

**Proposal for “The Public Humanities in Practice”
MLA 2022**

Bio:

Katharine G. Trostel chairs English and humanities at Ursuline College—a women-focused, four-year liberal arts institution located outside of Cleveland, Ohio. She was the project director for a 2019-2020 NEH Humanities Innovation Grant entitled, “Cleveland Divided: Rust Belt Revival” which resulted in the creation of a pathway through the core curriculum focused on the public and digital humanities and on the Rust Belt region as laboratory. In January of 2021, Ursuline was named an Institutional Affiliate for the Council of Independent College’s initiative, “Legacies of American Slavery.” She additionally secured a Modern Language Association’s “Humanities Innovation Course Development Grant” in 2018 to design the class, “From Rust Belt to Revival: Exploring the Legacy of Segregation, Inequality, and Social Justice in Cleveland through the Lens of the Anisfield-Wolf Canon.” You can learn more about her scholarship and commitment to the public humanities at: www.katharinetrostel.com

300-word abstract:

At Ursuline, I have made a concerted effort to connect our largely local student population (approximately 85% of our students stay in the region post-graduation, and 50% of our students are first generation) to a curriculum grounded in the public humanities where Cleveland and the Northeast Ohio region serve as the humanities laboratory. On September 29th, 2020, our local news platform *Belt Magazine* posted an editorial entitled, [“Cleveland and the Biden-Trump Debate”](#) penned by Chi Chi Nkemere and Bethany Studenic who argue eloquently for centering Cleveland in national conversations: “Cleveland is a majority-Black city in a Rust Belt swing state, nestled along one of the world’s largest sources of freshwater in the Great Lakes. In fact, there is perhaps no better setting to encapsulate this American moment.” Centering Cleveland means centering conversations like climate change and environmental destruction, race and social justice, and structural inequities.

In the fall of 2020, Ursuline College launched an NEH-funded project on the issues of inequity in our specific cultural landscape, the Rust Belt. The funding allowed us to design a pathway through our core curriculum dedicated to local engagement and the public humanities, specifically thinking through the legacies of structural injustice in a Rust Belt city like Cleveland and our institution’s role in fostering culturally competent, civically engaged graduates regardless of major. As part of the conversation centered on the “public humanities in process,” I would discuss specifically the creation of a modular journalism course focused on writing for civic engagement and activism. The class (currently under construction) is designed to connect students in all fields of study to hyper-local news platforms and practitioners in order to demonstrate the essential role of journalism in our community and to equip them with the tools to use their voices to advocate for social change. Partners include [Belt Magazine](#), [The Land](#), and [Literary Cleveland](#) (solutions-based journalism) and each is committed to facilitating the publication of student work.

Of interest:

More information on the results of our NEH Grant:
<https://humanitiesforall.org/blog/cleveland-divided>
www.ursuline.edu/neh

2020-2021 Rust Belt Speaker Series:

October 14, 2020: [“The Rise of Nonprofit News”](#)

November 11, 2020: [“Writing Place Through People”](#)

March 10, 2021: [“Black Women in the Rust Belt: A Call To Urgency”](#)
April 14, 2021: [Cleveland Documenters](#)