



## 2020-2021 Program Summary

### Overview

The Center for the Humanities' mission is to foster and enhance the humanities at NYU through programs and activities that promote interdisciplinary dialogue, research, and teaching. Despite facing numerous challenges in the 2020-2021 academic year, we were able to continue this mission with great success, hosting and supporting a wide range of initiatives involving faculty and students from across the university. These activities are summarized below, with links to our website offering further details.

### Fellowship Program

Conversation, direct exchange, and robust debate are key elements of research in the humanities. The Center's Fellowship program provides a fertile setting for Fellows to engage in such discussions while advancing a current project. In the 2020-2021 academic year, we supported a total of 15 **Doctoral and Faculty Fellows**: 5 Doctoral Student Fellows, 8 Faculty Fellows, and 2 Doctoral Student Public Humanities Fellows. Weekly seminars (conducted remotely throughout the year) began with a series of small break-out rooms, which enabled Fellows to become acquainted quickly and develop a strong rapport.

Throughout the year, Fellows discussed each other's work-in-progress and also paired-up to lead seminars on topics of shared interest, including methodology, sources, and curriculum/the canon. The Center provided further support for Doctoral Student Fellows in the form of workshops on writing and professional development.

In the coming year, the Center will host 14 Fellows: 7 Doctoral Student Fellows and 7 Faculty Fellows.

### Public Humanities

In addition to joining the Center's cohort of faculty and doctoral fellows, **Doctoral Student Public Humanities Fellows** belong to a cohort from eight other universities located in New York state, with the program overseen by Humanities New York (HNY). Within this cohort, Public Humanities Fellows receive training in the methods and approaches of the public humanities while working in partnership with a community organization on a public project of their own devising. At NYU, Public Humanities Fellows participate in weekly seminars and events alongside Faculty and Doctoral Student Fellows.

The current HNY Public Humanities program concludes with the 2020-2021 cohort; however, HNY is working with its partners to develop a revised program. To utilize residual funds from the current program, HNY is offering Public Humanities grants to graduate students for use over 12 months starting July 2021. Recipients will receive project funding and have the opportunity to participate in workshops and networking events. Grantees will be notified in June 2021.

## Bennett-Polonsky Humanities Labs

The Center is proud to support the Bennett-Polonsky Humanities Labs, which are now in their third year of activity. Humanities Labs (H-Labs) consist of year-long intensive collaborations involving faculty and graduate students from diverse disciplines across the University. An H-Lab's subject is determined by a self-assembled team interested in a specific question they wish to explore together. Topics are broad ranging in nature, touching upon the complex experience of being human in a social world, and demanding multidisciplinary exploration. The first semester of Lab activity is devoted to research; during the second semester the team teaches an undergraduate course while investigations continue. H-Lab teams often continue meeting after the initial funding period of one year. Labs active in the 2020-2021 academic year were:

- H-Labs launched in 2018-2019: **Digital Theory**
- H-Labs launched in 2019-2020: **Multi-Species, War, Radical Ecologies**
- H-Labs launched in 2020-2021: **Knowledge Alphabets, Asylum**

Information on each Bennett-Polonsky Humanities Lab may be found on the Center's website (<https://nyuhumanities.org/program/bennett-polonsky-humanities-lab/>). A bi-annual report on the labs may also be found on our site.

In December 2020, **Cross/Currents** was selected to launch in fall 2021. In early spring 2021, the Center invited members of existing labs to complete a survey, thus providing feedback on the program; many also attend a meeting where they shared their experiences with the newest lab team. Feedback from existing lab team members included the following remarks:

- ... this was truly a **luxury!**
- One of the **very best opportunities** in my years with NYU.
- ...how **transformative** the Lab experience has been...
- ...one of the most **enduring and lovely** experiences...
- ... a very **free and creative space** that isn't matched by any other forum or venue at NYU...

Faculty appreciated the genuine open-endedness of the intellectual exploration, having freedom to experiment and improvise. They had developed genuine collegial bonds, and appreciated taking part in collaborative learning across the hierarchy and disciplines.

Challenges, however, were encountered in negotiating priorities and different work expectations among faculty members, and finding ways for people from different disciplines to speak in a shared language. Some labs had also had difficulty setting up their undergraduate course:

- Setting up the undergraduate class was a lot more challenging administratively than expected (e.g., structure of course and practicum, and cross-listing).
- The undergraduate course was challenging because NYU is not equipped to support co-taught courses, particularly co-taught courses that span different departments /schools.

The Center is currently working to find ways of mitigating these challenges.

## Humanities Curricula in the Professional Schools

In an effort to create a more robust and sustainable environment for the humanities at NYU, the Center is working to identify existing good practice and models that might be taken up elsewhere in the university, and to find ways to encourage and sustain common ground, collaborations, connectivity among faculty, particularly those in the professional schools. Our efforts in the 2020-2021 academic year included:

- Continuing support of the **Steinhardt Humanities and Arts Initiative**, which meets regularly. The initiative has sponsored reports and reflection on humanities research and teaching in the school; reviewed innovative approaches to incorporating the humanities into a number of Steinhardt courses; recently launched freshman seminars in applied humanities; and hosted a virtual conference showcasing humanities teaching and research in Steinhardt.
- The **Medical Humanities Working Group**, funded by the Center, was in its second year of activity. The Group is working to forge interdisciplinary connections and collaborations among faculty members at NYU that focus on scholarship and teaching in the medical humanities, and develop a proposal for a medical humanities minor in the College of Arts and Science (CAS) that will enable undergraduate pre-medical students to have a deeper intellectual engagement with the humanities.
- Meetings attended and hosted include **The Humanities in the Professional Schools at NYU**, a virtual workshop convened in October by University Professor Kate Stimpson during which Deans and others gave a brief report on the humanities in their school or college. The broad spectrum of teaching, research and other activity presented was every bit as impressive as one might expect. It was clear, however, that this work could be better supported. The Center is therefore working to establish a **Humanities at NYU Working Group**, and has convened an exploratory meeting.
- Arising from the Humanities at NYU Working Group meeting, the Center is undertaking the following activities: launch a **dedicated newsletter** to share information specifically on humanities teaching and research in the professional schools; and **host events** modeled after the panel discussion involving Steinhardt faculty, held fall 2019. The newsletter will be a vehicle to establish a **network of humanities faculty** across the professional schools. We intend eventually to **survey faculty** to determine what support they need and concerns they have.

## Grant Programs

### **Digital Humanities**

The Center continues to work closely with Benjamin Schmidt, Director of Digital Humanities at NYU, particularly in support of the Digital Humanities Seed Grant program. The program annually awards \$100k for the initial development of new research projects that will analyze digital sources, apply algorithmic methods to humanities data, or create digital publications, exhibits, or websites. Projects awarded funding in the inaugural year began activity in the 2020-2021 year.

**Seed Grants 2020-2021:**

- **Abu Dhabi Calling! Exploring a Growing Capital City through Phone Directories (1970-2000)**, PI: David Wrisley, Associate Professor, Digital Humanities, NYU Abu Dhabi
- **Brown Brothers Collection: A Use-case Pilot for NYU-NYPL Research Collaboration, on DH Exploration of Nineteenth-century Financial Records**, PI: Thomas Augst, Associate Professor, Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Science
- **Developing a ‘Publications Page’ for NYU’s Prison Education Program (PEP) Website**, PI: Thomas Jacobs, Clinical Assistant Professor, NYU Writing Center & PEP Faculty
- **Holding Hiring Algorithms Accountable and Creating New Tools for Humanistic Research**, PI: Hilke Schellmann, Assistant Professor, NYU Journalism; Mona Sloane, Adjunct Professor, Tandon School of Engineering
- **Insuring Slavery: Underwriting Risk in the 18th Century**, PI: Michael Ralph, Associate Professor, Social and Cultural Analysis, Faculty of Arts and Science
- **Raising the Volume: Amplifying the Soul of Reason**, PI: Janet Bunde, University Archivist, Special Collections (project website: <https://nyu-dss.github.io/soul-of-reason/>)
- **The South African Jewish Cookbook Project**, PI: Gavin Beinart-Smollan, History / Hebrew and Judaic Studies, Graduate School of Arts and Science

Awardees for projects beginning summer 2021 were recently selected in two areas: Seed Grants and Graduate Student Summer Fellowships. Graduate Fellows receive a \$5,000 stipend and support to work on a project of their own.

**Seed Grants (2021-2022):**

- **Thinking With Moss: Troubling Botanical Archives through Co-Designing Critical Interfaces**, PI: Ahmed Ansari, Industry Assistant Professor, Department of Technology, Culture and Society, Tandon
- **The Material Cuba Platform**, PI: Maria Cabrera Arus, Adjunct Professor, Gallatin
- **The Zine Union Catalog**, PI: Lauren S. Kehoe, Accessibility & Accommodations Librarian, Assistant Curator, Libraries
- **Covid Collections**, PI: Jacob Remes, Clinical Assistant Professor, Gallatin
- **Creating a Digital Museum of the History of Dentistry at the College of Dentistry**, PI: Andrew Spielman, Professor, College of Dentistry

**Fellowships (Summer 2021):**

- **Jonathan Armoza**, English; project: Framing a Model: Literary Model Quality and the Autobiography of Mark Twain
- **Lauren Busser**, Integrated Digital Media, Tandon; project: Knitting Patterns That Bridge S.T.E.A.M. Education in Young Girls
- **Daniel Joslyn**, History; project: Organizing Resource Library Metadata and Exhibit
- **Jubilee Marshall**, Archives and Public History; project: Contextualizing Philadelphia's Black Graveyards through Digital Media
- **Alijan Ozkiral**, English; project: Reading Comments Reading Instagram Comics



- **Ada Petiwala**, Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies; project: Consuming India, Becoming Global: Contemporary Popular Culture and Branding between Mumbai, Dubai, and Cairo
- **Jackson Smith**, Social and Cultural Analysis; project: Dirty Money and Disorderly Homes: Civil Forfeiture, Vice Police, and Illicit Capital in Philadelphia
- **Georgios Tsolakis**, ISAW; project: Graphing the Ancestors: Using an RDF Database for the Interpretation of Familial Tradition in the Ancient World

### **Working Research Groups**

The Center selects two Working Groups each year to receive funding for activity lasting one or two years. The program seeks to build community and foster interdisciplinary exchange on topics with a humanistic focus. The Working Groups selected to launch in the 2020-2021 academic year were **Cold War Media**, and **Drama, Theater and Performance Studies**. The continuing Working Groups were: **Latinx Studies** and **Medical Humanities**. Descriptions of these working groups, including membership, are available on the Center's website (<https://nyuhumanities.org/program/working-groups/>). Two new Working Groups have been selected to begin September 2021: **Crip Authorship** and **el taller**.

### **Book Publication Subvention Grants**

The Center awards grants to support the publication of faculty books with a humanistic focus. In 2020-2021 we awarded 8 grants to faculty from the following departments and schools: Art History (FAS); Expository Writing (CAS); Hebrew and Judaic Studies (FAS); History (FAS); Media Culture and Communication x2 (Steinhardt); Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (FAS); Experimental Humanities (FAS).

### **Toward an Open Monograph Ecosystem (TOME)**

The TOME program enables the NYU Office of the Provost, the Center for the Humanities, and the Division of Libraries to support the publication of open access digital monographs in the humanities and humanistic social sciences. For the 2020-2021 academic year, the Center awarded three TOME grants:

- **Robin d'Avignon [History]**, *A Ritual Geology: Gold and Subterranean Knowledge in Savannah West Africa* (Duke University Press)
- **Alexandra Vazques [Performance Studies]**, *The Florida Room* (Duke University Press)
- **Jini Kim Watson [English and Comparative Literature]**, *Cold War Reckonings: Authoritarianism and the Genres of Decolonization* (Fordham University Press)

**National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer Stipends** provide an opportunity for faculty in the humanities to receive a stipend to carry out research over a two-month period. The Center nominates two proposals from senior faculty each year; junior faculty may apply directly. We are delighted to note that one of NYU's nominees, **Toral Gajjarwala, Associate Professor in the Department of English**, was successful in her application for a stipend and will receive funding this year. She will work on her project "Ajnabi: An Existential Reckoning in South Asia."

## Events

Collaborating with faculty, departments and centers from across the university the Center hosted, co-hosted and/or co-sponsored a total of 26 public events in the 2020-2021 academic year. All events are available on the Center's YouTube channel.

### Fall 2020

- Revolution Goes East (book event for **Tatiana Linkhoveva, Department of History**)
- Diversity, Inc., and This Land is Our Land (book event for **Pamela Newkirk, Journalism; and Suketu Mehta, Journalism**)
- Writing Matters: Research into Writing (panel discussion)
- Critical Latinx Indigenities Forum (Latinx Working Group panel discussion)
- A Good Time to be Born (book event for **Perri Klass, Journalism and Pediatrics**)
- Writing Matters: Your Second Book (panel discussion)
- Latinx Art (Latinx Working Group book event for **Arlene Davila, Anthropology**)
- Writing Matters: Collaborative Writing (panel discussion)
- Circling Around Disability and Dance (discussion, co-host with Center for Ballet and the Arts)
- Melancholy in Politics, Literature and Philosophy (panel discussion)

### Spring 2021

- Funeral Diva: Pamela Sneed in Conversation with Karen Finley (book event)
- Fictions of America (book event for **Uli Baer, Center for the Humanities; and Smaran Dayal, Comparative Literature**)
- Writing Matters: Memoir (panel discussion)
- Nowhere Else: South Carolina and the Legacy of Scientific Racism (panel discussion)
- Skirball Presents: Ai-jen Poo (discussion; co-sponsor with the APA Institute)
- Activism and the Humanities (panel discussion)
- Irregular Readings: A Conversation with Anja Kampmann and Anne Posten (panel discussion; co-sponsor with Deutsches Haus and Stanford University's Division of Literatures, Cultures and Languages)
- Writing Matters: Verse and Prose (panel discussion)
- Experiments in Skin: Race and Beauty in the Shadow of Vietnam (book event for **Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu, Social and Cultural Analysis**; co-sponsor with the APA Institute)
- Forced Jewish Migrations (book event for **Marion Kaplan, Near Eastern Studies; and Robert Chazan, Hebrew and Judaic Studies**)
- Writing Matters: Narrative Investigations (panel discussion)
- Minor China: Methods, Materialisms and the Aesthetic (book event for **Hentyle Yapp, Art and Public Policy**; co-sponsor with the APA Institute, Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, Department of Performance Studies, and Department of Comparative Literature)
- Writing Maternity (book event for **Dara Regaignon, English**)
- Possessed: A Cultural History of Hoarding (book event for **Rebecca Falkoff, Italian Studies**)
- Jump Start Your Summer Writing: Getting Ready for Publication (panel discussion)
- Humanizing Childhood (book event for **Anna Kendrick, Literature, Shanghai**)