

A topographic map with brown contour lines and blue water features is the background. An orange pencil is positioned vertically on the left side. A dark blue diagonal band runs from the bottom left towards the center. The title 'Story & Place' is written in a dark blue script font across the middle of the map.

Story & Place

Humanities Research Institute

FALL 2025 NEWSLETTER





At HRI, we respectfully acknowledge that we are on the lands of the Peoria, Kaskaskia, Piankashaw, Wea, Miami, Mascoutin, Odawa, Sauk, Mesquaki, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Chickasaw Nations. These Nations were forcefully removed from their traditional territories and these lands continue to carry the stories of these Nations and their struggles for survival and identity. As part of a land-grant institution, we have a particular obligation to recognize the peoples of these lands and the histories of dispossession upon which the university rests.

In keeping with the spirit of land acknowledgment statements, we also recognize that these histories are both shared with and distinct from those of African American, Latinx, Asian American, and Pacific Islander communities, among others.

As humanists, we recognize that the past is not past, and that no field or arena of inquiry is exempt from the responsibility of addressing the legacies of settler colonialism, enslavement, and their contemporary manifestations well beyond acknowledgments such as this.

Thus, this statement is a demonstration of our ongoing commitment to supporting the work of Indigenous scholars and communities. It is also a reminder of how accounting for Indigenous erasure and survivance makes visible the urgency of imagining change as collaboratively and collectively as possible. Let us, then, together envision what Muskogee (Creek) poet Joy Harjo calls “a map to the next world.”

Table of Contents

Director's Q & A	2
HRI Fellows, 2025–26	4
Fellowship Call	5
Summer Faculty Fellows, 2025.	6
Research Clusters, 2025–26	7
Humanities Research Lab Courses, 2025–26	7
Humanities Without Walls	8
Event Preview	9
2025–26 Calendar of Events.	10
Application Deadlines	11
The Year in Review	12
In Retrospect: Programs & Initiatives.	14
The Odyssey Project	14
Education Justice Project	15
Interseminars 2024–25	16
HWW Postdoctoral Research Associate.	17
Scholarship Out Loud	17
Experiential Learning at HRI	18
HRI Staff & Advisory Committees	19
From the Fellows.	20
Giving to HRI	21



Director's Q&A

with Antoinette Burton

The HRI research theme this year is “Story & Place.” As laid out in the description, the theme invokes a kind of inquiry that is grounded in “the particularity of place.” How do you see story and place intertwining in this year’s events and activities?



Antoinette Burton addressing students at the Dinner and DH workshop, led by Mary Ton.

Of all the themes we’ve launched in the last ten years, this one has produced the most enthusiasm and engagement so far. I think people appreciate the groundedness that place can provide in at a time when AI dominates. And story is something that we continue to reach for in a tumultuous world. Our programming this year

revolves around the ways the two are entangled. In that sense, the “&” in “Story & Place” plays an important role. It’s as much a bridge, a hyphen, as an additive: a sign that what’s happening here is entanglement—along with the kind of re-composition which occurs when things come together and do more than mingle.

We’ve chosen our speakers and shaped our events around that proposition. Whether it’s **Catherine Hall** on the history of the origins of racial capitalism in Jamaica or **Justin Garcia** on the work of the Kinsey Institute in Indiana, we’ll be hearing speakers make the links between geography and narrative visible in order to show how mutually dependent, and mutually transformative, they are. We’re also thrilled to be collaborating with **Terri Weissman** on the School of Art & Design exhibit **Another Place: Story-making and the Entangled Prairie**, which features work by our Fine & Applied Arts colleagues and opens in January 2026.

The institute itself is a place. What stories emerged in the past year? What stories do you hope to see?

HRI is indeed a place, and we came to appreciate how much the physical spaces it makes available are appreciated by humanities colleagues as we’ve navigated staffing challenges

and elevator repair in Levis. Meanwhile, the past year’s “Think Again...” theme generated a truly remarkable cohort of HRI fellows, who convened to share research in the uniquely interdisciplinary setting of the bi-monthly seminar. The invitation to “think again” was an opportunity to reevaluate stakes, methods, objects of inquiry, and, in the end, the power of collective conversation to change how we think about what our work is doing, why, and for whom. The camaraderie in the group was something to behold and has left a lasting impression on all of us. For a set of reflections on what the impact on them was, have a look at our *Inquiry* research blog (go.illinois.edu/inquiryblog).

As many threads in the social fabric are being shredded, we continue to think, again and again at HRI, about how porous the boundary-line between campus and community can be, and to work with partners at Illinois and in Champaign-Urbana to create opportunities for students and faculty to experience the power—and the urgency—of moving across it with conviction and care.



Odyssey Project artwork by students Matthew and Janelle. Janelle's painting depicts all of her classmates and instructors.

Undergraduates who participated in our Humanities in Action program, which we make available in collaboration with the good folks at WeCU, contributed to the work of local schools and community organizations, bringing their labor to neighborhood providers who have big ambitions but can benefit from additional support to expand their services or even simply to maintain momentum on projects that are essential to those they serve.

History professor **Yuridia Ramírez** brought that orientation to her Humanities Research Lab classroom this year, where undergraduates worked with staff and students at International Prep Academy. We are grateful for our partnership with the Office of Undergraduate Research and for funding from HRI donors who share our dedication to community-driven humanities teaching and learning at Illinois.

And, as ever, Odyssey students led the way, inspiring us with their willingness to “think again” about higher education as well as about the University of Illinois as a space that can welcome them through instruction in the humanities. This year was also a year of remarkable cohort bonding in Odyssey, thanks in part to the energy which Odyssey intern **Jalixa Sanchez**, a Spanish, Latina/Latino studies and gender & women’s studies major, brought to all aspects of the Odyssey classroom. You can see the archive of some of the work

which Jalixa helped the students curate at go.illinois.edu/odysseyarchive. As one commented, what he learned from this project and from Odyssey this year is that “there’s joy in being a messy work in progress while in community.”

I can honestly think of no better way to move from “Think Again” to “Story & Place” than to celebrate the remarkable journey of Odyssey students. Except perhaps to recall the public reading by **Ross Gay** last April, where he enraptured a ballroom full of poetry lovers when we needed it most. He reminded us of what the humanities at work and play look like, a lesson for everyone about all that is at stake for what we do at arguably the most perilous time in our history.

Join us in the beloved, messy, inspiring community of HRI and friends this year. We need each other more than ever.



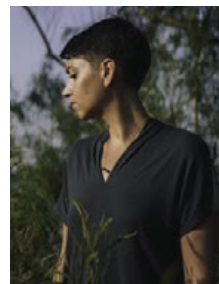
Ross Gay public reading.

HRI Faculty Fellows



Serouj Aprahamian
Dance

"Showtime!":
Dancing in the
New York City
UnderGround"



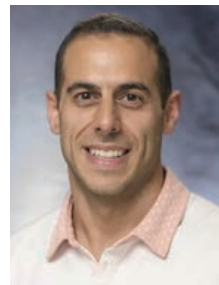
Simi Kang
Asian American
Studies

"Against Refugee
Resilience: On
Restoration &
Environmental Sacrifice
at the Ocean's Edge"



Ryan Griffis
Art and Design

"When the Landscape
Recognizable Today Was
Shaped"



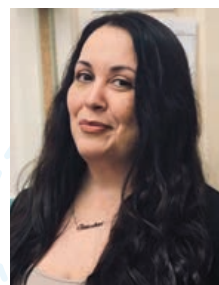
Daniel Nabil Maroun
French and Italian

"The Politics of Kinship:
Writing Queerness,
Filiation, and Race in
Contemporary France"



Rachelle Grossman
Comparative and
World Literature

"Afterwords: Yiddish
in the Postwar
World"



Mirelsie Velázquez
Latina/Latino
Studies and
Education Policy,
Organization &
Leadership

"Genealogies of
Empowerment and
the Makings of Home:
Latina/o Activism
at the University of
Illinois, 1970–1992"



Amy Hassinger
Creative Writing,
English

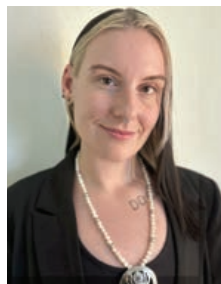
"DIMMENING, a
linked collection of
stories"

HRI Graduate Student Fellows



Kirsten Barker
Music

"Max of the Antarctic: Stories of 'Wilderness' in Music and Word"



Emerson Parker Pehl
English

"Colonial Unknowing in the Collective Unconscious: The Reverberations of Colonial Expropriation from the Archives of Psychoanalytic Thought"



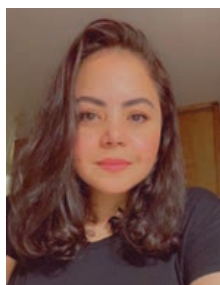
Debayudh Chatterjee
English

"Militant Memories at the End of History: Reimagining Resistance in Progressive Indian Literature and Cinema (1989–2014)"



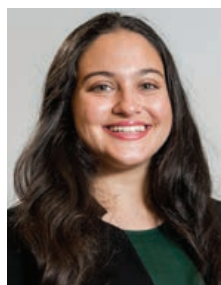
Ilaria Strocchia
Spanish and Portuguese

"Flowing Histories: Examining the Role of Water in Shaping Urban Spaces and Identities Across Cultures"



Asmaa Elsayed
Education Policy, Organization & Leadership

"Between Shadows and Stories: Navigating the Physical and Digital to Redefine 'Place' and Reclaim Belonging for Ex-Muslim Women"



Priyanka Zylstra
History

"'It was called Liberation': South Asian Women's Activism in Multi-Racial Britain, 1979–1994"



Stanislav Khudzik
History

"1905 After 1917: The Bolshevik Archive, Oral Storytelling, and Historical Media in Early Soviet Leningrad, 1921–1926"

2026–27 Campus Fellowship Call: Up Against Erasure

The etymology of the English word "erasure" leaves no doubt about the violence at the heart of its proposition.

With a genealogy in the Latin "eradere," erasure begins in a root that means "to scrape off," and leads us toward "scrubbing out," "striking out," "removal," "deletion." From there it moves headlong into "effacement," "expungement," "excision," "elimination."

At the end of this logic chain is the ineluctable possibility of erasure, otherwise understood as its fateful remainder: "obliteration."

Not all erasures work the same way. Some follow closely upon an event or claim. Some are instantaneous. Others take years, decades, centuries, or millennia to bring about, let alone to recognize. Erasures operate at multiple scales. They have specific linguistic and vernacular meanings. They are seen and unseen. They are often buried or denied or recast in ways that weaponize or even sentimentalize their meanings.

The ambition of the research and practice at the evolving heart of the humanities in the middle of this decade is arguably to show and to tell why the subjects we take up are both in danger of erasure and yet impossible to obliterate. Our charge is to work toward practices that document erasure in order, ultimately, to push up against it, wherever it is happening.

HRI is seeking proposals that are rooted in research in the humanities, arts, and related fields—and which build out from the substance of that work to persuade us of the stakes of identifying processes of erasure, of being up against it, and of working in opposition to it.

The submission portal will open on September 1, 2025 and applications are due December 5, 2025. Read the full call and application requirements at go.illinois.edu/campusfellows.

Summer Faculty Fellows 2025

Course Development



Pilar Martínez-Quiroga

Spanish and Portuguese

SPAN 320: Cultural Studies II - Facing Diversity: 50 Years of Democracy, Spain 1975-2025



Wei (Windy) Zhao

Architecture

ARCH 572: Place Making in Rural China

Research



Mukhtar H. Ali

Religion

"The Compendium of Mysteries: A Study of Sayyid Haydar Āmulī's Jāmi' al-Asrār"



Deepasri Baul

History

"An Aversion to Progress: the cultural habitus of north Indian caste-histories"



Leonard Cornell McKinnis II

African American Studies and Religion

"Everyday Muslim: An Ethnographic Study on the Nation of Islam"



Nikolai A. Alvarado

Geography & GIS

"Counter-Cartographāhies of Migration and Urban Informality: Nicaraguan Rap as Living Archive of Radical Place-Making in Costa Rica"



Eduardo Ledesma

Spanish and Portuguese

"The Uses and Effects of Artificial Intelligence in Latin American Cinema"



James Pilgrim

Art History, Art and Design

"Art and Environmentalism in Renaissance Venice"



Victoria Austen

Classics

"Landscaped *Commemorabilia*: The Mausoleum of Augustus as a Gardened Monument"



Kim McKean

Theatre

"Creating New Plays: Conversations on New Play Development with Directors, Playwrights, Dramaturgs and other Theatre Makers"



Emily Tarconish

Special Education

"The lived experiences of disabled students in postsecondary education classrooms"

Director's Fellows 2025–26



**Toby
Beauchamp**

Gender and
Women's
Studies



Natalia Lira

Latina/Latino
Studies



**Christopher
Freeburg**

English



**Anke
Pinkert**

Germanic
Languages and
Literatures

Research Clusters 2025–26

Environmental Humanities

Co-Directors:

John Levi Barnard

English/Comparative and World Literature

Pollyanna Rhee

Landscape Architecture

Interdisciplinary Sport Studies

Co-Directors:

Caitlin Clarke

Health and Kinesiology

Jesse Couture

Health and Kinesiology

Jacob Fredericks

Recreation, Sport, and Tourism

Humanities Research Lab Courses Spring 2026

ARCH 490: A Sense of Where You Are

Kathryn Holliday

Architecture

SPAN 232: Spanish in the Community

Ann Abbott

Spanish and Portuguese

Humanities Without Walls

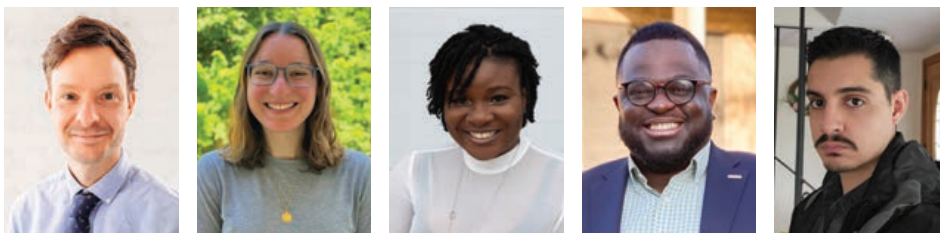
A Call to Put “R & R” in Action

Thanks to the support of the Mellon Foundation, Humanities Without Walls has distributed millions of dollars across its partner consortium since 2014. In that time, the consortium has helped to educate more than 250 HWW Career Diversity alums and to develop over 50 collaborative HWW research projects.

Our reorientation from thematic calls toward the methodological commitment to “reciprocity and redistribution” (R&R) in the 2019 renewal proposal stands as HWW’s most significant contribution to the national discourse on public humanities. This turn is undergirded by a commitment to community-based practices of social justice and equity and is rooted in a recognition of the urgency of reeducating university faculty, staff, and students away from a static notion of public humanities and toward a vision of the humanities as a social practice in the world beyond the campus or the seminar room.

As HWW heads toward the end of its third and final renewal, we have the opportunity to run one more grant opportunity aimed at continuing the R&R methods. Consortium institutions are invited to submit a proposal for “R&R in Action,” a paid summer internship program with a local community organization for PhD students in the humanities, arts, and related fields that enacts R&R methods in its design and implementation.

Applications are due by October 1, 2025. Read the full call and application details at go.illinois.edu/HWWRR.



Summer Bridge Program

The Summer Bridge program connects humanities PhD students from the University of Illinois with community partners for a summer-long collaborative project. Through the Bridge experience, students have the opportunity to explore career paths and build skills while contributing to an area of need in the community. This program is made possible through collaboration with our U. of I. campus partners We CU and the Graduate College.

2025 Participants and Partners

- **Chris Getowicz**, Education Policy, Organization & Leadership, Books 2 Prisoners
- **Alex Jacobs**, History, the Middle School for Boys
- **Toyosi Morgan**, Theatre, the Promise Zone
- **Paapa Nkrumah-Ababio**, Education Policy, Organization & Leadership, DREAAM
- **Daniel Rodriguez**, History, the Greater Community AIDS Project



GRC Update: Environmental Justice Worldmaking

Last fall, the Environmental Justice Worldmaking (EJW) team hosted a two-day symposium and People’s Assembly at the University of Minnesota, bringing together scholars, community members, and guest speakers from the U.S. and abroad to share their experiences and perspectives on environmental justice.

“I am just amazed at how committed people are... ‘committed’ in the sense that they will not give up until justice is realized,” said **Dr. Rose Brewer**, principal investigator for EJW. “It seems like the challenges are quite daunting, but the work continues. And to have that spirit, and not only a spirit, but a set of practices, which makes that manifest, has been just an amazing kind of gift.”

Read the full EJW story at go.illinois.edu/EJW.

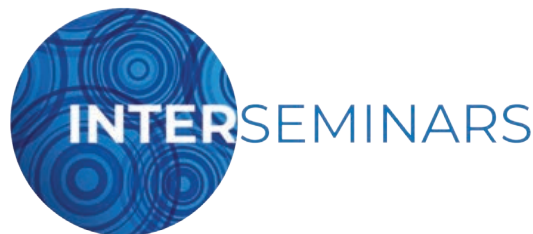
Event Preview

Humanities OPEN HOUSE

OCTOBER 4, 2025

Save the date for the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's **first ever** Humanities Open House! HRI, together with the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the University Library, will be highlighting the best of the humanities on our campus. Learn all about our academic departments, student groups, research, resources, and alumni stories.

In connection with the open house, we are sponsoring a video contest for humanities majors and minors. We want to broadcast all the amazing things humanists are doing—and why they matter. Get full details and the latest updates at go.illinois.edu/HumanitiesOpenHouse. We can't wait to see you there!



“Collisions Across Color Lines: Reconsidering Racism, Movements, and Epistemes in the Americas”

CULMINATING EVENT

September 4, 2025, 4:00 p.m. at Lincoln Hall 1092

September 5, 2025, 2:00 – 9:00 p.m. at Temple Hoyne Buell Hall

Over the past 18 months, the third Interseminars cohort, “Collisions Across Color Lines,” has analyzed how race, power, and movement diverge, converge, and remerge in knowledge formations and lived experiences across the Americas. Drawing on public talks, film, dialogue, and our interactive vessel, we gather in this two-day culminating event to engage the urgency of resistance, the resolve of refusal, and the radical possibilities of re-existence. This event will feature presentations by **Dr. Mariana Mora** (Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología, Mexico) on Sept. 4 and **Dr. Vivek Bald** (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) on Sept. 5. The vessel, our collaborative and multisensory centerpiece, is an invitation to sit with discomfort, to listen otherwise, and to move through the echoes of migration, memory, and becoming. It holds the traces of what we've learned, struggled with, and imagined together.

This is an event about disrupting the borders of knowledge and power. Join us in the friction, the making, and the imagining of the still to come.



PYGMALION

HRI is proud to continue its longstanding sponsorship of PYGMALION, which will return **September 18–20**. This year's festival boasts an impressive lineup of music, comedy, and literature featuring talent both national and local. thisispygmalion.com

2025–26 Calendar of Events

2025 SEPTEMBER

4-5

INTERSEMINARS

"Collisions Across Color Lines: Reconsidering Racism, Movements, and Epistemes in the Americas"

Culminating Event

Supported by the Mellon Foundation

9

INTERSEMINARS

Faculty Info Session: Course Proposals

23



STORY & PLACE

"Enslavement and Colonialism in the Caribbean, a Conversation"

Catherine Hall (Modern British Social and Cultural History, University College London) in conversation with **Jennifer Morgan** (History, New York University), moderated by **Antoinette Burton** (History)

24

STORY & PLACE

Graduate Brownbag: "Writing History for a Variety of Publics"

Catherine Hall and Jennifer Morgan

24



STORY & PLACE

Catherine Hall

"Land, property, and the story of 18th century race-making: displacement and belonging between the Caribbean and Britain."

With Jennifer Morgan responding

OCTOBER

4

HUMANITIES OPEN HOUSE

Resource Fair, Interactive Events, Keynote, and Alumni Panel

In partnership with the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the University Library.

16



STORY & PLACE

Nadine Naber

Gender and Women's Studies, Global Asian Studies, University of Illinois Chicago

Lecture on the Mellon-funded MAMAS project: "Amplifying Mothers of Police Violence Survivors"

22

INFO SESSION

HRI Graduate Fellowship Brownbag

A collaboration between HRI and the Writers Workshop.

NOVEMBER

3



STORY & PLACE

Faculty Book Talk: Erik McDuffie

The Second Battle for Africa: Garveyism, the US Heartland, and Global Black Freedom

African American Studies and History

2026 JANUARY

28

INFO SESSION

HWW Summer Bridge Program

29

STORY & PLACE

Another Place: Story-Making and the Entangled Prairie

Opening of the Art and Design faculty exhibition featuring work by Ryan Griffis, Emmy Lingscheit, Melissa Pokorny, Sharath Ramakrishnan, Stacey Robinson, Joel Ross, Stephen Signa-Aviles, Blair Ebony Smith, Nekita Thomas, Deke Weaver, and Brooke White.

FEBRUARY

19



STORY & PLACE

Justin Garcia

Executive Director, Kinsey Institute; Ruth N. Halls Professor of Gender Studies, Indiana University

Medical Humanities lecture sponsored by Daniel Shin ('91 LAS)

26

STORY & PLACE

Erin Brock Carlson

English, West Virginia University

Supported by HWW and the Mellon Foundation

MARCH

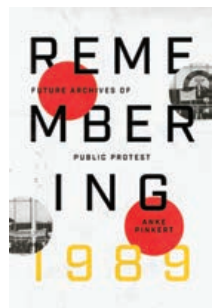
4

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Presentations and Celebration

Cohosted with the Center for the Study of Global Gender Equity

30



STORY & PLACE

Faculty Book Talk: Anke Pinkert

Remembering 1989: Future Archives of Public Protest

Germanic Languages and Literatures

APRIL

15



Credit: Fred Viebahn

INSIDE SCOOP

Rita Dove

U.S. Poet Laureate (1993–95); Creative Writing, University of Virginia

Cohosted with the Bruce D. Nesbitt African American Cultural Center

15

PUBLIC READING

Rita Dove

MAY

7

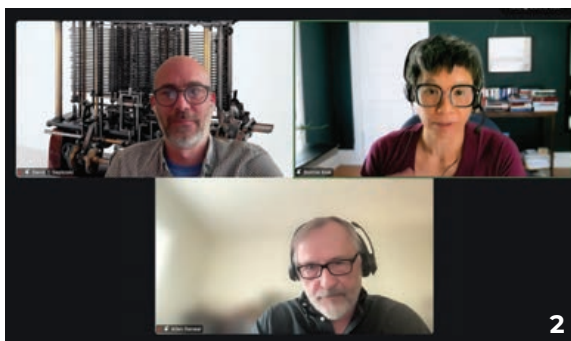
PRIZES FOR RESEARCH

Ceremony and Reception

HRI Application Deadlines 2025-26

SEPTEMBER 19	Prindable Internship
OCTOBER 3	Interseminars Course Proposals
OCTOBER 10	Humanities in Action
DECEMBER 5	Campus Fellowships
FEBRUARY 6	Summer Faculty Fellowships
FEBRUARY 27	HWW Summer Bridge Experience
MARCH 7	Prizes for Research in the Humanities
MARCH 27	Humanities Research Lab
MARCH 30	Humanities Gateway Internship
MARCH 31	Odyssey Project Internship
MAY 31	Reading Groups

HRI Year in Review



“Think Again” was the thematic throughline in much of last year’s programming, with a slate of speakers and topics that challenged us to rethink what we know and how we know it. **“AI and the Human Condition”** talks sparked conversation around the rapidly evolving technology, while **Rebecca Walkowitz’s** “Knowing and Not Knowing Languages” presentation called for humanists to build a stronger case for foreign language education in our current political climate. Spring brought us an unforgettable night of poetry and jazz thanks to the inimitable **Janice Harrington** and **Chip McNeill**, while **Ross Gay** lifted a packed audience with his infectious celebration of life’s joys and delights. We closed out the year in community at our annual research prizes ceremony and year-end reception, celebrating our colleagues’ and students’ noteworthy work in the humanities at Illinois.

1. Colleen Murphy, Jessica Greenberg, and Wojtek Chodzko-Zajko **2.** David Sepkoski, Bonnie Mak, and Allen Renear **3.** Jesse McCarthy **4.** Graduate Student Social **5.** Jamie Jones **6.** Robert Townsend **7.** Mary Ton and students at Dinner and DH **8.** Rebecca Walkowitz **9.** Gilberto Rosas **10.** Bonnie Mak, Antoinette Burton, Iris Clever, and Cris Hughes **11.** Kalindi Vora **12.** International Women’s Day presenters **13.** Bhakti Verma, Antoinette Burton, Emily Stone, and Traci Barkley **14.** Janice Harrington and Chip McNeill **15.** Ross Gay **16.** Anna Torres-Cacoullos, Antoinette Burton, and Nancy Castro





Beneath Our Feet: Interseminars Culminating Event

The second Interseminars cohort—Improvise and Intervene—presented their culminating event in fall 2024. Titled “Beneath Our Feet: Grounded Space, Place, and Worldmaking,” the three-day event featured a panel discussion, performances, and interactive workshops thematically exploring the land and how it connects us.

1. Dora Watkins, Elizabeth Velásquez Estrada, and Junaid Rana 2. Joe Bowie, Maryam Kashani, and Sayak Roy 3. Culminating reenactment 4. Body mapping workshop 5. Invited guest Kameelah Janan Rasheed 6. Improvise & Intervene conveners and fellows



In Retrospect: Programs & Initiatives



2025 Odyssey Graduation



The Odyssey Project

The Odyssey Project had a fantastic 2024–25 year, full of exploration and creativity. After diving into their coursework this fall, students participated in a field trip program that included tours of Krannert Center for the Performing Arts and Spurlock Museum. The group enjoyed participating in the “Speak Café” open mic poetry night at Krannert Art Museum (photo top right), where two Odyssey students were brave enough to read their work!

Enrichment continued in the spring semester with more arts-based field trips. In February, the group visited the Station Theater to see a moving performance of *Skeleton Crew*, starring Professor Emerita of Theatre **Lisa Gaye Dixon**. March included an electrifying poetry reading by Creative Writing and English Professor **Janice Harrington** of her new book *Yard Show*, accompanied by a lively jazz performance led by saxophonist and Music Professor **Charles “Chip” McNeill**, backed up by student musicians. April rounded out our semester with a phenomenal reading by award-winning poet and essayist **Ross Gay**.

Students not only took in art, but also created some of their own under the guidance of Odyssey’s undergraduate

intern, **Jalixa Sanchez**. Jalixa conceptualized starting an Odyssey archive and worked with each student to create a piece that memorialized their year in the program. The archive is digitally accessible on HRI’s website (go.illinois.edu/odysseyarchive). We invite you to explore the fascinating student creations and read their accompanying vivid reflections.

As the year ended, students explored steps to pursue more education or a new career post-Odyssey. Representatives from Parkland College, Eastern Illinois University, and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Human Resources shared information about their respective offerings. We also welcomed Odyssey alums who are

now Illinois students, **Crushion Stubbs** and **Justin Michael Hendrix**. Both are continuing their community impact work: Crushion through the founding of “Voices of Freedom,” a public speaking program for formerly incarcerated people, and Justin’s election to a seat on the Champaign Unit 4 school board.

We are looking forward to another wonderful year, where we will welcome new Critical Thinking and Writing instructor, **Dana Kinzy**, who also serves as the director of the Illinois Program in Professional Writing. As always, we end the year full of gratitude for the dedication, openness, and hope that Odyssey students bring to the classroom.

New Odyssey Endowment Gift

As an instructor with the Odyssey Project over many years, Philosophy Professor **Shelley Weinberg** inspired countless students to grapple with challenging concepts in an accessible way that drew connections from the academic to the reality of their daily lives. While her teaching certainly left a lasting imprint, her recently established gift—through her family’s David S. Weinberg Foundation—promises to help sustain a bright future for the program.

HRI is deeply grateful for the **Odyssey Project Futures Endowment Fund**, which will support the priorities and needs of the program and ensure that it continues to transform the lives of talented adult learners in East Central Illinois.

Education Justice Project

Incarcerated Students Excel in Education Justice Project



Mynor Lemus, who was chosen to prepare a statement for a recent legislative hearing on the Credit for Change campaign.

The heart and soul of the Education Justice Project (EJP) is our higher education programming at Danville Correctional Center. Over 500 incarcerated individuals have participated in EJP's college-in-prison program. We expect to start the fall 2025 semester with around 85 students and to offer five for-credit courses from the departments of education policy, math, psychology, computer science, and creative writing. We are also excited to welcome **Shaelyn Smith**, our newly hired academic director, who oversees our college in prison program.

Community programming is an important part of EJP's work outside the prison. In March 2025, as part of our authors' series, we hosted a campus discussion on *Abolition Labor* with authors **Andrew Ross** and **Aiyuba Thomas** from New York University's Prison Research Lab, an arm of the NYU Prison Education Program. They presented on the fight to end prison slavery. In April, we screened *In Their Hands*, a documentary about the Illinois Prisoner Review Board, featuring **Ronnie Carrasquillo** (freed after serving a 47-year sentence) and **Dan Protes** (filmmaker).

EJP currently chairs the Big Ten Consortium for Higher Education in Prison and in March hosted that organization's first-ever convening,

bringing together representatives from peer universities across the country. We discussed fostering stronger collaboration between our programs, sharing resources, and building our collective advocacy efforts.

EJP engages policy issues through our policy & research team, which engages students on the University of Illinois campus as well as EJP students at Danville. One of the latter, **Mynor Lemus**, was invited to provide testimony at a legislative subject matter hearing in Springfield on May 6, 2025 in support of "Credit for Change," a statewide campaign aimed at repealing the state's so-called "Truth-in-Sentencing" laws that have led to thousands of people serving long sentences in Illinois prisons. **Ashton Klekamp**, EJP's policy & research director, read Mynor's testimony during the hearing on his behalf. "Educational stimulation improves our mental health," said Mynor, "which

spills into our emotional well-being. Credit for Change will invigorate hope as we look to engage in activities for self-improvement, rather than remain subject to a warehoused state of being."

Finally, since last year's election, we have seen a significant increase in the number of people who have accessed our deportation guide, *A New Path: A Guide to the Challenges and Opportunities After Deportation*. We continue to seek ways to get the book, whether in physical or digital form, into the hands of those who can most use the valuable information it contains about their rights and supportive resources, here and abroad. We started producing this book for individuals who faced deportation upon release from prison, but it has become a sought-after guide for any individual threatened with deportation to Mexico or Central America, regardless of their involvement with the criminal legal system.

Humanities Advocacy Day



Advocating for the Humanities: Four SLCL students and faculty members participated in Humanities Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C. in March. During their visit to the Hill, the group met with staffers from the offices of U.S. Reps Mike Quigley and Nikki Budzinski and Sens. Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth. Left to right: Hafsa Faruqi, Mariselle Meléndez, Rep. Mike Quigley, Clara Bosak-Schroeder, and Lázaro García Angulo.



Speaker Gerald Horne with the Interseminars fellows and conveners, Elena Guzman, Amarela Varela Huerta, and Bryce Henson.

Interseminars Initiative 2024–25

The third Interseminars cohort, “Collisions Across Color Lines,” is nearing the conclusion of its 18-month interdisciplinary project. Faculty conveners **Erik McDuffie** (African American Studies and History), **Gilberto Rosas** (Anthropology and Latina/Latino Studies), and **Gisela Sin** (Political Science), together with nine graduate fellows from the Colleges of Liberal Arts & Sciences and Fine & Applied Arts, spent 2024–25 exploring themes of race, power, and resistance across disciplinary and geographic boundaries. Over the course of the year, the group collaborated on research, engaged in shared study, hosted guest speakers, and examined interdisciplinary methods and approaches central to their project’s focus.

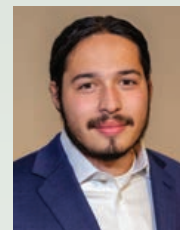
Guest speakers included **Gerald Horne** (Moore Professor of History & African American Studies, University of Houston), **Elena Guzman** (Assistant Professor, African American & African Diaspora Studies and Anthropology, Indiana University Bloomington), **Amarela Varela Huerta** (Professor, Academy of Communication and Culture, Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México), and **Bryce Henson** (Assistant Professor, Communication & Journalism, Africana Studies Program, Texas A&M University).

The 2024–25 fellows are **Yasmine Adams** (Anthropology), **Grace Eunhyun Bae** (Art Education), **Jose Figueroa Díaz** (Spanish & Portuguese), **Omar Agustin Hernandez** (Anthropology), **Samantha Jenae Jones** (Design for Responsible Innovation), **Nik Owens** (Dance), **Ann Xiaoxu Pei** (Comparative Literature), **Leonardo Ventura** (History), and **Tooma H. Zaghloul** (Urban and Regional Planning).

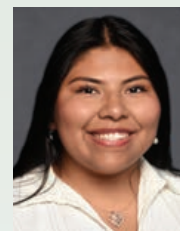
Following their second intensive seminar this August, the group is preparing for their culminating, community-oriented event to be held September 4–5, 2025. Also this fall: watch for more information about a new opportunity under the Interseminars umbrella. Faculty will be invited to apply to collaborate on team-teaching graduate courses in 2026–27.

And finally, we are grateful for the time and dedication of our Interseminars committees! The Steering Committee for 2024–25 included co-chairs **Jenny L. Davis** (Anthropology and American Indian Studies) and **Siobhan Somerville** (English and Gender and Women’s Studies), and members **J. David Cisneros** (Communication), **Jorge Lucero** (Art and Design), and **Anke Pinkert** (Germanic Literatures and Languages). The Interseminars Futures Committee included **Maria Serrano Abreu** (graduate student, Educational Psychology), **Cara Finnegan** (Communication), **Daniele Morales Fredes** (graduate student, Urban and Regional Planning), **Kevin Hamilton** (Fine & Applied Arts), **Yuri Ramirez** (History), and **Dora Watkins** (graduate student, Social Work). With special thanks to **Jarrett Newman** (graduate student, Education), who provided invaluable administrative support to Interseminars over the past year.

Humanities in Action Spring 2025



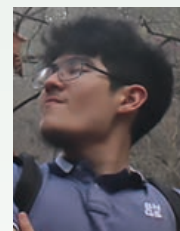
Tony Crispin
Urban Planning
Class of 2026



Yudany Lizbeth Diaz
History
Class of 2025



Pharah Green
Global Studies
Class of 2028



Fernando Angel Limon
Industrial Psychology
Class of 2025



Arshiya Shah
Political Science
Class of 2026

Humanities Without Walls Research Associate in Public Humanities



Jordan Woodward talking to Old King Coal 2025, John Smith [right]. Credit: Nick Talan

Jordan Woodward joined us as the Humanities Without Walls postdoctoral research associate in public humanities in August 2024, and has spent her first year getting to know HRI, the University of Illinois, and the community of scholars and organizations who share her interests in the historical and contemporary dimensions of industrial transitions, and specifically those around coal, in the Midwest. Coming to us from The Ohio State University with a PhD in English, and a specialty in rhetoric, writing, and literacy, she joined the HRI seminar and presented work in progress drawn from her thesis, “Rhetorical Place-Making in Post-Extractive Appalachian Ohio.”

Beyond the seminar, Jordan has been exploring a range of sites in Illinois where coal extraction has happened and is being commemorated by local communities. She has begun working with staff and volunteers on projects underway in the coming year. Among these are partnerships with the Coal Workers and Community Listening Project at the Climate Jobs Institute to collect oral histories from current and former coal mine and plant workers, residents of coal towns, and those living on reclaimed mining lands. She is also collaborating with organizations along the Kickapoo Rail Trail to document oral histories focused on the relationship between industrial transitions and the development of eco-tourism recreation. In both of these projects, Jordan is interested in exploring how communities commemorate, navigate, and (re)make place in the wake of extractive industries

Humanities Research Lab Fall 2024

Humanities Research Lab (HRL) is a collaborative effort between the Humanities Research Institute and the Office of Undergraduate Research, in which faculty may refashion an existing course to incorporate a significant community-based research component. Professor **Yuridia Ramírez** (History) taught the fall 2024 HRL course, HIS 391: Oral History Methods. The class provided students with the tools, methodology, and the opportunity to record the stories of community members from the Champaign-based International Prep Academy and the Immigration Project.

“As a public institution we have a responsibility to the community in which we live,” Ramírez said. “Intellectual thinking, intellectual exchange doesn’t just happen within these walls. The people we work with are also theorists and scholars in their own right.” Read the full story at go.illinois.edu/HRLstory.

Scholarship Out Loud

Members of HRI’s Graduate Advisory Committee coordinated two lunch events titled “Scholarship Out Loud,” in which graduate students from any discipline were invited to present on their research. The series encouraged graduates to share their enthusiasm for the scholarship that animates them, using the format of “lightning” talks.

“One of the goals of these events was to build a community with low stakes and high enthusiasm,” said co-organizer **Chloe Parrella**, who was pleased with the turnout. “I think this was a strong start to what hopefully will be an ongoing series in the future.”

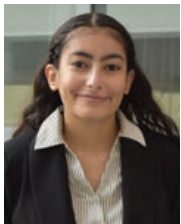
Bridging Student Affairs and Research



In early spring semester, HRI hosted a breakfast with staff from Student Affairs units and the OVCRI institutes in a “speed dating”-style program. Attendees spent time learning about each other’s departments while discussing and imagining the possibilities for connecting undergraduates with research opportunities.

Experiential Learning at HRI

David F. Prindable Intern



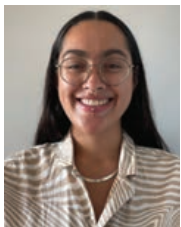
English major **Serena Naji** served as HRI's David F. Prindable communications and outreach intern. Throughout the year, she assisted with HRI's social media, wrote reflections and stories for the website, and interviewed her fellow interns at the institute.

Humanities Gateway Intern



Yehoshua McClerklin, a political science major, held the Gateway internship. Through this role, which is a partnership between HRI and Illinois Public Media, McClerklin worked with journalists to facilitate listening sessions with citizens in our region to help inform news coverage of Illinois communities.

Odyssey Project Intern



Jalixa Sanchez, a Spanish, Latina/Latino studies, and gender & women's studies major, served as the Odyssey Project intern. In addition to assisting Odyssey students with their coursework and classroom technology, Sanchez created the new student archive project, a collection of student writing and commemorative "artifacts." View at go.illinois.edu/odysseyarchive.

Welcome, New Staff



Julia Jing joined the HRI staff in fall 2024 as a communications specialist. She worked as a photographer and social media manager at Vietfive Coffee before joining HRI. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and a master's degree in broadcast/documentary journalism from Northwestern University. She is a photographer, designer, and storyteller passionate about visual storytelling. She loves hearing people's stories and thrives on capturing moments that convey unique narratives.



HRI welcomed **Danielle Sekel** in March as the new Interseminars coordinator. With more than a decade of experience in the education sector, her past roles have included program coordination, community outreach, and interdisciplinary curriculum development. Most recently, she served as the outreach and programming coordinator at the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center, where she managed the center's grant-funded programming and public engagement initiatives. She holds a bachelor's degree in literary studies and music from Roanoke College and a master's degree in musicology from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.



Ryan Reid joined HRI in July as Levis events and space manager, bringing more than 20 years in the service and hospitality industry. Most recently, Ryan worked as the director of sports operations for the Rantoul Family Sports Complex. With his direction, the Sports Tourism Facility, owned and operated by the Village of Rantoul, has brought nearly four million visitors to Champaign County in their five years of operation. Prior to his work with the Village of Rantoul, Ryan was the director of sports and events for Experience Champaign Urbana and director of the Champaign County Film office, where his passion for hospitality and welcoming people to our community began.

HRI Staff & Advisory Committees

STAFF

ADMINISTRATION

Antoinette Burton, Director
aburton@illinois.edu
217-244-3344

Nancy Castro, Deputy Director
ncastro@illinois.edu
217-244-7913

Stephanie Uebelhoer, Office Manager
suebelho@illinois.edu
217-244-3344

BUSINESS OFFICE

Jenna Zieman, Budget and Finance Manager
zieman@illinois.edu
217-244-5013

COMMUNICATIONS

Erin Ciciora, Assistant Director for Communications
elukehar@illinois.edu
217-265-7580

Julia Jing, Communications Specialist
yingj3@illinois.edu
217-300-0318

EVENTS & SPACE USE

Ryan Reid, Levis Events and Space Manager
rdreid1@illinois.edu
217-300-2863

INTERSEMINARS

Danielle Sekel, Interseminars Project Coordinator
dsekel2@illinois.edu
217-244-7939

ODYSSEY PROJECT

Kate Ross, Visiting Odyssey Project Academic Advisor and Student Support Coordinator
kspies@illinois.edu
217-265-4036

COMMITTEES

HRI Advisory Committee

John Levi Barnard
English/Comparative and World Literature

Teresa Barnes
Gender and Women's Studies/History

Angela Calcaterra
American Indian Studies

Deena Ryhms
American Indian Studies

Soo Ah Kwon
Asian American Studies

Robert Morrissey
History

Bobby J. Smith II
African American Studies

Oscar Vázquez
Art History, Art and Design

HRI Graduate Student Advisory Committee

Sharayah L. Cochran
Art History

August Hoffman
Anthropology

Dale Mize
History

Ray Martínez
Spanish and Portuguese



From the Fellows

Throughout the year, Campus Fellows contribute to HRI's research blog *Inquiry*. Here's a roundup of some reflections on the Fellows Seminar, a cornerstone of the fellowship program. View more at go.illinois.edu/InquiryBlog.

"This has been one of the most affirming experiences of sharing my own humanities research that I've ever had. Beyond the opportunity to receive feedback, it has been a chance to make friendships and bonds with scholars across the humanities. The fellowship seminar space really helps emphasize how interdisciplinary work can strengthen research and generate new discussions for everyone."

Eddie O'Byrn

Faculty Fellow, African American Studies

"The cohort is strongly aligned in interests and during my seminar there was a powerful discussion centered around the interdisciplinary approaches and various angles in my work. The seminar restored and possibly even planted my own ability to see the strength in my project. This work I do is for those who are coming after me and in honor of those who have come before me. There is no escaping history, and the literary offers a unique return and confrontation with the past that is often silenced and repressed—and the seminar confirmed that this work must be done."

Anna Sophia Flood

Graduate Fellow, English

"I am one of few community psychologists at the U of I, and I have struggled to identify where my research fits disciplinarily, as my research approaches are influenced not only by community psychology but also by history, sociology, African American studies, labor studies, and more. The seminar offered a much-needed space for bouncing ideas, sharing reading recommendations, and offering generative and generous feedback. Getting a chance to read and respond to the brave, boundary-pushing work of my colleagues and hearing their thought-provoking, constructive feedback on my own writing has increased my confidence in writing boldly about my interventions into my field and beyond."

Chelsea Birchmier

Graduate Fellow, Psychology

Giving to HRI



“Champion of the Humanities” Expands Support for Undergraduates

For more than twenty years, **David F. Prindable** (BUS '69) has been a steadfast supporter of undergraduate initiatives at HRI. In the early 2000s he established the Prindable Internship for communications and outreach, which just saw its tenth intern this year. More recently, he

expanded upon his generous support of HRI with a pledge to the Odyssey Project, a program administered by HRI that offers free U. of I. courses in the humanities to income-eligible adults in the East Central Illinois community.

In recognition of his longstanding generosity to the university, Prindable was honored with the university's Krannert Award in fall 2024. “David Prindable has been a consistent champion of the humanities and a cherished supporter of HRI,” said HRI Director Antoinette Burton. “He embodies the true power of the humanities at work in the world, and we are so grateful he is in our corner.” Read the full story at go.illinois.edu/prindablestory.

HRI Gift Updates

Thanks to donor **Dr. Dan Shin** (LAS '91), HRI will continue the Medical Humanities Lecture series in spring. This year's invited speaker is Justin Garcia, director of the renowned Kinsey Institute. We are also grateful for Dr. Shin's continued support of the Odyssey Project and the Humanities in Action program.

Philosophy Professor and past Odyssey instructor **Shelley Weinberg** established the new Odyssey Project Futures Endowment Fund, which will help to ensure the continuity of this life-changing program (see page 14 to learn more).

English alumnus **Tony Pomonis** (LAS '02) recently established the Merry-Ann Pomonis Humanities Fund—named in his mother's memory—to support community-based volunteer or internship opportunities for undergraduate humanities students.

HRI thanks **Elizabeth Nolan** (LAS '81) for generously continuing her support of the Humanities Gateway Internship and the Humanities Research Lab. In the 2024–25 school year, we welcomed the fourth Gateway intern since the inception of the program.

Join Us

You can make a difference today by visiting hri.illinois.edu/giving or contacting Director of Advancement **Betsy Rodriquez** at epowers2@illinois.edu.

Want to stay connected to the HRI community? Sign up for our emails at go.illinois.edu/EmailList.



Orange and Blue and You

In March, HRI participated in the university's first **Orange and Blue Crowdfunding Week** to raise funds for the Odyssey Project. For many Odyssey students, the program represents a pathway to higher education, better employment, and civic commitment. Thanks to everyone who helped us reach our fundraising goal in support of these talented students!



Humanities Research Institute

The Humanities Research Institute (HRI) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign fosters interdisciplinary study in the humanities, arts, and social sciences. Established in 1997 as the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities, HRI is a vibrant hub for humanities activity on campus. We coordinate and host lectures, symposia, and panel discussions on a wide variety of topics, and we award prizes recognizing excellence in faculty and student humanities research. We convene distinguished scholars from around the world, and we support Illinois faculty and graduate student research through fellowships and a bimonthly seminar. HRI cultivates collaborative faculty-driven initiatives through its Research Clusters; hosts multi-million-dollar external foundation grants; and supports faculty and graduate student reading groups.

Phone (217) 244.3344
Email info-hri@illinois.edu
Website hri.illinois.edu

   @HRIatIllinois

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
Levis Faculty Center, Suite 400
919 West Illinois Street
Urbana, Illinois 61801