

The background of the entire page is a photograph. It shows the silhouette of a building with a prominent bell tower on the left. The bell tower has a small dome on top and a window with a cross-shaped pattern. To the right of the building is a large, leafy tree. The sky is a vibrant orange and yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The text 'Miami University' is in a smaller font, and 'Humanities Center' is in a larger, bold font. Below 'Humanities Center' is the text '2020-2021'.

Miami University **Humanities Center**

2020-2021

humanitiescenter.MiamiOH.edu

Humanities Center

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From the director

In an age of scientific miracles, it is easy to forget that the most important questions about our world are often the oldest.

No matter how advanced our machines and systems, each generation must wrestle with age-old questions about how to form a more perfect government, coexist peacefully, and live a meaningful life. These questions — and many others like them — are the stuff of the humanities. For centuries, they have been the heart of university education because democratic societies require leaders who understand the enduring challenges of freedom and justice, power and knowledge, ethics and a life of purpose.

As I write these words, our world is roiled by pandemic, racial injustice, and widespread distrust of media and government. If these crises have taught us anything, it is that social problems cannot be solved by good science alone. Progress on public health, racial justice, climate change, and democratic governance requires deep historical knowledge, rhetorical skill, the empathy cultivated by expansive reading, and an ethics honed by philosophical inquiry.

The Miami University Humanities Center is committed to ensuring that a Miami education instills these faculties.



Our collective future depends on our ability to read critically, evaluate evidence, separate hokum from authoritative knowledge, and understand people unlike ourselves. It depends, in other words, on the forms of thinking that constitute the humanities.

We are also committed to showing the power of the humanities to address pressing social issues. One of the ways we do so is through our John W. Altman Program. Each year, the Altman Program brings together teams of faculty members, graduate students, undergraduates, and visiting experts for intense study and public engagement. Roughly 2,500 people participate annually in dozens of lectures, seminars, special courses, community programs, and research collaborations. Recent programs have taken on “Truth and Lies” in public discourse, global human “Migrations,” and the frustrating persistence of “Race and Racism” in our world. A 2015 program review called this program “one of the best imagined, designed and run such initiatives at any university in the world.”

All of the Humanities Center’s 16 programs emphasize the practical value of the humanities. Our Humanities Labs engage students in community projects that build practical

skills. Our Medical Humanities minor prepares students for the ethical, personal, and social challenges of medical practice. Miami’s award-winning HumanitiesWorks program is helping humanities majors chart paths to successful careers. The center’s popular Research Apprenticeship Program has allowed more than 50 undergraduates to assist faculty on advanced scholarly projects. We also support two innovative programs — Bridges and Student Citizens — that give underserved high school students a pathway to liberal arts college education.

Helping Miami faculty produce and disseminate ideas is a major part of our work. We offer Writing Workshops and Digital Fellowships to help outstanding faculty publish research, secure external funding, and share their discoveries with the public. Our many Interdisciplinary Research Clusters help faculty work together across fields. Our Research Collaborative grants have allowed faculty teams

to finish a PBS documentary, produce a popular podcast on the hidden dimension of sound (“Phantom Power”), and launch an ambitious project on “Approaching Extinction.”

Most years, we plan, fund, and help to coordinate almost 150 events featuring visiting scholars, writers, and artists — all free and open to the public. Confronted with a pandemic in 2020, however, we pivoted to online events and created three new series of events for Miamians. Thousands of people viewed our one-minute Laptop Lectures on the history of pandemics and the origins and effects of racism. We also created a new program of Lectures for Alumni: “Objects that Changed the World.” I hope you’ll attend some of our upcoming events, either online or during your next visit to campus.

In the meantime, will you support our work by joining the Friends of the Humanities at Miami? We ask our Friends to help us by advocating for the value of liberal arts education or by making a modest annual contribution to sustain our programs. I am deeply grateful to all of you who have given your time, energy, and treasure to support our mission. Your generosity sustains the humanities at a time when the world urgently needs them.

TIMOTHY MELLEY

Geoffrion Family Director of the Humanities Center and Professor of English



Working in the lab

In 2019, the Humanities Center launched its Lab Program. Funded by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Miami's Humanities Labs provide opportunities for collaborative experimentation, research, and public engagement. Each lab is organized by a team of faculty members from different disciplines. They work with a small group of dedicated undergraduates on advanced humanities research projects with direct benefits to the public. Humanities Labs promote skill building and foreground what the humanities do best: ask difficult questions, gather data, develop critical interpretations, and explain their meaning for our world.



Urban Architecture

Jeffrey Kruth, Architecture
Elizabeth Keslacy, Architecture
John Blake, Center for Community
Engagement in Cincinnati

Members helped residents recover the history of their downtown Cincinnati neighborhood.



Virtual History

Andy Rice, Media, Journalism, and Film
Eric Hodgson, Emerging Technology
in Business and Design

Teams mined King Library's special collections to produce an augmented reality project on the 50th anniversary of Miami student protests against the Vietnam War.



Visible Religion

Rosemary Pennington, Media,
Journalism, and Film
Liz Wilson, Comparative Religion

Students and faculty members worked with local communities to identify and counter bias against religious minorities.



Performing Social Justice

Ann Elizabeth Armstrong, Theatre
Katie Johnson, English

Students wrote original, collaborative performances about climate change and racial injustice, workshoped them with a New York theater company, and performed them.



Humanities in practice

The Miami University Humanities Center is nationally recognized for its exceptional commitment to undergraduates.

The center's eight student programs provide opportunities that are not available in ordinary college classes. They offer ambitious students opportunities for practical experience, independent thinking, and high-caliber intellectual challenges that prepare them for the competitive environment they face upon graduation.

Pathways to Research

The center's workshops, research methods classes, and Summer Research Institute guide students on the multiyear journey to a major scholarly project.

The Geoffrion Family Fellowship

Each year, the center selects eight exceptional students for its highest honor, the Geoffrion Family Fellowship. Fellows join a think tank where they shadow faculty, interview distinguished visitors, and learn the meaning of intellectual community. Geoffrion Fellows collaborate on a major public project and produce individual research projects. Each spring, they deliver lectures on their work to faculty, students, and visiting experts.

Research Apprenticeships

Our NEH-supported Research Apprenticeship Program is a win-win for all involved. Faculty receive needed assistance on major research projects. Students learn how research is done and develop skills essential to advanced study and professional life. They also contribute to published scholarship, an achievement increasingly sought by graduate schools and employers.



Kierra Sondereker '19

Majors: English Literature, Journalism
Minor: Film Studies

Sondereker says her apprenticeship with history professor Erik Jensen readied her for professional life. "I loved being part of a process where my suggestions helped make Dr. Jensen's book the best it could be. Working with him taught me how to communicate with authors, something I use on a daily basis in my job as an editorial assistant at a publishing company in New York."



Margaret Hamm '19

Majors: Comparative Religion, Political Science
Minor: Classical Languages

Hamm completed a research apprenticeship with journalism professor Rosemary Pennington before winning a Geoffrion Family Fellowship at the Humanities Center. These experiences led to a spot at Harvard Divinity School and a research associateship with Harvard's Pluralism Project. "One of the most rewarding experiences of my work with Professor Pennington was building a bibliography of sources on modest dress in different cultures. Not only did I learn how to use databases and resources, but I gained a better understanding of the role that clothing plays in religious practices."





Sixty students attended an informal coffee hour to discuss queer theory with Jack Halberstam, professor of English at Columbia.

A stage for big questions

Each year, the Humanities Center plans dozens of major events, and it helps to fund and coordinate over 100 lectures, readings, exhibits, workshops, and symposia at Miami. The center’s John W. Altman Program leads campuswide inquiry each year on a grand social challenge. Recent topics have included “Migrations,” “Truth & Lies,” “Urban Futures,” “Medicine & the Humanities,” and “Race & Racism.” The Altman Program includes a series of lectures by distinguished intellectuals, intensive seminars, special classes, and undergraduate research initiatives. Approximately 2,500 students, faculty, and community members participate. An external review of the Humanities Center called the Altman Program one of the “best imagined, designed and run such initiatives at any university in the world.”



Yale philosopher Jason Stanley explained how propaganda works and its role in fascism to 250 Miamians in Benton Hall.



Journalist Masha Gessen argued that authoritarian leaders use lies not to deceive, but to bully citizens by showing that they can do whatever they want.



The Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Viet Thahn Nguyen addressed “War, Fiction, and the Ethics of Memory” before a packed house in the Shriver Heritage Room.



Sianne Ngai, professor of English at the University of Chicago, discussed the origin and function of the gimmick in modern society.



As part of a yearlong program on “Time and Temporality,” geologist Marcia Bjornerud argued that a new sense of “timefulness” can save our planet.



Louis Menand, Harvard professor and Pulitzer Prize-winning author, explored the question “Is History a Myth?” before an audience of 400, including members of Miami’s Board of Trustees.

Communities of inquiry

Bringing people together for crucial conversations is the most important function of the Humanities Center. In a world increasingly divided by partisanship, hyperspecialization, disciplinary silos, and “filter bubbles,” the center aims to model the behavior that holds democracy together. Each year, we organize countless conversations on challenging and sometimes uncomfortable topics. Only by talking frankly about matters related to the common good can we build a more perfect union.



A hub for innovation

Scholarship can be a lonely endeavor. It is strengthened when scholars can collaborate across fields and receive feedback from experts in other disciplines. Supporting this sort of teamwork is at the core of the Humanities Center’s mission.

Supporting Collaboration

Nearly every program of the Humanities Center relies on the power of diverse intellectual communities. The center’s Altman Program, Junior Faculty Seminar, Humanities Labs, and Scholarly Publishing Programs invite scholars from across the university to work together on issues of common interest. The center’s numerous Interdisciplinary Research Clusters foster new partnerships by bringing faculty together to share new scholarship and develop new curricula and public programming. The center’s Research Collaborative Award seeds groundbreaking scholarly partnerships.

Approaching Extinction

The center’s thriving Environmental Humanities Research Cluster won a Research Collaborative Award for a yearlong program on extinction and political imagination. Faculty members from English, Spanish, French, history, and philosophy worked with visiting experts to explore how societies motivate citizens to address environmental crises.

Phantom Power

Professors Mack Hagood and cris cheek won a Research Collaborative Award to produce their popular podcast “Phantom Power” about the sonic arts and humanities.

Medical Humanities

A successful Altman Program on “Medicine & the Humanities” led to a new interdisciplinary Medical Humanities minor. A large faculty research cluster studies the history, ethics, and narrative dimensions of medicine and health.



New books at Miami

Helping faculty publish and share their work is a vital part of the center's mission. Our workshops help authors develop new ideas and communicate them to the public. Our "New Books" events showcase exciting new faculty publications, allowing authors to introduce their work and celebrate with colleagues. Recent sessions have featured books on the history of grocery stores, sound and media, settlements in early America, feminism and race, the Roman poet Virgil, reporting in Black Cincinnati, and many other topics. Many featured books received prior support from the Humanities Center.



Supporting faculty excellence

The Humanities Center helps outstanding scholars influence public debate through workshops on digital methods, book writing, grant procurement, and public engagement. The center's 2020 workshop on "Writing for the Public" helped eight humanities professors craft articles and books for large audiences. Over the next year, they published more than a dozen articles in national outlets, including The Atlantic, the Los Angeles Review of Books, The Conversation, and The Washington Post.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT



In "Free Thinker" (2020), Kimberly Hamlin tells the story of Helen Gardner, who negotiated congressional passage of the 19th Amendment. It is a story of transgression in the face of religious ideology, a sexist scientific establishment, and political resistance to women's right to vote. Hamlin, professor of history and American studies, illustrates how Gardener's story informed feminist movements from suffrage through the 2017 Women's March.

A recipient of the National Endowment for the Humanities Public Scholar Award and a frequent commentator in major U.S. publications, Hamlin has been an Altman Fellow and a participant in the center's Writing for the Public and Book Proposal Workshops. "These programs," she says, "helped me finish 'Free Thinker' in time for the 2020 suffrage centennial and share my research beyond the academy."



TaraShea Nesbit, professor of English, says that her second novel, "Beheld" (2020), "would not be the novel it is without the support of the Humanities Center." "Beheld" tells the story of the first murder of a Plymouth colonist through the perspectives of two women from different social classes and religions. "The collaborative environment of the Altman Program helped me see that I was writing a novel that is in conversation with the past, rather than attempting photorealism. In a year dedicated to analyzing truth, communing with scholars from other fields deepened my own thinking about the relationship between history and fiction immensely."



After the liberal arts

Miami University humanities students end up in an extraordinary range of careers. Support from the Humanities Center opens even more doors for them.



Caroline Godard '19

Majors: French, English Literature
Minor: History

A 2018-2019 Geoffrion Family Fellow, Caroline served as a media relations intern for the Cleveland Orchestra before earning a master's in modern languages at Oxford. At Oxford, she was president of the Medieval and Modern Languages Graduate Network, and she won the Oxford Student Union's College Community Award. She then began her doctorate in French at the University of California, Berkeley. "Being a Geoffrion Fellow reminded me of the importance of community. The intensity of faculty-student interaction, the variety of opportunities open to undergraduate fellows, and the yearlong focus on one single topic makes Miami's Geoffrion Program stand out. During lectures, at dinners, in seminars, I always felt like I was surrounded by people who cared about the big questions. I couldn't think of a better way to end my four years as a humanities student at Miami University."



Hannah Clarke '19

Majors: Classics, Creative Writing, and
Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

A Humanities Summer Research Fellow, and a Geoffrion Family Fellow, Hannah went on to receive a master's in English at the University of Chicago. The Geoffrion Fellowship, Hannah notes, "gave me a brilliant cohort to work and learn with" and provided the "institutional support to conduct and perform my incredibly bizarre queer research." After receiving a Pushcart Prize nomination for "Invertebrate: a Lament," Hannah won a Lambda Literary Fellowship for a debut novel entitled "The Scapegracers."

Responding to the pandemic

When COVID-19 changed our world, the **Humanities Center responded with new formats and crucial perspectives.**

Laptop Lectures

Within weeks of the pandemic shutdown, the Humanities Center launched a new series of virtual lectures. Recorded by faculty in social isolation and shared with a public audience, these two-minute talks connected ongoing humanities research to contemporary social challenges. A first series offered historical perspectives on the COVID-19 pandemic. Months later, a second series showed how humanities scholarship can address our ongoing struggle with systemic racial injustice.

Going Virtual

Facing a ban on performances, the Humanities Performance Lab pivoted to an online format, thanks to the leadership of Professors Katie Johnson, English, and Ann Elizabeth Armstrong, Theatre. The group worked online with the Tectonic Theatre Project of New York to hone its "moment work" technique. They then developed a multiplatform performance on the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic and the social and racial inequalities that it exposed.

COVID-19 Temporality

The show also went on for the center's Geoffrion Family Fellows, who gave lectures to an online audience of more than sixty. After individual research talks, the group unveiled their ambitious series of podcasts with visiting scholars, and then held a roundtable discussion on how the COVID-19 pandemic directly affected their understanding of "Time and Temporality," the theme of the annual Altman Program.



The center at a glance

Altman Fellows Program	
A Framework for Intense, Collaborative Inquiry The Altman Program unites faculty, students, distinguished visitors, and the public for a yearlong study of a major social challenge.	High-profile lecture series
	Biweekly faculty research seminar
	Annual symposium
	Special undergraduate classes, team-taught by faculty fellows
	Graduate and undergraduate fellows program
	Exhibits, film series, and special events
	Collaborative public humanities project
	Integration with up to 40 courses campuswide
	Approximately 2,500 participants annually



Humanities Programming	
Signature Events	The center organizes approximately 20 major lectures, readings, symposia, and workshops per year.
Visiting Experts	An elected steering committee funds an additional 25-30 intellectual events on campus.
Alumni Programming	Alumni are invited “back to Oxford” for virtual lectures by leading faculty.
Lunchtime Lectures	Informal talks to help students understand and join faculty research projects.
Coordination and Promotion	The center promotes 150 humanities events annually.
Faculty Research Support	
Research Collaborative	Vital support for groundbreaking, team-based projects.
Interdisciplinary Research Clusters	Cross-disciplinary think tanks for faculty and grad students.
Publishing Programs	Workshops and expert consultations to help faculty publish books and share ideas with the public.
Junior Faculty Seminar	A space for new faculty to forge cross-disciplinary connections.
Research Apprentices	Faculty are assigned paid student workers for their scholarly projects.
Humanities Labs	Faculty-student teams use humanities scholarship in community engagement and service.
Digital Humanities Fellowships	A year of technical and financial support to develop a major public-facing project.



Initiatives	
Valuing the Humanities	Study and dissemination of research on the value of humanities scholarship and education.
HumanitiesWorks	Ensuring all humanities majors receive evidence-based career guidance.
Medical Humanities	Specialized training in the ethical, narrative, and cultural dimensions of medicine.
Laptop Lectures	Short talks on how the humanities contribute to society.
Student Programs	
Altman Graduate Fellowship	Outstanding graduate students join a faculty seminar and supervise undergraduates.
Paths to Research	Workshops on how to launch a research project.
Research Methods Workshop	Participants develop proposals and research projects.
Geoffrion Family Fellowships	Outstanding undergraduates join a faculty think tank, conduct research, and collaborate on public projects.
Summer Research Institute	An intense collaboration on individual research.
Research Apprenticeships	Students are paid to help faculty with scholarship.
Student Citizens and Bridges	Programs for underserved high school students.
Humanities Labs	Faculty-student teams combine advanced study with community service.

Community	
Forum	A space for faculty to discuss issues in higher education.
Gatherings	Receptions, parties, and a celebration of publications.
Outreach	All events are free and open to the public.
Friends of the Humanities	A community supporting the center and its values.
Communications	
Calendar	Over 150 annual humanities events universitywide.
This Week in the Humanities	Regular event and program updates for 4,000 subscribers.
Website	Program information, application guidelines, and more.
Print Media	Program and event information.
Social Media	Facebook and Twitter feeds.
Annual Report	A glossy overview of our work.
Stories	Original and curated news and commentary.

Friends of the humanities

Miami alumni are living proof that humanities majors have fulfilling careers and make the world a better place. **The Humanities Center invites all Miami alumni to become Friends of the Humanities.** We want to hear your ideas and keep you informed about our work. We also want your advocacy for the importance of studying history, ethics, narrative, and culture today.

COME BACK TO OXFORD

The Humanities Center schedules public events to coincide with alumni events.

We also offer online lectures and classes so that alumni can return to the classrooms of extraordinary faculty. Our inaugural class for alumni, “Objects that Changed the World,” featured nine lectures on transformative human creations, such as concrete, the Model T, the photograph, Native American earthworks, the blues, and the birth control pill. Over 1,000 people attended.



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Support the center

We study a changing world. Your gift helps.

Fulfilling the center’s commitment to students, faculty, and the public would not be possible without your help. Please join the generous alumni and friends who have invested in the future of the humanities. Every dollar makes a difference. Please visit **humanitiescenter.MiamiOH.edu/support** to make an online gift.



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