Faculty members often advise students—“just say no”—to opportunities that may be a distraction from completing coursework and dissertations expeditiously. But is that still good advice? Each January, the Obermann Graduate Institute on Engagement and the Academy encourages 15-18 competitively selected graduate students from across the University of Iowa to explore ways to build engaged practice into their teaching, creative work, and research. Students consider a range of engaged practices, develop skills necessary for collaboration, explore the challenges community partners face when they partner with universities, and develop projects of their own. After thirteen years and over 200 participants, our alumni, those who sought careers both inside and outside higher education, are now teaching us when and why it’s wise to “just say yes” to publicly engaged arts, research, and scholarship.

Teresa Mangum is a professor in the departments of Gender, Women’s, and Sexuality Studies and English at the University of Iowa. She directs the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies, which supports individual faculty, but also encourages creative collaborations that connect artists, scholars, and researchers in interdisciplinary areas such as health humanities and information design.