

SHASS Programming Initiative Report

May 6, 2024

Charge

To identify priorities for a humanities initiative in SHASS (See Appendix [A](#) and [B](#) for email communication with Heads and slides):

- A rationale for why we need additional programming opportunities
- A survey of our peer institutions and other relevant schools
- A list of programs that are possible (for example, Visiting Fellows, interdisciplinary speaker series, etc)
- A list of programs of greatest interest to SHASS (based upon outreach to the community), including costs.
- A consideration of a “Center”
- An overview of preexistent Humanities Centers proposals.
- Recommendations to the Dean on next steps

Process

- An assessment of Humanities Centers at our peer institutions. (See Appendix [C](#))
Unsurprisingly, all of our peer institutions have Humanities Centers that play a vital role in their intellectual communities.
- Feedback from faculty. Each member of the working group engaged with their faculty and shared the discussions with the working group. This outreach to the faculty was inconsistent across units. We would benefit from greater outreach to the SHASS community, but we were constrained by time.
- Collect and review preexistent documents concerning the Humanities and Interdisciplinary programs
 - SHASS Dean Search Committee report (Appendix [D](#)), which highlights three key needs: a Humanities Center, additional postdoctoral student support, and increased frequency of research leaves.
 - Gender Equity Committee Faculty Interviews (Appendix [E](#)), which highlights the degree to which SHASS faculty feel excluded and marginalized within the Institute.
 - Interdisciplinary Program Needs (Appendix [F](#)), which highlights the range of academic programming that already exists within SHASS, but which are not properly supported.
- Collect and review preexistent Humanities Center proposals (See Appendix [G](#)). Our charge was to collect proposals, but not assess them or make any recommendations as to whether or not to adopt any of the proposals.
- Meetings with individual stakeholders, including:

- Professor Will Broadhead, Kelley-Douglas Fund
- Alexia Hudson-Ward, Associate Director of Research, Learning, and Strategic Partnerships - MIT Libraries, to discuss potential use of the Nexus space for Humanities Initiative events.
- Chanh Phan, SHASS Dean's Office.
- Professor Emily Richmond Pollock, SHASS Undergraduate Education Chair
- Professor Agustin Rayo, SHASS Dean
- Professor Marjorie Resnick, Burchard's Scholars Program
- Jonathan Schwarz and Kate Doria, Institutional Research
- Maura Ridge and Janna Greene, Office of Foundation Relations (only met with Keeril Makan)
- As a thought experiment, the committee created an outline of a Humanities Center, assuming an annual budget of \$1 million, nicknamed the "Gold plan" (Appendix [H](#))
- Presentation of a draft of this report to Extended School Council on May 2, 2024. At this meeting, the SHASS Heads presented a document they created, separately but complementary to the SHASS Programming Initiative's committee, "Envisioning the MIT humanities initiative — Ideas from the SHASS Heads". It is included in the report as Appendix [I](#).

Summary

MIT's mission to bring knowledge to bear on the world's greatest challenges critically depends on the humanities. While science and technology will play a role in addressing these challenges, they are ultimately human issues that we must consider, and we cannot make progress with science and technology alone. Working to improve the lives of people and the life of the planet requires understanding the human condition. There are vital roles that the humanities must play in educating our students with a humanistic perspective, in providing a humanistic component to our research endeavors, and for exploring and expressing what it means for us all to be human. This work must ultimately include humanities that intersect with science and technology in more applied ways, as well as basic humanities scholarship, much like our STEM research benefits from a combination of applied and basic research.

While MIT has remarkable scholarship in the humanities, we lose both great scholars and great opportunities due to a lack of support for individual scholars, collaborative efforts, and community building. We can only rely so much on individual goodwill, and serendipity to foster work in this area. Many of our peers have devoted significant resources and effort to create strong humanities initiatives that benefit scholars in the humanities directly, as well as their connected colleagues across campus, their students, and ultimately the world who reaps the benefits of this work.

We are at a moment when the importance of this work is highlighted both by the nature of the great crises that we face in the world, and by the overreliance on science and technology to address them. These needs are part of the public consciousness, as evidenced by a continual stream of popular press emphasizing the importance of the humanities in an era of STEM, and

are clearly a part of the future vision of MIT, as seen in the recent Humanities Visiting Committee report which stated that MIT ought to “go big or go home” in the humanities.

Now is the time to set our sights on a grand vision for what a significant humanities initiative might look like - a place where people from disparate fields can come together to work on common problems, a place that lifts the research and the researchers in the humanities, a place that builds connections and communities and conveys the critical importance of this scholarship to the Institute and the world. At the same time we must build footholds to get us to that place, as it is a journey that will take time.

We see the long-term vision leading to an initiative that advances new scholarship by providing grant support to basic and applied work in the humanities, that creates community through events and shared spaces, that fosters collaboration by connecting people through common interests, that expands our vision by supporting fellowships for outside scholars, and builds careers through similar fellowships for inside scholars. Attaining this goal will involve bootstrapping from a more modest start. But that can provide a model to build upon, personnel to support the needed work and a singular focus for the humanities community.

Ultimately, the long-term vision of the humanities is interwoven with the vision for the intellectual mission of MIT. We suggest a larger, multi-School, Institute-wide initiative that braids the humanities with the STEM fields. Walker Memorial can be transformed into the Intellectual Commons of the Institute. Faculty and students can be in community together, with the resources necessary to unite our community, including the Humanities initiative we envision, along with presentation space, dining space, and the student groups already residing in the building.

Recommendations 1-4

We were asked to consider how best to allocate \$300,000 per year towards Humanities Initiatives. The recommendations below focus primarily on the short-term use of those funds, with some pointers and next steps towards the longer-term goal of a Humanities Center envisioned above.

1) Create an Internal Faculty Fellows program

Create an internal fellows program. 6 professors, selected competitively on the basis of a project proposal, are relieved of teaching responsibilities for a semester (but are still expected to do service and be in residence), for a total of 12 professors per year. The fellows meet regularly for lunch to share their work with each other. The fellow's home unit can receive teaching replacement funds for one class, upon request. Other expectations for the fellows to be defined, guided by the rationale of sustained conversation, sparking collaboration, and fostering community. Possibilities include involvement with the Burchard's program or giving a public lecture at the Nexus.

If combined with a normally occurring sabbatical, these fellowships would also enable faculty who are eligible for a year-long leave at half pay to take a year-long leave at full pay while staying in residence at the Institute. Such a scheme would be particularly valuable for faculty with limited mobility (e.g. those with children in school, elderly care responsibilities, or partners who cannot easily relocate to pursue an external sabbatical fellowship).

Many of our peer institutions have opportunities for internal fellowships along the lines described above. Examples include the Stanford Humanities Center, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard, Cornell's Society for the Humanities, the Heyman Center for the Humanities at Columbia, and the Jackman Humanities Institute at the University of Toronto. The internal fellowships directly addresses the need for greater frequency of research leaves outlined in the SHASS Dean's Search Committee Report (Appendix [D](#)).

We recommend forming an implementation committee, charged with creating the guidelines for the Internal Fellows program. Guidelines should be in place so that faculty have sufficient time to apply for the fellowships, to start Fall 2025.

2) Hire additional staff in the Dean's office to support interdisciplinary programs

To support SHASS' current interdisciplinary programs, and to start the administrative support for future initiatives, create a new staff position in the SHASS Dean's office, so that current interdisciplinary programs are more supported, such as Digital Humanities and French +, as well as current curricular interdisciplinary programs such as Ancient and Medieval Studies, etc. The new position would work with Chanh Phan, with the division of duties TBD. Between the two of them, they should have the capacity to support additional interdisciplinary programming. Use Professor Emily Pollock's report on Interdisciplinary Program Needs (Appendix [E](#)) as a guide.

We recommend tasking the Dean's office staff and Undergraduate Education Chair with creating a job description and running a search, in communication with the various pre-existent interdisciplinary programs in SHASS. The new staff member should be in place by Fall 2024.

3) Reassess funding categories for Dean's grants

Currently the new Dean's grants pilot provides great flexibility towards what projects can receive funding. However, by being so flexible, it may not always be clear the range of activity that could be supported. Are "themes" the best way to incentivize collaborative activity, or should there be more specific programs? Many of the grants programs similar to those at our peer's Humanities Centers could be funded by pre-existent funds in the Dean's office. For example, speaker series, interdisciplinary seminars, conferences and symposia, etc. Use the assessment of peer humanities centers (Appendix [C](#)) as a guide.

The implementation committee from Recommendation 1 can also be tasked with creating this holistic set of grants programs for the Humanities in the Dean's office, modeled upon programs found in peer institution's Humanities centers.

4) Create opportunities for the community to gather

One example would be a works-in-progress lunch. A recurring lunch where faculty and teaching staff can share their current work. Perhaps two or three short presentations per lunch. Tasks your two Associate Deans with creating programming that enhances community.

Recommendations 5-7

These recommendations are longer term. A committee should be formed and tasked with the following:

5) Create a proposal for an Institute-wide Humanities Center

A Center as outlined in the Summary above would include an external fellows program, and significant public programming (speaker series, conferences, etc.) Like other Humanities Centers it would have dedicated space, a Faculty Director, a Board, and staff. It would be an "umbrella" entity that would house and provide administrative support for current and future faculty initiatives. Use the proposals from Appendix [G](#) as a guide, in particular the [Ideas for a Humanities Center](#) compiled by Professor Susan Silbey.

6) Assess space needs for SHASS

Can any existing SHASS space be devoted towards a Humanities Center? Work with Provost's office on identifying additional space for a Humanities Center, both in the short-term, but also to support a larger vision as outlined above.

7) Identify Philanthropic and Foundation support

In addition to individual donor philanthropy, work with MIT Office of Foundation Relations to identify potential foundation support for an MIT Humanities Center.

Membership

Dwaipayan Banerjee, Associate Professor
Science, Technology, and Society

Catherine Clark, Associate Professor
History

Kai von Fintel, Professor
Linguistics

Stephanie Frampton, Associate Professor
Literature

Stefan Helmreich, Professor
Anthropology

Justin Khoo, Associate Professor
Philosophy

Eric Klopfer, Professor
*Comparative Media Studies/Writing, Head
Literature, Interim Head*

Keeril Makan (Chair), Professor
*Music and Theater Arts, Head
SHASS, Associate Dean*

Bernardo Zacka, Associate Professor
Political Science

Appendix

A. Email to Heads 8/14/2023

Dear Heads,

Dean Agustin Rayo has charged me with exploring the idea of creating a “Humanities Center”, or a related humanities initiative, within the context of SHASS. The Dean has committed modest recurring funds to this project, so something will come of this effort. Aside from the satisfaction from ultimately increasing the support for the faculty, I look forward to the process of the School coming together. So often our time is spent solving problems—this is an opportunity to shape the future of the School.

At multiple points over the past few years, the faculty has called for the creation of a “Humanities Center.” These entities are common at almost all of our peer institutions. I want to share with you some of the parameters that I’ll be working within and the process I’ll be initiating. Most importantly, I’m committed to this being a transparent, inclusive process that engages with any unit in SHASS that wishes to be part of the endeavor.

It's important to acknowledge that each word in the term "Humanities Center" is problematic. First, there is already a "Humanities Department" in SHASS (CMS/W, Global Languages, Literature and WGS), but there are also humanities all across the School. Maybe for simplicity we refer to the Humanities, but for the purposes of this conversation, we are talking about all of SHASS, not just the sections of the Humanities. Second, the use of "Center" at MIT comes with specific expectations: it's normally thought of as an entity with designated space and a substantive endowment. So, I don't think we should get too focused on a center designation. A more apt term for our exploration is probably "SHASS programming initiatives."

What we will be talking about is structure, not content. What programs are of interest to the faculty in SHASS? What programs would improve our research or teaching? What programs or entities will make us more competitive?

The September 14 School Council meeting will be devoted to discussion of this topic. I have thoughts about how to proceed, but I don't want to do anything until the Heads have had an opportunity to weigh in on the best way to engage with SHASS. I recommend we set up a working group with representation from all units that wish to participate, but I won't take that step until we've all discussed the best path forward.

The goal is drafting a public report with recommendations, hopefully by February. Feel free to share this email with your colleagues. We will make a SHASS-wide announcement about this endeavor once the Fall semester is underway. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to reach out with your thoughts, ideas, and feedback prior to our meeting on September 14.

Best,
Keeril

B. SHASS Programming Initiative Presentation 9/14/2023

[SHASS Programming Initiatives](#)

C. Humanities Centers at peer institutions researched

1. Brown University - Cogut Institute for the Humanities

Synopsis: The Cogut Institute for the Humanities at Brown University focuses on collaborative research and curriculum development in the humanities. It features an annual fellowship program that includes faculty, postdoctoral, graduate, and undergraduate fellows. The Institute offers a Doctoral Certificate in Collaborative Humanities and transdisciplinary seminars for undergraduates. Pembroke Hall, renovated in 2008, provides classrooms, offices, and seminar spaces. The staff comprises approximately five members, including an Associate Director and a Communications Manager. The governance structure includes a Faculty Director and an eight-member faculty board. The Institute supports internal and external postdoctoral fellows, hosts various events, and facilitates interdisciplinary courses and humanities programming.

2. Columbia University - Heyman Center for the Humanities

Synopsis: The Heyman Center for the Humanities at Columbia University aims to blend innovative scholarship with critical, reflective, and interpretive practices to address realworld challenges. It is located in the East Campus Residential Facility and staffed by nine members, including two faculty co-directors. The Governing Board consists of 18 faculty members from Columbia University and Barnard College. The Center hosts eight external fellows and supports internal fellows, including four junior and four senior Columbia faculty, as well as four ABD graduate students. The Center organizes workshops, conferences, lectures, and public humanities collaborations. It plays a pivotal role in coordinating humanities programming and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly through its involvement in Columbia's humanities core curriculum and various public event series.

3. Cornell University - Society for the Humanities

Synopsis: The Society for the Humanities at Cornell University, established in 1966, is dedicated to advancing research in humanities disciplines. It is housed in the A.D. White House, a historic building that provides essential space for its activities. The Society is staffed by four members, including a Director and a Program Coordinator. It is guided by an advisory council of 12 faculty members from various university departments. The Society offers up to six one-year residential Society Fellowships for external faculty, focusing on a rotating annual theme. Additionally, it hosts Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowships and internal faculty fellowships. The Society's commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration is evident through its weekly seminars and its support for various programs, including an undergraduate Humanities Scholars Program and several annual lectures.

4. Princeton University - Humanities Council

Synopsis: The Humanities Council at Princeton University focuses on nurturing the humanities both locally and globally, aiming to engage diverse perspectives and enrich public dialogue with humanistic approaches. The Council is headquartered in the historic Joseph Henry House and employs approximately 4-5 administrative staff. Its governance structure includes an executive committee with a director and various chairs and directors from different departments. The Council supports both short and long-term external fellows, including faculty, writers, and postdoctoral fellows through the Society of Fellows. Its role in building community and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration is highlighted by its organization of lectures, seminars, interdisciplinary grants, and collaborative humanities grants. The Council also coordinates extensive humanities programming at Princeton.

5. Harvard University - Mahindra Humanities Center

Synopsis: The Mahindra Humanities Center at Harvard University is dedicated to promoting interdisciplinary exchange in humanities studies. The Center is located within the Barker Center, with additional space in the adjacent Warren House. It is staffed by eight members, including a Director and an Executive Director. The Center's governance includes a Director and an 11-member Executive Committee comprised of senior Harvard faculty. While it does not offer

external faculty fellowships, it hosts six postdoctoral fellows annually, focusing on a changing theme. Internal support includes dissertation completion fellowships for Harvard graduate students. The Center's seminars, chaired by Harvard and external faculty, are central to its mission, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and community engagement. Its humanities programming is coordinated through faculty-led seminars and lecture series, such as the Tanner and Norton Lectures, among others.

6. University of Toronto - Jackman Humanities Institute

Synopsis: The Jackman Humanities Institute (JHI) at the University of Toronto advances humanities scholarship and interdisciplinary understanding of human experience. It occupies an entire floor of a high-rise, providing offices and conference rooms. The Institute is led by a Faculty Director and supported by a six-member staff, including an Associate Director and a Communications Officer. It hosts a Circle of Fellows working on annual themes, comprising faculty, undergraduates, and graduate students. Other programs include the Scholars-in-Residence and Program for the Arts. JHI emphasizes community building through events, exhibitions, and working groups, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. Its advisory board, involving deans and department heads, sets annual themes and coordinates humanities programming.

7. Johns Hopkins University - Alexander Grass Humanities Institute

Synopsis: The Alexander Grass Humanities Institute (AGHI) at Johns Hopkins University aims to advance humanities scholarship and facilitate cultural studies in Baltimore and beyond. AGHI supports the goals of Johns Hopkins' humanities-related departments and centers. It focuses on areas like global humanities, media and knowledge formation, aesthetics, and public humanities. The Institute's staff includes a Senior Administrative Coordinator and a Postdoctoral Fellow. It is overseen by a faculty board of seven members, including a director and associate director. AGHI does not have external fellows but supports internal faculty and recent graduate fellows. It houses programs like Digital Humanities and the Humanities Blast Courses, contributing to community building and interdisciplinary collaboration.

8. Dartmouth College - Leslie Center for the Humanities

Synopsis: The Leslie Center for the Humanities at Dartmouth College is dedicated to advancing the study of meaning, purpose, and creativity in the human experience. It is currently located in a light-filled space on the second floor of the Haldeman Center and is set to move to Dartmouth Hall upon its renovation. The center is managed by two staff members and overseen by a faculty director supported by a seven-member faculty advisory committee. Key initiatives include the administration of two Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowships and the ACLS Emerging Voices Postdoctoral Fellowship. The Leslie Center also hosts an annual Humanities Institute, featuring a senior fellow and visiting lecturers. It supports faculty and student engagement through faculty working groups, seminars, and Student Research Fellowships. The center's commitment to building community and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration is reflected in its diverse programming and support for student-led research.

9. University of Pennsylvania - Wolf Humanities Center

Synopsis: Established in 2017 from the Penn Humanities Forum, the Wolf Humanities Center at the University of Pennsylvania, funded by Noelle and Dick Wolf, is committed to highlighting the importance of the humanities in understanding both the past and contemporary societal issues. It is located in Williams Hall, the heart of the School of Arts & Sciences. The center is managed by three staff members and steered by a faculty director, a topic director, and an Undergraduate Humanities Forum Director, supported by a seven-member Faculty Advisory Board. The Center's unique approach involves an annual thematic focus, with this year's being "Keywords." It offers fellowships to undergraduates, graduate students, faculty at Penn and regional universities, and postdoctoral scholars, all participating in interdisciplinary seminars, conferences, and cultural events. The Wolf Humanities Center stands out for its broad, inclusive definition of the humanities and its emphasis on diverse perspectives and approaches.

D. From SHASS Dean's search report:

Research

SHASS has tremendously productive, world-leading researchers. Nonetheless, there are tangible ways in which the research environment could be improved for faculty in SHASS departments.

First, and most foremost, the Institute policy on research leave has a negative effect on SHASS faculty research productivity. The Institute policy is one semester of paid leave, one semester of unpaid leave, every seven years. In practice, for most faculty at MIT, including almost all faculty in engineering and the natural sciences, that means two semesters of leave every seven years, one funded by MIT, the other funded by a research grant. But many SHASS faculty work in disciplines with few sources of external funding, and have no way to secure financing for a semester of leave. In practice they take just the one semester of research leave every seven years. That puts them well behind their peers at other world class institutions, which typically offer (to faculty in those disciplines) two semesters of paid leave every six or seven years.

This is an example of an Institute policy that makes sense when applied to departments in the SoE and the SoS, but does not make sense when applied to departments in SHASS. Curtailing the research productivity of faculty in SHASS is bad for morale, bad for productivity, and bad for MIT. The new Dean needs to work to correct the policy.

Second, many units need regular post-docs. This is needed because a steady flow of young researchers passing through a department has the effect of stimulating the research of faculty in the department (and the need is particularly acute in SHASS units without graduate students). The new Dean needs to work with SHASS units to identify and fund post-docs.

Third, MIT could greatly benefit from a physical space akin to a Humanities Center to foster crossdisciplinary interaction and stimulate research. Every Ivy and Ivy Plus university except for MIT already has a Humanities Center. Creating one here would be deeply transformative. By supporting topic-driven research seminars and working groups, it could foster interdisciplinary

collaboration across all of SHASS's disciplines. By sponsoring internal sabbaticals, it could incubate groundbreaking research within SHASS. By hosting visiting fellows and postdocs, it could infuse the Institute with new ideas and expand our pipeline for recruitment. By supporting project-based initiatives, it could create experiential learning opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Endeavors along these lines could be undertaken quickly on an ad hoc basis, but their eventual incorporation under the auspices of a unitary center—with its own budget, staff, physical space, and strategic vision—would provide a common focal point for intellectual and creative endeavors across SHASS's disparate units, while sending a message to the world about the importance MIT attaches to humanistic research.

Professors Stephanie Frampton, Malick Ghachem, Jonathan Gruber, Caspar Hare (Chair), Sabine Iatridou, Graham Jones, Chakanetsa Mavhunga, Seth Mnookin, Janet Sonenberg, and Kathleen Thelen

E. From SHASS Gender Equity Committee Faculty Interview Project (released March 21, 2022):

SHASS as “other” at MIT

Faculty were asked to share their impressions on the topic of SHASS relative to the broader Institute. In response, interviewees discussed their perceptions of relative lack of support for SHASS and views that SHASS is not treated equally, is not accorded influence, or is marginalized as a school within the Institute.

“I think I realized that going into it. But I also realized as a [SHASS faculty member], coming into MIT, you're already in this kind of minority status. You're not in engineering and sciences. So, in this sense, you're already kind of a bit marginalized.”

Community

Some expressed the opinion that MIT lacks a sense of campus-wide community. As a result, faculty do not meet or interact regularly with colleagues in different schools. Some posited that the lack of exchange across campus is not just about relationships, but also about understanding.

“I would appreciate a greater Institute-wide community. I think a lot of assumptions are made in both directions that are probably wrong. I know the ones that are made about us are wrong. I think there's a lot of ignorance about what we do in SHASS in the other schools. Not malignant, I think they just don't know.”

Part of the sense of marginalization that some interviewees described relates to how MIT promotes SHASS to the world. Many interviewees said they perceive a “lack of awareness” on the part of the MIT's central leadership of what the faculty of SHASS “do academically” and

what SHASS faculty “offer to the standing of the university.” Some faculty interviewees suggested that measures should be taken to highlight that SHASS programs enhance MIT’s reputation for excellence across disciplines beyond the fields for which MIT is typically known.

“I always feel like MIT should make more of the fact that it is not just a technological institute. That it's a university that embraces all the areas of learning and that we should be more a part of their message to the wider world about who they are. I imagine this sometimes happens to others, that you encounter somebody from outside who says “Oh, I didn't know they did that at MIT” Becoming a visible part of the identity of the Institute is still like a glass ceiling for us. So it's partly about messaging, about the way that MIT communicates who it is and what its values are, including us. That would help enormously.”

Invisibility and value of SHASS

SHASS faculty shared experiences and interactions with colleagues from other schools within the Institute that they felt point to a lack of understanding about the types of work done in SHASS, the heterogeneity of work within the School, as well as the broad—but fundamental—disciplinary distinctions.

“I have a lot of conversations when I do meet colleagues from other disciplines, where they’re just astonished at the style of work that I do. There's something like that at the Institute level where there are people who have a gap between understanding it abstractly, but not even doing really the basic work of knowing what that is. Not even doing more than gesture and say, oh yes, we love the humanities. And they’ll use humanities and SHASS interchangeably without realizing there's a difference between social sciences, humanities, arts, it’s not all humanities.”

Many SHASS faculty shared feeling that their scholarship is “undervalued” and that colleagues, as well as students, view SHASS as complementing MIT’s research and education in fields that are seen as more core to the Institute. Students, particularly, are described as often viewing SHASS courses as requirements to check off along the educational journey, despite the value that many later ascribe to their SHASS coursework.

“I think humanities and social sciences have a lesser status. I just think the scientists and engineers, they don't see what we do as on the same plane or valid in the same way. Or they see it as in service to the real work, which is the science and engineering work. And I think there's a lip service paid to SHASS, but that mentality, it's clear to the students. But students say our classes, I think they often later say that our classes were the most meaningful to them. Or help them become the people that they are. But when they’re here, it’s more like, “just let me jump this hoop. I need a HASS A, a HASS S.””

“I think that I would want them to think more about the type of education that doesn’t have immediate direct application. I think that the upper-level administration has been very excited

about [SHASS] recently with the college of computing. And the kind of way in which [SHASS] might be able to help think about ethics. Or help think about applications of artificial intelligence. And it feels like they're willing to talk about us and these moments when it applies to the sciences, or to technology. But there is something really important that we do in helping students become more critical thinkers, learn about the world, that they need that's not directly applicable to the applications of other parts of [MIT].”

Diminishment of SHASS

Some faculty provided examples of encounters with faculty from other schools within the Institute where the contributions of the SHASS curriculum was diminished. Faculty shared that students receive conflicting messages or disparaging remarks from advisors who diminish the value of SHASS.

“I went to some meetings that were very unpleasant, where, especially the engineers, were taking out on me their irritation that they didn't have control of the whole curriculum. It seems to me in a general way, that not everyone at MIT, appreciates the fact that our world-class humanities and social science is one of the things that makes us a real competitor for undergraduates, with places like Princeton and Stanford and so forth.”

“As a student, when you're someone who's inclined towards the humanities and social sciences, you are kind of seen as a second-rate student. And then, as faculty, it means that your students have competing interests. Often, it's that they actually care about the subject matter, but they're getting messages from their faculty advisors that this doesn't matter as much.”

Interviewees described feeling undervalued and unrecognized, and “adjunct to the more important” schools at MIT. Some described an impression that colleagues in the Schools of Engineering and Science view SHASS faculty’s contribution as to provide “warm, fuzzy classes.”

“I think the complaint you hear in SHASS is the assumption by science and engineering faculty that the faculty in SHASS teach all these warm, fuzzy classes. And they are our resident nurturers. So when bad stuff happens, you know, like Black Lives Matter riots, those people in SHASS will talk to undergraduates and, you know, calm them down and hold their hands. So that’s one sort of element of lack of intellectual respect, you know.”

“I would say it does feel like SHASS is second fiddle to – or fifth fiddle to all the other schools. It does feel like SHASS is expected to be – you know, people talk about mind, hand, heart. And SHASS is the heart. So, it does feel like we are expected to do the heart work in this institution. And that is things like taking the brunt of students relying on us to talk about problems going on in their lives because we know their names and they know ours.”

Lack of Institute support

Many interviewees expressed their belief that because research in SHASS often requires less direct financial support than some other areas, SHASS is not seen as a priority for funding, “we feel like the poor cousin.”

“I think in terms of resources, this is what I hear often from other faculty is that the kind of money that we use, or that we need as social sciences and humanities folks is peanuts compared to what science and engineering folks get.”

“I just found it very dispiriting. It's like this whole college [Schwarzman College of Computing] is created out of nowhere. None of us knew it was going to happen. There's lots of money being poured into it, and we're told that there's kind of money and opportunity for us. But there's not money and opportunity for other things that don't necessarily intersect with the College of Computing.”

Some interviewees discussed a relative lack of administrative support and described office space that is either inadequate or pales in comparison to that of colleagues outside of SHASS.

“Office space is dear in our school. We don't have much of it. And when people retire, they typically lose their space. Whereas, in engineering, they can keep their space until they keel over. That's a snapshot of the discrepancy in space allocation.”

“I love my office. But it is minuscule; my office is basically a closet, of which the books go from the floor to the ceiling. There is no room, I had to get rid of some file cabinets in order to make a place. But there are people in engineering and in science whose offices are the size of the President's. I mean I've gone over to visit people. They have couches, and they have tables. But you would think that the institute could take money and give it to the poor, a little redistribution.”

“Most people in [SHASS] do not have any assistance whatsoever. They don't have staff or any kind or a pool of people they can lean on. They have to do absolutely everything themselves. It's a function of what the Institute thinks is important. You know, it's pretty clear to me, that there's—there's a money constraint. And those other three schools raise a lot of their own money. It's very difficult to do that in humanities and most of the social sciences. If we could raise the money, we would and we could do everything we want. But we can't, and so we don't.”

F. Interdisciplinary Program Needs

[Interdisciplinary Program Needs](#)

G. Pre-existent Humanities Center Proposals created by MIT faculty

Center for Human Values

[MIT Center for Human Values](#)

Climate and Society Center

In the era that geologists have termed the Anthropocene, in which human activity is the dominant factor shaping the global climate, it is imperative to put people at the center of efforts to understand and redress climate change. As a broad coalition of humanists, artists, and social scientists, we propose creating a major new **Climate and Society Center (CSC)** where collaboration with natural scientists and engineers will generate not just new research on climate change, but new *modalities* of research and intervention. Based within SHASS but interfacing with all of MIT, the CSC would comprise at least six key components: (1) the **Climate and Society Forum**, a focal point for sustained interdisciplinary exchange, organized around pivotal Thematic Clusters; (2) interdisciplinary **Working Groups** and **Labs** that will dynamically grow and evolve through active collaboration; (3) a **Postdoctoral Bridge Fellows Program** to jumpstart impact-oriented interventions; (4) a **Communications Studio** to study knowledge flows and empower MIT's creative community to pioneer new forms of expressive public engagement; (5) a **Community Fellows Program** to bring diverse constituencies of leaders, activists, and concerned citizens to campus for mutually beneficial knowledge transfer and political empowerment; and (6) a **Climate Education Atelier** to incorporate humanistic perspectives at all levels of climate education.

Prepared by the Anthropology faculty for the Climate Grand Challenges.

Global Humanities

[PROPOSAL Humanities Center](#)

The HACK Center

Humanities Action Community Knowledge

There are many humanities centers in the world. We think that if MIT were to have one it should be unique and reflect the distinctiveness of our institution.

What is singular about MIT? It is a problem-solving university that was founded on the principle of partnerships with government and industry. What is missing, however, in that equation is civil society. We would like to leverage the unique skills of SHASS to address that gap.

At HACK, civil society partners such as community organizers, environmental activists, journalists, teachers, artists, farmers, factory workers, labor organizers, artisans, and organic intellectuals would have residential fellowships in which they would work on projects alongside SHASS faculty and students. In the course of the residency, the fellows' concerns could turn into project-based learning opportunities in the classroom. Their networks and communities could be the platform for wider public engagement. Their insights could be the basis for new directions in scholarship and research.

We are already far too over-extended with scholarly talks and colloquia. What we need are transformative opportunities to apply our skills as social scientists, humanists, and artists to address the very real problems of the world.

Prepared by Professor Kate Brown (STS) and Professor Graham Jones (Anthropology)

Ideas for a Humanities Center

[Ideas for human center](#)

A New Center

[A New Center for MIT](#)

H. “Gold Plan”

[Gold plan](#)

I. Envisioning the MIT humanities initiative — Ideas from the SHASS Heads

We propose a Humanities Center, whose purpose would be to showcase and reinforce how humanistic expertise contributes not only to understanding the world and making meaning out of it, but also to solving its great intellectual, creative, and practical challenges.

An MIT humanities center should establish connections on three scales.

1. Among SHASS units themselves. The new center would enhance internal community, sociability, and belonging.
2. Across humanities and STEM, driven in large part by humanities faculty priorities, including those of SA&P humanists.
3. Between MIT humanities and the outside world to make the humanities more legible both inside and outside MIT.

In establishing these kinds of connections, an MIT humanities center can:

1. showcase the *manus* capabilities of humanistic expertise, i.e., how the humanities makes sense of human events and the world's great problems
2. help to overcome the "town/gown" divide by uniting experts at MIT with leaders from civil society, including community workers, artists, and independent scholars, who seek to integrate MIT humanities and STEM expertise into their problem-solving work
3. help to move the humanities from the margins to an integral physical and intellectual node in MIT's ecosystem. The Center would expand MIT's own sense of itself while enhancing SHASS's ability to impact STEM scholarship – that is, the humanities is a leader and partner, not always a follower or in service to STEM initiatives.
4. reduce the intellectual and material chasms between the "sections" and "departments" within SHASS, including academic programs

We can assess progress toward these ends using the following measures:

1. our faculty's sense of the internal cohesion and connection of SHASS, with or without an impact on the world outside SHASS; the inclusion of our humanistic colleagues in SA&P should be part of this measure
2. our ability to promote public communication about the ideas that drive interdisciplinary humanistic research at MIT, and its significance in the world – Science Writing, Knight fellowship program, and CAST offer three different models for how to do this
3. efforts by our humanists to translate their research into projects that have a policy or other applied impact on the world (akin to the CIS-based Policy Lab)
4. the number and depth of partnerships between SHASS and STEM faculty

We do not need to wait on a more elaborate/ambitious vision than the one outlined above. This is our vision. We believe it is an inclusive, exciting one that we can and should act on now.

Sandy Alexandre (Literature)

Kate Brown (STS)

Deborah Fitzgerald (STS)

Danny Fox (Linguistics)

Malick Ghachem (History)

Jonathan Gruber (Economics)

Eric Klopfer (CMS/W)

Heather Anne Paxson (Anthropology)

Jay Scheib (Music and Theater Arts)

Kieran Setiya (Philosophy)

David Singer (Political Science)