The public humanities prepare students to pursue careers outside of academia and train students who wish to remain within academia to articulate new horizons for their research.

The public humanities build on the Center for the Humanities' pioneering work in the public humanities and its related programs for graduate students, including the Public Humanities Exchange (HEX) and the Public Humanities Fellowships. It provides enrolled students with training and experience in the focuses on essential knowledge and skills required for professional paths that may not include traditional university teaching positions, whether in other sectors of higher education, policymaking and analysis, cultural organizations, new media, government, or research. Through coursework and hands-on project development, the program equips students with theoretical, historical, and practical knowledge that will help them to develop alternative applications for their scholarly research and engage their scholarly methods for use in broader social and professional contexts.

Graduate students pursuing degrees in any program at UW–Madison are welcome to seek admission into the public humanities. Students must complete an admissions form, and may submit it at any time for review and acceptance by the certificate advisor. The application requires approval by the director of graduate studies or graduate chair in the student's home department.