just, ethical, sustainable worlds start with the humanities

2020-21 ANNUAL REPORT
As the new director of the Institute for Humanities Research, I was supposed to arrive at Arizona State University in August 2020, but I could not make it until March 2021. My late arrival was of course due to COVID-19 and the delays it created in visa issuing as well as several cancellations of flights from Australia to the U.S. During this delay, however, I was in weekly contact with the team at the institute, and I was impressed by the success of the online programming they had put in place. Measured by large attendance numbers by both faculty and community as well as positive feedback, its success was due to the staff’s innovative know-how, professionalism and dedication to the humanities.

Some highlights of the past year include the Distinguished Lecture on community, identity and belonging by adrienne maree brown; the selection of the 2021 Book Award winner “That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves: 1260-1500” by Hannah Barker; and Kathryn Yusoff’s “Institute of Inhumanities” seminar. Professional workshops were offered to assist faculty and students with their teaching, research and writing. In particular, the institute hosted workshops on grant writing, journal publishing and designing successful book proposals, as well as weekly sessions dedicated to scholarly writing that continued throughout the year.

The institute’s ongoing seed grants and the Fellows program have not only supported innovative and exciting internal research projects — many of which showcased the vital role the humanities play in safeguarding the well-being of individuals, communities and our democratic institutions — but consequently have generated successful external research proposals. Our initiatives in Black Ecologies, Desert Humanities, Digital Humanities, Environmental Humanities, Health Humanities and Humane Technologies all engaged important speakers and discussions addressing some of the most current and pressing issues our society is facing, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, climate change and species loss and the impact of the coronavirus on the health of our communities.

In the coming year the institute aims to continue to support research projects, enable internal and external grants and fellowships and host events that address the issues we are facing today in order to inspire and generate ideas and advance interdisciplinary collaborations. I look forward to the institute facilitating significant and innovative contributions and solutions to industry, government, community and the real-world problems of our time, and to increasingly engaging and involving humanities students and faculty across ASU campuses.

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Nicole Anderson, Director, Institute for Humanities Research

A very big thanks to all of our constituents — faculty, students, staff, the administration, donors and community members — for your support this past year, and we look forward to working with you in the coming year.
grants + awards

Grants and awards at the institute imagine and create better futures by funding humanities-based projects and publications.

fellows

The Fellows program provides funding for faculty to commit to a year of intensive, collaborative research.

What does it mean to be human and humane in an age that undermines our humanity? “Recov- ering the Human(e) in an Age of Dehu- manization” was the 2020-21 theme for the institute’s fellowship program.

Ana Hedberg Olenina, assistant professor, School of International Letters and Cultures
Project: Eisenstein’s Embodied Spectatorship in the Context of Contemporary Neuro-cognitive Approaches to Film.

Dave Fossum, assistant professor, School of Music, Dance and Theatre

Linh D. Vu, assistant professor, School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies (SHPRS)

James E. Wermers, clinical assistant professor, College of Integrative Sciences and Arts
Project: Teaching Shakespeare: White Supremacy and Dehumanization in U.S. American Education.

200K dollars in grants and awards was distributed in 2020-21

26 projects received funding in 2020-21

67 percent of seed grant projects funded in 2020-21 were interdisciplinary

78 percent of seed grant projects funded in 2020-21 supported marginalized communities

Is Shakespeare an ‘engine of inequity’?

Fellow James Wermers’ project examines the ways that teaching Shakespeare in U.S. American schools is often rooted in a logic of white supremacy and has therefore been used, even if accidentally, as a tool of structural racism and oppression.

“My work on Shakespeare in this project has forced me to rethink how and why we do the work of education in U.S. America,” Wermers said. “This has, in turn, led me to two important realizations: One, educators are generally amazing individuals who care passionately about their students and about the content they teach. Two, educators, myself included, are deeply reliant on narratives and logics that we have not fully interrogated.”

Wermers hopes his book, when complete, will help others look critically at educational possibilities, recognize their roles in perpetuating white supremacy and become actively engaged in creating more equitable learning environments.

“My aims here are small but, I think, important. It has taken a long time to build a nation so profoundly and unfortuntely steeped in inequity and it will take a long time to undo what has been done,” he said. “I just want to be a part of that process.”

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Read the full article:
seed grants

The institute’s seed grant program empowers the ASU community to imagine, innovate and create humanities research that addresses significant social challenges in the past, present and future.

Spring 2020 seed grant recipients

A Highway in the Desert: Christians in the Valley of the Sun
Jason Bruner, associate professor, SHPRS.

The Amazonian Social Relation to Nature: A Digital Variable Pathway Resource
Janis Nuckolls, professor, Brigham Young University; Tod D. Swanson, associate professor, SHPRS.

Constructing the Maghrib: Contested Landscapes
Chouki El Hamel, professor, SHPRS; director, Center for Maghrib Studies; Said Ennahid, associate professor, AI Achkawayn University in Ifrane; Edward Oetting, librarian, ASU Libraries; Matthew Toro, director of maps, imagery and geospatial services, ASU Library Map and Geospatial Hub.

Immigrant Artists, Alternative Modernisms and Collecting as a Public Good in the US, 1910-40
Julie Coddell, professor, School of Art.

Rebirth and Resurgence in Southern Arizona: A Political History of Hia Ced O’odham Sovereignty Since 1850
David Martinez, associate professor, American Indian Studies.

Reframing Theories of Evil: Interventions in Philosophy
Imge Oranli, assistant professor, College of Integrative Sciences and Arts.

The Sound of Social Change: A History of Women’s Music
Julia Himberg, associate professor and director of film and media studies, Department of English.

Fall 2020 seed grant recipients

‘What Happened Here is Not Right’: A Critical Oral History of Post-9/11 Detention and Surveillance
Anand Gopal, assistant research professor, Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict and Center on the Future of War; Daniel Rothenberg, center co-director and professor of practice, School of Politics and Global Studies.

Conspiracy Pedagogies: QAnon, Social Media and the Teaching of Far-Right Extremism
Jennifer Sandlin, professor, School of Social Transformation.

Mapping Black Ecologies
J.T. Roane, assistant professor, School of Social Transformation, program lead, Black Ecologies Initiative; Huewayne Watson, instructor, School of Social Transformation.

Book Award

The institute’s Book Award celebrates outstanding writers whose contributions to the humanities change the conversation by fostering new directions for their discipline. The 2021 award was open exclusively to publications by ASU faculty.

Winner That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260-1500
Author: Hannah Barker, assistant professor, SHPRS
Publisher: University of Pennsylvania Press

The history of the Black Sea as a source of Mediterranean slaves stretches from ancient Greek colonies to human trafficking networks in the present day. At its height during the 14th and early 15th centuries, the Black Sea slave trade was not the sole source of Mediterranean slaves; Genoese, Venetian and Egyptian merchants bought captives taken in conflicts throughout the region, from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, the Balkans and the Aegean Sea. Yet the trade in Black Sea slaves provided merchants with profit and prestige; states with military recruits, tax revenue and diplomatic influence; and households with the service of women, men and children. Reading notarial registers, tax records, law, merchants’ accounts, travelers’ tales and letters, sermons, slave-buying manuals, literary works and treaties, Barker gives a rich picture of the context in which merchants traded and enslaved people met their fate.

Short-listed works

Beyond Hashtags: Black Digital Networks
Author: Breanne Fahs, professor, School of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies
Publisher: Routledge

Colonial Legacies in Chicana/o Literature and Culture: Looking Through the Kaleidoscope
Author: Ana Hedberg Olenina, assistant professor, Department of English
Publisher: NYU Press

Psychomotor Aesthetics: Movement and Affect in Modern Literature and Film
Author: Richard A. Cohen, professor, School of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies
Publisher: Oxford University Press

Women, Sex, and Madness: Notes from the Edge
Author: Vanessa Fonseca-Chávez, assistant dean of diversity, equity and inclusion, College of Integrated Sciences and Arts
Publisher: University of Arizona Press

GRANTS + AWARDS • 5
research advancement

The institute offers support to The College’s Division of Humanities at ASU as well as internal funding recipients in developing and crafting humanities-based projects for external funding applications. Support includes identifying funding sources as well as providing assistance with all aspects of an external application, with no regard to the size, scope, funding level or experience of the researcher(s).

*Research advancement data are measured over an 18-month project period (Jan. 1, 2020-June 30, 2021).

46 ASU faculty participated in sponsored projects in collaboration with the Division of Humanities

38 project proposals were submitted

14 proposals were awarded funding (with 12 still pending at the time of reporting)

4.96M dollars in external funding was awarded

16 collaborative proposals were submitted

12 proposals included direct engagement with local communities

This infographic shows the number of faculty (in collaboration with the Division of Humanities) who have applied for external funding and the number of proposals that were submitted and awarded funding during the 18-month project period (Jan 1, 2020-June 30, 2021).
In this broader time of uncertainty, this series sought to provide conversations and resources to create a community of mutual support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Topics included parenting, community building and distance learning and teaching.

**Designing for Care and Embracing Ungrading with Jesse Stommel**

Stommel argues that grading creates a hierarchical system that stifles community, social justice, self-confidence and compassion. In this lecture, Stommel discussed the relationship between ungrading and designing inclusive pedagogies in order to help educators imagine new learning environments centered on care instead of competition.

**Examining TikTok with T.X. Watson**

The Digital Humanities Initiative and Race, Queerness and TikTok research cluster hosted a presentation by humanities-focused TikTokker T.X. Watson on “Examining TikTok: Investigations and Findings of The Online Creators’ Association.” Watson discussed the built-in prejudices in TikTok’s algorithms, such as the artificial suppression of disabled and LGBTQ creators.

**How do we belong to this place?**

**How do we belong to this planet?**

**How do we belong to this species?**

adrienne maree brown 2021 Distinguished Lecturer
initiatives

These dynamic programs are designed to make an impact in critical areas of contemporary life through interdisciplinary humanities research. They are windows into imagining and building better futures for us all.

Black Ecologies
The Black Ecologies Initiative encompasses various multi-media projects to document, amplify and create alternative cultural resources related to the ecological vulnerability Black communities in the U.S. and around the African Diaspora face.

Desert Humanities
Deserts are demanding and pose large questions to us — questions that invite large ecological solutions. The Desert Humanities initiative intersects our home in the desert with the humanities issues that arise in such a harsh environment.

Digital Humanities
Digital humanities work is interdisciplinary and creative. It weaves new media tools and data and computational sciences with humanities methods, primary materials and theoretical frames to address the challenges of current digital cultures. The Digital Humanities Initiative is a feminist, antiracist and inclusive space.

Environmental Humanities
The environmental humanities explore how art, history, literature, philosophy and other humanities topics serve as entry points to discussions about the relationships between people, place and planet.

Health Humanities
The Health Humanities Initiative transcends boundaries by bringing academics, clinicians, caregivers and students together to address grand social challenges in areas of health and healthcare.

Humane Technologies
Humane Technologies brings together tech leaders, entrepreneurs and humanists to co-create the frameworks, tools and skill sets needed to overcome the potentially dehumanizing effects of new technologies. This initiative is now central to the work of ASU’s Lincoln Center for Applied Ethics, whose mission is to engage the humanities to shape technologies keyed to human flourishing.

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‘Extraction, Disposability and Resistance’
The ‘Extraction, Disposability and Resistance’ series hosted by the Black Ecologies Initiative brought together environmental justice organizers, farmers, performance and visual artists and intellectuals. Together, participants discussed overcoming extraction and disaster, confronting ecological crises and connecting Black communities across time and place.

Bias, racism and colonialism in the history of epidemics
The COVID-19 pandemic is not the first or the only disease outbreak that has threatened human health and disproportionately affected those already disadvantaged by established institutions and networks of care.

The Plagues, Epidemics and Culture: Histories of Crisis and Care series hosted by the Health Humanities Initiative explored historical changes in the cultures of care that arose from past epidemics. Speakers addressed how bias, racism and colonialism are intimately bound up in the histories of epidemics and what can be learned from these histories.
thank you

The past year has brought on challenging new circumstances and called attention to existing social injustices. In response to these challenges, the institute has funded and organized events, initiatives and projects that seek to build better futures through humanities methodologies.

Thank you to our friends, colleagues and stakeholders who have supported these efforts.

2020-21 Advisory Board

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Liz Grumbach, assistant director and Digital Humanities Initiative program lead
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Celina Osuna, coordinator and Desert Humanities assistant director
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mission

The mission of the Institute for Humanities Research is to develop and facilitate significant and innovative humanities research events, contributions and solutions for organizations, communities and the real-world problems of our times in order to be a leader in creating a socially just, ethical and sustainable world.

We fulfill this mission by:

Funding humanities research that has real-world impact.

Developing and supporting public and academic humanities programming.

Encouraging interdisciplinary collaborations.

Engaging students in humanities research.

Becoming a leading humanities institute.