

Tanya Domi: Hi, this is Tanya Domi. Welcome to the Thought Project recorded at the Graduate Center of the City, University of New York. Fostering groundbreaking research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences and sciences. In this space we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating cutting edge research, informing New Yorkers and the world.

Tanya Domi: Katina Rogers is co-director of the Futures Initiative at the Graduate Center CUNY, where she guides and mentors graduate fellows and develops programming. She is also director of programs and administration for the Haystack Online Scholarly Network and co-director of a new \$3.15 million grant from the Andrew Mellon Foundation to support the Humanities Alliance, a partnership between the Graduate Center and four CUNY community colleges. Rogers' scholarly work focuses on higher education reform including scholarly communication practices, professionalization and career development and advocacy for fair labor policies. Her first book is Putting the Humanities PhD to Work Thriving in and Beyond the Classroom. Duke University Press 2020. Rogers holds a PhD in comparative literature from the University of Colorado at Boulder. Welcome to the Thought Project, Doctor Katina Rogers.

Katina Rogers: Thank you so much. I'm so happy to be here.

Tanya Domi: Congratulations on your new and forthcoming book, Putting the Humanities PhD to Work Thriving in and Beyond the Classroom. Duke University 2020, this summer. It's now available for pre-order. This book really does break ground in the literature and among advice books for graduate students. How did you get this idea?

Katina Rogers: Well, first of all, I just want to say it's been so wonderful to work with with Duke University Press and with Ken [Wessiger 00:02:09] on this book. It's really an exciting project for me and it's been wonderful to watch it come to fruition. I first started working on the topic as a postdoctoral fellow working with the University of Virginia in the Scholar's Lab in the Scholarly Communication Institute, where I was charged with conducting a survey of people who have advanced humanities degrees and who were working in non-faculty careers. So working in and around universities, but not necessarily teaching in the classroom, and I also did a survey of their employers. And the goal of the survey was to start moving from anecdote to data about the types of career preparation that people felt that they gained in their PhD programs, what they felt they needed to learn once they were on the job, and where they felt like they really had particular strengths based on their doctoral training.

Katina Rogers: In the work that I do now with Futures Initiative, I have an opportunity to build programs working directly with graduate students that helps them to apply their work in different career spaces that I think are really necessary not only to the students themselves, but also in a way that the students and their education really bring value to the different sectors in which they're working. Whether

that's in an academic space or in a nonprofit, in business, in government, anywhere.

Tanya Domi: In the private sector, more or less. And you are co-director of the Futures Initiative. You joined with distinguished professor Cathy Davidson, who's just a model to talking about breaking out of the traditional academy. And this is a CUNY-wide program that really leans forward on digital scholarship, peer mentoring and learning. And this experience had to inform your ideas as you wrote the book.

Katina Rogers: Absolutely. I think one of the things that's been most transformative about working with the futures initiative is that first of all, as a program we talk about equity and innovation as being connected rather than seeing them as, sometimes I think they're seen as opposed. That universities that focus on equity are not necessarily the most innovative and vice versa. But what has been true at CUNY for a long time and what the Futures Initiative has really tried to amplify is that in an institution that serves half a million students all across the city of New York with a wide range of complex commitments outside of the classroom and experiences outside of the classroom, there have to be innovative classroom practices and innovative practices in libraries and other university spaces to enable those students to succeed and to support those students.

Katina Rogers: So working with the Futures Initiative has helped me to think even more deeply about the kinds of structures that are in place in institutions and where there might be points of tension between the stated values of an institution and the structures that underpin the way that institution functions. And I think that where we find those points of tension, whether it's between tenure and promotion practices or admissions practices or evaluation practices, those are really good opportunities for intervention. And those are the spaces I try to focus on in the book.

Tanya Domi: So, traditionally in most research universities, teaching isn't really parlayed into questions of tenure, it's devalued quite a bit. How do you see that now at CUNY? And you address this in the book, for sure.

Katina Rogers: Yeah, I mean, I think that we see it most pronounced in the increased reliance on adjunct labor, and that's not only true at CUNY, it's true nationwide. I think now it's something like 70% of all courses are taught by adjunct faculty members who are often very, very good instructors, but who don't have the kinds of support that can help them to be as effective as possible in the classroom and with their students. Because I don't think that we would see that type of employment structure if teaching was valued as deeply as it should be.

Katina Rogers: So I think that any effort to think about career pathways for people coming out of PhD programs should focus on what those structures of value are and how to

begin by reinvesting in the importance of teaching. I think sometimes when people start to talk about career preparation and careers beyond the classroom, that's sometimes seen as being an opposition with a desire to reinvest in teaching. I see them as very closely linked. Because I think that a commitment to teaching is a commitment to serving the public and it's a commitment to being able to translate scholarship for different communities who are not already experts in that subject. And I think that's the same project as public humanities work, as public facing scholarship.

Tanya Domi: Well, I would say it's no mistake that you're here at CUNY because it's part of the mission of CUNY to leverage knowledge for the public good. So here you are in this more or less a percolator of ideas in innovation. It's New York City, it's a global capitol. With the local population, most of the students at CUNY are working. I myself was an adjunct this past fall at Hunter. Almost all my students worked outside the classroom. So there were things that would come up because of that. And traditionally you would say, "You can't miss class," or those kinds of issues as a teacher. And I learned, I went with it and just tried to deal with the student as fairly as possible. But when you're talking about 70% of the labor being adjunct, most of those adjuncts are working other jobs. So it's really hard to keep learning.

Tanya Domi: And one of the things you have to continually learn about, which you address quite well, is technology in learning and how technology's affecting all of our lives. And when you're teaching in the academy and you're an adjunct, it's very challenging when you have a full time job or other jobs that you're supporting yourself with.

Katina Rogers: Yeah, absolutely. I mean I think that the question of career development is definitely not a standalone issue. It's embedded in questions of technological fluency, digital literacy, digital engagement. And also I think maybe even more importantly, in questions of equity and inclusion and labor structures, as I was just talking about. I think that all of these things are interconnected and often reform efforts will try to address one of them at a time. And what I tried to do in the book is really look at where those things intersect and the ways in which they interrelate. Because I do think it's critically important to be thinking about questions of digital literacy and the ways in which scholarship moves between hands and between scholars, between institutions.

Tanya Domi: How it's shaped, how it shapes the way we write and the way we research. It's changed. Primary research used to be quite a bit going into old buildings, you'd have to go into archives depending in what you're doing. But the way we promote it, the way we distribute it and give it to the public.

Katina Rogers: This is an area where the role of libraries and librarians is even more important than it's ever been. Because I think that the way that knowledge is moving and is circulated right now is, it's complicated. And it's hard to get a handle for

readers, for scholars on how to navigate within these really vast systems of information. And because those structures of information are also structures of power, structure of authority and of the ways the different types of scholarship are normalized, I think the librarians who are engaging in that work are more important than ever to scholarship.

Tanya Domi: This is a shout out to the librarians at the Graduate Center, who I adore. We've had them on the Thought Project, they leaned forward. Open access is one of their big ideas and they advocate for it. I really call them more or less, they're sort of like the resistors within the institution. Because they one, want to protect privacy. Two, they want to leverage open access. And three, they are the people in the buildings saying, "Look, this technology is affecting the way we're curating work. And you have to pay attention to the questions of privacy even more." So I call them sort of like the canary in the mind now. They're part of the overall world we're occupying in the academy and their work is changing too.

Katina Rogers: Absolutely. Yeah.

Tanya Domi: So a lot of shade has been thrown at the humanities. We kind of live in this age, well, everything's technical, everything's been digitized. You know, we're in this new world. A lot of people are being put out of work. And colleges are trying to find a way to stay in the business because they've raised tuition, lots of people are in debt. It's the largest debt in America. It's larger than credit card debt. It's significant, student loan debt. So people are being told, "Well, you should get a degree in business or a professional degree on technology." We don't need humanities, we don't need history. So how do you push back on that in the book? I mean clearly we talk about here at the Graduate Center in the academy and outside of the academy, but given the state of our politics, I would argue we need more humanities, not less.

Katina Rogers: Yeah. And that's exactly the position I take in the book. I think I push back in two ways. One of which is more theoretical, that we need people with humanities training in all sectors of society. Especially now, especially when there are questions of technological developments that are perhaps assumed to be neutral. Things like surveillance techniques and even algorithmic search that people take for granted in their day to day lives or don't necessarily notice, but that are encoded with the biases of the people who have designed those systems. And without people with humanities training who understand the history, the philosophy, the ethics, the potential cultural outcomes of these different systems, those technologies can get very far into development before anybody asks a thoughtful question about what some of the unintended consequences might be.

Tanya Domi: Yeah, the lack of accountability. I mean, we see Facebook executives go up to Congress and saying, "Well, we don't care if it's not true. People have the right

to free speech." And this is where critical thinking skills and the ability to discern what isn't true, what is true, the idea of media literacy. Having all these skills that you develop in humanities, reading history, learning about what's happened before. I mean, English, we're talking about literature, we're talking about society and how it developed. The literature right now I think of is Sinclair Lewis. I think what he was writing in the 1920s couldn't be more relevant than it is today.

Katina Rogers: And yeah, I think that's absolutely true. And at the same time, I know that humanities training is not a guarantee against bias. I mean, even despite decades of research and teaching and ethnic studies and cultural studies, there are still many, many incidents of bias within academic spaces. I mean, tenure denials and many other things. So it's certainly no guarantee. However, I do think that that training is really important in those contexts to bring nuance and to bring in different perspective. And not only in technological spaces, but also to be able to think about which communities are served by different projects, to think about policy implications.

Katina Rogers: I think it's also really important for our undergraduate students, and this is something that is the focus of a new grant that we've been awarded by the Mellon Foundation. Where one of the premises of this project that I'll talk more about in a moment, is that I think there's an even stronger push at the community college level to nudge students towards vocational and so-called practical fields of study.

Tanya Domi: Skills, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katina Rogers: The reality is that people with humanities degrees have just as robust of employment metrics as people in other fields, and at more advanced levels the salaries are also quite similar, across any field except maybe computer science. The salaries tend to be significantly different. not only is it practical, I think that those humanities skills also give students, and maybe especially community college students, tools that they need in order to be able to navigate the contexts that they're coming from in their home lives, in their professional lives, bringing that into their educational lives.

Katina Rogers: And I think especially in an institution like uni, where we have so many students who are the first in their families to go to college, we have so many students who are speaking different languages in the home than what they might speak at school or in their workplace. We have students who are navigating incidents of bias, questions of cultural navigation, whether that's cultural discomfort or a sense of cultural richness and vibrance. They're bringing all of that into the classroom and that's a huge richness, if it can be harnessed and explored and valued as such. And it's the humanities where I think we're able to do that.

Tanya Domi: Well, I too agree. Having taught CUNY students, undergrads no less, I would also say you told me when we spoke earlier that the target audience for your book is administrators who are advising students and graduate students themselves. I mean, I never got to read such a book. I wish I had it when I went to grad school. Clearly you've been talking to people and learning from people. What's your idea on how somebody could use your book as they apply to go to graduate school to maybe get a PhD? And how will it yield support to them as they go through the process?

Katina Rogers: Yeah. I also wish I had a book like this when I was a graduate student. There was so much that I didn't know. And in some ways I'm still learning all of the things that I didn't know and that just were not made clear to me as a student. I didn't have access to certain spaces and I didn't know how to navigate different administrative structures. I think that for students in particular, there are several ways in which the book will be valuable. One is that I talk quite a bit about my own pathway. I think that for people with PhDs, one of the stumbling blocks to thinking really broadly about where to apply their study is that the path from graduate study through a faculty career is very clearly delineated, even though there's lots of uncertainties along the way.

Katina Rogers: The job announcements go up at the same time. They go up in the same place. Interviews happen around the same time of year. Those steps are really clearly sequenced. And when you're thinking about careers in different spaces, no other job search process looks quite like the academic job search does. And I think that that's actually a good thing. I think the academic job search process is really brutal in a lot of ways. But learning about what to look for can be really tricky. So for that reason, I think that seeing as many stories and pathways as possible is really helpful to see what the small decisions were along the way that led person in one direction or another. So I think that's useful.

Katina Rogers: There's a chapter in the book that's just concrete advice for students in particular, so I think that that is a great place to start for students. But I also think that it's really valuable that the book includes the more theoretical underpinnings of how we got to where we are in terms of academic labor. I talk a lot about the adjunct crisis. I talk a lot about equity and inclusion and why I think diversity efforts in universities tend to fail. Drawing a lot on Sarah Ahmed's work on being included. All of this is connected to the question of the value of the humanities. Because in an institutional context where the humanities are only valuable to be transmitted in other classrooms and in research to other experts, that's a very, very narrow definition of success. And it appeals to a very narrow subset of students and prospective students. So admissions committees look for students who have a certain academic pedigree who are poised to succeed in this very particular way.

Katina Rogers: I think that if our vision of what thoughtful and valuable and successful scholarship looks like is much broader, then that opens up a lot of other

possibilities for how we recruit students, what kinds of students we're looking for, how we value things like community engagement rather than having that always be something people have to do on the side of their real scholarship, quote unquote real scholarship. Having that be integral.

Tanya Domi: Well, I mean I've run up against that myself. Because I teach also public policy school at Columbia, which does appreciate my past background doing public policy. But on the other hand, inside CUNY in the place I taught, they really don't want to have people who have been practitioners, although they recruited practitioners. But you're not going to be able to stay in the system, you have to leave after two years.

Katina Rogers: Oh yeah. And that's something too-

Tanya Domi: I think that short changes people who have been trained academically, but have a considerable lot of real practical experience.

Katina Rogers: Absolutely. And I think, and it sounds like you're speaking about something where there's really a clear term, like a duration of time that people are allowed to be a part of it.

Tanya Domi: That's right. Only two years in a row.

Katina Rogers: Only two years, right. So, that's not great institutionally. Students don't have a chance to really connect longer term with that person.

Tanya Domi: That's right. And I'm mentoring students right now that I taught in the fall. And I'm working with them now to help them get published in the papers that they wrote in my class. So within another year I won't have that institutional tie, because I have to leave for at least a year.

Katina Rogers: And then they look for letters of recommendation and the person's not there. And I think that this happens in informal ways too. When someone is recruited even to a tenure track position and the department of program really wants this person to do creative and innovative things, but nothing in the structure of that department is set up to support that work.

Tanya Domi: And to affirm it.

Katina Rogers: And to affirm it.

Tanya Domi: And calculate its value.

Katina Rogers: And to count it towards tenure and promotion.

Tanya Domi: Got it, yeah.

Katina Rogers: Then people leave, you know? So I think that those questions of institutional commitment go way beyond just recruitment and meeting certain numbers questions.

Tanya Domi: Absolutely. So you talk about diversity failure in the academy. Why don't you address that? I'd like to hear your thoughts.

Katina Rogers: Sure. I mean I've been really influenced by Sarah Ahmed's work where she talks about, the metaphor she draws on throughout the book is that of a brick wall. Where diversity initiatives are set up within an institution and the fact that they have been set up is considered to be a success. And because-

Tanya Domi: And not the outcome.

Katina Rogers: Right. And because that alone is successful, the institution is not incentivized to actually carry out things that would lead towards-

Tanya Domi: And implement.

Katina Rogers: Yeah, towards those outcomes. So it runs into a brick wall. And this is what I see in so many different programs and at so many different levels of the academy, and at many, many different types of institutions. Where there are stated goals within a program or school to have a more diverse faculty, to have a more diverse student body. But there's very little attention given to issues of microaggressions and bias issues of tenure denials. And even things like the increased service and mentoring load that women and especially women of color often have to do, because people look to them for advice and for support in an academy that often feels very alienating and very oppressive.

Katina Rogers: So when none of those other things are taken into consideration, there's such an insurmountable hill that people are facing to try and just be a part-

Tanya Domi: Maneuver.

Katina Rogers: Yeah.

Tanya Domi: Maneuver within that environment.

Katina Rogers: It makes it hard for people to thrive. So then I think institutions might be surprised to see people leaving or surprised that they don't see longer term improvement. But it's not just about who is coming in the doors, it's about how those people are being supported.

Tanya Domi: That makes sense. That makes a lot of sense. Well, we could talk about this quite a bit. I recommend people who are in the academy, if they're an administrator or they're a graduate student, and I might just add this because I've spent a lot of time in overseas. When in Europe or in the Commonwealth countries, you can actually go apply to a PhD program, present a research proposal and really do it in three years. And that's one of the reasons why a lot of people don't want to do a PhD in the United States because you're talking about a big commitment of time, a minimum of five years.

Tanya Domi: So, that's another thing that crosses my mind. Looking at the economy, being out of the economy for so long, being employed and active in the academy, and then the payoff may not be there because of the lack of opportunity, because the numbers are just not that. It's very, very, as you said, very, very competitive.

Katina Rogers: Yeah, absolutely.

Tanya Domi: But you did mention earlier that today, the Graduate Center announced second and new Andrew Mellon Foundation Grant, \$3.5 million, very lucrative, to expand the CUNY Humanities Alliance. A program designed to engage doctoral students here at the Graduate Center, now expanding from LaGuardia to include three other community colleges in CUNY. Tell our listeners about why this is such a big moment for the Graduate Center and for CUNY itself.

Katina Rogers: Sure. I'm so excited about this project. I'll be co-directing the project along with Luke Waltzer, who's the director of the Teaching and Learning Center here at the Grad Center and under the leadership of David Olin, who's the PI on the grant and together with Casey Holman who's the director of programs and administration. We're so appreciative to the Mellon Foundation for this opportunity and it builds on so much work that's been done in the first phase of the Humanities Alliance where the grad center was in partnership with LaGuardia Community College.

Katina Rogers: What the second phase does, and what I'm so excited about in this grant is that it brings about a different structure. We're creating fellowships for a number of doctoral students. And those fellowships are structured differently than I think anything we've previously had at the Graduate Center. Fellows will be embedded at one of the four community colleges that we're partnering with. And because so many doctoral students at the GC have really abundant teaching experience, in this iteration we decided that rather than have those students be teaching in the classroom, we would give them opportunities to see some of the inner workings of administrative practices, the spaces around classrooms, teaching and learning centers. All of the spaces in an institution that support learning outside of that confined and really special set aside time of the classroom.

Katina Rogers: So we'll be building on the work that's been done in the last four years, but taking it in a slightly different direction. And one of the things I'm most excited about is that just like I was saying that the book tries to address many different elements at once around graduate education reform, this program is an opportunity to really create new structures that support several different reform efforts at once. Not only at the graduate level where we'll be implementing career development for doctoral students, but also really advocating for the importance of humanities education both at the doctoral level and at the undergraduate and especially community college level. It includes a lot of peer mentoring and near peer mentoring programs, which has been shown to be one of the most significant interventions to promote student success and retention. And it really gives the Graduate Center an opportunity to be learning from and engaging with community college faculty, staff and students in a structured and systematic way that I think is not always present within even-

Tanya Domi: Or are even conscious of.

Katina Rogers: Yeah. And we have such a great opportunity at CUNY because there are so many institutions that are interconnected. But everybody is so busy all the time and it's really hard to foster those connections. Of course, there are projects that have done so really well. But it's exciting to have this particularly set aside opportunity to build those connections and to foster the ways in which graduate education and community college teaching are deeply linked.

Tanya Domi: That's terrific. So first of all, I want to thank you for coming here today. Congratulations on the new book, your first book, which is very exciting.

Katina Rogers: Thank you.

Tanya Domi: Duke Press is very highly regarded. We thank them for acknowledging you and supporting you. And we'll have you back to talk about the progress on the Mellon Grant.

Katina Rogers: Thank you so much. It's been really a pleasure to be here.

Tanya Domi: Thanks for tuning into the Thought Project and thanks to our guest, Katina Rogers of the Futures Initiative at the Graduate Center CUNY. The Thought Project is brought to you with production, engineering and technical assistance by Kevin Wolf of CUNY TV. I'm Tanya Domi. Tune in next week.