In Spring 2014 The Hall Center featured three panels on the Applied Humanities and jobs in the humanities outside the academy. These panels were organized by Henry Fortunato, a Simon Fellow at the KU Hall Center for the Humanities and Director of Public Affairs at the Kansas City Public Library. The SLL graduate students attended the panels and thus met the Responsible Scholarship mandate for the semester. Below are Prof. Carlson’s occasionally irreverent summaries of the three events.

**Applied Humanities Panel 1   6 March 2014
Hall Humanities Center**

Featuring panel chair Henry Fortunato, Simon Fellow (and Director of Public Affairs, Kansas City Public Library); Matt Naylor, National World War I Museum; Clay Bauske, Harry S. Truman Library; Dee A. Harris, National Archives at Kansas City; Eli Paul, Missouri Valley Special Collection, Kansas City Public Library; Jason Roe, Civil War on the Western Border website; Aimee Larrabee, Inland Sea Productions; Steve Nowak, Watkins Museum of History; and Jean Svadlenak, museum consultant.

Yes, yes, the panel discussion started out threatening to send only one message: if you are a very lucky American historian, you are golden. Everyone else, forget it. But, folks, it did improve.

And yes, these panelists all talked about how “lucky” they were to get their gigs -- but they also managed to get gig after gig after gig. As Henry Fortunato pointed out, “**luck is the residue of design.**” Yes, they walked into “unexpected” jobs, but only because they had done their homework, completed the right internship, been at the right professional conference, and networked the right people who offered them that job.

**STRATEGIES** -- if you are interested in a career in applied humanities:

- in graduate school, pick a minor that corresponds with what you like to do (try something concrete: film production, museum studies, art history, project management, music, digital technologies, etc.);
- think about shaping yourself as a generalist as well as (or rather than) a specialist;
- find good mentors (more than one, in various places, especially outside the university);
- do an internship or volunteer work in a relevant organization; make this work a “stepping stone” to other opportunities;
- join professional organizations or at least attend their conferences, meet people, talk to people about what is out there in the areas you are interested in;
- be open to opportunities that are not on your “list”;

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- embrace short-term projects; you need a track record that shows initiative and success
- become comfortable with being uncomfortable;
- get over the fact that you have invested years in grad school; get over thinking about applied humanities careers as “Plan B” -- embrace the idea that you are trained to do many things;
- give serious thought to which of your skills are transferable and how they can be used;
- don’t look down on business skills -- meld your entrepreneurial urges and your humanities training; learn to read spreadsheets and to create them (you don’t have to become a bean-counter, but you will be working with them).

SKILL SETS. The following skills were mentioned by different speakers over the course of the panel discussion:

- ability to learn new things;
- ability to think critically about opportunities;
- willingness to reinvent one’s self continuously and as necessary (thematically, processually);
- excellent writing skills (one typo in your cover letter and you’re out; didn’t master basic grammar? you won’t be working here!);
- attention to detail;
- ability to both synthesize and analyze, but especially to synthesize for various audience levels;
- enthusiasm and interest in the job, the topic, the task;
- proactivity (go-get-em-ness);
- entrepreneurial spirit (idea-popping, then following through);
- ability to change and grow;
- courage, confidence, and creative self-reflection.

The panelists also pointed out that graduate school knocked about half of these qualities out of graduate students. Hold on to them or get them back if they have been knocked out of you. Don’t be shy.

Applied Humanities  Panel 2  13 March 2014
Hall Humanities Center
Carlson’s Summary with a few personal additions

Featuring panel chair Henry Fortunato, Simon Fellow (and Director of Public Affairs, Kansas City Public Library); Mary Madden, Kansas Historical Society; Tim Rives, Eisenhower Presidential Library; Harlan Brownlee, ARTS KC; Lucinda Adams, Kansas City Public Library; Angela Elam, KCUR; and Ann Birney, historical reenactor.
Factors to consider when considering a position in the applied humanities:

- Are you able to toggle between being a generalist and a specialist? especially a generalist? can you be “synthetic” as well as “analytical”?
- Whom do you know? Most jobs, at least entry level jobs, go to job seekers who have some kind of connection with job offerers (they met them at a professional conference, they worked with them on an internship, they chose to do an informational interview with them, they interviewed the person currently in the job, they share a mentor, etc.). Have you networked in the appropriate places?
- Start early. Do not wait until you have the degree in hand to start looking. Seek out some internships now. Check out the job lists in fields that interest you. What are they looking for? Can you be that person? If you are undecided, look in various places and see what other agencies are posting positions you might enjoy. Always keep in mind that agency and government HR usually cranks very slowly.
- Not sure where the job lists are hiding? Ask. Ask at the career center, ask people who work in that field, ask the internet.
- Check the most promising places frequently: unlike academia, where the job may be listed for months, the advertising and application window of non-profit jobs may be very, very short.
- Don’t be afraid to put your oar in the water. Take Wayne Gretzky to heart: “You miss one hundred percent of the shots you don’t take.”
- You won’t find the perfect job on your first search. Be ready to do something else and get some added skills until the right job turns up.
- Don’t be put off by the advertised rank being “beneath” you, because:
  a) you have to start somewhere,
  b) most non-academic jobs are advertised below desired rank; and
  c) being in a job offers opportunities to meet more relevant people and develop a better job offer. If you are “over-skilled,” you can make a contribution and develop good contacts. You won’t be in that job long.
- Are you “innovative”? Can you study an agency and identify what they need (or even what they don’t yet know they need)?

Where do you look for that applied humanities job?

- Identify the “type” of job you want (museum, library, historical society, foundation, philanthropy, media, public affairs/outreach, etc.), get on their professional list-servs, then check those regularly.
- Talk to people at (non-academic) professional conferences and meetings -- many are regional; start there.
- Many agencies, including government and state agencies, have to have “print” advertising -- so check the newspapers for the region you want to work in.
- For state jobs, see the state’s home page: <http://www.kansas.gov/employment/state-employment/>. Every state has a job site, if you are looking to work in a specific region).
- Ditto the US government: <https://www.usajobs.gov/>.
Check out the non-profit connect <http://www.npconnect.org/> -- they even have a career center that posts some 200 jobs a day.

[Go to the KU career: <http://career.ku.edu/> – yes, yes, a lot of their stuff is for seniors (because there are so many of them), but they also have materials for advanced graduate students and PhDs. The best thing you can do – after coming up with a concept for your future – is to make an appointment with Wendy Shoemaker, go on over to Burge Union, and have a serious chat with her.]

Networking

Get over the fear of networking. Networking is absolutely key to professional employment. Networking is not about “using” or “manipulating” people; it is about making contacts and developing a web of people and opportunities. You want a job, they want an employee, either now or later. You want to learn, other people will help you learn. They are paying it forward and backward, because someone has helped them and others will help them in the future. Even you might help them in the future. Networking is a fair exchange. Academics also network (in most cases badly, I might add.) Learn the skill. People won’t bite you.

Engage in “sustainable networking”:

- Show up at events around your interests; you can do a lot at a reception or an opening.
- Make an effort to meet people; everyone is there to meet people and they will make it easy for you.
- Keep communication open with people who might help you down the line. Offer an idea in an occasional email – “I saw this and thought you would be interested”; or send congratulations on a special project – “I loved it and heard great things from others who attended”; or ask a very specific question -- “To whom should I talk in that other office?”
- Have a system for monitoring, augmenting, and weeding your network.
- Be “persistent but polite.”
- Mentorship – it’s important. Find good mentors and keep them.

What did our panelists think were the most important skills/qualifications? Here are their observations:

- Communicate: are you a master of both written and oral communication and its modes (paper, email, reports, etc.)? (of course you are; this you get to practice every day for class);
- Pay attention to detail and minimize error of argument, grammar, and composition (this you should practice while doing your homework);
- Show sincere interest in the work, regardless of level -- be ready to demonstrate this through your attitude, self-confidence, and commitment (this is on you);
- Hone grant writing skills (you have multiple opportunities to build this skill as a grad student);
● Develop skills in promotion, outreach, marketing (be aware that even academics need these skills and must achieve some level of entrepreneurial activity: they must promote their programs, recruit students, do outreach to a variety of constituencies, design flyers for courses, “sell” their books to publishers, build Blackboard courses that attract students, etc.);

● Learn to create and read spreadsheets, budgets (this is a more specific skill, but there are occasional workshops on campus that teach these skills and many individuals who can help or tutor you; you could even do an intro to accounting course as part of a targeted minor in business or public administration);

● Develop skills in planning and managing projects of various sizes (did you organize a workshop for other students? work with a unit outside the department to organize a learning program? provide support for an academic conference? engage in a student recruitment initiative for the department? take a course in project management as part of that “professional” minor? volunteer at a campus museum or the library?)

● Preparation: do your research on the agency to which you are applying. Do it.

● Watch your social media presence like a hawk (email address, Facebook etc., telephone message, etc.); potential employers do. Are you sending the right, professional message? (engage in some ego-surfing – what does your web presence look like?);

● [The panel did not mention web designing skills, but while you are in grad school is the time to choose among many free workshops on web design, digital humanities, and other computer skills. (do this now, because once you leave the university, you will have to wing it or PAY to learn it.]

Gaps (what the panelists didn’t talk about):

● What about applied humanities jobs with an international component?\(^1\)

● What about jobs further away than Wichita? If you are seeking an entry job in a certain region of the country, you need to be in that region.

● What kind of foundation work is available in the region and beyond?\(^2\)

● You are learning research skills in your graduate program. Use them to research potential jobs.

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● Note that the Hall Center is offering 4 internships this summer (300 hours, $3,000) and hopes to expand the number available. You are also free to develop a particular internship yourself. Nothing is stopping you except your fear.

\(^1\) CIEE, ACLS, (and about two dozen other agencies that work with international education) hire program officers and then move them up the ladder. For example, ACTR/ACCELS (American Councils for International Education) was founded and is headed by a KU grad who majored in Russian (Dan Davidson); his Number 2 (David Patton) is a 1999 PhD in Slavic linguistics from Ohio State. He wrote his dissertation on the spread of non-agreement in noun phrases in Russian, but today he is running one of the largest non-profit agencies of its kind in the world and doing a fine job. He has created language and culture learning opportunities for literally thousands of students. So there is hope.

If you decide you are more interested in seeking an alternative academic career (working in a college or university, but not as a faculty member), go to the SLL home page and check out the Professional Development page: <http://slavic.ku.edu/information-current-graduate-students#prof>, and look under “Responsible Scholarship Colloquia”; read what it says under 2. Alternative Careers.

Applied Humanities   Panel 3   27 March 2014
Hall Humanities Center

Featuring Henry Fortunato, Simon Fellow (and Director of Public Affairs, Kansas City Public Library); Julián Zugazagoitia, Nelson-Atkins Museum; Perry Collins, National Endowment for the Humanities; Alex Burden, Truman Library Institute; Mary McMurray, Truman Library; Julie Mulvihill, Kansas Humanities Council; Lori Cox-Paul, National Archives at Kansas City; Kelly Seward, Arts KC; Ann Prochnow, Julia Farr Collection; and Mary Kennedy, Mid-America Arts Alliance.

Why pursue jobs in applied humanities? Individuals choose not to go into the academy for a variety of reasons, and our panelists mentioned the following:
- interest in working with different kinds of people;
- opportunities to interpret the humanities for a wider audience and in different ways;
- preference for collaborative work;
- need for a more social, less cloistered life than academia offers;
- a sense of wonder at and curiosity about what comes next or what you are really capable of;
- need for change and variety;
- anything to get away from petty departmental politics;
- freedom from “inevitability” (a chance to tread a less structured path);
- an opportunity to be creative in a variety of ways; and
- a sense of adventure.3

Is it all serendipity? No. The panelists at this third panel were more professionally advanced than those at the first two, and most were near the top of their particular profession. Unlike earlier panelists, they did not stress serendipity or luck, but pointed out that a look back at their career paths reveals that a logical pattern can be found in all of those earlier moves. Even if they could not see it at the time, it all made sense to them now. They agreed that their career started with serious interest in a particular thing that was important to them (either an academic interest, a relevant hobby, a personal priority, or an important social value) that became the cornerstone of their career path. But they followed no structured path (unlike academia, where you move from asst. to assoc. to full professor in a single field and then possibly to

3 I found it particularly interesting that not one of the panelists mentioned money (although this third group was clearly well-remunerated). But all panelists stressed job satisfaction and the gratification of working to promote humanistic values. I don’t think they were putting it on.
administrator). On the applied humanities path, you find some opportunities, some find you, and you create others (after all, many jobs of the future do not exist today), and you should never box yourself in by limited expectations and aspirations.

**It is all about experience and network.** Build experience and meet people. Not every job will be a dream job, but all of them will be interesting, and each will teach you something important (important skills, strategies, how to work effectively with others, how to understand human psychology; they may even teach you something about yourself). Get experience besides being in school. See the Big Picture: what part-time or summer jobs or internships have you had? have you volunteered at agencies that work with things you are interested in? have you worked to support yourself at a variety of jobs? paid at least part of your way through school? what smorgasbord of skills have you developed that could come together in a job? Are you constantly on the look-out for new interests? Are you a life-long learner, excited about learning new things?

**Hands on. Let’s get real.** How should you think about your cover letter, your resume, your interview? What will allow your materials and you to “break through” and out of the pack? The panel made the point that the application review process is based on elimination: the selection committee or the boss asks, “Whose letter and resume can we throw out so that we can narrow the pool?” So what will keep yours from being tossed? (The following points are not in any particular order -- but you should consider all of them.)

- do your research: if you apply to an agency with a public profile (museum, library, etc.), go visit the place unofficially; check the agency out on the internet; read the last annual report; know what the focus and priorities are; think about how you might advance the agency’s work; ask questions about the agency, the employees, the agency culture;
- do not be over-modest: take pride in your achievements, show a learning trajectory, but present your achievements without inflation;
- show a little *chutzpah*, but do it without *attitude*;
- express confidence and self-respect, not arrogance or entitlement;
- really, truly know *why* you want this job, and make that clear in the letter and interview;
- clearly state not only how this job will benefit you, but also how it will benefit the agency if they hire you -- what will you contribute to their mission and goals?
- banish errors and typos from your materials (formatting errors, bad grammar, bad punctuation, etc. -- pay attention to those details; they are the No 1 reason to toss your application into the rejection pile);
- do you know how to “promote,” “present,” “sell,” you, your experience, your skill set?
- be “quantifiable” -- don’t just make general claims about skills and abilities, but give specific examples wherever possible;

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4 Think about the agency and its location; get a sense of its culture. Note that in some parts of the country and in some fields, *chutzpah* may be perceived as rudeness, while in others, deference may be perceived as wimpiness. And don’t assume that everyone everywhere will think your jokes are funny. What come across as witty and satiric in one place may be perceived as snarky and mean elsewhere.
• GOOD WRITING skills are your greatest asset. Applied humanities jobs all involve writing for a variety of audiences. This includes writing research reports, grant proposals, business or project plans, descriptive texts, synthetic summaries, PR materials, letters, emails, etc. Your letter should show you can do that;
• demonstrate that you can analyze data;
• find a way to show the agency that you are a problem solver;
• for your resume:
  • use a normal, readable font of decent size;
  • provide the information in the form of easy-to-follow concrete bullet points, not dense text;
  • provide sufficient white space to rest the eyes;
  • use action VERBS;
  • use 1-2 pages (but not longer for entry level; focus on materials relevant to this position. This is not a CV; the resume has to be specific and targeted);
• pay very close attention to the job description and craft your letter and resume to address each and every one of the required qualifications;
• TAILOR, TAILOR, TAILOR your letter to the agency (in terms of style and language) and to the specific position (in terms of addressing all required and preferred qualifications);
• you are not in this alone -- take your resume and your letter to University Career Services for some professional editing and advice, for Career Services can help you online and in person; take it to someone in your professional network if you have one;
• don’t leave the heavy lifting to your cover letter alone: use your network: who can put in a good word for you? bring up your name in the right place? advocate for you?
• show that you have a life beyond academia: are you engaged with your community? do you volunteer? do you have useful or relevant hobbies? what have you learned through competitive activities?
• be authentic: your greatest strength is being you, so be yourself; know your strengths and weaknesses (and don’t be afraid of the weaknesses);
• prepare for the future job search by being on Linked In (and consider what your profile there says about you and to whom); joining professional organizations; finding strong mentors who will speak for you when the time comes to apply;
• remember to send the “thank you for the interview” letter/email -- within 24-48 hours.

5 In business, the resume is generally one page long; it may expand to two pages after the individual gains relevant work experience. In applied humanities, some of that “humanities stuff” sticks, and you may find yourself creating a beginning resume that is untraditionally longer (1½ - 2 pages), perhaps with some annotations and short text as well as bullet points. That’s OK. Every area or field has its own “style” -- track some resumes for the field down and look at them. There are a million resumes and cover letters for every conceivable position somewhere on the internet. When you have some down time, read a few, get the idea, catch the tone -- then use your grad student skills analyze why they “work” or don’t. If you have developed even the beginnings of a network, ask to see your contacts’ resumes. They want you to see it, because you may be in a position to put in a good word for them at some point. Really, human resources are everything. Get to know the right people at every level.