

Thought on Tap September 2019 Transcript

Telling Stories from the Ivory Tower

- Intro: [00:06](#) You're listening to Thought on Tap, a monthly podcast about the role of the humanities in the world today, brought to you by the College of Liberal Arts and the Core Humanities program at the University of Nevada, Reno. I'm Carlos Mariscal. I'm Bretton Rodriguez and I am Caitlin Earley and every month we convene a panel of local experts to discuss the issues of the day and have a moderated discussion. This month we are talking about "Telling stories from the Ivory Tower. Now here's our moderator Bretton Rodriguez.
- Bretton Rodriguez: [00:40](#) Okay, so let's go ahead and let's get started. This session is, I'm telling stories from the Ivory Tower and I only go ahead and introduce our speakers first, but I'll give a brief introduction about what this session is all about and then we're just going to go ahead and have him an open conversation between us. First. I'm going to open it up to the whole, kind of, to everyone after that. So our first kind of panelist is Carlos Mariscal. Carlos is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at UNR. He is interested in the intersection of philosophy and science, as well. And he's also one of the cofounders of Thought on Tap so it please a round of applause for Carlos.
- Carlos Mariscal: [01:23](#) Yay, Carlos!
- Speaker 2: [01:23](#) That makes Carlos so happy. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So our second speaker is Katherine Fusco. Katherine's an Associate Professor of English at UNR. And some of the things that she's interested in are the ways that media shapes identity and also encourages people to be other kind of cruel to one another. Katherine's published two academic books and also numerous articles as well. So please a round of applause for Katherine.
- Katherine Fusco: [01:52](#) [Inaudible]. I don't need it so much.
- Bretton Rodriguez: [01:56](#) So, confidence is a wonderful thing. So, and then also just introduce myself briefly. My name is Breyton Rodriguez. I'm a teaching assistant professor of Core Humanities at UNR. Academically, I'm interested in the intersections between literature and history and [inaudible]. And I'm also one of the cofounders of Thought on Tap. So before we kind of get started-

[applause]

Bretton Rodriguez: [02:25](#)

So before we get started, just to give you an idea of kind of where this session is coming from and kind of what our ideas of it are. So first of all, just a little bit about Thought on Tap, which is kind of the organization that kinda came up with this idea. I kind of got it started. So it was founded last year. And so the idea is a Thought on Tap, first of all, would it kind of really engage with this, with this idea of what the humanities are and kind of the role the humanities, what communities can do and kind of in the community and in society. And also look a little bit, I kind of this idea of engaging in kind of creating connections between the university and the community as well. So kind of trying to really kind of establish some more dialogue. I'm kind of thinking about the role of humanities kind of really kind of connecting dream links between the university community and the larger Reno community as well. So that's great. So what we want to do kind of today is kind of first of all being kind of your optimum and take stock and kind of things that are working, things that not working as well. And also think a little bit about kind of ways of really kind of thinking about the humanities, what the humanities are, how they're useful. I also think about kind of really reaching a wider audience as well. I mean I think often in the university and academia kind of what we call the "Ivory Tower", I think often there's this idea of this kind of separation between the university and the wider community. So one thing we really want to kind of think about it with and could engage with here is ways of kind of telling stories or ways setting our research not just to each other, not just to come to university community but also to the larger kind of our community as a whole. So we're going to have to come up with some ideas at first and kind of talk about it a little bit. And then we really do want to hear from you all kind of see kind of ways that kind of things that we're doing well and things definitely that we can do better as well. Cause, I mean, one, we really do want this to be is kind of dialogue. So just to kind of get us started, we did want to kind of start and the way we structured this as we all came up with a couple of questions and so we'll kind of go ahead and ask each other a few questions and then we'll go ahead and open it up. So my first question is this: In a time where there's more and more focus in what seemed to be more practical skills, (So things like business kind of ways of making money, things along those lines.) there's this idea that the humanities are becoming less and less necessary only for those who have a high degree of privilege such as those who are living and working within academia. So the question I want to start off with is, who do you think the humanities are for? And also how do you think your own kind of research kind of reaches this audience? How do you kind of reach out to this audience kind of wider kind of broader audience as well. And

also when you do kind of the work that you do really who are you writing for? And also kind of why. So I guess that's a few different questions kind of packed into one kind of multi-clause kind of statement. But Carlos, you want to go to start us off?

Carlos Mariscal:

[05:07](#)

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. And thank you everybody for being here. I'm excited to be here. So I guess the first question was who are the humanities for? And, and I have a simple trite answer. It's for humans and I have a less trite answer and I think it's primarily for the people who are either the majority or in power or in some sort of other way. I'm viewing invisible to, to some of the underlying factors of reality to better understand those factors. And you also ask them the question about who our research speaks to or what it speaks. So it kind of who you're reaching. So who are your audiences in a sense? Yeah. So I'm a philosopher of science. And as a result of that, I, I spent a lot of time justifying why I exist. Those might be separate thoughts. And one of the, one of the ways that I explained this to people is anytime science makes a discovery or an invention or any major change, it raises several philosophical and humanistic questions about how those ideas fit into our broader understanding how you know them and what we should do about them. And I think my research speaks to all of those questions and to anybody who is interested in those questions or who thought that the answers were immediately obvious and may they might not be that obvious once you start thinking about them. And then I think the last thing you asked was who am I writing to? And I'm reminded of the Kurt Vonnegut used to say that all of his writing was directed to his sister. And so I guess I am also writing to Kurt Vonnegut's sister. But no, I, I'm writing to multiple audiences all the time. And I think some of my work, I spend a lot of time translating between disciplines. And so as a result, I think I'm trying to write too as big and broad of an audience as possible. So Katherine.

Katherine Fusco:

[07:20](#)

Sure. I think I've got sort of two separate answers to that question. So there were a lot of questions in that question. So I think that when we talk about who the humanities are for nowadays and also, and you're going to hear a lot of anxiety from me when I talk today. I think that to some extent these questions about the value of studying literature, art, history, theater history, philosophy, even history, history, I think these questions are being asked more and more at public universities like the kind of universities where we three teach. I don't think these questions are being asked as much at elite institutions. And so the anxiety that I have is that we may, in justifying ourselves have bought in to this sort of idea that like art for poor people and middle-class people is something that has to

be justified whereas it's not for the wealthy, right? That the assumption is that if you are wealthy you know, that's part of your education, but we have to make a special case that students who are poor or working class or middle class get to study this kind of material. And so you know, I think that that that to me is sort of like who the humanities should be for is for everybody. And maybe especially for people who have been told that it's not for them, right. For who have been told, Oh, what's for you is vocational training only, right? But arts and philosophy and literature are not for you. Those are only for certain people who look a certain way or who have a certain amount of money. And so I really sort of don't care about the humanities thing for those people. I care about the humanities being for people like the students at the University of Nevada. So that, that to me is who the humanities are for. Love, blah, blah. Oh, we don't have a right to explore. So I- I've written two academic books. I'm working on a third one right now. I'm very lucky to be on sabbatical right now. And as I was, my first academic book is pretty esoteric. It is a comparative analysis of US naturalist literature, which was a body of literature that basically got produced only in 15 years like between 1890 and like 1905 basically. And it's a comparative analysis of US Naturalist literature and very early silent film like before people even really figured out how to tell stories with movies. And it's about the formal relationship between those two arts. So pretty heady narrow stuff that is very hard for me to explain to other people. When people were like, what is your dissertation about? I remember you saying it to my father-in-law and him just sort of going like, you know, his reaction. But one thing that was pretty lucky was that I happened to be at an institution that was bringing in journalists for workshops with the academic faculty. And so I got to take some writing workshops with journalists as I was finishing my PhD. And so since then I have done some writing that is strictly academic. I've also done some writing that's very, very public. So I've written about my daughter in Harper's Bazaar. I've written at something for the Atlantic. So some things that are much more public facing. And so, you know, I think taking those workshops with journalists has helped me write in a clearer way as such that when I wrote an article this year, my parents were able to read it, which mattered to me. But I actually am committed to a certain kind of academic jargon as well because I think sometimes the humanities in particular come up for a kind of public beating in the press for being too jargon-y, right? Like we have these theory words humanists use words like problematize, whereas like other people were trying to fix things, we're always trying to problematize things, right? You've got these like weird words that you get made fun of. But I actually want to retain our

specialized language a little bit because I think theory, the kind of hard words of academic study, especially in the humanities can be tools for thinking. Like I still remember reading the essay by Adrian Rich "Compulsory Heterosexuality" when I was an undergraduate student and the phrase compulsory heterosexuality, and it's not the most jargon-y phrase that you'll ever run into but it's a bit jargon-y, right? It's a bit of a specialty term. But it, it was a word, it was sort of, it gave me a tool for thinking that I hadn't had before. And I think that is what's narratively glorious about reading theory, which is sort of the most academic kind of stuff that you can run into is that it gives people tools for thinking with, and so those tools we're thinking with can be really liberatory and really eye opening. So even as I'm trying to sometimes in my writing, bring in the tools about writing simpler declarative sentences that I've learned from journalism or painting a scene. Like I often start by writing with describing a scene now. Two, when I write in a more popular vein, I'll try to bring theory or kind of ideas from academia out into the public because I think those tools are useful for everybody to get to think with, right. To sort of say like, "Hey, there's a person who's thinking about this. These are the tools that are describing they should be in your toolkit cause they're really good tools." So that's good. Good question. So this is an anxiety question which I think comes in some ways from that first book that I wrote, which is the more esoteric kind of abstract book. And so my question for you to both is I want to know if there's a gap in the way that you understand the value of your research for yourself and for your field and the way you understand the value of your research for the broader public. Right? Are the values the same? Or are they different and is that okay? Is that a good thing? Right. So, you know, I don't think the broader public cares a wit about formal relationship between US Naturalist literature, early silent film. But it did keep me on to a couple ideas about how white supremacy is as powerful as it is that are, I think, an important idea and an idea that I've continued to work with because one of the things that I kind of end with in that book is [inaudible] if it's the birth of the nation and the kind of you know, big impact that that film had. And so like, how was white supremacy so persuasive? So that's something that matters a lot. That wasn't necessarily the most important thing that my book did for my field. So yeah, so that's my question.

Bretton Rodriguez: [14:13](#)

Okay. I'll start it off here. I mean, I think whenever you have different audiences, they're going to hit a receive and kind of read your work in different ways. So I think, and I'm speaking to an audience, I mean I work on [inaudible] Liberia, which is not the most easily kind of, you know, field to kind of enter into. So I

think if I'm speaking to other specialist, they'll read my work in one way, maybe kind of be able to kind of introduce or in debates with that. But I think what we all should do, or I think what kind of all of our work maybe we should be kind of thinking about is ways of reaching a wider audience as well. And so a lot of what I talk about a lot where I think about love, I write about, even though talking about 15th century Iberia, 15 century Bastille, it has been a more immediate impact as well. I mean, a lot of the issues I talk about are things like, you know, identity, things like power, ways of kind of telling stories. And these are all things that are still kind of relevant today. And also, I mean, so one of the, one of the things I've been, I've been thinking a lot about recently are conversive. So these individuals who converted from Judaism to Christianity and then kind of began kind of really trying to kind of enter into kind of Christian society. And so we see them kind of in the 15th century constantly being kind of marginalized within society. And this is still the same type of things we see happening today as well. So we see things happening 600 years ago that is still very much happening today. We see the same type of kind of fear of this kind of this new group coming in. We see the sphere and you know, 15th century literature or the scream coming in and taking people's jobs, which is a fear that's going to kind of resonate with kind of people today. Right? But at the same time we get these same, the same kind of tension and I think one of the things that I work could do and should do, but kind of highlighting the way that kind of these tensions were worked out. It's really helped us to get them understand our world come today in a different way. It kind of really kind of take a different approach to it as well. So yeah, so I think different audiences but hopefully had a resonance is that really kind of crossover from one audience to the other. And I think that's really kind of on me to make sure that I have allowed the value I see my work would be kind of understood and seen by contemporary audience as well. So, Carlos?

Carlos Mariscal:

[16:14](#)

Awesome. Yeah. Awesome. Thank you. So this is an interesting question for me and so I said I'm a philosopher of science, right? So I'm a philosopher within that, there's branch called philosophy of science. Within that there are people that focus on particular sciences. So I'm a philosopher of biology within that I'm interested in origins of life, like in the universe, extreme organisms that kinda- the weird stuff in life. Right? And so, so I wrestle with, with how this fits. I mean, humanities are broad and I don't even know if I could define them if I, if I, if I'm here. But I do feel like I'm wrestling with some of these deep questions, these fundamentally deep questions about what it is to be alive, what what, what, what should matter or how we

should think about it. And where we should look for, for life in the universe. How should we should think about our place in the universe? So I guess when I'm thinking about what I do for, you know, as an audience of myself, I think I'm wrestling with some particularly deep questions. But then when I try to pitch this to other experts in my field, I try to say, Oh, I'm wrestling with like tiny little questions that you guys can engage with as well. A little, literally anybody questions that are hopefully making problems easier to understand or relating ideas to each other and in particularly interesting ways. But then when I go back and speak to the public again and then I say, no, they're the deepest questions ever. So, so, so there's a sense in which in order to, to sell my work to other experts, I'm presenting it as a little bit more of the same, but I think it does speak to some, some hopefully deeper truths. And yeah, I, I was thinking as you were saying, Katherine, a little while ago, you were wrestling with the idea of jargon. I spent a lot of time translating different jargon between you know, technical words between different fields. And I think it's important to have a simple words for complex concepts, but the more of those that you introduce, it, it it creates this, this problem where people that aren't used to them don't don't know how, what, how to use them or how to relate to them. And so your position actually is making, making me rethink my position, which is kind of exciting.

Katherine Fusco: [18:50](#)

I have a thought about that if I could. So there's, there's a, so queer theory, if anybody knows queer theory comes in for a particular beating for being jargony. And there's an introduction. I believed the book, homographesis, right, which is a fancy word, a fancy made up word by the theorist Lee Edelman. And he writes a defense of difficulty in difficult language in his introduction to that book in which he points out that plane's speech is a way of disguising like its own kind of jargon. So if you think about two simple words like family and values, there is a lot that is riding on those two little words, right? That is its own jargon, right? That is a term of art that has special meanings for people who are deploying it, who are in the know, right? That's simple speech, right? It's not a fancy made up word or you know, whatever. But so, so I think that there's like a skepticism too that we can, you know, as people who analyze things like language and speech sort of point out the way in which coded language coded other incidents are taking place actually all around us anyway.

Carlos Mariscal: [20:11](#)

Yeah, no, that's awesome. I mean, I mean the, the words that we use every day are imbued with their own values and their own understanding of reality. Right. so that's awesome that I'm learning here. I had a question for you guys. Okay. So

sometimes when I teach my classes, I make this point about the relationship between science and pseudoscience. And the point is that when we go out into the public when you compare scientists speaking science to the public and pseudo scientist speaking pseudoscience to the public, the pseudo scientists will always win. And the reason for that is because they are actually gearing their discussion to the public, whereas scientists are speaking to themselves and isolated ivory towers. And, and in fact, it, it's even worse than that. Sometimes it is viewed negatively to go out and speak to the broader community. It shows that you aren't actively engaged in your research. So I guess I have a related question about like humanities and everything that's not science. When the sciences fate or, sorry, when the humanities face off against anti humanist forces. Do you think that the anti human is forces when, because I worry that they will,

Katherine Fusco:

[21:39](#)

Oh [inaudible] I have such a hard time even like thinking about the version of that question that exists for the humanities. Right. Cause there's like a couple of different things. Like on the one hand for example, there's a new TV show being developed about Emily Dickinson, which like makes her look like a kind of wild party girl and a bunch of them, like some scholars are like, we don't know about those. And I feel like okay here's like people to read some Emily Dickinson poetry, I kind of don't give a shit. Right. I'm kind of okay with that. So that seems like one version was like, Oh, people might have a not true idea of Emily Dickinson, which is like, I mean obviously like it looks, you know, like there's like a rock music soundtrack and you know, it's sort of like very much like Sophia Coppola's, Marie Antoinette or something. Right. It's like a modern adaptation. I don't really care. So there's that. And some people do care. I like, I think there are people who have a lot more like invested in like people knowing the truth about their authors of their figures and things like that. I don't care as much about that. But I think what we see more often is the kind of people who are not in the humanities declaring the humanities useless. Right. People who are actually not inside the discipline, not teaching it, not studying it, not taking classes in it, looking at it from afar and declaring it have no use at all. And so I think that you know, I think, I think that is sometimes we are done that does service by our own colleagues at the university. Who I told these guys when we were preparing for this, like I, I've been trolled by a cowardly account called "Real Peer Review" which will pull up abstracts from the humanities and humanistic social sciences and then like make fun of their abstracts in public. And I thought like, "Real pure of you, you're not in my field, you're not my peer". Right? And so I think there is like every once in a

while like peer review is useful to sort of be like, actually you have no idea what the norms of my discipline are. And I think that kind of thing, we do see kind of like hoaxes where people try and see, "Oh, can I get my work published in a women's studies journal" and prove the uselessness of women's studies, right? Like people who aren't invested in the questions and who aren't invested in producing a body of knowledge. Right? It's like, really I'm being done in that phase, which is perhaps true, the pill to the sciences.

Bretton Rodriguez: [24:06](#)

So now I'd like to, in a ways I want to kind of go with this or think about it. I think with regard to the humanities, I do think this idea of almost the pop humanities is kind of interesting. Like I said, I think there's this kind of divide between what people think the humanities are versus what they really are. And so this idea of kind of dismissing it as jargon or just being kind of really meaningless. I think there's a real kind of threat or real kind of danger. I think we kind of need to kind of push back against. And I think that's one, one thing that we can and should do and speaking the community is kind of really show where the value kind of lies or kind of where we see the value with what we do as well of how kind of, what the communities really are. It's not just kind of jargon, it's not just breaking everything down, it's not just cut dismissing things. There's actually this real kind of concrete value to it and I think we need to do a good job of articulating kind of that value as well. And I, I do kind of like, yeah.

Audience Member 1: [24:58](#)

Done. Yeah. Actually I have a question about that. I think the point that was made earlier, and I think second speaker is a very good point that that it's certain schools in the city, whether you're lesbian or Swarthmore or, or the University of Pennsylvania or, or both in college, there is this expectation that the humanities are very valuable and that the students who go there, as you said, from these privilege backgrounds don't really question all of that content. Or why are we studying Shakespeare or medieval history or whatever. And I'm just wondering if you could talk a little bit more in detail about maybe what we can say to the students who are in Canticle intimate or upset with our works or nursing. I mean, there are these sort of usual things that we can say about our place in the university and in sort of our understanding of, you know of why we are here and it gives us a richer and a more textured sort of way to interact with the world around this. But I'm wondering if you could talk just a little bit more in detail about that. But I do think the distinction was a good one. I think we will really try saying that at certain schools. It's not the question that hot and at large public universities, it's a question very much.

Bretton Rodriguez: [26:23](#)

I can start just cause I have the mic [inaudible] I'm 10, I'll pass it, pass it on. But no, I mean I do think that there is head of, I think it comes in the way people see the humanities. I think there is this perception of it being kind of worthless in a way. So I mean I do think that that's something we need to push back against. And I do think that's something that we need to articulate as well, just kind of where this, this kind of value, this value is. And I think also it's kind of a dangerous thing if the humanities become only for the wealthy, only for the elite, only for people who are at Ivy league schools and kind of from these kind of wealthy privileged backgrounds. I mean, I think it's doing kind of to kind of a double disservice. They're doing a disservice to kind of students who are not from those backgrounds are not able to take those classes. I think it's also doing a disservice to the humanities as well and kind of presenting it as only kind of this this game that people play if they don't need to actually do more. And I don't think that's true. Like I think the humanities has a real impact. Whether you're nursing, whether you're mechanical engineering, whatever it is you're doing, the humanities will touch your life. And I think a lot of these issues that we face, whether it's ethics, whether it's morality, whatever it might be, these are all things you need to know. These are the things you need to be able to think about. Whether you're a nurse, whether you want, whether you're designing of driving core or car for instance. These are all kind of issues. You need it in front and this is something that we need to kind of teach and really engage with our students so that they can see and be able to make these decisions as they move forward as well. I'm going to let Katherine respond and then I think what we'll do, because we're kind of getting to time anyways is we're just going to open it up to questions from you all, but I will let kind of Katherine spot in there all open it up.

Katherine Fusco: [28:00](#)

So I also think that question is very complicated in lots of ways too because in my discipline, I'm in English and I don't know, I assume this is true in other disciplines as well. I think we're seeing some anxiety about the humanities right now. Because some people who are used to seeing themselves centered in humanities curriculum are finding that humanities curriculum is changing. Right? So there was just an op ed in the Wall Street Journal that was like, you know, I actually like dinner meetings. I was like, I am not like wasting my time on this because I've seen this before. It'll come again and I'm done. But it was basically not bad. That was like, what's the use of the English major? These students are not learning to write clear sentences and they're not even learning Shakespeare anymore, you know, and it's this kind of like they're learning you know, like Post-colonial literature and African American literature and Women's Studies

and like queer theory and like what happened to the good old English major. And like this is also somebody who's like happy to have no one studied English major ever, honestly, or you know what I mean? But, but I think that part of this, like what is the use value of the communities is also coming back at a particular history as people who are used to a core humanities curriculum being centered around largely white, largely male, CIS, hetero, you know, like Christian, right? And so as that curriculum changes, I think that they're, it's also not surprising that we're seeing some of these objections to the humanities. I think that's also part of what's happening here, which is not exactly an answer to your question, but I think it's important. I think it's an important context.

Bretton Rodriguez: [29:38](#)

Well, okay, so I think we asked him some questions. Why, why don't we start over here and then we'll go from there

Audience Member 2: [29:45](#)

I was so intrigued by what it says here in the program. [inaudible] No, I think the way they do their work, video, podcasts, again, digital platform as well as increased engagement with popular culture. Cause I teach at TMCC, which you know, you think that you went are, is you know TMCC really grappled with a lot of real life, real life stuff. I really respect the students. I love it and I'm always wanting to try that may bring stuff to the table for them to do that really is kind of like where theory is, you know, rubber hits the road and make it exciting and make it relevant and not forget all the wonderful stuff that we've learned if we were privileged enough to go to a school where we got to stimulate stuff even in, so I was wondering how you are all doing that.

Carlos Mariscal: [30:37](#)

Yeah, well, I mean, I, I'm doing that exclusively in that, in, in my classes, I have assignments from podcasts and you know I assigned like magazine articles and other, you know, some TV shows every once in a while. And I think part of the reason I do that is that once you become sensitive to the fact that this is everywhere then you start seeing it and understanding it at a deeper level and it is everywhere, right? But, but I'm the one that, that's curating the list of-of topics and, and otherwise stories that the students will have to like look into to see the, the topics that we're talking about. And so that's another way I think of reaching audiences by appealing to diverse media.

Katherine Fusco [31:26](#)

And to, I, I don't, I didn't realize I was going to become such a shell for a journalist. [inaudible] I think we're in because of, I mean, I'm the one who has a terrible moment for journalism, right? Because newspapers have gotten thinner, the better. That's not surprising. Journalists are having a harder and harder

time getting paid and given a full time job, but once that they get shot and they get shot. So yeah, in some ways it is a horrible time for journalism, but certain media platforms have made a certain kind of long form journalism more possible, right? So online journalism doesn't have the same limitations as print journalism. You can publish really long pieces online. And podcasts are also pretty cheap to make. And so you've got this kind of like blossoming of podcast storytelling. And so what, what's actually happened is there's a fair amount of like, history and cultural criticism that are appearing in these platforms. So I'm gonna forget the name. It's not Indivisible, but there was a Supreme Court podcast fairly recently. Yeah. I forget what it was, but I had my students, what is it called? It's from the radio lab. Yeah. So it was the Supreme court podcast. What is it? "More perfect." Why? Yes. Thank you. So I had my students in the CH American experience class, listen to an episode of it. And what's really wonderful about that kind of journalism is people are one interviewing academics for their podcasts. And two they're giving kind of like long historical context to present day things. So for the core humanities class, I asked students to do a kind of podcast assignment based on that, where they connected something from US history, US culture of the past to the present. They were supposed to go interview an expert think about what their like intro, outro music would be like in the way that a podcast producer would be like making these kind of connections. And so I do think that there is, like in journalism we're actually seeing I think good use, sometimes made of expertise, not always, but I think sometimes that is a good model for us.

Bretton Rodriguez:

[33:28](#)

Tell me really quick, but I do think one of the things that's really exciting right now and just, you know, teaching right now and kind of being able to kind of gauge the students right now is there are so many different ways that we can engage with students. I mean, we could do things like this, podcasting and kind of sharing ideas. This actually right now is a podcast where we're recording and you can find that online later. So, and this is so you can share information, you can preserve information, you can disseminate information. And I think in the classroom as well, you can kind of expose the students to more different sources of information as well where those podcasts with this video whatever it might be, there's just a lot of different ways of kind of exposing students to different information. I think this is great with types of students as well. So some students that maybe don't have kind of, you know, the formation to can be able to kind of read very long articles might be able to kind of gauge the podcast in a different way. For instance. So I think there's just a lot more that we can do and I think as instructors

and I think as intellectuals, there's one way that we should do and kind of need to do as well. Okay. Are there questions?

Audience Member 3: [34:31](#)

Yeah. So you spoke a lot about assigning a multimedia multimodal works to your students, but I'm curious about what they, they create instead of a traditional, you know, page 12 research paper, I'm wondering are you encouraging them to, to create things to create information, knowledge using different platforms aside from just the regular written paper, a podcast, video, essays, what are they thinking?

Bretton Rodriguez: [34:59](#)

So I keep trying to get my students to make videos and then not doing it. So I'll give them the option to do like a presentation in class or do a video and no one's ever chosen the video and they'll like the two [audible], I've been given this assignment. So I think I could just maybe to do more to kind of force them to do it perhaps. But I want them to do it. But there is a resistance on the part of the students of doing it as well, I think. I think that's just not what they're used to. I think kind of there is this kind of comfort or familiarity with him, nutritional essay on our part, on the instructor's part, and also the students as well. So I think this is something that maybe I think we can kind of push them on as well, but I think that might be changing in the future as well, but right now soon as a lot of things are more comfortable with what they've done before.

Katherine Fusco: [35:42](#)

But I think also like work, we're older than our students when we need to catch up our skills too. You know what I mean? Right. Like if you asked me to do a video essay, I'd be like, Oh, you're to hear it. So like there's, there's a way in which like I'm a scholar of things that I cannot make myself. Right. And like I, I've been speaking to some people who do assigned video essays. They're students. And I have actually assigned a video essay in my intro to film class, but I had to rely on the skills of somebody working at the computer lab on campus. And so we went as a class to the computer lab and like it would be better if I had those skills. So like it's a different layer of pedagogical knowledge that we need to take on a little bit. You know, so I think like lots of people in this room probably do blogs and I think that actually is kind of helpful. Like I have done a blog with a student and actually it was very cool because one of the student's moms followed the blog And so it's like we have a reader, someone's reading goes, "That's my mom." Was, it was sort of in my kind of like way of wanting students to kind of be able to see how theory is in the world. They were doing kind of like key term posts where they were connecting a key term that was theoretical to something in there, like popular cultural diets, you know? And so they were writing blog posts and saying

like, Oh, like, you know, you can see, you know, cultural appropriation and this or you know, like something that was in there, pop cultural diets. So they, you know, I think like also in like, kind of like getting old way, like not only do you no longer know how to make like memes or like do Instagram or whatever, but you also like, it is impossible to try and keep up with pop cultures. I mean, I try but there are just like certain objects where I'm like, what is a VSC girl? Like what? Like, I don't even know. Or like, you know what I mean? Or just like Kimra says, like, you know, but it's just too hard at a certain age, but it's nice to have assignments where like students can do that work right at the blink and allow them to, to do that and be the experts that they are in some ways. Right. That like we can't be forever.

- Carlos Mariscal: [37:41](#) Wow. Invite, by the way earlier, we didn't say thought on Thoughtontap.com. [laughter] But yeah, and so yeah, before I was a philosopher of astrobiology, I was a graphic designer and so I have some assignments in my class where I make students do posters or do handouts or I've had a weird creature project, I had a video project. I've tried all sorts of different things and they work to various degrees. Other questions? A gentleman with a, yeah. Yeah.
- Audience Member 4: [38:14](#) I'm not in academia, but I follow a lot of the issues on YouTube. I wondered if you followed those too or also if your students follow me, you get any feedback but people coming up with a talking point. So a good here are some of the scars you to some of them. All right. This is very controversy. A lot of people, I felt like Triassic McAfee media broke the PAC.
- Carlos Mariscal: [38:47](#) I thought you were going to go in a different direction and talk about like crash course YouTube pages and saying I have assigned my students, but yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. I don't know if either of you have something [inaudible].
- Katherine Fusco: [39:00](#) I mean, I'll just say I did have a student, I had 'em for a long time. I had an assignment where I asked students to connect things from the past to contemporary articles from the New York times. And at a certain moment in our recent past, students started objecting to being asked to read the New York times because it was elective publication in their mind. And I was like, okay, New York times or Wall Street journal like that should make everybody happy. It didn't make everybody happy. And so I had a student who like relentlessly submitted Breitbart articles for that. But what was helpful is that his classmates actually policed him. I didn't have to. And there was actually this sort of like lovely moment where like someone in this group is

like, that is not a trustworthy news story and like the students, I mean students are good, you know, in some ways. And I think, you know, like you do hear that and you do see that kind of thing come up. But I think like what's both horrible. Yeah. What's horrible about the internet and social media culture is it makes people who are actually consuming stuff as part of a small group of individuals feel like they're much bigger. And I think that's part of the, the issue with these YouTube things is like you get someone who's consuming a lot of conspiracy theories on YouTube and because they're being connected to people all over the world where I'm consuming them and they feel like it's a much bigger group of individuals than it actually is. And I think that's part of why classroom discussion is so important is because other students can be like "No, no no, you know, like no, like that, that is like a way out there kind of thing. Like that is not actually, you know, the case." So...

Bretton Rodriguez: [40:29](#)

So I mean, yeah, just to build on that a little bit, I think the best kind of thing that we can do to kind of theories like this, I might pop up on the internet and you'd say we're not. It's really just to of have a different experience for the students in the classroom. And I do think when the students hear something from their peers and see their peers doing something that carries a lot of weight, then maybe kind of us as kind of the authority and for the classroom. I say get my anger as much weight as their kind of class. Things being like, no, no, no. This is what we're doing. This is what the project is, is we're trying to do, and I think that's a really powerful thing and that's something that we should facilitate. Something we should kind of really try to set up a very kind of purposefully, so, okay, why don't we go to the back?

Audience Member 5: [41:06](#)

Yeah. I'll try to reduce the complexity and time. Do you find that universities sustain helping you to sustain the value of the humanities through incoming students in notion that they were ready or are you finding that as we brought it up, perhaps the university itself is beginning to discuss, reduce your own value [inaudible] I don't know. There will be time to answer is as teachers and you're younger than my wife. What else as teachers now are you finding the students were born, nurtured, raised in the digital age that are coming to you and 20 years old, 19 years old, being more disconnected from the humanities and previews? I listened to what we're talking about now. Podcast platforms were different ways to exchange and gathering information, but I hear nothing about critical exchange of ideas now you would fit platform knowledge, exchanging information.

Bretton Rodriguez: [42:38](#)

I mean I, I think the platforms if kind of correctly used provide a space for suits, like I have exchanged information and also kind

of think critically as well. Right? I mean I think providing kind of space for them to do that is what we should be doing. I think this kind of question about the kind of relationship between the university and the humanities is a more kind of difficult one to answer. I think it's a really good question. I'm not exactly sure what the, with the kind of absolute answer would be. I do know. So I teach in core humanities and I do, I've, I've personally felt kept support from the administration and kind of a real, yeah, just kind of general kind support for what we do. But it is a very complex question. I'll, I'll pass it to Carlos and then we should maybe do like one more question, right? Yes. Yep.

Carlos Mariscak: [43:19](#) Yeah. So the, this event is sponsored in part by the College of Liberal Arts = who has been very good to us. And in fact, they're they have a new campaign about the resurgence of liberal arts. And I think UNR in particular, it's actually fairly, fairly good in this respect. I can't speak to other universities in general. I feel like this, the STEM push has pushed down humanities. But I think we're good here. So one last question.

Audience Member 6: [43:52](#) Yes. I'd like to sort of reframe what we're talking about. A little bit of science and I think there is a push back against basic research and research as well, like the golden fleece members of Congress. So, I don't know if it's the STEM fields, it's the same. [inaudible].

Carlos Mariscal: [44:16](#) Yeah. So, so I, I take the question to be something about Congress being against, so the golden fleece awards for those of you that don't know, is a I guess a website that is updated that this research into how fruit flies have sex is not useful. Therefore, we shouldn't fun to any sciences except it turns out that for clients, our model organism, and in fact we've been studying them for over a hundred years, more than a hundred years. And knowing how they behave in a variety of ways is extremely useful for figuring things out like cancer and other things, right? Which is why what might appear ridiculous or, or farcical when you hear it and aren't familiar with this subject isn't necessarily the reason to think that it is not worthwhile. And I think that, you know, we were talking about all sorts of other areas in humanities that some people think that they know are useless. But as a matter of fact, none of them is, people studied these. And, and when they do, they become, they begin to realize that these areas of study are extremely important.

Katherine Fusco: [45:28](#) And I'll, I'll just say I have a friend who is an English professor who's married to a math professor and she has said that, you know, if, if folks, and I think your question points to those, if

folks from STEM aren't kind of like careful about making allies the next letters to go are the S and the M. Right? So because they're not applied, right? So like eventually math and science will start to be treated sort of the way that the humanities have been treated, which is like useful so long as they're serving industry. Right? So like to the degree that studying math helps you be an engineer, we're going to keep it around, right? Which is like the way that English is increasingly treated. Like to the degree that English helps you write a memo, we're going to keep it. Right. And so I think that, you know, college and so I think your question is a good one because it's that same idea that if people, you know, don't see the value of sort of scientific research when it's not tied to you know, I mean, and I used to work in a writing center where we help scientists write grants and I was laughed about the way they had to work on these grants. They had to talk about their broader impacts always. And it was like inevitably they were like cancer. Some are not. That's seems like a far road tomorrow. You know, they had to do that to get their grants. Funding is like make it very, very clear to the people who are giving the money away that there was going to be an application. Right. Even though that might be in some ways be getting in the way of the science. And I think there's a kind of really similar problem there. Yeah.

Bretton Rodriguez:

[47:06](#)

So unfortunately we are out of time. If you enjoy the session, please do send out a thought on top of that. Com also, we will have sessions the second Thursday of every month at the university of laughing planets and Virginia. So we would invite you to come out. Those will be a 5:00 PM- at 5:30 PM on the second Thursday of every month at the university level. Please come check it out. We enjoy this. Thank you so much for coming. And do have a lovely evening.

Ending.