**KEE—Can**

<0 images>

**Can a ‘Global Digital Humanities’ Include Private-Sector Collaborations? A Case Study of One University-Community Digital Humanities Partnership**

Kee, K. B.

Can the digital humanities lead our universities as they contemplate how best to collaborate with the private sector? Universities have always been useful to their societies, but the question is especially relevant today, amidst increasing calls from governments—in Australia, but also in Canada, the United States, and Great Britain—to leverage existing partnerships and cultivate new ones. I address this question by focusing on one example, the Niagara Interactive Media Generator (nGen), an interactive media business incubator that I helped establish in Niagara, Canada. Our experience and the lessons that we learned are presented as one path for digital humanists (and indeed humanists broadly) to pursue as we contemplate engaging the private sector.

My presentation answers the big question of how universities partner with the private sector by progressively narrowing our focus: from how researchers have understood the promotion of innovation (a literature review), to how a group of us promoted innovation in my city through the creation of a business incubator, to how I promoted innovation through the creation of one digital humanities project within that business incubator.

The paper is organized in three parts. In part 1 I briefly review the recent history of university-business relations. Since the time of the Museion in Alexandria, or the Imperial Academies (Guozijian) of China, universities have contributed to innovation in their societies. I point to the ways in which the gap separating higher education and commerce has narrowed with the rise in the west of the ‘knowledge economy’, and the concomitant government promotion of universities as engines of economic productivity. At a time in history in which the essential currency of higher education—knowledge—can be turned into real currency, universities are being viewed as incubators for entrepreneurship.

In part 2 I survey how researchers in universities understand the promotion of innovation, and specifically partnerships between their institutions and business. To many researchers, private-sector partnerships have served as evidence of the commercialization of higher education. This kind of concern can be heard across the university. From the administrative side, Derek Bok, former president at Harvard, has suggested that entrepreneurial activities within universities might succeed in the short term, but only at the cost of academic values in the long term (2003). From the other side of the academy, sociology professor Stanley Aronowitz has blamed academic leaders such as Bok for creating ‘a learning enterprise [that] has become subject to the growing power of administration . . . which more and more responds not to faculty and students… but to political and market forces’ (2001, 164). Our colleagues in the humanities have been among the forceful proponents of this critique (Nussbaum, 2010; Harpham, 2013; Donoghue, 2008). I examine this literature both sympathetically and critically, then extend my review to include the scholarship of business researchers, who have focused attention on specific examples of university-business partnerships. While these scholars (Slaughter and Rhoades, 1996; Slaughter and Leslie, 1997; Gertler and Vinodrai, 2004; Bozeman and Boardman, 2004; Boardman and Gray, 2010) are divided on the benefits of university-business collaboration, they acknowledge that research innovation centres ‘are not homogeneous and much remains to be learned by developing a deeper knowledge of their differences’ (Bozeman and Boardman, 2013, 115).

In part 3, the main section of my paper, I reflect on lessons learned through the establishment of one university-industry partnership, the ‘Niagara Interactive Media Generator’ (nGen), at my home institution in Niagara, Canada. I also draw on conclusions taken from the development of one digital humanities application, my War of 1812 location-based iPhone game, which became nGen’s signature project, bolstering our social legitimacy required in the early days and ensuring continued support for the incubator.

I describe how, in the case of case of nGen and my iPhone app, the digital humanities led the way for other disciplines and domains of knowledge. Viewed from another angle, the hub of innovation activity at our university grew out of the culture and the practices of the digital humanities. I build on Johanna Drucker’s conclusion that the digital humanities are complicit with the ideology of the moment (2005). The ideology of our knowledge economy moment has affected what we study, how we teach, and how we conduct research. Most importantly for my purposes, it has affected how we relate to our communities—including, I argue, our relationship to the private sector.

The primary and overriding goal for the nGen at its launch, and into the present, is to strengthen the economy of a depressed region—the heart of the industrial rust belt—and provide new opportunities for its young people. In the same way that we digital humanists are engaging new media alongside ancient manuscripts, teaching students how to program as they learn to become better writers, and building labs and centres to quickly develop and launch new ideas, we can contribute our significant resources to kick-start local economies while we strengthen those already established.

Whether we use the terminology of a century ago, and call this ‘public humanities’, or adopt something more contemporary, such as ‘critical vocationalism’. the result is the same: thinking about what it means to be human while simultaneously helping students develop skills they can use in the contemporary knowledge economy. If we hold true to this purpose, we do not have to worry that we might be accidentally corporatizing the academy. As Alan Liu points out, the job of the humanities, and of humanist educators, is to ‘build people’. nGen is one more way to achieve that. ‘Global’ is a term not limited to geography, and a global digital humanities can engage sectors of our societies, including the private sector, in Canada, and other parts of the world as well.

**References**

**Aronowitz, S.** (2001). *The Knowledge Factory: Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating True Higher Learning*. Beacon, Boston, MA.

**Boardman, C. and Gray, D.** (2010). The New Science and Engineering Management: Cooperative Research Centers as Government Policies, Industry Strategies, and Organizations. *Journal of Technology Transfe*r, **35**(5): 445–59.

**Bok, D.** (2003). *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education.* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

**Bozeman, B. and Boardman, C.** (2004). The NSF Engineering Research Centers and the University-Industry Research Revolution. *Journal of Technology Transfer,* **29**(3–4): 365–75.

**Bozeman, B. and Boardman, C.** (2013). Academy Faculty in University Research Centers: Neither Capitalism’s Slaves nor Teaching Fugitives. *Journal of Higher Education,* **84**(1): 88–120.

**Donoghue, F.** (2008). *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities*. Fordham University Press, New York.

**Drucker, J.** (2005). Humanities Games and the Market in Digital Futures. *Criticism,* **47**(2): 241–47.

**Gertler, M. and Vinodrai, T.** (2004). Anchors of Creativity: How Do Public Universities Create Competitive and Cohesive Communities? Paper presented at *Building Excellence: Graduate Education and Research. Taking Public Universities Seriously*, University of Toronto, Toronto, December 2004.

**Harpham, G.** (2013). *The Humanities and the Dream of America*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

**Liu, A.** (2005). Understanding Knowledge Work. *Criticism,* **47**(2): 249–60.

**Nussbaum, M.** (2010). *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

**Slaughter, S., Campbell, T., Folleman, M. H. and Morgan, E.** (2002). The ‘Traffic’ in Graduate Students: Graduate Students as Tokens of Exchange between Academe and Industry. *Science, Technology and Human Values,* **27**(2): 282–313.

**Slaughter, S. and Leslie, L. L.** (1997). *Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies, and the Entrepreneurial University.* Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.

**Slaughter, S. and Rhoades, G.** (1996). The Emergence of a Competitiveness Research and Development Policy Coalition and the Commercialization of Academic Science and Technology. *Science, Technology and Human Values,* **21**: 303–39.

**Slaughter, S. and Rhoades, G.** (2004). *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy.* Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.