

Annual Report
Center for Humanistic Inquiry Advisory Board
May 20, 2020

The Center for Humanistic Inquiry (CHI) provides resources for Amherst faculty, staff, and students to engage a broad vision of the role humanistic thinking can play in scholarly and public life. The CHI Advisory Board is comprised of nine members representing a cross-section of humanities interests at the college: Andrew Dole (Religion), Sheila Jaswal (Chemistry and Biochemistry), Susan Kimball (Libraries), Michael Kunichika (Russian), Jen Manion (History), Emily Potter-Ndiaye (Mead Art Museum), Austin Sarat (Law, Jurisprudence, and Social Thought), Kiara Vigil (American Studies), and Jane Wald (Emily Dickinson Museum).

The Advisory Board chose “Home” as the theme for the CHI this year. The theme offers a framework and rallying point for a portion of the center’s work. Under the rubric of the theme, we welcomed a new cohort of six fellows into a two-year residency to conduct research and to work in collaboration with one another. Their research interests span a wide range of topics, including mobile homes, incarceration, Indigenous dispossession, Korean diaspora migration, French culinary traditions, and architectural studies. Their work this year has included eleven conference presentations, three book reviews, three published journal articles, and two completed book manuscripts (one of which has been accepted for publication this summer).

With over 50 faculty and staff participants, engagement has more than doubled since the previous year in the CHI Research Seminars, yearlong programs of study around specific research questions. The nine topics this year were Black Girlhood, Exile, Freedom of Speech, Religion and the Environment, Premodern Studies, Feminist Thought, The Stranger and the City, Emily Dickinson’s Conceptions of Home, and American Studies.

The CHI helped to sponsor several external grant opportunities for humanities research. Over two dozen faculty and staff members applied for these programs either as principal investigators or as participants. Notably, one faculty member won a public humanities fellowship supported by the New England Humanities Council (NEHC), the college’s regional consortium. Several submitted applications to the NEHC-sponsored collaborative grant program. Two applications involving Amherst faculty and staff were funded. Several were participants in an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-sponsored grant administered in partnership with the college’s Center for Community Engagement for public scholarship pedagogy.

Student research opportunities included the Undergraduate Fellows program in cooperation with the Folger Shakespeare Library. Nine Undergraduate Fellows, the largest cohort yet, took part in an intensive seminar titled, “Before Farm to Table: Early Modern Foodways and Cultures,” through which they engaged in a 360-degree investigation of an 18th-century manuscript recipe book from the Folger Shakespeare Library collection. Students examined how the book was physically built, written, and compiled. They investigated its users, contributors, and sources. They identified seasonal ingredients, preservations methods, and ingredients made available through trade routes and supported by the hidden labor of slavery. The fellowship gave the opportunity for students to train in archival research skills; to

contribute, through their own transcriptions, to a growing body of research encoded texts; and to consider a host of research questions across a range of disciplines.

The CHI partnered with *The Common*, the Emily Dickinson Museum, and the Office of Communications to produce Amherst's fifth literary festival. This year's festival featured Jesmyn Ward, winner of a 2017 National Book Award (NBA) for fiction; 2019 NBA Fiction Winner Susan Choi; 2019 NBA finalist Laila Lalami; memoirist Ben Rhodes, former speechwriter and deputy national security advisor to President Barack Obama; and U. S. Military Veteran and poet Karen Skolfield.

Finally, in partnership with departments and programs across the college, the CHI hosted or co-hosted roughly 80 events for the community, including book talks, lectures, panels, workshops, and performances.

With sincere thanks for your support and engagement,

Darryl Harper, Director
Center for Humanistic Inquiry