

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 has a strong commitment to participation in the remaking of the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (HASS) curriculum and feel strongly that MIT undergraduates need to be excited about ideas as well as techniques and 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. In the fields of both undergraduate and graduate education, we are enthusiastic about working 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 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, History, and the Program in Science, Technology, and Society (STS).

One emphasis of the program is the pursuit of initiatives in the area of visual anthropology, with continuing development of classes relating to documentary and photography, 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 pursue the study of science and technology cross-culturally. The ongoing interest in human rights, development, and indigenous-state relations has shifted direction towards a more global perspective and a more overt concern with environmental issues, populations, representation, national and international intervention, and social movements. There also has been involvement with the institute's Ethics Initiative.

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 continued to serve as head of the Anthropology program. Professor James Howe served as acting head during the spring term while professor Silbey was on leave as a Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellow. Assistant professor Heather Paxson was promoted to associate professor without tenure beginning July 1, 2008. On the same date, Manduhai Buyandelger joined the Anthropology faculty as an assistant professor. Assistant professor Erica James was successfully reviewed for promotion to associate professor without tenure, to begin July 1, 2009. Associate professor Stefan Helmreich continued as director of graduate studies for MIT's HASTS doctoral program. Professor Jean Jackson took a sabbatical leave, and Professor Paxson took a junior faculty leave during the spring term. Ms. Rosemary Hegg continued as administrative officer and Ms. Amberly Steward as senior administrative assistant.

Highlights of the Year

Anthropology produced the first in a series of short films about what Anthropology is and what Anthropologists do, which received widespread and very favorable notice in the field. The film, *Doing Anthropology*, about ethnographic fieldwork (and featuring three faculty members) is licensed for near-universal access through Creative Commons; it can be picked up on YouTube or on departmental and association websites. Other activities included cosponsorship with STS of the HASTS colloquia Global STS in Africa, Asia and Beyond. In addition, Professor Silbey hosted a conference titled Sociological Citizens in January and visiting professor Lucy Suchman hosted the workshop Relocating Innovation in May; both events were held at MIT.

Professor Helmreich won MIT's Levitan Teaching Prize in the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences. Professor Paxson became the holder of the Class of 1957 career development chair, beginning July 1, 2008. She has also received the Belasco Prize for Scholarly Excellence from the Association for the Study of Food and Society. Professor Silbey was honored with the 2009 Harry J. Kalven Jr. Award by the Law and Society Association for empirical scholarship that has contributed most effectively to the advancement of research in law and society, in particular for critical contributions to the sociology of law. Professor Silbey became Leon and Anne Goldberg professor of humanities on July 1, 2008, and took up her Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship for Trust and Surveillance in the Cultures of Science in the spring term.

Teaching and Curriculum

The department, led by Professors James and Silbey, was successful in obtaining funding from the d'Arbelloff Fund and the SHASS Teaching and Learning Fund for the revision and development of 21A.109 How Culture Works into a new core undergraduate class. Professor Christine Walley received an MIT Alumni Class Funds Award for the new undergraduate class 21A.339/STS.064J DV Lab: Documenting Science through Video and New Media.

Five new subjects were introduced to the Anthropology undergraduate curriculum: Professor Buyandelger's 21A.252 How Cultures Remember, 21A.253 God, Violence, and Media; 21A.470/SP.448J Gender and Representation of Asian Women; Professor

Paxson's 21A.370/STS.074J Art, Craft, Science; and 21A.345 The Politics of International Development, taught by Professor Walley. Professor James cotaught the new interdisciplinary class 21A.114J Black Matters: Introduction to Black Studies. Professor Suchman presented a revised version of undergraduate class 21A.350/SP.484/STS.086 The Anthropology of Computing: Digital Cultures, and a new graduate-level class, 21A.850/STS.484 The Anthropology of Cybercultures. In addition to the graduate class taught by Professor Suchman, Anthropology faculty introduced two other graduate-level classes, 21A.780/STS.451J Representing Reality: Theories and Production of Documentary Film and Video, taught by Professor Walley and Mr. Chris Boebel, and 21A.790/11.238J Ethics of Intervention: Anthropological Approaches, taught by Professor James.

Professor Silbey designed a new subject for an energy minor to be offered next year, 21A.341/15.031/14.43J Energy Decisions, Markets and Policies, with professors Lessard and Schmalensee of the Sloan School. Professor Silbey also taught for two weeks in the MIT Portugal Program, and along with Christopher Winship of the Harvard Sociology Department, organized and taught an informal 10-week graduate seminar, Social Theory: Pragmatism.

Professor Helmreich continued as director of graduate studies for the HASTS doctoral program. Several faculty members served as graduate student advisors and on dissertation committees.

Research Projects and Publications

Professor Buyandelger has a book manuscript, *Tragic Spirits: Shamanism, Socialism, and Neoliberal State in Mongolia*, under contract with the University of Chicago Press.

Professor Michael Fischer published a book, *Anthropological Futures*, Duke University Press. This is the first book in a series of three (for which he is coeditor): *Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices*. He also published chapters in three other books as well as three articles in refereed journals. Professor Fischer made research trips to Singapore, the Middle East, and Brazil.

Professor Helmreich's book, *Alien Ocean: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas* was published by the University of California Press. He also published the chapter "Intimate Sensing" in *Simulation and Its Discontents*. (S. Turkle, ed.) as well as "Submarine Sound" in *The Wire*, "Species of Biocapital" in *Science as Culture*, and a review of *Dolly Mixtures: The Remaking of Genealogy* by S. Franklin in *American Ethnologist*.

Professor Howe's book *Chiefs, Scribes, and Ethnographers* is forthcoming in November 2009 at the University of Texas Press.

Professor Jackson published a review article "Neoliberal Multiculturalism and Indigenous Movements" in *Latin American Research Review* and the articles "Traditional, Transnational and Cosmopolitan: The Colombian Yanacona Look to the Past and to the Future" (with M. C. Ramirez) in *American Ethnologist* and "The Cross-Cultural Evidence on 'Extreme Behaviors': What Can It Tell Us?" in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*. She also wrote a report to the American Association of Anthropology

(AAA) Committee on Human Rights on “The Awa of Southern Colombia: a ‘Perfect Storm’ of Violence.” Professor Jackson also has a chapter in press titled “The Evolution of Colombian National Press Portrayals of Amazon Indigenous Development and Organizing, 1985–2005” in *Editing Eden: A Reconsideration of Identity, Politics, and Place in Amazonia* (F. Hutchins and P. C. Wilson, eds.).

Professor James’ forthcoming book, *Democratic Insecurities: Violence, Trauma, and Intervention in Haiti*, is in press at the University of California Press.

Professor Paxson continued her ethnographic research, funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation, on domestic artisan cheesemaking, interviewing cheesemakers and visiting dairy farms in Wisconsin and northern California. In February, she distributed the first nationwide social science survey of American artisan cheesemakers. Portions of the survey will be published in *Culture: The Word on Cheese*, and a 10-page report was distributed to survey participants as well as to interested cheese organizations.

Professor Silbey published “Taming Prometheus: Talk of Safety and Culture” in the *Annual Review of Sociology*, “The Sociological Citizen: Recognizing Relational Interdependence in Law and Organizations” with graduate students R. Huising and S. V. Coslovsky in *L’Année Sociologique*, and “Science and Technology Studies: From Controversies to Post-Humanist Social Theory” with HASTS graduate student S. Roosth in the *Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Another article coauthored with C. Seron is forthcoming in *Engineering Studies*.

Professor Walley is finishing a book manuscript *The Struggle for Existence from the Cradle to the Grave: An Anthropologist’s Memoir of Family and Class in the United States*, as well as several articles.

Presentations

Professor Buyandelger presented “Technologies of Election: Women’s Participation in the Parliamentary Election of 2008” at the conference Contemporary Mongolia: Transitions, Development, and Social Transformations held at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

Professor Fischer visited Brazil delivering several talks: “The Geoid as Transitional Object,” “The Futures of Anthropology and STS,” and “From the World Geodetic System to Climate Models: the Place of Brazil in Global Science and STS.” He spoke on “Technoscientific Imaginaries” at Harvard University and made presentations on “Postcolonial Disorders: to Live with What Would Otherwise be Unendurable,” “Visual Media and Ethnography in Conflict Zones,” and “Ethnography and Science Studies in Anthropology” at AAA meetings. He also presented “Hermeneutics and Phenomenological Anthropology” at Emory University and “Global STS” at the National University of Singapore.

Professor Helmreich presented “Science As/Is Culture” at a Harvard-MIT symposium and gave two other talks at MIT. He also presented “Species of Biocapital” and “Artificial Life across Media, Simulated and Submarine” in the United Kingdom. “Alien Ocean:

Life at Sea” was presented at Sarah Lawrence College and at Brown University. He participated in a panel presentation on “Alien Ocean: The Symbiopolitics of Life at Sea,” as well as in a discussant commentary “The Anthropology of What Happens Between” at another panel at AAA meetings, a presented a commentary at a workshop at New School for Social Research in New York, and participated in a joint presentation at the Megapolis Audio Festival, in Cambridge, MA.

Professor Howe was principal speaker at a symposium at the Library of Congress in February 2009 and delivered a talk titled “The Kuna and Anthropology: A Century of Engagement.”

Professor James gave a presentation on “Reflections on Anthropological Work in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings” at the workshop on the Anthropology of Conflict and Post-Conflict Interventions: Comparative Studies of Post-Conflict Interventions in the Balkans, West Africa, Latin America, and Indonesia, at Harvard University. She gave talks titled “Neo-Modern Insecurity in Haiti and the Politics of Asylum” at the AAA annual meeting in San Francisco and “Haiti, Insecurity, and the Politics of Asylum” at the Nathan S. Kline Institute for Psychiatric Research in Orangeburg, NY.

Professor Paxson gave a talk on “Locating Value in Artisan Cheese: Staking ‘Terroir’ Claims in New World Imaginaries” at State College, Philadelphia, PA. This talk was presented in an extended version at a three-day academic workshop on “Ethnographic Studies of Contemporary Cheese Making and Marketing” that Professor Paxson co-organized at Schumacher College in Devon, England. Other talks based on her research were “What Makes Artisan Cheese *Artisanal*? Art, Craft, and Science in American Artisan Cheesemaking?” at the University of California at Davis, “The ‘Microbiopolitics’ of Raw-Milk Cheese in the US” at Brown University, “Cheese Cultures: American Tastes and Traditions of Artisan Invention,” at the Robert Mondavi Institute for Wine and Food Science, University of California at Davis, and “What Makes Artisan Food Artisanal?” at the AAA annual meeting in San Francisco.

Professor Silbey gave several presentations: “The Sociological Citizen: Observing Relational Interdependence in Law and Organizations” at the Society for Advancement of Socio-Economics in Costa Rica; “Rotten Apples or a Rotting Barrel” at a National Academy of Sciences workshop on Ethics Education, Washington, DC; “Trust and Surveillance in the Technologically Structured Workplace” in Cachan, France; “Sociological Citizen: Interdependencies in Law and Organizations” and “A Font of Civic Virtue, A Buzzing, Argumentative, Tendentious Engagement” at MIT; “Unchallengeable Orthodoxies in Science” at Arizona State University Law School; “Governing Green Laboratories: Trust and Surveillance in the Cultures of Science” in Hyeres, France, the American Sociological Association in Boston, and Brown University; “The Public Deliberation Industry: Old Wine in New Bottles” at the New England Law and Society Meeting; “Tracking the Rule of Law: How to Build Theory from Qualitative Data” at Yale School of Management and Northeastern University; “Explaining Influence” at Harvard University; a talk at the interdisciplinary workshop on law and rationality at Cardozo Law School; “Governing the Gap” at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver; and “Law and Space: The Signs of Law in Everyday Life” and

“Talk of Safety Culture: The Neo-Liberal Legacy” at the Law and Society annual meeting in Denver.

Professor Walley presented a paper at the African Studies Association meetings in Chicago, “What We Women Want: An Ethnographic Exploration of Participatory Politics and Transnational Feminism” and gave a lecture at MIT titled “‘Sustainable Development’ from Tanzania to Chicago: Tracking the Subaltern in Social Science Debates about the Environment.”

Program Contributions to MIT and Outside Communities

Anthropology program faculty members served on various committees, boards, and task forces at MIT. Professor Walley was chair of the McMillan-Stewart search committee for the faculty position of chair of women in the developing world. Professor Helmreich was a member of the Committee on Graduate Programs and interim director of the Kelly-Douglas Fund. Professor Fischer served on the associate provost’s committees on the Middle East and on India. Professor Paxson served on the Women’s and Gender Studies curriculum committee and joined the childcare task group to work with the MIT Council on Family and Work. Professor Silbey served on the MIT Energy Initiative education task force, the HASTS steering committee, the Procurement and Dean for Undergraduate Education task forces of the president’s ad hoc task force on the budget, and the technical advisory group of the MIT task force on race.

Outside MIT, Professor Jackson served as a member of AAA’s ad hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with 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 Arqueología Universidad de los Andes*, *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, and *Boletín de Antropología*. Professor Jackson is also on the advisory boards of *Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* and *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*. Professors Jackson and Howe both served on the board of directors of Cultural Survival. 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 Fischer is also on the editorial board of *Cultural Anthropology* as well as *Cultural Politics* and *East Asian Science, Technology and Society*. He is on the board of governors of the University of California Humanities Research Institute and was on the ad hoc committee of the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton, NJ.

James Howe
Acting Head
Professor of Anthropology

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/>.