

CENTER FOR HUMANITIES

College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences

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A Message from the Director, Sylvester Johnson



The Center for Humanities is proud to be one year old! Since our official launch in 2018, the Center has met with tremendous support across the university through collaborations for programming that showcases humanistic inquiry, intellectual advancement through research talks, and public impact through external engagement. From sponsorship of arts events to show-casing research on human development by Virginia Tech faculty, the humanities centers has taken an active role in promoting human-centered scholarship in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences and beyond.

This year, the Center for Humanities celebrates a thematic focus on “Technology, Democracy, and Humanity.” It is timely given the tremendous importance that technology holds for concerns regarding democratic outcomes that certainly include security for elections but go far beyond. Of equal importance are issues of ethics, privacy, cyber security, transparency, and algorithmic fairness. Government officials have recently turned significant attention to the matter of public accountability for technology companies. Civil liberties groups have focused particularly on the meaning of human rights in an age of big data. Think tanks are grappling with the policy implications of innovation. All of these developments underscore the fact that academic institutions, which prepare generations of students to become society’s leaders and stakeholders, must develop new ways to account for the comprehensive nature of technology. The humanities center is engaged with the human interests at stake in the present and future of technology. Contemplating the exercise of democracy in this context is a fitting way to explore humanistic scholarship at this juncture of human history.

I hope you will join us in the programming we are supporting to promote humanistic scholarship at Virginia Tech in the 2019-2020 academic year. Together, we have a great year ahead.

Anthony Kwame Harrison named Edward S. Diggs Professor in Humanities



Anthony Kwame Harrison, associate professor of sociology in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences at Virginia Tech, was recently named Edward S. Diggs Professor in Humanities by the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors. The Edward S. Diggs Professorship in Humanities recognizes and promotes excellence in research and teaching in the humanities. Recipients hold the position for a five-year term. A member of the Virginia Tech community since 2003, Harrison is a cultural anthropologist who conducts research on the impact of race in popular music, recreation, and higher education.

Harrison is regarded as an innovative teacher who was named a Diggs Teaching Scholar in 2011. He has received 11 other awards and recognitions for teaching excellence, including the university’s Alumni Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2015. Earlier this year, Harrison was reappointed the Gloria D. Smith Professor of Black Studies by Virginia Tech President Tim Sands and Executive Vice President and Provost Cyril Clarke. He had held that appointment since 2014. Harrison has written two books, co-edited a book on race in the marketplace, and published multiple peer-reviewed journal articles. In addition, he has received 15 awards and grants supporting his efforts to promote diversity and inclusion.

Upcoming Events

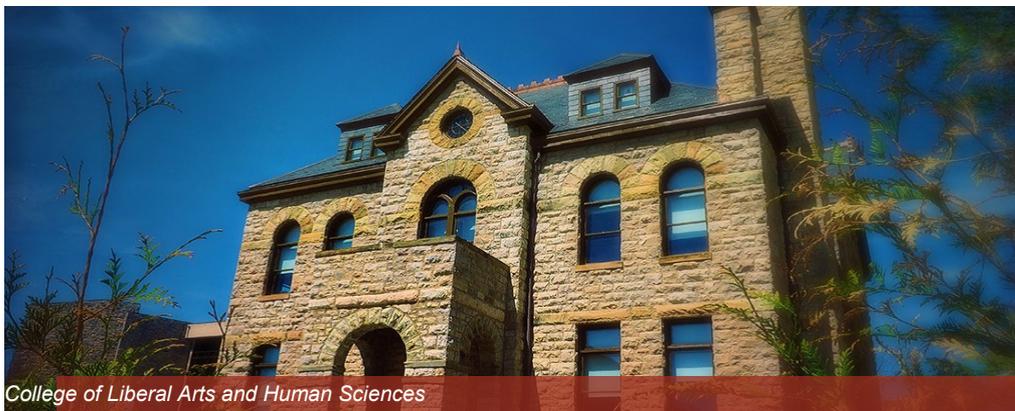
- ◇ Friday, September 27th from 12 to 1:30pm at the Steger Hall Conference Center (1015 Life Science Circle). ***The Humorous Side of the Climate Story: A workshop on the bizarre, unexpected, and delightfully weird side of climate change*** Lunch will be provided. To reserve your space for this event, please RSVP to humanities@vt.edu by September 23rd.
- ◇ Thursday, October 3rd from 4 to 5pm at El Centro (room 309 Squires Student Center, 290 College Avenue). In honor of Hispanic Heritage Month, poet and acclaimed translator of Latin American poetry, Mark Weiss, will be presenting ***A Talk on Translation***. A reading of poetry by Mr. Weiss will follow from 6:30 to 7:30pm in room 210 in the new Classroom Building (1455 Perry Street).

The Center for Humanities reopens in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences Building

On April 30th, the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, which houses the Center for Humanities, celebrated its official new home in the former YMCA building at 200 Stanger Street on the Virginia Tech campus. Constructed between 1900-1902, the building recently underwent extensive renovation, uncovering features hidden by previous renovations, including a large brick interior archway.

The building was the first on campus to use Hokie stone, the signature limestone defining campus buildings. Prior to housing the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, it served as the Performing Arts Building for 36 years. The recent renovation retained several historical features, including the building's wooden floors, wall wainscoting, wood sash windows, original stair bannisters and spindles, roof trusses and tie rods, suspended track floor supports, corner fireplaces, and slate roof. Added during the renovation is a 2,316 square-foot addition that allows full accessibility and compliance with the American Disabilities Act (ADA).

Interior upgrades include an elevator, a new HVAC system, energy-efficient windows, water-efficient plumbing, modern furnishings, and enhanced audiovisual offerings. The building was renovated in conjunction with Virginia Energy Conservation and Environmental Standards and is on track to receive LEED Silver Certification. Building materials were secured through sustainable procurement practices.



College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences

Tech for Humanity Initiative

The “Tech for Humanity” initiative is a university-wide effort that emphasizes Virginia Tech’s role as a top comprehensive university leading discovery, learning, and engagement to address the societal impact of technological innovation through human-centered approaches. The initiative foregrounds the role of ethics, policy, equity, human identity, societal values, inclusion and diversity, sustainability, and attention toward the future of work to ensure a viable outlook for human thriving amidst significant innovations in technology that will shape our world in the decades to come.

This initiative is producing a compelling case across the university for liberal arts and human sciences to be engaged as a leading source of scholarship at a time when national and global audiences are perceiving technology as a comprehensive societal and not merely technical formation. In 2018, the Center for Humanities became the heart of this initiative, championing the role “big humanities” in an age of big data.

A Look Back on 2018

The Center for Humanities’ official launch was on August 31st, 2018. The Center has sponsored a robust series of programming in 2018. These ranged from serial events such as the bi-weekly research colloquium featuring the work of scholars pursuing human-centered scholarship to singular events such as a summit on humanities and AI to guest lectures. The Center also promoted the ASPECT graduate student conference during the Spring 2018 semester.

Two book talks were held: on April 25th with Reginald Ellis (*Between Washington and DuBois*) and on April 27th with Robert Emmett (*Environmental Humanities*). On May 29, 2018, the Center for Humanities held a NEH Grant planning session, focusing on inter-institutional collaboration to develop a digital humanities summer research institute. In early June, we promoted the Human Futures and Intelligent Machines Summit (Humanities and AI).

The Center for Humanities hosted a series of Faculty Research Talks, among these were Joseph Bedford on September 28th, Karen Kovaka on October 26th, LaDale Winling on November 13th, Deborah Tatar on November 30th, and Koeun Choi on December 6th.

From October 31 - November 4, The Center for Humanities (along with CLAHS and CAUS) co-sponsored *Poe’s Shadows: An Immersive Theatrical Installation*. Finally, on November 27, we promoted the Beloved Community Initiative Public Humanities Summit (partly funded by the Virginia Humanities foundation). This public humanities summit focused on responses to inequality and advancement of human rights in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Research Associates Join the Center for Humanities

The Center for Humanities welcomes our new Research Associates as we begin our new academic year.

Nneka Logan

Nneka Logan is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication. Her research and teaching focus on public relations, organizational communication, corporate social responsibility, and race and diversity. She presents her research at national and international conferences and has won several awards for her academic and industry work.



Shaily Patel

Shaily Patel is an Associate Professor in the Department of Religion and Culture. Her research examines Early Christianity, Graeco-Roman Religions, Magic in Antiquity, and Critical Theory and Ideological Criticism. Professor Patel explores the various, often contradictory ways discourses of magic were used to advance myriad theological ends in early Christian literature.



Andrea Baldwin

Andrea Baldwin is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology. Her areas of expertise are transnational feminist and black feminist epistemology, intersectionality and reflexivity in qualitative research. Among the topics she examines are gender representations in popular culture and the use of popular culture (particularly digital technologies) for feminist activism, fat feminist activism, theorizing pedagogy as a form of feminist activism, and Caribbean cultural studies.



James Dubinsky

James Dubinsky is an Associate Professor in the Department of English. He studies Scholarship of Teaching (Pedagogy), Scholarship of Engagement (Service-Learning), Professional and Technical Communication and Veterans in Society. He is the founding director of the department's Professional Writing Program and was instrumental in helping to shape the first liberal arts PhD at Virginia Tech (in Rhetoric and Writing). He is the founding director of the Center for Student Engagement and Community Partnerships (now VT-Engage) and the lead faculty member in the Veterans in Society initiative. Dubinsky is also a steering committee member of a county-wide Dialogue on Race.



Vinodh Venkatesh

A faculty member in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures since 2011, Vinodh Venkatesh is the author of *New Maricón Cinema: Outing Latin American Film* and *The Body as Capital: Masculinities in Contemporary Latin American Fiction*. He is an Associate Professor in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages. His areas of expertise are Latin American Literature and Cinema, Spanish Literature and Cinema, Masculinity Studies, Urban Studies and Queer Theory.



Amy Azano

Amy Azano is an Associate Professor in the School of Education. Her research focuses on the literacy needs of rural youth, critical literacy, and place-based pedagogy. She is the co-principal investigator on a five-year, \$1.9 million grant, Promoting PLACE in Rural Schools, which serves to promote and support gifted education in high-poverty, rural school districts. She teaches graduate courses in the English education licensure program, content area literacy courses to secondary licensure students across the disciplines, and doctoral students in adolescent literacy. Her areas of expertise are Rural Education, Adolescent Literacy, Place-based Pedagogy and Special Populations in Rural Communities.



Karen Kovaka

Karen Kovaka is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy. Her recent work explores biological debates about individuality and developmental plasticity and what they tell us about evolutionary theory, underdetermination, and scientific controversies. She also studies the factors that influence people's acceptance of climate change, the dynamics of peer disagreement, and the features of ethical intervention in natural systems. Her areas of expertise are Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Biology, Environmental Philosophy and Public Understanding of Science.



Fabian Prieto-Nanez

Fabian Prieto-Nanez is a Postdoctoral Researcher in the Department of Science, Technology and Society. He specializes in History, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and Media Studies. His research focuses on satellite television and informal infrastructures in Colombia and its relation with public space and copyright.



Koeun Choi

Koeun Choi is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Science. Her areas of expertise are Cognitive Development, Technology and Media, Attention, Learning, and Memory, Eye-tracking and Computational Modeling and Data Science. Her research program aims at understanding how children learn in a complex and dynamic digital media environment.



Cara Daggett

Cara Daggett researches feminist and environmental politics and is particularly interested in the politics of energy. Her book, *The Birth of Energy*, traces the entangled politics of work and energy following the discovery of energy in the 19th century. Dr. Daggett is also beginning research on her next project, which interrogates the relationship between energy and gender. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science. Her areas of expertise are Environment and Energy Politics, International Relations, Critical Security, Feminism and Gender Politics and Political Theory.



Lucien Holness

Lucien Holness is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History. He specializes in African American history and the eighteenth and nineteenth century United States.

