucdavis.edu/colloquiumschedule/>

⁴ <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com/2011/12/environments-and-societies-at-uc-davis.html>

setting."⁵ Directed by the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, the second project, titled the "Voices of Resilience and Recovery in Robeson County," Due to the disruptions caused by the Coronavirus pandemic, this project is restarting now. The "Voices of Resilience" projects seeks to document and amplify the stories of differentiated communities impacted by the hurricanes in Robeson County, NC, particularly Hurricanes Matthew and Florence in Robeson County. At present the project aims, first, to document the life-experiences using a participatory photographic project employing Photovoice. Second, the initiative will produce a number of performance workshops among a number of distinct constituencies in the county. Robeson County is one of the most racially diverse in North Carolina and includes among its members of the Lumbee Tribe. The project identifies for objectives: (i) personify the data on climate change impacts, (ii) incentivize manufacturers, developers, and farmers, (iii) facilitate policy discussion across difference, and (iv) give voice and space and ignite agency among impacted constituencies.⁶

The Program-Based EH Initiative

The University of Minnesota has established an exciting program-based Environmental Humanities Initiative, funded by a grant from the College of Liberal Arts. The institute of Environmental Humanities is consciously intersectional and has provided an especially robust slate of talks, colloquia, and graduate student roundtables since at least spring 2017 ranging over Indigenous studies, political ecology, food studies, cultural geography, animal studies, and cultural anthropology. "Environmental humanities scholars also seek to bridge the divide between academic analysis and practice in the public sphere."⁷ This EH Initiative is geared for the most part at the graduate level, but the University actively promotes Environmental Humanities undergraduate level coursework as well. The University of Minnesota is home to at least four distinct programs and initiatives supporting the pursuit of the Environmental Humanities. The cross-campus, interdisciplinary Institute for the Environment promotes the study and implementation of sustainability and consciously promotes partnerships with business, investment, media, government, academic and the nonprofit sectors. The university-wide Institute of Advanced Study which provide funding support for faculty and graduate interdisciplinary research which engages the wider community. The Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment Initiative was developed to understand the roles played by religions, religious practices, religious epistemologies, and religious ideologies in the changing human-environment relationship but appears currently dormant. And lastly, the CREATE initiative, funded by the University of Minnesota's Grand Challenges Research Initiative, promotes research into problems at the intersection of environment and equity. The Environmental Humanities Initiative at the University of Minnesota proffers an exciting confluence of research, third-party engagement, and inclusive practice around the idea of the Environmental humanities.

⁵⁵ <https://willson.uga.edu/public-partners/coasts-climates-the-humanities-and-the-environment-consortium/atlas-of-meaning/?highlight=terrebonne>

⁶ <https://willson.uga.edu/public-partners/coasts-climates-the-humanities-and-the-environment-consortium/voices-of-resilience-and-recovery-in-robeson-county/?highlight=robeson>

⁷ <https://envhum.umn.edu/>

The Curriculum Approach

Of the all the benchmark institutions studied, the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has developed the most fully integrated Environmental Humanities program into their curricular landscape. The Center for Culture, History, and Environment (CHE) within the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, offers both a graduate certificate and a Ph.D. minor. The graduate/professional certificate requires 12-13 credit hours from at least two of the main divisions of the UW-Madison curricula, i.e., the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. The certificate includes a required 3-credit interdisciplinary methods graduate seminar as core, and students define a thematic sequence for the remaining courses.⁸ The Ph.D. minor requires a 9-credit sequence of courses defined by student interest and drawing from two distinct divisions.⁹ CHE hosts lunchtime environmental colloquia every semester, produces *Edge Effects* – a CHE graduate student digital magazine,¹⁰ organizes a CHE graduate seminar every spring (in addition to the required methods course for the certificate), sponsors collaborative place-based multidisciplinary workshops annually, and hosts or sponsors campus-wide workshops continually. Fundamentally, CHE provides a transdisciplinary home to graduate students, faculty, and associates from across the university and the local and regional community. CHE is truly "at the forefront of some of the most exciting humanities and social science scholarship on the entangle histories of nature and culture."¹¹

Multi-Modal Approaches

The University of Arizona promotes the Environmental Humanities through a variety of initiatives within the Arizona Environment network. These initiatives appear rather to be the product of work by fine arts, design, history, literature, philosophy, and cultural studies faculty working for the most part independently. The University of Iowa created a Spatial and Environmental Humanities Working Group within the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies. In 2016-27, the university established the Spatial and Environmental Humanities Working Group; and a number of faculty currently list Environmental Humanities as an area of expertise. Environmental Humanities at the University of Michigan appears to have been especially active during the 2018-19 academic year, named the Year of Humanities and Environments by the university. Humanities faculty at that time organized a day-long conference titled "Concepts for the Environmental Humanities." Currently, the University of Michigan hosts a graduate level Animal Studies and Environmental Humanities Interest Group under the leadership of Dr. Antoine Traisnel, Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature and of English Language and Literature. An Environmental Humanities initiative at Ohio State University, which was funded for two years (2016-2018) by the Humanities & Arts Discovery Themes, appears to be moribund now. At Michigan State University, a number of faculty list EH and ecocriticism as an area of interest, but there appears to be no organized cluster of initiative. And the University of

⁸ <https://guide.wisc.edu/graduate/environmental-studies/culture-history-environment-graduate-professional-certificate/index.html#requirementstext>

⁹ <https://guide.wisc.edu/graduate/environmental-studies/culture-history-environment-doctoral-minor/index.html#requirementstext>

¹⁰ <https://edgeeffects.net/>

¹¹ <https://che.nelson.wisc.edu/>

Missouri has no apparent faculty cluster or initiative in the Environmental Humanities. However, the Executive Director of Missouri Humanities Council and Adjunct Professor of penned a letter indicating a new Environmental Humanities initiative in 2020.¹²

When considering the rich collaboration EH initiatives have with sustainability efforts and programming, the Environmental Humanities initiative at the University of Virginia stands out. On the one hand, UVA offers a Graduate Certificate in Environmental Humanities. A 12-hour certificate, "the Certificate in Environmental Humanities trains graduate students to integrate methods of the humanities into cross-disciplinary environmental research."¹³ With 9 core faculty, the UVA EH program mentors graduates students from all across all disciplines. The EH Programs lists four active related initiatives. The first, the Coastal Futures Conservancy promotes long-term ecological research. It is unclear if this initiative, funded by an NSF grant is still active, or if it has been subsumed within the currently active Virginia Coastal Reserve (VCR) long-term ecological research project supported by the NSF. Second, the Mapping Indigenous Worlds project is a Mellon Global South Humanities Lab at the University of Virginia. "Especially fecund, "the Mapping Indigenous Worlds Lab comprises four overlapping work clusters: 'Representing Space and Place: Maps, Images and Narratives'; 'Curation: Arts and Music'; 'Care: Environment, Language, and Heritage'; and 'Collaborative Community Engagements'".¹⁴ Third, The Sanctuary Lab at UVA studies the impact of global climate change on sacred landscapes. The Lab's research focus is typically defined annually has focused or will focus on four distinct sanctuaries: (i) Yellowstone National Park (2018), (ii) Bhutan 2019, the Jordan River (2022), and (iv) the Virginia Coastal Reserve. This last ecological zone is ongoing and appears to be identical to the VCR research project mentioned above. Lastly, the Water Futures Initiative is an initiative taking place under the UVA Environmental Resilience Institute. The wide array of research opportunities afforded by UVA's EH initiative, its strong core faculty, and its robust public-private partnerships offer a model for long-term EH planning.

A special mention should be made of UCLA's EH initiative. At UCLA Professors Ursula Heise and Jon Christensen and postdoc Michelle Niemann organized and hosted the Sawyer Seminar on the Environmental Humanities during the 2014-15 AY. This seminar. Funded by the Mellon Foundation, the Sawyer series included of nine monthly seminars and resulted in the publication of the Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities, © 2017. UCLA has a strong English Department within which work numerous scholars in ecocriticism and the environmental humanities.

The University of Georgia has been mentioned already as it is a partner member in the "Coasts, Climates, the Humanities, and the Environment Consortium" with the Universities of Florida, Louisiana State, and North Carolina-Chapel Hill. UGA's special status among equals in this CCHEC partnership is of special note, as the Consortium's logistical home is located at UGA in the Wilson Center for Humanities and the Arts. In addition to CCHEC, however, UGA also boasts the Ecocriticism/Environmental Working group. "Texas A&M is one of only 17 universities in the United States with the triple designation of land-grant, sea-grant, and space-grant

¹² <https://mohumanities.org/ss-2020-letter-from-ed/>

¹³ <https://eh-uva.net/graduate-certificate/>

¹⁴ <https://uva.theopenscholar.com/mapping-indigenous-worlds/about>

university.¹⁵ Hence the work of the Glasscock Center for Humanities Research provides a model for other land-grant institutional efforts to integrate EH into their land-grant mission. The University of Illinois offers a cluster of undergraduate courses related to Environmental Humanities. The cluster seems to fulfill part of an undergraduate certificate in Bio-Humanities at Illinois, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The EH course cluster was offered AY 2019-20, and it is unclear if this remains a vital option. Pennsylvania State University, while having no cluster dedicated to environmental humanities, does host the Rock Ethics Institute. This dynamic institute has a long and influential history of humanities research both nationally and internationally, and sustainability is an identified topic of concern within the Institute.

Summary of Benchmarks Study

- Strong faculty engagement essential to success
- Research driven pedagogy
- Conferences & Paper Workshops which bring unique and influential voices to campus that can substantively engage UK faculty and grad students (paper workshops)
- Regional research partnerships, especially SEC schools, other land-grant institutions
- Multi-faceted engagement with local and regional constituencies, especially of minority and native stakeholders

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **short term**
 - connect with Cooperative for Humanities and Social Sciences¹⁶ as incubator to new initiative
 - form EH faculty cluster:
 - pedagogy focus
 - curriculum development
 - reading groups
 - research focus
 - writing groups
 - conference organizing
 - engagement focus
 - public/private programming
 - active public education
 - plan and implement a Nearly Carbon-Neutral (NCN)¹⁷ conference or colloquia
 - theme: #ecologies
 - TEK
 - #blackecologies
- **medium term**

¹⁵ <https://liberalarts.tamu.edu/glasscock/hlss/>

¹⁶ <https://chss.as.uky.edu/>

¹⁷ <https://hiltner.english.ucsb.edu/index.php/ncnc-guide/>

Proposal: An Environmental Humanities Initiative (Sandmeyer)

- develop undergraduate and graduate curriculum
 - undergraduate certificate
 - consult with ENS program to amplify that program
 - graduate student development
 - hire graduate assistant to help coordinate colloquia
- produce a textbook: published either with Routledge or Cambridge
 - EH pedagogy
 - #ecologies
- **long term**
 - establish regional EH Center at UK
 - Andrew W. Mellon Grant
 - NEH Humanities Connections - Planning Grant