

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. The faculty is active in the remaking of the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (HASS) curriculum. We feel strongly that MIT undergraduates need to be excited about ideas as well as techniques to think creatively and analytically about the social fields and cultures in which they work.

In the area of graduate teaching, faculty contribute directly to the doctoral program in History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society (HASTS) in which anthropology has emerged as the primary social science discipline, and to the PhD programs in the MIT Sloan School of Management. In both undergraduate and graduate education, we collaborate with faculty from other departments, bringing anthropological perspectives and cultural analyses to students through less conventional routes. Through research and teaching collaborations, the Anthropology faculty maintains strong ties with programs in the School of Engineering and in the Sloan School of Management (the Institute for Work and Employment Studies, the Organization Studies Group, and the Economic Sociology Program) 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, History, and the Program in Science, Technology, and Society.

One emerging strong emphasis of the program is in the area of visual anthropology, with classes relating to documentary and photography, to the intersection of visual anthropology with science and technology studies, and in the production of films. Science studies have also become a central focus of the department, with a strong commitment to pursuing the study of science and technology cross-culturally. The ongoing interest in human rights, development, and indigenous-state relations has shifted direction toward a more global perspective and a more overt concern with environmental issues, national and international intervention, and social movements. We are also involved with the Institute's Ethics Initiative.

As cultural anthropologists, department faculty work across the globe exploring the diversity of human practices. We work to achieve excellent anthropology by producing (1) detailed descriptions of the places, activities, and relationships of the persons and groups being studied, achieved through fieldwork and ethnography; (2) insightful, valid interpretations of what the described behaviors, events, and objects mean or signify to the actors observed; and (3) theoretical explanation of these practices and interpretations that can be placed within the larger body of anthropological and social theory. Thus, Anthropology faculty contribute to MIT's excellence by producing ethnographies that draw upon a rich pool of detailed descriptions to provide insight into 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

During academic year 2009–2010, professor Susan Silbey continued to serve as head of the Anthropology program. Assistant professor Erica James was promoted to associate professor without tenure beginning July 1, 2009. Professor James Howe took a sabbatical leave in the fall semester and associate professor Stefan Helmreich took a sabbatical leave in the spring semester, during which he was a fellow at the Institute of Advanced Study at Durham University in the United Kingdom. Associate professor Heather Paxson took up residency for the year as the Mary I. Bunting Institute Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. During the fall semester assistant professor Manduhai Buyandelger took a child care leave.

Teaching and Curriculum

New classes introduced by the program this year included the revised 21A.109, retitled *How Culture Works*, which was supported by the d'Arbelloff Fund for Excellence in Education and the SHASS Fund for Teaching and Learning and introduced as a new core undergraduate class taught by professors James and Buyandelger. DV Lab: Documenting Science through Video and New Media 21A.339/STS.064J, sponsored by the MIT Alumni Award Fund, was taught by associate professor Christine Walley and Chris Boebel, manager of multimedia development for MIT Academic Media Production Services. Professor Silbey, with professors Donald Lessard and Richard Schmalensee of the Sloan School, offered a newly designed subject for the energy minor, 21A.341/15.031/14.43J *Energy Decisions, Markets, and Policies*.

Professor James Howe introduced a new graduate subject, 21A.900/11.498J *Monitoring the Rights of Native Peoples*, in which students examined, assessed, and reported on the human rights status of indigenous peoples in Panama. This exercise was undertaken as part of the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR), in which the circumstances of indigenous peoples around the globe in different countries are examined each year on a rotating schedule. The students wrote a comprehensive assessment, which was submitted as a brief to the UPR Working Group. Three students were able to accompany Professor Howe, an expert on the Kuna people of Panama, on a fact-finding trip to Panama. The class was also visited by a professional anthropologist and historian, Bernal Castillo, who is himself a Kuna. More information can be found by reading the article published in the MIT News at <http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/2010/anthropology-panama.html>. In subsequent years, the course will select another group undergoing universal periodic review by the UN for the focus of their research. In this way, our students learn not only how to do in-depth empirical analysis of social organization and culture but also participate in a major global policy initiative and practice professional responsibilities.



Indigenous scholar Bernal Castillo during his trip to MIT as a visiting lecturer



Students with James Howe on a human rights study trip to Panama

Several faculty members served as graduate student advisors and on dissertation committees.

Publications

Professor Buyandelger has a book manuscript, *Tragic Spirits: Shamanism, Socialism, and Neoliberal State in Mongolia*, under contract with the University of Chicago Press. She has also written reviews for several journals.

Professor Helmreich published “Menschliches Leben auf See (Human Nature at Sea) in *Bios und Zoë: Die menschliche Natur im Zeitalter ihrer technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Human Nature in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility), M. Weiss, ed. Edition Suhrkamp. He also published a review of *Promising Genomics: Iceland and deCODE Genetics in a World of Speculation*, by M. Fortun, in *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*.

Professor Howe’s book, *Chiefs, Scribes, and Ethnographer: Kuna Culture from Inside and Out*, University of Texas Press, was published in November 2009.

Professor Jean Jackson wrote a review of Edward F. Fischer, ed., “Indigenous Peoples, Civil Society, and the Neo-liberal State in Latin America” in *Journal of Anthropological Research* and also reviewed several other journal articles and book manuscripts.

Professor James’s book, *Democratic Insecurities: Violence, Trauma, and Intervention in Haiti*, was published by the University of California Press. Two articles by Professor James were also published: “Neomodern Insecurity in Haiti and the Politics of Asylum” in *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* and “Ruptures, Rights and Repair: The Politics of Truth in Haiti” in *Social Science and Medicine*.

Professor Paxson published a review of *The Gospel of Food: Everything You Think You Know about Food is Wrong* by B. Glassner in *Agricultural History* and reviewed several book and journal manuscripts.

Professor Silbey published “Taming Prometheus: Talk of Safety and Culture” in the *Annual Review of Sociology* and with C. Seron, “The Dialectic between Expert Knowledge and Professional Discretion: Accreditation, Social Control, and the Limits of Instrumental Logic” in *Engineering Studies*. She also published “In Search of Social Science,” in *Workshop on Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research*, M. Lamont and P. White, eds.

Professor Walley’s article “Deindustrializing Chicago: A Daughter’s Story” appeared in *The Insecure American*, University of California Press, H. Gusterson and C. Besteman, eds. She also reviewed book manuscripts and journal articles.

Projects and Presentations

Professors Helmreich and Paxson won a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to fund a 2010–2011 Sawyer Seminar on the Comparative Study of Cultures entitled “Sensing the Unseen.”

Professor Michael Fischer gave the keynote speech entitled “Switching Points: New Asian Science and Technology Sites in the Global Cosmo-political Circuitry” at the Asian Now! Summer School Capstone Conference at the National University of Singapore. Professor Helmreich presented “Alien Ocean: Life at Sea” at York University, Toronto, and also at a public lecture sponsored by the Institute of Advanced Study at Durham University, United Kingdom. He also gave a talk on “Underwater Music” at Maastricht, Netherlands. At the meetings of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in Philadelphia, he presented on “Extreme Life Forms” at the panel Extreme: Histories and Economies of Humanness Inside Outerspaces and on “Nonlinear Works and Lives” at the panel The End/s of the Anthropology of Technoscience: Celebrating 10 Years of the Diana Forsythe Prize. He also presented with Professor Paxson on “Microbes Meet Earth” at the University of Toronto.

Professor Howe’s paper “Voting for Autonomy and Reconciliation” was spoken by a colleague in absentia at the AAA meetings in Philadelphia.

Professor Jackson presented “The Work of Culture: Representation of Two Indigenous Peoples in the Colombian National Press” in the session on Performing Difference: Circulating Culture Across Boundaries at the Latin American Studies Association in Rio de Janeiro and “Caught in the Crossfire: Colombian Indigenous Resistance in Cauca,” a paper for the session on Indigenous Identity and Civic Activism in Latin America at the AAA annual meetings in Philadelphia.

Professor James co-organized a panel on Intervention: The Anthropology of Postconflict Humanitarianism at the Society for Medical Anthropology meeting at Yale University, where she also gave a talk called “Brokering Bare Life: ‘Bureaucraft’ and the Social Life of Aid in Haiti,” which she also presented at the AAA meetings in Philadelphia.

Professor Paxson gave talks on “Microbes Meet Earth” at the University of Toronto, “Tasting and Talking *Terroir*: Locating Value in American Artisan Cheese” at a public lecture at the Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Study, and “Reverse-Engineering Terroir: Locating the Value of American Artisanal Cheese” at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

Professor Silbey’s presentations included “Governing the Gap: Forging Safe Science through a Community of Practice” at the European Group for Organizational Studies in Barcelona, Spain; “Taming Prometheus: Talking about Safety and Culture: The Neoliberal Legacy” at MIT and at a workshop held by the University of Chicago and Northwestern University; “Legal Culture and Cultures of Legality” at the 25th Anniversary of the International Institute for the Sociology of Law, held at Onati, Spain; and “The Dialectic between Expert Knowledge and Professional Discretion: Accreditation, Social Control, and the Limits of Instrumental Logic” at the Society for Social Studies Annual Meeting in Arlington, VA.

Professor Walley presented a paper, “The Pristine and the Polluted: Exploring Future Directions in Anthropological Research on the Environment,” as part of a panel she co-organized on Forging a New Generation of Anthropological Studies of the Environment:

At the Crossroads of Political Ecology, Science Studies, and Environmental Justice at AAA meetings in Washington, DC.

Program Contributions to MIT and Outside Communities

Anthropology program faculty members served on various committees, boards, and task forces at MIT. Professor Jackson served on the SHASS Teaching Awards Committee, the Steering Committee of Women's and Gender Studies, on the editorial board of the MIT Faculty Newsletter, and as study director on an MIT Alumni Travel-sponsored trip to Amazonian Peru. Professor Walley was chair of the McMillan-Stewart search committee and also of the Stata Parent Council, and served on the admissions committee of the HASTS program. Professor Helmreich was a member of the Committee on Graduate Programs. Professor Fischer served on the associate provost's committees on the Middle East and on India and on the McMillan-Stewart search committee. Professor Paxson served on the Child Care Task Group. Professor James served on the Humanities Oversight Committee. Professor Silbey served on the MIT Energy Initiative Education Task Force, the MIT-Singapore University of Technology and Design exchange, the HASTS Steering Committee, and the MIT budget task forces on procurement and on undergraduate education, and the research advisory group of the MIT Task Force on Race and Diversity.

Outside MIT, Professor Jackson served as a member of the AAA's Ad Hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology in US Security and Intelligence Communities and was also an at-large board member of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America. She also served on the editorial boards of *Antipoda: Revista de Antropología y Arqueológica Universidad de los Andes* and the *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*. Professor Jackson is also on the international advisory board of *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*. Professors Jackson and Howe both served on the board of directors of the Cultural Survival organization. Professor Howe is also a trustee of the Pilgrim Hall Museum in Plymouth, MA. Professor Helmreich is on the editorial boards of *Cultural Anthropology* and *Science as Culture*. Professor James is an advisory board member of the Haitian Multi-Service Center of Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Boston. Professor Buyandelger is a consultant for the Oral History of Mongolia project for the Department of Anthropology, Cambridge, UK, and is a member of the Fulbright selection committee at the US Embassy in Mongolia, US Information Service. Professor Silbey is a mentor for the Sociology of Law Section of the American Sociological Association and the Law and Society Association. She is on the editorial boards of *Annual Review for Law and Social Science*, *American Political Science Review*, and *Regulations and Governance*. Professor Fischer is on the editorial boards of *Cultural Anthropology*, *Cultural Politics*, and *East Asian Science, Technology, and Society*. He also serves on the board of governors of the University of California Humanities Research Institute.

Susan S. Silbey

Program Head and Professor of Sociology and Anthropology

Leon and Anne Goldberg Professor of Humanities

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