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Defending the Humanities: Making a Case for Eighteenth-Century Studies

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Defending the Humanities: Making a Case for Eighteenth-Century Studies

Katherine Gustafson, Heather King, Scott Richard St. Louis, Linda Zionkowski

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Forum Introduction

Defending the Humanities: Making a Case for Eighteenth-Century Studies

Katherine Gustafson and Scott Richard St. Louis

While the percentage of humanities majors has long been on the decline, the more recent experiences of the Great Recession, its aftermath, and the outbreak of Covid-19 have introduced a variety of daunting and intertwined challenges to scholars in these disciplines.¹ Financial and occupational anxieties surrounding higher education threaten not only to crowd out humanities departments but also to alter the very understanding of what higher education is.² While some students attend college to prepare themselves for engaged citizenship or to learn in a community, many also attend as a pathway to employment and expect a prompt return on investment.³ Moreover, state-level disinvestment contributes to higher tuition fees and student debt, heightening an emphasis on immediate job outcomes to the detriment of the humanities, which typically do not offer study-to-job pipelines.⁴ Such financial and legislative divestment can lead to falling enrollments within and cuts to humanities departments, simultaneously reflecting and confirming the public perception that humanistic study is impractical.⁵

While humanists have long sought to stem this decline, scholars of the eighteenth century may be uniquely positioned to innovate pragmatic solutions because of the historical period we study.⁶ First, eighteenth-century Europe experienced political and economic phenomena that parallel trends in our own era. In England alone, eighteenth-century society faced sharp financial downturns, rising inequities, unfit political leaders, moribund statutes, and new technologies that abetted entrenched class structures. Second, scholars of the eighteenth century have a model of interdisciplinarity and innovation in Enlightenment *philosophes*, who

were not siloed within discrete disciplines as we are today and so were more able and willing to think across epistemological categories.

By drawing upon our knowledge of eighteenth-century culture, the following essays seek both to open an inquiry into the decline of the humanities and to provide potential solutions to it. They grew out of a roundtable discussion held at the March 2018 Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies. In publishing this forum, we hope to continue the expansive and ambitious conversation begun in Orlando, Florida.⁷ As scholars of the eighteenth century, we seek to apply the interdisciplinary insights drawn from our research to help strengthen the humanities, especially within those academic institutions that have neither expansive funds nor research-intensive aims. As these authors argue, today's humanists face extremely high stakes but also abundant possibilities.

While all of these essays engage with the ethos of eighteenth-century culture, they approach the problem from different perspectives. Two essays explore solutions that individual campuses can adopt to overcome the administrative and methodological barriers between academic disciplines, empowering scholars to meet student needs innovatively. Katherine Gustafson discusses a medical humanities minor created within a regional public university system, as a means of both increasing enrollments and addressing a lacuna within health education. As Gustafson argues, humanities programs have the unique ability to train students in critical nonscientific skills they will need as health practitioners. Moreover, national scientific organizations increasingly encourage this type of interdisciplinarity, thereby creating collaborative opportunities that humanists—in particular, scholars of the eighteenth century—should consider joining. As the sole eighteenth-century literature professor in the English department at her small, private comprehensive university with a modest endowment, Heather

King finds her generalist role has empowered her to embrace an eighteenth-century ethos of interdisciplinarity, helping to foster the development of a tightly knit faculty culture by way of a Humanities Advisory Council. Several departments, she observes, now collaborate regularly by coordinating their teaching schedules to improve enrollment, pooling funds to implement effective student-centered programs, and encouraging rich intellectual friendships that yield unexpected fruit in pedagogy, research, and service.

Other essays move beyond the boundaries of the academy into the wider public. Scott Richard St. Louis reflects on Enlightenment legacies and their relationship to contemporary developments in scholarly communication, highlighting several efforts to improve access to humanities research as university libraries confront major budgetary limitations. Linda Zionkowski draws attention to the rich potential for engagement signaled by the flourishing of humanistic study in off-campus community settings, suggesting a need for greater recognition of faculty work in these settings and more opportunities outside the classroom for students keen on local outreach. In a nod to the eighteenth-century spirit of sociability and vigorous debate, the authors submit these essays with every hope to continue this conversation long into the future.

¹ For further information, see Jon Marcus and The Hechinger Report, “Making the Case for Liberal Arts,” US News and World Report, 17 Mar 2018, <https://bit.ly/2TjqFfV>; Benjamin Schmidt, “The Humanities Are in Crisis,” The Atlantic, 23 Aug 2018, <https://bit.ly/2Nar8xE>; Noah Smith, “The Great Recession Never Ended for College Humanities,” Bloomberg Opinion, 14 Aug 2018, <https://bloom.bg/2IXgSr4>; “The Decline in Humanities Majors,” The Trend (Blog). MLA Office of Programs, 26 June 2017, <https://bit.ly/2XH9jrS>.

² See Schmidt; and Smith.

³ See Schmidt; and Smith.

⁴ See Willard Dix, “It’s Time to Worry When Colleges Erase Humanities Departments,” Forbes, 13 Mar 2018, <https://bit.ly/2EJCPod>; Jon Marcus, “Most Americans Don’t Realize State Funding for Higher Ed Fell by Billions,” PBS News Hour, 26 Feb 2019, <https://to.pbs.org/2XCpEhr>.

⁵ See: Mary Mogan Edwards, “Ohio State Humanities Profs Blame University for Declining Enrollments,” The Columbus Dispatch, 8 Feb 2016, <https://bit.ly/2XJT7FZ>; Valerie Strauss, “A University of Wisconsin Campus Pushes Plan to Drop 13 Majors—including English, History and Philosophy,” The Washington Post, 21 Mar 2018, <https://wapo.st/2H55BD4>; Melissa Tarrant, Nathaniel Bray, and Stephen Katsinas, “The Invisible Colleges Revisited: An Empirical Review,” The Journal of Higher Education 89 (2018): 341-367.

⁶ For examples of other scholarly interventions see Jeffrey Selling, “As Humanities Majors Decline, Colleges Try to Hype Up Their Programs,” The Atlantic, 1 Nov 2018, <https://bit.ly/2zohPAs>; and Peter J. Kalliney, “We Reversed Our Declining English Enrollments. Here’s How,” The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2 Apr 2018, <https://bit.ly/2uZzJul>.

⁷ We give our sincere thanks to panel organizer Peggy Thompson, Ellen Douglass Leyburn Professor Emerita of English at Agnes Scott College, as well as to fellow panelist Waqas Khwaja, Ellen Douglass Leyburn Professor of English at Agnes Scott College. Their leadership and insights contributed to a lively debate, and helped participants analyze possible strategies to understand and address the decline in humanistic study.

Bringing the Humanities Home (via the Eighteenth Century)

Linda Zionkowski, Ohio University

During the past decade, scholars in the humanities have faced wave after wave of discouraging news. Some of this misfortune we share with all departments at our universities: institutions of higher learning across the country are struggling to meet enrollment targets, with many of them competing to attract the same declining demographic of high school students. *The Hechinger Report*, a nonprofit news organization focused on inequality in education, predicts that starting in 2017 colleges should expect a gradual two-decade drop in the high school graduating cohort, eventually culminating in graduation totals that by 2027–2032 may be down 150,000 to 220,000 students from the national count in 2013.¹ Empty seats, of course, create empty pockets: smaller freshman classes frequently result in substantial budget cuts, with universities, colleges, and departments scrambling to meet their operating expenses with fewer tuition dollars.

Tax subsidies to public institutions do not alleviate this shortfall. Because higher education remains the largest discretionary component of many state budgets, the percentage of taxpayer funding to public colleges and universities has dropped sharply, with the trend moving steadily toward “divestment.”² Ohio, for instance, now spends 15.2 percent less per student than it did in 2008, despite adjustment for inflation.³ At the same time, tuition at public universities during this period has risen, in some places precipitously, with predictable results: our students, many of them first-generation, face the prospect of accumulating crippling debt in pursuing a bachelor's degree at a time of economic uncertainty—a factor that contributed to my department's drop in English majors from 411 in 2008 to 199 in 2018.

The migration of possible humanities majors to business and STEM fields remains a concern as well. Anxious about students' employment prospects, lawmakers, teachers, and, above all, parents strenuously proclaim the return value of investments in majors such as accounting, finance, chemistry, engineering, mathematics, and computer science, whereas the return value of investments in English studies, history, music, art, classics, and philosophy is far less obvious and far more difficult to explain in econometric discourse. Given this situation, studying the humanities appears a luxury that few can afford, and universities themselves reflect this sentiment by eliminating supposedly under-enrolled programs and courses. As Benjamin Winterhalter states in *The Atlantic*, "The very people demanding to know why English and art history departments weren't doing very well were often the people who'd helped drive students away from those departments to begin with."⁴ While it is possible to dispute the data behind the apparent decline in the humanities, the idea of this decline has taken hold to the point of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. And our field faces its own distinct challenges: as the number of English majors drops, period-specific courses often give place to more popular general education classes that skip from Will (Shakespeare) directly to Jane (Austen), avoiding the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a flyover zone between two very attractive destinations.

But does all of this mean that the humanities are, as reported in *American Affairs*, "almost dead"?⁵ To address this question, it may be helpful to view education beyond the confines of the conventional undergraduate experience and remember that the study of literature, history, music, art, classics, and philosophy is not confined to, in Samuel Johnson's words, "the young, the ignorant, and the idle."⁶ Long before the Great Recession of 2008, adults, including people in the over 60 age bracket, manifested a strong and growing desire for

continuing their education in arts and letters. As David Staley, Director of the Humanities Institute at The Ohio State University observes, the revitalization of the humanities does not depend solely upon capturing the attention of the postadolescent demographic, since “there are clearly a large number of non-traditional learners who have demonstrated interest in the humanities, but who have either been turned off by, or simply not invited into, the academy.”⁷ While Staley suggests the possibility of a “boomer college” for these students, we can attend to them in less exclusive ways as well. Nontraditional degree-seeking students are a growing presence in my own university, both on the main campus and on the regionals: some of them are veterans whose education is made possible by the GI Bill, some of them are adults transitioning out of one career and into an altogether different field of employment, and others are retirees determined to earn the degree that circumstances kept out of reach years before. They come back to the humanities but not as preparation for law school or as refugees from STEM or business programs. More often than not, these students enroll in English classes because they see a unique value in literary studies. They are unashamed to tell their younger classmates that imaginative writing helps them reflect upon and articulate the complexity of the life they have experienced. The fact that these adults choose the humanities—often at considerable financial cost to themselves—suggests that they find importance in the questions and problems that fields like ours confront and discuss. We should cultivate this group of learners, especially as they may require extra time and attention to (re)acclimate to an academic environment. Despite a wealth of other options, they make a mature decision to share our interests and in turn deserve our recognition and support.

We also need to remember that not everyone who values the humanities gravitates to a university setting. Beyond the campus, humanistic studies flourish in literary societies,

reading and discussion groups, museum seminars, *Great Courses* formats, and community lectures, many of which convene in online venues as well as through face-to-face contact. Reading groups in which I have participated included adult learners from a broad spectrum of educational backgrounds and occupations: one of these groups has met for years at the Athens Public Library to study *Beowulf*, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, Jane Austen's *Emma*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, and the history of the English language. The librarian coordinating this program attributes its success to the "powerful need among people in the non-university community, typically from age thirty onward through to people in their eighties, to experience learning and discussion from a more mature point in their lives."⁸ Significantly, requests for community involvement of humanities scholars most often come from the community itself: our local Jane Austen Societies invite faculty to speak at their gatherings; health care professionals ask our department's creative writers to lead writing-as-therapy workshops; and summer programs involving arts, music, and language studies recruit faculty to instruct audiences of all age levels. Because these activities foster public appreciation and enthusiasm for the humanities, universities need to reward faculty who participate in them, beyond the faint praise we often give to community service in determining merit raises.

Besides strengthening their own presence outside the university, faculty also can encourage humanities students to showcase and employ the knowledge they have acquired. In a political climate that threatens Enlightenment ideals and institutions, we have no reason to

retreat into vague arguments about the skill set that we cultivate in students. As we know, critical thinking, contextual analysis, and collaborative problem solving also emerge from the study of STEM and social science fields. Instead, by endorsing creative initiatives, we can advocate for humanistic learning in general—and for eighteenth-century studies in particular—as essential to understanding and confronting problems within our present culture. The recently established Ohio University Honors Program, for instance, enables students to connect their coursework in an academic discipline with experiences beyond the classroom, and one pathway for extended learning involves community engagement, primarily at the local level. Faculty are responsible for developing courses that allow for this Honors component, and they assist undergraduates in collaborating with university outreach groups and community-based organizations. Students, in turn, are expected to apply the insights gained in class to achieve community-defined goals. Such an approach holds special promise for classes in the humanities, and definitely for eighteenth-century studies. As instructors, many of us already focus on the complex interplay between texts and the social world they represent, and we often turn students' attention to analyzing ideologies of race and gender, the emergent rhetoric of human rights, and the cultural conflicts ignited by the spread of reading and writing. Honors projects related to these topics may include assisting with literacy education for children and adults, chiefly through our campus literacy center; working with civic organizations, such as United Campus Ministry, to raise awareness of the deep history of racial and gender bias; and engaging with the area's legal system and our campus center for law, justice, and culture to investigate the contemporary political effects of eighteenth-century discourse on the law. All of these initiatives would highlight the continued importance and influence of Enlightenment thought while forging a stronger fellowship between groups on and off campus. Although still

in its initial stages, the Honors Program's commitment to students' community involvement may prove a model for asserting the value and utility of humanities classes both to students' intellectual development and to the societies in which they live. Such a program may also enable students to extend their experiences into rewarding career paths.

Of course, justifying the humanities on the basis of its relevance to present-day concerns carries its own risks: times change and the focus of public attention changes along with them. But while contemporary problems and issues cannot provide the sole impetus for humanistic study, we may do well to embrace these opportunities for engagement. Whether from students, from our communities, or from voices in cyberspace, we see a new swell of interest in interrogating the structures of thought and circulations of power that order our lives. The humanities, especially eighteenth-century studies, are uniquely positioned to ride that wave—to historicize and analyze existing cultures while proposing new ways of orienting ourselves in the world. Our challenge is to encourage the habit of questioning in our audiences and to help them find their voice in the ongoing discussion of how things have been, how they are now, and how they could be different.

¹ Mikhail Zinshteyn, "Colleges Face a New Reality, as the Number of High School Graduates Will Decline," The Hechinger Report, 6 Dec 2016, <https://bit.ly/2SXhUqS>.

² Jennifer Smola, "Public Universities Struggle as Ohio, Other States Put Brakes on Funding," The Columbus Dispatch, 29 Jan 2018, <https://bit.ly/2Gwk6zG>.

³ Michael Mitchell, Michael Leachman, and Kathleen Masterson, "A Lost Decade in Higher Education Funding," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 23 Aug 2017, <https://bit.ly/2pwkjiT>.

4 Benjamin Winterhalter, "The Morbid Fascination with the Death of the Humanities," The Atlantic, 6 June 2014, <https://bit.ly/2A830Wx>.

5 Justin Stover, "There Is No Case for the Humanities," American Affairs 1, no. 4 (2017), <https://bit.ly/2BV6KHf>.

6 Samuel Johnson, The Rambler, No. 4, in The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, vol. 3 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 21.

7 David Staley, "Appealing to Non-Traditional Students: A Strategy for the Humanities," The EvoLLLution: A Destiny Solutions Illumination, 28 Aug 2013, <https://bit.ly/2GQdWcT>.

8 Todd Bastin, e-mail message to author, 8 May 2018.

Humanities and Health Programming:

An Eighteenth-Century Approach to a Twenty-First Century Conundrum

Katherine Gustafson, Indiana University Northwest

Newspapers and magazines frequently represent the humanities as a discipline under attack.¹ However, as a college professor, I experience disregard rather than vitriol. My students enjoy literature, but many major in so-called practical fields, thereby reflecting an assumption that humanities classes are *nice* but will not be *useful* once they graduate from college and begin their careers. What follows is my experience working with colleagues at three regional campuses within Indiana University—IU-South Bend, IU-Kokomo, and IU-Northwest—to create a multi-site, two-track health-humanities program that includes a medical humanities minor. This essay argues that collaboration between health and humanities departments may move the debate beyond a defense/attack binary by enabling humanists to ally with and demonstrate to nonhumanists that humanistic study is useful, especially for students pursuing health degrees.² Moreover, it asserts that eighteenth-century study plays a unique role in this debate by testing medical students' empathy.

It is no secret that students major in fields like nursing, business, or engineering for what they assume are better employment opportunities, and do so despite reports that corporations increasingly value employees with humanities training.³ This disconnect, Scott Carlson argues, may be because such reports do not “account for factors like class, institutional prestige, and student inputs.”⁴ These factors matter, though, especially for U.S. college students who attend community colleges, regional state universities, and other non-elite institutions.⁵ IU-South Bend, IU-Kokomo, and IU-Northwest may offer insight into such

campuses. IU-Northwest, for example, teaches a sizeable percentage of so-called nontraditional undergraduates. As of Fall 2017, 30 percent of IU-Northwest students were enrolled part time, and nearly 85 percent of all students attended school while working.⁶ For these students, the choice to attend college likely entails financial burden and risk, and thus a major with a direct employment pipeline may be preferable to one with an uncertain future.

This information can help humanities faculty increase their enrollments by innovating around student needs. In 2016 IU-Northwest faculty from the Departments of Nursing, Public and Environmental Affairs, Health Information Management, English, and History collaborated to create interdisciplinary programming. The group eventually partnered with other IU campuses to develop the Health Studies Consortium, which consists of an Allied Health Practitioner Credentialing Program and a Medical Humanities Minor.⁷ The Medical Humanities Minor is a fifteen-credit-hour program in which students take required introductory and capstone courses, as well as elective health topics courses in science, social science, and humanities.⁸ These classes encourage students to think holistically about health and dovetail with the Consortium's goals of providing pathways into health studies, encouraging students' empathy, and offering a center for community health projects.

Such collaboration parallels a report by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, which urges universities to create integrated STEM-Humanities programming even as it recognizes the administrative barriers that impede such efforts at many universities where course schedules and graduation requirements differ by discipline.⁹ Administrative divides, our team found, exist and require a shared commitment to problem solving. For example, we learned that nursing students might avoid the Medical Humanities Minor for fear of adding coursework to their jam-packed schedules. In response, we asked

advisors to enroll pre-nursing students during their first two years of study when their schedules were more flexible. Equally important, our team found that methodological divides between the humanities and sciences can pose barriers to collaboration. Nonhumanists, for example, were skeptical that humanities courses could enhance medical students' empathy and cultural knowledge. Our team approached such skepticism as an opportunity to explain the value of a humanistic perspective, articulate the program's goals in language that would appeal to STEM partners, design a research protocol to test our claim, and study available data on humanities training in medical education.

This research found that humanities coursework demonstrably develops medical students' observational abilities, empathy, and cultural competence, skills that directly impact patients' health outcomes.¹⁰ In addition, research suggests that current medical curricula does not sufficiently train students in empathy or cultural knowledge. Student empathy levels have been found to decline during medical school, and students themselves have recommended that professors use humanities readings to teach cultural competency topics.¹¹ This research confirms that the type of training matters, with humanistic study providing a more robust education in nonscientific medical skills.

My own experience teaching a health and literature course both supports this research and suggests that eighteenth-century study may be an especially powerful tool when teaching empathy and cultural competence. While students skillfully connected our modern readings to their medical experiences, early modern literature uncovered and challenged the limits of their cultural assumptions. A key issue is temporal distance; the older the work the more alien it seemed to students and the more trouble they had appreciating the health issues represented. For example, students certainly comprehended the plague's devastation in Giovanni

Boccaccio's *Decameron* but more robustly understood its complexity after reading Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*. The latter communicated the epidemic in ways that seemed modern and relatable, as the narrator calculates whether he can afford to leave his business, cites demographic reports, and cogitates public health measures. As this case suggests, eighteenth-century works offer representations that are modern *enough* to allow students to empathize by seeing complex connections between historical and modern experiences of illness. At the same time, they are sufficiently *unmodern* to test students' cultural competence, for they bespeak both modern practices of scientific inquiry *and* archaic medical interventions that stymie students' assumptions. For example, several students were upset by Frances Burney's "Mastectomy Letter" because they felt her doctor behaved unprofessionally. Their response catalyzed a discussion about how eighteenth-century surgeons defined medical professionalism and empathy versus our understanding today.

The strength of eighteenth-century history within medical education may lie in the fact that it bridges both early modern and modern sensibilities and allows students to confront a culture in which medicine and humanities were not as siloed as they are today. In this sense, it illustrates the advantages of the educational integration envisioned by the National Academies of Engineering, Science, and Medicine by enabling students to continue to develop empathic skills while learning that humanistic study can enhance medical knowledge. Indeed, eighteenth-century readings proved especially useful in early 2020 as Covid-19 spread across the U.S. as a new, understudied, and devastating infection, which did not always respond to modern medical interventions.

Cross-disciplinary collaboration may appear to dilute the humanities, forcing scholars to ally with the very programs prioritized over the humanities in the public sphere.

But the breakdown of disciplinary boundaries fulfills the purpose of humanistic inquiry, addresses pragmatic issues of enrollment and relevancy, and is currently sought by the scientific community. Partnership among scholars not only allows humanists to publicize our values—it also enables us to teach skills that are critical to medical students and that we are uniquely qualified to teach.

I would like to thank the Health Studies Consortium team: Monica Solinas-Saunders, Crystal Shannon, Susan Zinner, Jonathyne Briggs, Chae Young Chang, Linda Galoci, David Tobey, Dorinda Sattler, Mark Fox, and Jerome Horn. I would particularly like to thank Monica Solinas-Saunders, with whom I collaborated on an earlier article about the Consortium and community health education, which became the impetus for this current essay.

¹ See Stanley Fish, “Stop Trying to Sell the Humanities,” Chronicle of Higher Education 64, no. 36 (2018): <https://bit.ly/2XbdbB9>; Justin Stover, “There is No Case for the Humanities,” American Affairs 1, no. 4 (2017): 210–224; and Rick Seltzer, “Disparaging Interpretive Dance (and More)?” Inside Higher Ed, 14 Sept 2017, <https://bit.ly/2BFrHrq>.

² Such students include, but are not limited to, those studying medicine, nursing, dentistry, health information management, social work, pharmacy, and clinical psychology.

³ See Michelle Cheng, “Students at Most Colleges Don’t Pick ‘Useless’ Majors,” Five Thirty Eight, 14 Aug 2017, <https://53eig.ht/2S92HhW>; J.M. Olejarz, “Liberal Arts in the Data Age,” Harvard Business Review (July–Aug 2017): 144–145, and Vivek Wadhwa, “Why Liberal Arts and the Humanities are as Important as Engineering,” Washington Post, 12 June 2018, <https://wapo.st/2InGe0Z>.

⁴ Scott Carlson, “What Gets Forgotten in Debates about the Liberal Arts,” Chronicle of Higher

Education 65, no. 26 (2018): 58.

⁵ On university demographics, see Ben Casselman, “Shut Up About Harvard: A Focus on Elite Schools Ignores the Issues Most College Students Face,” Five Thirty Eight, 30 Mar 2016, <https://53eig.ht/1UFt5iL>.

⁶ I would like to thank Mary Beth Mitchell, Programmer and Research Analyst at IU-Northwest, and John Monte Novak, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Institutional Effectiveness, for researching this information.

⁷ This program was initially funded through a grant from Indiana University’s Regional Grand Challenge Initiative.

⁸ For further information about the Medical Humanities Minor, see <https://bit.ly/2Gyk7mv>.

⁹ The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, The Integration of the Humanities and Arts with Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in Higher Education: Branches from the Same Tree (Washington: The National Academies Press, 2018).

<https://doi.org/10.17226/24988>. Also see Richard Prystowsky, “A Systemically Collaborative Approach to Achieving Equity in Higher Education,” Metropolitan Universities Journal 29, no. 1 (2018): 93–102.

¹⁰ Samantha Batt-Rawden, et al., “Teaching Empathy to Medical Students: An Updated Systematic Review,” Academic Medicine 88, no. 8 (2013): 1171–77; Carlos Centeno, et al., “Palliative Care and the Arts: Vehicles to Introduce Medical Students to Patient-Centred Decision-Making and the Art of Caring,” BMC Medical Education 17, no. 257 (2017): DOI 10.1186/s12909-017-1098-6; Joyce Zazulak, et al., “The Impact of an Arts-Based Programme on the Affective and Cognitive Components of Empathic Development,” Medical Humanities 41, no. 1 (2015): 69–74; and Catherine Belling, “Sharper

Instruments: on Defending the Humanities in Undergraduate Medical Education,”
Academic Medicine 85, no. 6 (2010): 938–40.

¹¹ Julia Ward, et al., “The Empathy Enigma: An Empirical Study of Decline in Empathy among Undergraduate Nursing Students,” Journal of Professional Nursing 28, no. 1 (2012), 34–40; Mohammadreza Hojat, et al. “The Devil is in the Third Year: a Longitudinal Study of Erosion of Empathy in Medical School,” Academic Medicine 84, no. 9 (2009): 1182–91; and Danica Fulbright Sumpter, and J. Margo Brooks Carthon, “Lost in Translation: Student Perceptions of Cultural Competence in Undergraduate and Graduate Nursing Curricula,” Journal of Professional Nursing 27, no. 1 (2011): “Recommendations” paragraph 1.

The Strategy of *Faculty of Letters*:
Advocating Eighteenth-Century Studies Curriculum on a Budget
Heather King, University of Redlands

Like most faculty in eighteenth-century studies, I am the sole practitioner in our English department. This is hardly surprising: of the twenty eighteenth-century-related tenure-track jobs to begin in Fall 2017 discussed on the “Restoration and Eighteenth Century” Academic Jobs Wiki, the bulk of them sought candidates able to teach “transatlantic” or “postcolonial” material and to cover the entirety of the long eighteenth century, across genres, often throwing in Milton, Shakespeare, or Romanticism for good measure.¹ That trend didn’t change in jobs that will begin in Fall 2018—of nineteen jobs, the majority explicitly requested interdisciplinary interests. We are teaching in the age of the historical generalist, the *pre-1800 literature* job opening.

There is a strong case to be made that such a generalist approach actually suits eighteenth-century studies. After all, the figures whom we study did not consider themselves bound by narrow disciplinary divisions and might in fact have mocked narrowly focused “virtuosi.”² Adam Smith lectured on *belle lettres* and jurisprudence as well as advancing moral philosophy and establishing the field of economics. Dramatists like John Dryden and William Davenant made it clear that texts could be endlessly refashioned across generic modes and, indeed, across genres, like turning William Shakespeare’s *Tempest* into an opera. The practice of active, engaged relationships with respected texts is equally instructive to us today. If we combine our love of the eighteenth century with the interdisciplinary models that characterize it, we can find surprising ways to infiltrate

multiple areas of our curricula, perhaps especially at small schools with smaller budgets. Taking seriously the intellectual and artistic practices that cross genres in our period—such as adaptation or embracing innovations in textual dissemination—has led me to questions that transcend my department and strategies for promoting my field as part of the humanities.

Interdisciplinary connections are gaining prominence as a response to the crisis in the humanities as universities come up with innovative ways to collaborate. Many of these initiatives, however, are associated with institutions that have substantial resources the rest of us may lack. Schools like Stanford University, Rice University, the University of California-Davis, the University of Florida, or Arizona State University boast humanities institutes or centers for the humanities that run a range of innovative programming supporting faculty research, collaboration between students and faculty, speaker series, and other community outreach programs. Just down the road from my home institution, Pomona College is kicking off a Humanities Studio this fall, with support from a Mellon Grant, that will also focus on student-faculty research, speakers, and programming.³ But splashy events like this aren't possible at my cash-strapped university. In the absence of deep pockets, what can we accomplish?

The University of Redlands, where I have taught for eighteen years, is a small, private comprehensive university, with approximately 2,250 students in the College of Arts and Sciences. We are tuition-dependent, with a very small endowment. In 2008–2009, I was chair of the English Department. Prompted by the recession budget crisis and anxieties about coming cuts, I began what I called simply a “Humanities Chat,” inviting my colleagues who studied or taught the humanities to gather.⁴ It was clear after the first meeting that the feeling

that we were in this together improved morale. At subsequent meetings, I pushed for pragmatic steps like coordinating our department teaching schedules so that we no longer offered eighteenth-century philosophy at the same time as eighteenth-century literature. To promote our fields, we needed to make it easier for students to delve into them, after all.

Thanks to colleagues who took on leadership roles, that conversation has grown into the Humanities Advisory Council. Council members are elected at the departmental level by English, History, Art History, Philosophy, Modern Languages, Religious Studies, and interdisciplinary programs with humanities cores. We then elect a chair, who attends monthly chairs' and directors' meetings with the Dean, reviews teaching schedules to look for energizing connections and avoid conflicts, and helps advertise courses to students.

With modest financial support from the Dean's office, we have begun to offer student-focused programming. For example, we instituted a Humanities Homecoming Reception to provide networking opportunities for recent grads and broader professional horizons for current students. This event is sponsored by our budget from the Dean as well as the Alumni Development office and comes in under \$2,000 for upwards of fifty people. Even on this slender budget, we have sparked imitators across campus. We have added a combined Humanities Graduation Reception, making it possible for smaller departments to have a more lavish event than they could have afforded individually. At this event, we present our Humanities Prize for an outstanding paper by a student in any of our disciplines, with a \$500 cash prize. We are effectively raising awareness of our activities on campus and among alums.

Our next goal is to attract potential students. We are in conversation with the Dean's office and Development about named chairs, a landing page for the university website, and other profile-raising campaigns. We have also worked together to submit multidepartmental

grant applications. A strength of our approach is the centrality of curriculum and students to our efforts. Our recent grant application to the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation highlighted student internships in the humanities, and our submission to the NEH Humanities Connection program was built around a spatial humanities curriculum, combining methodologies from Spatial Studies—including mapping—with humanist texts and lines of inquiry. Admittedly, there is a lot of faculty time *donated* to these endeavors, but otherwise it is, as my colleagues in administration might say, “budget neutral.”

To my mind, this kind of porous intellectual community mirrors that enjoyed by eighteenth-century authors and informs the way I seek out connections to pockets of eighteenth-century interest across campus. The rich intellectual friendships of artists like Joshua Reynolds with men of the theater like David Garrick and authors like Edmund Burke is an ideal I actively try to emulate. As Allison Conway notes, establishing pathways for students into our less-familiar fields is crucial to educational access.⁵ The pathways will vary for each of us, but I have found a surprising variety of connections possible. An economics colleague has an interest in Adam Smith: he and I are in regular conversation about our courses and sending students in one another’s direction, planning a reading group, and exploring joint-authored projects. I teach courses on Jane Austen in *Adaptation* (or *Shakespeare in Adaptation*, featuring the eighteenth-century iterations of *Lear*, etc., in the mix) for Visual Media and Culture Studies. I have learned that it is more effective to build relationships with colleagues around genuine shared interest rather than curricular coincidence. While my colleagues in philosophy regularly teach a course on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy, none of the current faculty “own” the course, so efforts to build connections there tend to fall flat. Connections founded on something we both care

about, however, bear fruit in unexpected ways.

To wit: I have worked with colleagues in theater repeatedly, including around adaptation and comedy of manners. As a result, when they chose Kate Hamil's *Sense and Sensibility* for their Spring 2019 show they asked me to teach a class on adapting Austen to accompany the production, ideally with student cast members in the course.⁶ When the Faculty Forum planning committee got word of the Hamil production, they asked me to speak about Austen for the annual campus lecture series. These opportunities raise the profile of my subject matter, both on campus and in the community—and on a shoestring budget—giving me the chance to show that, as Paula Backscheider notes, “Eighteenth-century literature makes it easy to relate literature to culture and to change.”⁷ We would do well to heed her advice and take advantage of that insight. By framing my generalist role as an opportunity to practice an eighteenth-century ethos of interdisciplinarity, learning from the thinkers we study to transcend disciplinary boundaries, I have built connections that get my courses on students' radars.

¹ Fandom, “Academic Jobs Wiki: Restoration /18th Century.” accessed 15 July 2018, <https://bit.ly/2tpRpvN>; Colleen Flaherty, “Withering Humanities Jobs,” Inside Higher Ed, 21 Nov 2017; <https://bit.ly/2hJSCIw>; Scott Jaschik, “The Shrinking Humanities Job Market,” Inside Higher Ed, 28 August 2017, <https://bit.ly/2V5Ho2q>; The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, “Undergraduate and Graduate Education,” Humanities Indicators, accessed 16 July 2018, <https://bit.ly/2T1HhYp>.

² Anthony Kronman, Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

³ For more information on these programs, see: <https://stanford.io/2hPid2b>, <http://hrc.rice.edu/>, <http://dhi.ucdavis.edu/>, <http://www.humanities.ufl.edu/>, <https://ihr.asu.edu/>, and <https://www.pomona.edu/administration/humanities-studio/about>.

⁴ For a similar narrative, see Christopher Panza and Richard Schur, “To Save the Humanities, Change the Narrative.” The Chronicle of Higher Education, 20 Oct 2014, <https://bit.ly/2SJ67gh>.

⁵ Alison Conway, “Accessing Liberal Education,” ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830 2, no. 1 (2012): article 9, <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/abo/vol2/iss1/9/>.

⁶ On interdisciplinary collaboration: Paul Hunter, “Representing the Past,” ADE Bulletin 108 (Fall 1994): 31–33, doi: 10.1632/ade.108.31; Peter Pfeiffer, “In This Together: Language and Literature in the Academy,” ADE Bulletin 136 (Winter 2004): 7–9, doi: 10.1632/ade.136.7. Carol White and Kathryn Russell, “Crossing Borders: An Interdisciplinary Course in the ‘Enlightenment,’” ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830 3, no. 2 (2013): article 2, <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/abo/vol3/iss2/2/>.

⁷ Paula Backscheider, “The Futures of Eighteenth-Century Studies,” Digital Defoe 3, no. 1 (2011): article 1, <https://bit.ly/2V4RpwY>. See also: Ellen Pollak, “The Future of Feminist Theory and Eighteenth-Century Studies,” The Eighteenth Century 50, no. 1 (2009): 13–20; Stephen Pinker, Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress (New York: Viking, 2018).

Expanding Access to Knowledge:

How Enlightenment Ideals Can Strengthen Public Support for the Humanities

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Many serious challenges presently afflict American civic life: growing inequality, proliferating antipathy and distrust, and malevolent anti-intellectualism, to name but a few. The humanities have a vital role to play in confronting such difficult trends. Art, history, literature, philosophy, and related fields can prepare students to enter the public square with a sense of depth, with an appreciation of complexity and variety, and with the cognitive resilience it takes to cultivate truly democratic habits of mind: among them, learning broadly, thinking precisely, listening compassionately, and debating attentively.¹

How, then, might the Enlightenment inform the approach of those who strive to defend the humanities amid political and economic circumstances that regularly question the value of these disciplines? How might scholars bring within the reach of nonacademic audiences a wealth of humanistic intellectual resources, produced by learned methods of discernment, in a digital age where misinformation can spread all too quickly? How might we mitigate that foreboding tension—between academic expertise and popular sovereignty—when it rears its ugly head?²

Reversing the erosion of public trust in these fields of study, and in higher education more broadly, will require changes from *within*. Scholars of the humanities need to question why their traditional infrastructures of research dissemination remain so distant from the alternatives a digital world makes possible. Enlightenment ideals that continue to inspire

change in our time—natural equality over inherited standing, critical examination over deference to authority, and scientific advancement over the flattering of tradition for its own sake or for fear of the unknown—can help us frame effectively the importance of contemporary movements for open access to knowledge, especially to humanistic research funded by tax and tuition dollars.³ Mindful of the numerous qualifications that scholarly rigor demands, I intend to encourage fruitful and imaginative contemplation about how we share our work.

In the twenty-first century, digital technologies boast powerful capabilities for elevating the visibility and impact of scholarly research, a worthy aspiration for a needful time.⁴ Unfortunately, contemporary arrangements in academic publishing have largely prevented these technologies from widening public access to such information. Due to subscription price increases and growth in the sheer amount of research available for purchase, library expenditures on academic journals increased by more than 400 percent between 1986 and 2011, compared to an increase of just 71 percent for monographs over the same period.⁵ As academic libraries struggle to cope with the financial strains imposed by this serials crisis, important knowledge across disciplines becomes increasingly inaccessible to researchers at institutions confronting serious budgetary constraints, let alone to the multitudes of educated nonspecialists who do not possess academic library privileges.⁶

Put more simply, dramatically rising prices for scientific journals, often published by corporations, have squeezed library acquisition budgets at even wealthy research institutions, prompting a decline in demand for monographs in the humanities and thereby lowering the accessibility of humanistic scholarship. This bind has raised very serious—even existential—uncertainties about the future of research dissemination in our fields of study.⁷ To defend the

humanities, it is thus imperative to think critically about scholarly communication itself.⁸

Some scholars of the humanities, like Robert Darnton, have begun to address these problems by supporting the development of open access (OA) publishing infrastructure in their own disciplines.⁹ While others continue to believe that OA necessarily entails the imposition of author-side publication fees, this is simply not true. *Philosophers' Imprint*, published by the innovative University of Michigan Library, is an OA humanities journal that does not require the payment of any author-side fees. Additionally, the Open Library of Humanities (OLH) is a nonprofit organization that publishes OA scholarship without author-side fees. Launched in September 2015 following early support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the OLH operates using a partnership subsidy model in which an international library consortium supports the OLH financially in exchange for participation in its governance. The consortium currently includes more than two hundred members, among them some of the most prestigious institutions of higher learning in the world.¹⁰ In March 2018, the University of Minnesota Press—also with Mellon support—launched Manifold, “a free, open-source platform to publish and read networked, interactive, media-rich books online.”¹¹ With yet another Mellon grant of nearly one million dollars, the University of North Carolina Press announced in June 2018 that it will conduct a three-year pilot program “to publish up to 150 monographs from university presses in digital-first open access editions.”¹² Momentum is gathering, thanks to grassroots energy and concentrated funding alike.

What do such recent events have to do with the Enlightenment? Connections abound, with some imagination. Critiques of monopoly stand as one instructive example: “The eighteenth-century philosophers saw monopoly as a main obstacle to the diffusion of

knowledge—not merely monopolies in general, which stifled trade according to Adam Smith and the Physiocrats, but specific monopolies such as the Stationers’ Company in London and the booksellers’ guild in Paris, which choked off free trade in books.”¹³ When corporations lock important scholarship behind prohibitively expensive paywalls—scholarship produced with some form of public funding, more often than not—even researchers with stable institutional affiliations are hobbled in their efforts to advance knowledge for the common good. Monopoly thereby inhibits the robust exchange of ideas in our own time, as it did then.¹⁴

Consider, too, Denis Diderot’s belief that the spread of knowledge could facilitate social improvement. In “its attempt to classify learning and to open all domains of human activity to its readers,” the *Encyclopédie*, by its very existence, demonstrated that enhancement in the accessibility of knowledge—if not truly for everyone—was nevertheless integral to the aspirations of key Enlightenment *philosophes*.¹⁵ Admittedly, the *Encyclopédie* was large, expensive, and often highly abstruse. Voltaire recognized these limitations, publishing his affordable and pithy *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif* in 1764.¹⁶ It would be incorrect to assert that Voltaire desired universal access to knowledge; he had no interest in making the French peasantry literate, for instance.¹⁷ Even so, scholars of the humanities ought to consider how the ethos of broad accessibility informing his one-volume encyclopedic dictionary—from an affordability standpoint as well as a discursive one—might resonate with our own commitments to sharing knowledge and speaking truth to power. While the French *philosophes* often published their works clandestinely to circumvent clerical repression and state censorship, scholars of the humanities today can work within existing economic realities and legal frameworks to make open access the norm—not the exception—for research

communication in our disciplines.

The noble challenge before us is clear, though difficult: “new technology can make it possible to realize an old ideal, a republic of letters in which citizenship extends to everyone.”¹⁸ Such was never the case in the eighteenth century. If we seek to defend the humanities, we must ask ourselves, do the humanities possess redeeming civic purposes that justify their public funding? If so, should not humanistic research be more easily accessible to the wide public that makes such work financially possible?¹⁹ Shall scholars aim to share their knowledge on a more democratic basis, or shall great amounts of such knowledge remain a privilege of “the cultural elite and corporate insiders” who today elicit so much resentment and suspicion?²⁰ Enlightenment ideals—though elusive and imperfect—continue to fire the imagination.

The Hauenstein Center at Grand Valley State University generously provided the funding which made possible my participation in the 49th Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies.

¹ For a well-known exploration of the importance of the humanities to democratic life, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

² For a classic examination of the mistrust of intellect and expertise in American culture, see Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1963). For a more recent look, see Tom Nichols, *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign Against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³ Historian Roy Rosenzweig illustrates nicely the indispensable connection between historical scholarship and public resources; see Rosenzweig's book Clio Wired: The Future of the Past in the Digital Age (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 117: "After all, historical research also benefits directly . . . through grants from federal agencies like the National Endowment for the Humanities; even more of us are on the payroll of state universities, where research support makes it possible for us to write our books and articles. If we extend the notion of 'public funding' to private universities and foundations (who are, of course, major beneficiaries of the federal tax codes), it can be argued that public support underwrites almost all historical scholarship."

⁴ The academic library community is not standing idly by in the face of such opportunities; see <https://sparcopen.org/>.

⁵ Association of Research Libraries, "Monograph and Serial Costs in ARL Libraries, 1986–2011," <https://publications.arl.org/rli280/22>. More recently, academic and research institutions have begun to walk away from large journal subscription bundles that place a major burden on tight library budgets. See SPARC, "Big Deal Cancellation Tracking," <https://bit.ly/2AdRrLE>. See also Roger C. Schonfeld, "Is the Value of the Big Deal in Decline?" The Scholarly Kitchen, 7 Mar 2019, <https://bit.ly/2CeWs6U>. In February 2019, the University of California system canceled all its subscriptions with Elsevier, the world's largest scientific publisher, specifically to push for open access in scholarly communication. See UC Office of the President, "UC Terminates Subscriptions with World's Largest Scientific Publisher in Push for Open Access to Publicly Funded Research," 28 Feb 2019, <https://bit.ly/2IGVfLf>; Academic Council of the Academic Senate of the University of California, "Statement on the University's Negotiations with Elsevier Publishing," 28 Feb 2019, <https://bit.ly/2UjZwFX>; Gretchen Kell, "In Push for

Open Access, UC Breaks Ties with Publishing Giant Elsevier,” UC Berkeley News, 28 Feb 2019, <https://bit.ly/2Hg4XBY>; Lindsay Ellis, “U. of California System Cancels Elsevier Subscriptions, Calling Move a Win for Open Access,” The Chronicle of Higher Education, 28 Feb 2019, <https://bit.ly/2C8o9hX>; Gretchen Kell, “Why UC Split with Publishing Giant Elsevier,” UC Berkeley News, 28 Feb 2019, <https://bit.ly/2tUeh6X>. See also University Committee on Library and Scholarly Communication, Academic Senate of the University of California, “Declaration of Rights and Principles to Transform Scholarly Communication,” 25 Apr 2018, <https://bit.ly/2txpsCN>.

⁶ Even Harvard University is struggling to afford access to the research it needs amid this ongoing crisis. See Ian Sample, “Harvard University Says It Can’t Afford Journal Publishers’ Prices,” The Guardian, 24 Apr 2012, bit.ly/2KuiM1H. See also Carolyn Y. Johnson, “Harvard Panel Pushes Benefits of Free Journals,” The Boston Globe, 28 Apr 2012, bit.ly/2Kk31v6.

⁷ See Robert Darnton, “Google & the Future of Books,” The New York Review of Books, 12 Feb 2009, bit.ly/2mLrTi3.

⁸ Robert Darnton, “The Case for Open Access,” The Harvard Crimson, 12 Feb 2008, bit.ly/2MymrZL.

⁹ By open access, I am referring to the standard definition used in the Budapest Open Access Initiative of February 2002: bit.ly/1oBB1zD. See also the Bethesda and Berlin statements of June and October 2003: bit.ly/2fuDVrL; bit.ly/2wudfgx. Leading scholars and advocates of open access include Caroline Edwards, Martin Paul Eve, Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Heather Joseph, Peter Suber, and John Willinsky, among many others.

¹⁰ A list of institutional members for the OLH is available here: bit.ly/2KFr0kq. To learn more

about the OLH model, visit this page: bit.ly/2SvWmwX. For an example of an OLH article pertinent to eighteenth-century studies, see François Dominic Laramée, “How to Extract Good Knowledge from Bad Data: An Experiment with Eighteenth Century French Texts,” Digital Studies/Le champ numérique 9, no. 1 (January 2019): article 2, bit.ly/2NfT7Jm.

¹¹ University of Minnesota Press, “The University of Minnesota Press with CUNY’s GC Digital Scholarship Lab and Cast Iron Coding Announce the Release of MANIFOLD 1.0,” Mar 30, 2018, bit.ly/2J7NFWc.

¹² Gina Mahalek, “UNC Press Receives \$950,000 Mellon Grant for Open Access History Monographs,” 14 June 2018, bit.ly/2tXEtOe.

¹³ Darnton, “Google & the Future of Books,” bit.ly/2mLrTi3.

¹⁴ According to MIT Libraries, some academic publishing corporations even enjoy profit margins rivaling—by percentage of earnings, not by absolute value—those of Apple, Disney, ExxonMobil, Starbucks, and McDonald’s. See Right to Research Coalition, “The Problem: Students Can’t Access Essential Research,” Image 1, <https://bit.ly/30B7i4q>.

¹⁵ University of Chicago, “The ARTFL Encyclopédie,” <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu>.

¹⁶ Roger Pearson, Voltaire Almighty (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 297.

¹⁷ Robert Darnton, George Washington’s False Teeth: An Unconventional Guide to the Eighteenth Century (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 5.

¹⁸ Darnton, “The Case for Open Access,” bit.ly/2MymrZL. For Darnton’s role in the establishment of the Digital Public Library of America, see Corydon Ireland, “Robert Darnton Closes the Book,” The Harvard Gazette, 11 May 2015, bit.ly/2Kzq94V.

¹⁹ For a brief exploration of the urgency of these and similar questions in our own time, see Adam Waters and E.J. Dionne, Jr., “Is Anti-Intellectualism Ever Good for Democracy?”

Dissent 66, no. 1 (Winter 2019): 91–96: “Should we always dismiss charges that intellectuals are out of touch or too protective of established ways of thinking? ... Contemporary efforts to break down the walls separating academia from the outside world help to ensure that intellectualism promotes the values of equality and inclusion, which are fundamental to a well-functioning democracy ... What must be fostered is the exchange of ideas, whether inside the academy or outside its walls.” See also a fascinating preprint manuscript by Erin Rose Glass and Micah Vandegrift, “Public Scholarship in Practice and Philosophy” Humanities Commons, bit.ly/2SEYE1K.

²⁰ See Robert Darnton, foreword to Peter Suber, *Knowledge Unbound: Selected Writings on Open Access, 2002–2011* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), xi. This book is freely available at <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/knowledge-unbound>.

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