

Anthropology

The MIT Anthropology program is dedicated to research in cultural anthropology, to undergraduate teaching that introduces students to the fundamentals of cross-cultural understanding and social thought, and to graduate teaching in the history and anthropology of science and technology. Our undergraduate subjects cover a wide range of social action, with special strengths in the study of the contemporary world and the social context of technology. Through research and teaching collaborations, the Anthropology faculty maintains strong ties with programs in the School of Engineering and the Sloan School of Management and with other programs in the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (SHASS), including Women's and Gender Studies, Latin American Studies, Comparative Media Studies (CMS), History, and the Program in Science, Technology, and Society (STS).

As cultural anthropologists, department faculty members work across the globe exploring the diversity of human beliefs and practices. We believe the three criteria for excellent anthropology are: detailed descriptions of the places, activities, and relationships of the persons and groups being studied, achieved through fieldwork and ethnography; insightful, valid interpretation of what the described behaviors, events, and objects mean or signify to the actors observed; and theoretical explanation that can be placed within a larger body of anthropological literature. The Anthropology faculty seeks to contribute to MIT's excellence by producing ethnographies that draw upon a rich pool of detailed descriptions to provide windows on the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of particular human groups and communities while drawing inferences about the significance of this site for more general scholarly problems concerning power, justice, ethics, technology, science, environmental sustainability, violence, and identity.

Personnel and Administrative Changes

Professor Susan Silbey began serving as head of the Anthropology program on July 1, 2006. Rosemary Hegg continued as administrative officer, and Amberly Steward continued as administrative assistant.

Two senior Anthropology faculty members, Professor Susan Slyomovics and associate professor Hugh Gusterson, left MIT for senior positions at the University of California, Los Angeles, and George Mason University, respectively; we could not meet the terms of the competing offers financially for Professor Slyomovics or with a spousal hire for Professor Gusterson. The loss of two senior faculty in an eight-person department is a significant reduction in human capital, energy, and continuity. The loss of Professor Gusterson, with his extraordinary accomplishments in teaching, advising, and research, and his media presence as a monthly columnist for the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, will be felt strongly.

A faculty search request was made and approved in October 2006. We advertised our desire to hire candidates whose research builds on the strengths of MIT, particularly in ethics, conflict, science and technology, or focus in Asia or Europe. We received

applications from 161 candidates (52.2 percent female; 18 percent Asian, 1 percent Black, 2.5 percent Hispanic), of whom 18 (66.6 percent female; 38.8 percent Asian, 5.5 percent Black) were interviewed. We selected six finalists (three male; three Asian, one Black) who came to the campus to meet, in groups and individually, with the dean as well as with faculty in our department and others. We were very favorably impressed with four candidates, all of whom showed great strengths as researchers, theorists, and speakers and whose research agendas and teaching interests would enhance our program with expertise in new topics or regions. In the end, we made successful offers to those whose work was most advanced: lecturer Heather Paxson, who is joining our faculty as an assistant professor and being reviewed for promotion to associate professor without tenure in the fall, and Manduhai Buyandelger, who will join the faculty on July 1, 2008.

Lecturer Paxson received her PhD from the Stanford Anthropology Department in 1998. In addition to the book *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and Family Planning in Urban Greece* (University of California Press, 2004), she has published nearly a dozen articles and chapters, three of which derive from her current research on artisanal cheese production, the slow food movement, and transformations in the global food system. Because Heather has been teaching part time in our program, we are familiar with her extraordinary talent as a teacher. We think that Heather can make a major contribution to the Program in Women's and Gender Studies, carrying forward the expertise and commitment historically represented by professors Evelyn Fox Keller and Evelyn Hammonds, and become a central player in, if not the leader of, new programs in ethics. She will teach courses in reproductive technologies and politics, food and culture, and gender and technology. As lecturer Paxson is married to associate professor Stefan Helmreich, we hope her appointment will attenuate offers from other institutions attempting to hire Professor Helmreich away from MIT.

Since 2004, when Manduhai Buyandelger earned a PhD from Harvard University's Anthropology Department, she has been a member of the Harvard Society of Fellows and a part-time instructor in the Anthropology Department at Harvard. Manduhai's research links contemporary developments in Mongolian nationalism and culture with a revival of shamanism, which seems to serve as both an entry to global capitalism and a lens for recovering historical memory. She has begun preliminary work for her next project on the effect of neoliberal reforms on urban gender relations in Mongolia. When she joins our faculty in 2008, Manduhai will teach courses on postsocialist ethnographies, representations of Asian women, economic anthropology, and magic, science and religion.

Program Contributions to MIT and Outside Communities

Anthropology program faculty members served on various committees, boards, and task forces at MIT, including the MIT Energy Initiative Education Task Force; the editorial board of the *MIT Faculty Newsletter*; the HASS Overview Committee; the Women's and Gender Studies program and steering committees; the Faculty Council on Human Rights and Justice; curriculum committees for CMS and the Boston Graduate Consortium in Women's Studies (now at MIT); the Steering Committee of the Doctoral Program in History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society (HASTS); the Siegel, Kelly-Douglas, and Edgerton prize committees; SHASS equal opportunity committees;

the search committee for vice president for human resources; the Levitan Proposal and SHASS Research Fund Review committees; the McMillan-Stewart senior chair faculty search; and the special committee to appoint a new dean for SHASS. Other faculty have served as HASTS organizer for the McMillan-Stewart Lecture Series on Women in the Developing World and director of outreach for Women's Studies.

Outside MIT, Professor Jean Jackson served on the advisory boards of the *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* and *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*. Professors Jackson and James Howe both served on the Cultural Survival program council and board of directors. Professor Howe is a trustee of the Pilgrim Hall Museum in Plymouth, MA. Assistant professor Erica James is on the advisory board of the Haitian Multi-Service Center in Boston. She is also a primary and secondary grant reviewer for the US Department of Veteran Affairs and made a US Department of State presentation at the Haiti ambassadorial seminar for Janet Sanderson. Professor Silbey served as editor of the Cambridge Studies in Law and Society book series; on the editorial boards of the *Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology, Regulation and Governance*, and the *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*; and as Article Prize Committee chair of the Sociology of Law section, American Sociological Association.

Educational Activities

Anthropology classes continued to be popular among undergraduates. One new subject and one significantly revised course were introduced during the year. Professor Silbey offered STS.380/21A.860/J Methods for Graduate Research in the Social Sciences (cotaught with Professor Anne McCants, History), jointly listed in Anthropology and STS and required for PhD students in Sloan. Professor Howe took over the teaching of and completely revised 21A.348 Photography and Truth, previously taught by Professor Slyomovics. Three courses were newly published by Anthropology faculty on OpenCourseWare: 21A.340/STS.075J Technology and Culture, 21A.235 American Dream, and STS.330 History and Anthropology of Medicine and Biology.

As department head, Professor Silbey served on the HASTS steering committee. Professor Helmreich has been appointed HASTS director of graduate studies for AY2008. Associate professor Christine Walley is a major advisor for CMS. Professor Howe serves as a transfer credit advisor for religious studies as well as Anthropology while also advising anthropology majors.

Professor Silbey served on the PhD committee and was advisor to five doctoral students in the Sloan School, two in the Engineering Systems Division (ESD), four in HASTS, and two in Urban Studies and Planning. One Sloan and one ESD student supervised by Professor Silbey graduated with the class of 2007. Professor Walley worked with two 2007 graduates, on the PhD committee for Meg Heisinger of HASTS and as a reader for Bill Massaquoi of Urban Studies and Planning. She is on the PhD committees for two other HASTS graduate students and is also the faculty advisor for an upcoming HASTS graduate student conference ("Disruptive Environments") on energy and the environment. Professor Helmreich is principal advisor for three HASTS graduate

students and is on the PhD committee for a fourth. Professor Helmreich also serves on PhD committees for David Bharnason and Kristin Hardardottir of the University of Iceland and Hallam Steven of Harvard University.

Presentations

Professor Michael Fischer gave keynote lectures at the University of Chicago “Theology without Nature” conference, the Institute for Philosophy in Tehran (on science and ethics and on Iranian film), and the annual Mehregan Conference in San Diego. He lectured at Harvard on Iranian diasporic art and politics (“Lords of Illusion”) and on filmmaker Majid Majidi. Also, he spoke on “Anthropology as Cultural Critique” at the Academia Sinica (Taiwan) and on science, technology, and society at Yang Ming University (Taiwan), Xingua University (Taiwan), and the University of Technology (Bandung, Indonesia). He was a commentator on panels at three US national professional meetings and a panelist at a Harvard symposium. Professor Fischer arranged a visit to the MIT Media Lab for former Iranian president Muhammad Khatami in conjunction with Khatami’s official visit to Harvard.

Professor Helmreich presented “Marine Bioprospecting and Biotechnology in Hawaii: Legal Contests and Contexts at Sea” at Amherst College and Harvard University; “How the Ocean Got Its Genome: Bodies of Knowledge and Bodies of Water in Marine Microbiology” at New School University, New York, and the American Anthropological Association annual meeting; “Alien Ocean: An Anthropology of the Deep Sea” at Wesleyan University; and “Thick Accounting,” a discussant commentary at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association.

Professor Jackson spoke on “Indigenous Organizing in Colombia: The Search for Autonomy and Self-Determination” at the University of Oregon and on “‘Extreme Behaviors’ Resulting from Integrated Body/Mind Disciplines: The Cross-Cultural Evidence” at the Longevity and Optimal Health: Integrating Eastern and Western Perspectives conference held by the Columbia University Integrative Medical Program. She also presented “Representations of Andean and Amazonian Indigeneity in the Colombian National Press, 1980–2002: Icons or Agents” at the 52nd International Congress of Americanists in Seville, Spain. She presented “Traditional, Transnational and Cosmopolitan: The Yanacona of Huila, Colombia, Look to the Past and the Future” at the American Ethnological Society meetings in Toronto, Canada, and was a discussant for a session on “Beyond Authenticity: Indigenous Cosmopolitanism.”

Professor James made presentations on “Causes and Consequences of Urban Violence” at the Haiti ambassadorial seminar and on “Ruptures, Rights and Repair: The Politics of Truth in Haiti” at Yale University. In addition, she presented “History and Ethnography of the Catholic Charities” and “The United States and Haiti: Human Rights, Democracy, and Security” at the Haitian Multi-Service Center in Dorchester, MA.

Lecturer Paxson spoke on the “The Raw and the Regulated: The Micropolitics of Raw Milk Cheese in the US” at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting and “Cultivating *Terroir* in Artisanal Cheese: A View from Anthropology” at the Culinary Historians of Boston series at Radcliffe Institute. At MIT, Paxson presented

two public lectures: “Reverse Engineering *Terroir*: Crafting Nature-Culture in American Artisanal Cheese Production” and “The Micropolitics of Artisanal Cheese: How Human and Microbial Cultures Refigure Taste, Place, Health and Safety in the U.S.”

Professor Silbey was the Edwards memorial lecturer at the University of Toronto on the topic “Governing Green Laboratories: Trust and Surveillance in the Cultures of Science.” She spoke on the same topic at Carleton University, Ottawa; the University of California, Berkeley, Center for the Study of Law and Society, Jurisprudence and Social Policy; the American Bar Foundation, Chicago; and the Sociology Department at Northwestern University, Evanston, IL. She also spoke on “Inventing Engineers: An Opportunistic (Natural) Experiment” at the Google Corporation, San Jose, CA; “The Rule of Law as Everyday Practice” on accepting the Doctor Honoris Causa from the Ecole Supérieure, Cachan, France; “The Institutionalization of Crisis and Reform in Engineering Education: Professional Aspirations and Commercial Constraints” at the International Network for Engineering Studies at Virginia Tech; and “Legal Regulation of Technoscience” at the Law and Society Association annual meeting in Baltimore.

Professor Walley presented “The Competing Politics of the ‘Pristine’ and the ‘Polluted’ Parks and Environmentalism in Mafia, Tanzania and Southeast Chicago” and “Debating ‘Sustainable Development’: Social Class and the Politics of Water in a Tanzanian and a U.S. Community” at Harvard University.

Publications

Professor Fischer published “Culture and Cultural Analysis as Experimental Systems” in *Cultural Anthropology*, and “Dialogue with Meron Benveniste and Salim Tamari” in *City of Collision: Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism* (Philip Misselwitz and Tim Reiniet, eds.). He also published several reviews and small essays in *Problematizing Global Knowledge* (Mike Featherstone, ed.).

Professor Helmreich published “An Archaeology of Artificial Life, Underwater” in *Genesis Redux: Essays in the History and Philosophy of Artificial Life* (Jessica Riskin, ed.); “Induction, Deduction, Abduction, and the Logics of Race and Kinship: Commentary on Stephan Palmié’s Genomics, Divination, ‘Racecraft’” in *American Ethnologist*; and “‘Life Is a Verb’: Inflections of Artificial Life in Cultural Context” in *Artificial Life*. “Gender in Real Time: Power and Transience in a Visual Age, an Interview of Kath Weston by Stefan Helmreich” appeared in *Body and Society*.

Professor James published a review of *Haitians in New York City: Transnationalism and Hometown Associations* in *Anthropological Quarterly*.

Lecturer Paxson published “Reproduction as Spiritual Kin Work: Orthodoxy, IVF and the Moral Economy of Motherhood in Greece” in *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, as well as “Artisanal Cheese and Economies of Sentiment in New England” in *Fast Food/Slow Food: The Cultural Economy of the Global Food System* (Richard Wilk, ed.).

Professor Silbey published “Talk of Law: Contested and Conventional Legality” in the *DePaul Law Review*, an item on “Legal Consciousness” in the *New Oxford Companion to Law*, and listings on “Globalization,” “Ideology,” “Law and Society,” “Legitimacy,” “Philip Selznick,” and “Science and Technology Studies” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology*.

Grants, Honors, and Awards

Professor Helmreich was a visiting scholar at the Faculty of Social Science, University of Iceland.

Lecturer Paxson was awarded a grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for her research on “Economies of Sentiment, Ecologies of Production: Crafting Locality in American Artisanal Cheesemaking.”

Professor Silbey was awarded a Doctor Honoris Causa from the École Normale Supérieure, Cachan, France, in November 2006.

Professor James received honorable mention in the Career Enhancement Competition of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation.

Susan S. Silbey
Program Head
Professor of Sociology and Anthropology

More information on the Anthropology program can be found at <http://web.mit.edu/anthropology/>.