

Center for Advanced Study | Spring 2018

Learning Publics

Theory, Performance, Practice

What does it mean to be a public university? Our typical answers are unsatisfying. Public universities, we say, are supported by public revenues rather than tuition; they are accessible to students regardless of social-economic status; they serve the public. The first answer is too formalistic and is, in any case, fast becoming a fiction as tuition has now surpassed state support. The second answer points to a substantive ideal but, again, is starting to look like wishful thinking. Admissions at public flagships is increasingly selective, and as tuition rises the student body is increasingly affluent. The third answer, that public universities serve the public, begs the key questions: who do they serve and how?

If we want to deal with these questions seriously we have to investigate the nature of public formations, public things, and public goods. This team-taught interdisciplinary seminar will do just this. Through close reading and discussion of primary texts, from a range of humanistic fields, we will examine the nature of the public and the current conditions of public life. We will investigate what part universities play in catalyzing public formations and discourse. And we will consider what special role might be played by the arts and humanities in “summoning the public into being” (John Dewey)? The phrase “learning publics” is meant to signal the double connection between education and the public: that public life itself is educative and that central to education is the act of making public. Graduate students from all disciplines interested in pursuing such questions through collaborative inquiry and serious-playful discussion are welcome.

CAS 587

meets with GER 576, EPS 512,
ANTH 515

Thursday, 2:00pm – 3:50pm,
Education 242

Instructors:

Chris Higgins (EPOL),
Anke Pinkert (German)

This course is part of the
three-semester interdisciplinary
2017-2018 CAS Initiative on
Learning Publics:

<https://cas.illinois.edu/learning-publics/>

