



PhD Studentships in Transformative Humanities

Information and Q&A Session



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council



Introducing Our Speakers

Prof. **Alberto Rigolio**, Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research

Prof. **Robert Song**, Department of Theology and Religion

Prof. **Sarah Semple**, Department of Archaeology

Ms. **Katrin Krauss**, Faculty Postgraduate Research Coordinator

For questions, you can reach us at

artsandhumanities.pgrteam@durham.ac.uk







Durham
University

Transformative Humanities



Transformative humanities: the context

- An uncertain world
- Government and public emphasis on STEM subjects
- Arts and humanities on the defensive?
- Conventional responses no longer adequate?

Transformative humanities: the rationale

- Questioning the STEM consensus?
- Are the humanities underselling themselves?
- Making the humanities publicly intelligible without selling out

Transformative humanities is...

- Enriching, shaping and transforming lives
- Nurturing thoughtful, critical, engaged citizens for a rapidly changing and complex world
- Inherently interdisciplinary
- Methodologically plural



**Creativity,
Culture,
and
Heritage**

**Creativity, Culture,
and Heritage**

Innovative approaches to heritage: landscape, collections, visual culture, heritage science, local to global. Rooted in partnered challenge and community engagement.

**Digital
Humanities**

Digital Humanities

Data-driven research from machine-learning, linguistics, and stylometry, to AI and museum collections management, object analysis, and human movement and music.

**Environmental
Humanities**

**Environmental
Humanities**

Global research, from African mega-fauna, environmental activism, literary eco-criticism, Arctic experience, heat in Asian cities, to climate change and migration.

**Medical
Humanities**

Medical Humanities

Cross-cutting research and impact on Health and Human Experience: the Institute of Medical Humanities Discovery Research Platform, Moral Injury, Death and Life Studies.

**Science-
Humanities**

Science-Humanities

Distinctive collaborative research on the history and practice of science: ancient mathematics, medieval astronomy and meteorology, emergence, and medical learning.

**Social Justice,
Communities,
and Policy**

**Social Justice,
Communities, and
Policy**

High impact research on education policy - Classics for All; democratic activity - Elections and Petitions; human dignity - health, refugees, death, community-building.

The environmental humanities can help us to understand:

- how people have responded to crises throughout history and across different cultures
- how Western responses have often been marked by Eurocentric assumptions
- how people engage with crisis with their imaginations and through literature
- how fundamental philosophical questions about the world and our place in it are raised by the environmental crises
- how theological and religious dimensions of questions about loss, hope, and meaning are raised by the ecological crises

Some current projects (1):

- Extinction as loss of an *Umwelt*
- Floods, heat and health in Wuhan
- Early childhood years and the development of a sense of the natural world
- Music, plants and indigenous cosmologies

Some current projects (2):

- How understanding games could help COPs go better
- What Newcastle looks like from the point of view of a kittiwake
- How to write gardens
- What does it mean to hope if optimism is dead?

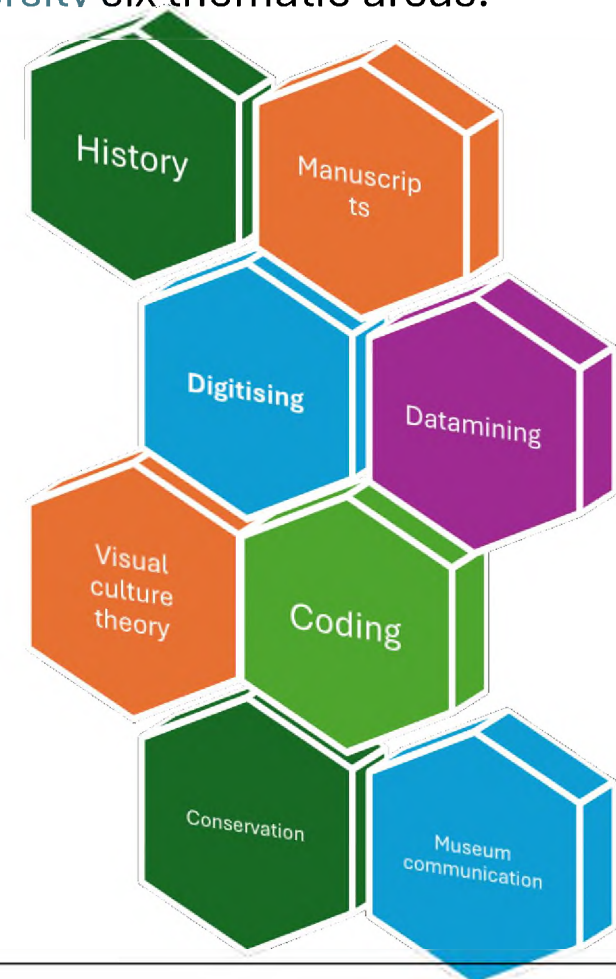
Alignment to Transformative Humanities

- Great idea – but needs to compete within context of six themes
- Projects must fall within the [Transformative Humanities - Durham University](#) six thematic areas:
 - [Culture, Creativity, and Heritage](#)
 - [Digital Humanities](#)
 - [Environmental Humanities](#)
 - [Medical Humanities](#)
 - [Science-Humanities](#)
 - [Social Justice, Communities, and Policy](#)

Digital Humanities is the **application of digital methods to research in the humanities and cultural heritage**, such as **computational studies of music, text or images** and the use of **humanities methods to understand digital phenomena, including the ethics and social impact of AI and cyberspace history**.

Read the themes carefully and identify how best to fit and develop your application within these six areas.

More than the sum of its parts – think interdisciplinary/multi disciplinary in terms of theories, subject areas, techniques and skills



The project package

Drafting a first proposal...

- What is the research context? What makes this project original, timely and innovative?
- What are the goals/ aims?
- What are your research questions? What questions will you ask to get you to the outcomes you want?
- What datasets are your building blocks? Archives, objects, buildings, texts?
- What are the objectives? What steps will you take with your datasets to answer your research questions? What methods will you use?
- What are you bringing to the project? Linkage to previous research/skills training at MA/MSc level?



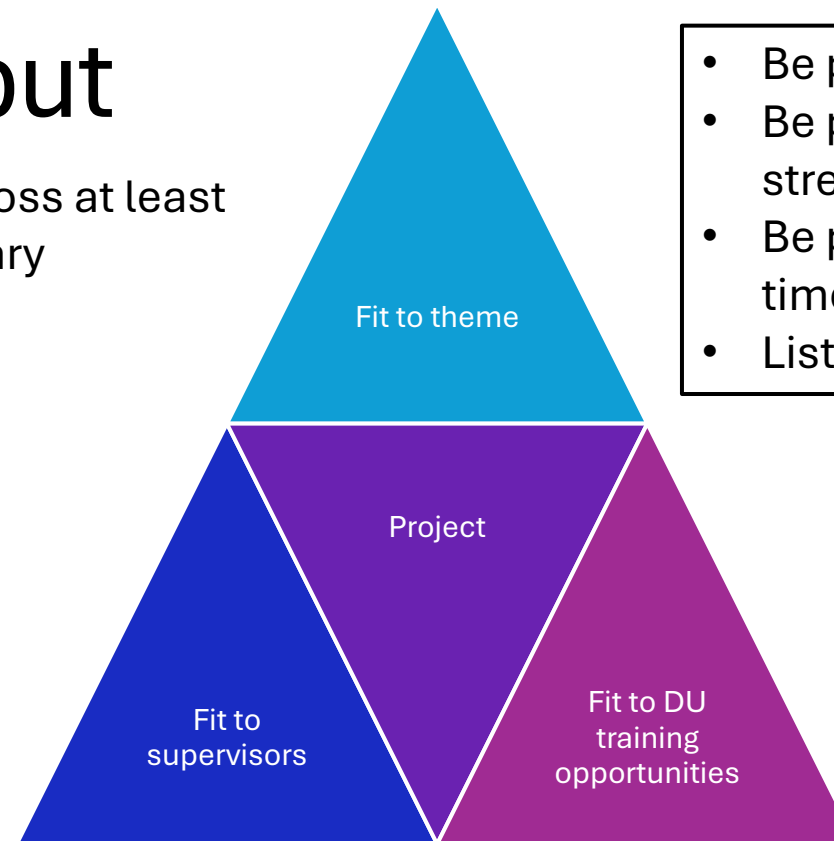
Supervisors and input

Supervision must include collaboration across at least two departments. Think multi-interdisciplinary distinctiveness!

- Approach an expert in the field....
- MLAC, History, English, Archaeology, Computing....etc.
- History [Staff - Durham University](#)

Please use these links to view details of our staff

 Academic staff Our academic staff are all engaged in ground-breaking teaching and/or research	 Administrative staff We have a small team of administrative staff, who ensure that the Department runs smoothly throughout the year
 Associated staff Our associated staff are our colleagues who hold honorary or emeritus fellowships or professorships with us	 PhD students The postgraduate community is an integral part of the History Department's wider research culture
 Meet our staff Get to know some of our members of staff and learn about their work and research interests.	



- Be prepared for critical feedback
- Be prepared to modify and strengthen the project
- Be prepared to redraft several times
- Listen to advice

- Email the experts – directly aligned to your field (or DRPGs)
- Have your ideas on paper...previous slide
- Ask for feedback and suggestions for additional supervisory expertise
- Arrange to meet and discuss the project online
- Ask about distinctive training opportunities or relevant resources: archives, collections, laboratories

Fit to resources and training opportunities

What training do you need to do this project?

What are you bringing already?

MSc/MA research

Additional training

Publication/communication experience (short articles, blogs, podcasts)

Professional experience (volunteering or working in relevant sectors)

Relevant skills sets e.g. GIS, coding, theoretical knowledge

What additional skills do you need?

Why is Durham the best place to provide them?

What facilities and labs and methods do you need?

What training do you need to make the most of these?

Are there national or international assets you will need access to?

Can the funding provide the costs needed for travel or training?

[Archives and Special Collections - Durham University](#)
[Conservation - Durham University](#)
[Facilities and Equipment - Durham University](#)
[Laboratories - Durham University](#)
[Centre for Visual Arts and Culture - Durham University](#)
[Oriental Museum Collections - Durham University](#)
[Institute of Medieval and Early Modern Studies - Durham University](#)

Explore our collections



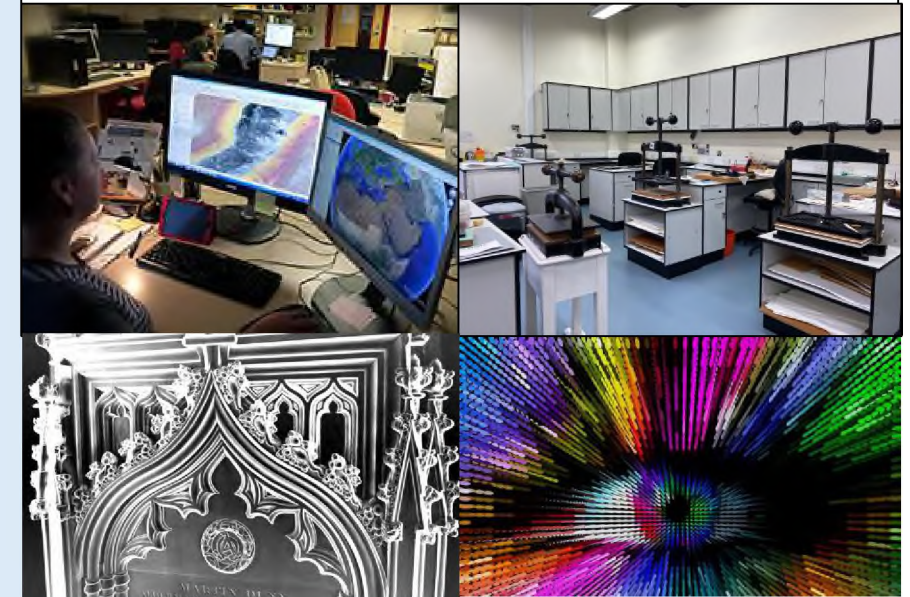
Search Our Collections

Explore our collections online, refine your search results or get in touch for more support.



About Our Collections

Find out more about the range and depth of each of our collections.



PhD Awards

Studentship Details

Duration	3.5 years (full-time) or 7 years (part-time)
Financial Support	• Full Tuition Fee Waiver • Annual Stipend at the UKRI rate, currently £20,780 (for 2025/26, tax-free)
Additional Support	• Dedicated training and research funds • Placement resources • Specialized development and training programmes
8 awards for entry in October 2026	• Seven available for Home students • One available for an Overseas student, covering the full overseas tuition fee

Eligibility

Supervisory Lead

You must be accepted as a PhD student with a lead supervisor in either the **Faculty of Arts and Humanities** or the **Faculty of Social Sciences**

Classics and Ancient History
English Studies
History
Modern Languages and Cultures
Music
Philosophy
Theology and Religion

Anthropology
Archaeology
Education
Geography
Government and International Affairs
Law
Sociology
Sport and Exercise Studies

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Your supervisory team must include collaboration across at least two Departments at Durham University

International Entry Requirements and English Language Requirements

- <https://www.durham.ac.uk/study/international/entry-requirements/>
- <https://www.durham.ac.uk/study/international/entry-requirements/english-language-requirements/english-language-levels-required/>

Application Documents

As part of your application, please submit the following documents:

- **Research Proposal** that clearly defines research questions and context, the intended approach and methods, the relevance of the project to transformative humanities, and the fit with Durham University (max. 1,000 words)
- **A CV**
- An **Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form**, to be filled in online at the main page of the scheme: <https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/arts-humanities/study/postgraduate-funding/phd-studentships-in-transformative-humanities/>
- The name and contacts of **Two Referees**. Upon submission of the application, referees will receive an automated message and will have two weeks to submit their references

Application Process and Key Dates

- Contact potential supervisor(s) to discuss your project.
- Submit your complete PhD application **by 16 January 2026 (23.59 UK time)**, via our online Applicant Portal: <https://www.durham.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/>
- In the funding section of the Applicant Portal, under “Scholarship details,” please select “**PGR - Transformative Humanities**” from the drop-down menu.
- Successful applicants will be notified in March 2026.
- For further information, see <https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/arts-humanities/study/postgraduate-funding/phd-studentships-in-transformative-humanities/>

A bright, sunny day on a historic cobblestone street. On the left, a large stone building with arched windows and a stone staircase. A group of students is gathered on the steps. In the center, four young women are walking towards the camera, smiling. They are dressed in casual summer clothing like t-shirts and jeans. On the right, a young man is sitting on a stone ledge, looking down at something in his hands. The street is lined with historic brick and stone buildings. In the background, a tall, ornate Gothic-style building is visible. The overall atmosphere is lively and academic.

Questions