What is the Place of Public Scholarship?
A forum with UWM faculty and staff

Gregory Jay (Cultures and Communities Program), Jasmine Alinder (History), Michael Doylen (Archives), Kate Kramer (21st Century Studies)
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Curtin Hall 118

On March 12, a broad cross-section of UWM filled Curtin 118 to hear faculty and staff respond to the question put forth by the forum, “What is the Place of Public Scholarship?” Panelists included Greg Jay, director of the Cultures and Communities Program; Jasmine Alinder, co-coordinator of the Public History program; and Kate Kramer, the Center’s deputy director. Substituting for Cheryl Ajirotutu (Anthropology), who was laid low by the flu, was Michael Doylen, head of the UWM Libraries’ archives.

To open, Greg Jay noted that his Cultures and Communities Program (CC), born from UWM’s Milwaukee Idea (1995-2005), was founded in 2000 to promote multicultural awareness and civic engagement by sponsoring community partnership grants, undergraduate classes with service learning components, and fellowships for faculty. In 2009, CC joined the national organization, Imaging America (IA), a consortium of higher education institutions that support public scholarship. (See our Winter 2010 newsletter for an account of UWM’s presentation at the 2009 IA conference.)

An IA research paper, Scholarship in Public: Knowledge Creation and Tenure Policy in the Engaged University (2008), available from www.imaginingamerica.org, is a valuable core document that provides a way to think about engaged scholarship in the tenure and promotion process, and how to think about scholarship as a continuum of activities, rather than as the traditional silos of teaching, research, and service. In defining “public scholarship” (see sidebar), Jay noted that the many different end products of such scholarship present a challenge to the traditional academic rewards system which recognizes the peer-reviewed journal article and book. Also worthy of note is that public scholarship is always a mutually collaborative
arrangement between academia and the community, in both the research and the design process: this type of public scholarship differentiates itself from more common “drive-by” community engagements, where an academic swoops into a community, studies it, and then swoops back out.

**Jasmine Alinder** provided an enlightening introduction to “public history” as a subset of public scholarship. Not recognized by higher education until the mid-1970s at UC-Santa Barbara, the discipline flowered partly because that at the time the job market for academic historians was bleak, yet recently graduated historians recognized that they had valuable skills to offer. If the universities didn’t want their skills, then government agencies and corporations certainly could use them. Immediately this created a tension between the pure, academic historians and the government/corporate/public historians who “sold out.”

Both Alinder and **Michael Doylen** spoke about their March on Milwaukee: Civil Rights History Project, housed at the UWM Libraries Digital Collections. Emanating from UWM’s 2007 March on Milwaukee conference commemorating the 40th anniversary of Milwaukee’s open housing marches, the project is a fully searchable online digital archive of documents related to the civil rights struggle during the 1960s. These digitized documents include personal letters, public school records, newspaper accounts, oral histories, WTMJ video footage, and more. The goal of digitizing these documents was not to completely replicate the physical archive, but to make a key selection of primary source materials more readily available. Though still in beta testing, the March on Milwaukee archives are the most popular of all UWM’s digital archives. The archive can be accessed at [www.uwm.edu/libraries/digilib/](http://www.uwm.edu/libraries/digilib/).

As the final panelist, **Kate Kramer**, the Center’s deputy director, noted that although public scholarship is not central to the mission of the Center, it certainly has played a strong peripheral role in Center programming, manifested through recent collaborations with Anne Basting (Center for Age and Community), Ray Isaacs (Architecture), and Arijit Sen (Architecture). Kramer also reminded faculty in the audience that the Center, in developing its public programming, responds to the needs of UWM faculty, so that if a critical mass of interest in public scholarship develops among the faculty, the Center will certainly show interest, too.

### Public Scholarship Defined

Publicly engaged academic work is scholarly or creative activity integral to a faculty member’s academic area. It encompasses different forms of making knowledge about, for, and with diverse publics and communities. Through a coherent, purposeful sequence of activities, it contributes to the public good and yields artifacts of public and intellectual value.