

Anthropology Section

Personnel and Administrative Changes

During academic year 2015–2016, Elting E. Morison Professor of Anthropology Stefan Helmreich continued to serve as head of the [Anthropology Program](#). William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor Heather Paxson continued in the role of director of graduate studies for the Doctoral Program in History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society (HASTS) during the fall semester, and Associate Professor Christine Walley assumed the role in the spring term.

Highlights of the Year

Associate Professor Manduhai Buyandelger continued work on her second book manuscript, *A Thousand Steps to Parliament: Women Running for Election in Postsocialist Mongolia*, which is under review for an advance contract with the University of Chicago Press. Also this academic year, Buyandelger was awarded an MIT Class of 1956 Career Development Chair. In November 2015, Professor Helmreich published his book *Sounding the Limits of Life: Essays in the Anthropology of Biology and Beyond* (Princeton University Press). Associate Professor Erica James continued directing and building the Global Health and Medical Humanities Initiative (GHMHI) with funding from the provost; the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (SHASS) Dean's Office; and the Todman Family Fund. GHMHI hosted a series of well-attended afternoon lectures on contemporary issues in global health and co-sponsored Harvard University's Friday Morning Seminar in Culture, Psychiatry and Global Mental Health. In spring 2016, James spoke at inaugural events for MIT's Campaign for a Better World. Associate Professor Graham Jones took up a Mellon Foundation New Directions Fellowship, an award permitting him to undertake substantive training in a new field, in this case Chinese language training. During 2016, he was a visiting researcher in anthropology at Boston University.

Assistant Professor Amy Moran-Thomas, whose appointment officially commenced in May 2015, began teaching MIT subjects. In spring 2016, Anthropology organized a workshop for Moran-Thomas's manuscript in progress, *Metabola: Planetary Health and the Global Diabetes Epidemic*, which examines diabetes and environmental injustice in Belize and is under contract with the University of California Press. Professor Paxson presented the Gehman Lecture at the University of Western Ontario in March and gave a keynote lecture during the Critical Consumption: The Future of Food Studies conference at Princeton University in April. In September Professor Susan Silbey, on leave from MIT, served as a distinguished visiting professor in the Faculty of Law at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia; also, during the fall, she was a visiting scholar at the Institut d'Études Avancées in Paris, France. Professor Walley's 90-minute documentary film *Exit Zero: An Industrial Family Story* (directed by Chris Boebel and produced and co-written by Walley) premiered at the Margaret Mead Film Festival, held at the Museum of Natural History in New York City on October 24. The film was awarded the 2015 Studs Terkel Media Prize by the Working Class Studies Association.

Anthropology continued to gather funds for ongoing research projects, from MIT and beyond. Professor Buyandelger received funding from the Samuel Tak Lee MIT Real Estate Entrepreneurship Laboratory for her project “Disjuncture and Resilience: A Holistic Approach to Real Estate Development in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.” Professor James, in collaboration with Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering Dennis McLaughlin, continued work on a three-year grant (“Leverage Points: Opportunities for Increasing Food Production in Developing Countries”) through the Abdul Latif Jameel World Water and Food Security Lab (J-WAFS). Professor Paxson was the principal investigator on two National Science Foundation (NSF) Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grants, one ending in 2015 and another ongoing into 2016. Professor Silbey received continued funding from the Simons Center for the Social Brain and from the Tata Center for Technology and Design for her project “Environmental Sanitation Solutions to Improve Female Workforce Participation.”

This year Anthropology once again hosted several visiting students and postdoctoral researchers. Brandyn McKinley came to us from the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Connecticut as a 2015–2016 Mellon predoctoral fellow and was supervised by Heather Paxson. Doctoral student Fortino Dominguez visited for the month of October 2015 from the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico and was supervised by Stefan Helmreich and Emeritus Professor Jean Jackson. Noémie Merleau-Ponty joined us beginning in 2016 as a Fysen Foundation Fellow after completing her PhD in the Laboratoire d’anthropologie des institutions et organisations sociales at L’École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris. She was supervised by Stefan Helmreich and Heather Paxson. Postdoctoral associate Seth Hannah completed his second and final year with us, supervised by Erica James, and he taught sociology subjects in connection with the Global Health and Medical Humanities Initiative.

Teaching and Curriculum

Professor Buyandelger taught the core subject 21A.01 How Culture Works in fall 2015. In spring 2016 she taught WGS.274J Images of Asian Women and 21A.104 Memory, Culture, and Forgetting, an undergraduate course that is a “meets with” graduate subject offering. Professor Helmreich taught 21A.303J The Anthropology of Biology in the fall and co-taught (with Professor David Jones of Harvard’s Department of the History of Science) the 21A.319J History and Anthropology of Medicine and Biology graduate seminar in the spring.

Professor James taught two new courses, 21A.308 Global Mental Health (fall) and 21A.331 Infections and Inequalities (spring). The second of these courses was a cross-school offering that James team-taught with Professor of Biological Engineering Arup Chakraborty and Professor of Biology Dennis Kim. James also taught the 21A.306 Culture, Embodiment, and the Senses undergraduate seminar in the fall. In addition, she was a co-instructor (with Professor Michael Fischer of the Program in Science, Technology, and Society) for HST.934J Introduction to Global Medicine: Bioscience, Technologies, Disparities, Strategies, a three-unit class offered under the joint Harvard-MIT Health Sciences and Technology umbrella. James served as a supervisor for three Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) students working on GHMHI and J-WAFS projects and was a member of the Committee on Prehealth Advising.

James's GHMHI received continued postdoctoral support to offer two undergraduate courses in sociology and medical sociology.

Professor Graham Jones worked with Heather Paxson and Stefan Helmreich on a new subject, 21A.157 *The Meaning of Life*, that will be taught for the first time by Jones and Paxson in spring 2017; an award from the d'Arbeloff Fund for Excellence in Education enabled the development of this subject. In fall 2015, Professor Moran-Thomas revived the long-dormant but very popular 21A.305J *Drugs, Politics, and Culture* subject. In the spring, she taught our other core subject, 21A.00 *Introduction to Anthropology*. Professor Paxson taught WGS.172J *For Love and Money: Rethinking the Family* in the spring along with 21A.809 *Designing Empirical Research in the Social Sciences*, a graduate subject aimed at preparing HASTS students to write grant proposals. Although on leave, Professor Silbey continued to serve as chair of the MITx Policy Committee. In the fall, Professor Walley taught one of our CI-H (Communication Intensive in the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences) classes, 21A.461 *What Is Capitalism?*

As has been the case for several years, faculty participation in the Doctoral Program in History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology and Society as well as in PhD programs in the Sloan School of Management and the Department of Urban Studies and Planning, continues to be well in evidence, with faculty members serving as graduate student advisors and on dissertation committees. Professor Helmreich served on 20 dissertation committees (eight as principal advisor), and Professor James served on four such committees. Professor Jones served on five dissertation committees (three as principal advisor) and was a faculty advisor to one undergraduate major. Professor Paxson, in addition to her role as director of graduate studies, served on nine dissertation committees (three as principal advisor). She also was a faculty advisor to one undergraduate 21E major. Professor Silbey served on six dissertation committees (three as chair), and Professor Walley served on eight dissertation committees (one as principal advisor). Professor Walley was also a faculty advisor to two undergraduate majors and, as noted above, assumed the role of director of graduate studies in the spring term.

Publications

Professor Buyandelger completed a draft of her new book, *A Thousand Steps to Parliament: Women Running for Election in Postsocialist Mongolia*, which is under review for advance contract with the University of Chicago Press.

In addition to *Sounding the Limits of Life: Essays in the Anthropology of Biology and Beyond* (Princeton University Press, 2016), Professor Helmreich published "Transducing" in *Experience: Culture, Cognition, and the Common Sense* (MIT Press, 2016); "Transduction" in *Keywords in Sound Studies: Towards A Conceptual Lexicon* (Duke University Press, 2015); and "Old Waves, New Waves: Changing Objects in Physical Oceanography" in *Fluid Frontiers: New Currents in Marine and Maritime Environmental History* (White Horse Press, 2015). He also published a variety of commentaries, including "Hokusai's Great Wave Enters the Anthropocene" in *Environmental Humanities* (2015) and "Being the Wave" in *Cabinet* (2015).

Professor James published two chapters in edited volumes: “‘If You Remember, You Can’t Live’: Trauma, Insecurity, and the F/utility of ‘PTSD’ in Haiti” in *Living and Dying in the Contemporary World* (University of California Press, 2015) and “Culture, Trauma, and the Social Life of PTSD in Haiti” in *Culture and PTSD: Trauma in Global and Historical Perspective* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). She also published (with Malick Ghachem) a September 2015 viewpoint piece, “Black Histories Matter,” in *Perspectives on History*, the newsmagazine of the American Historical Association.

Professor Jones completed a new book manuscript, *Dangerous Doubles: Magical Thinking and the Anthropological Imagination*, now under contract with the University of Chicago Press. He published “‘There’s No Rules. It’s Hackathon’: Negotiating Commitment in a Context of Volatile Sociality” (with Beth M. Semel and Audrey Le) in *The Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* (2015). Also, he co-published two edited volume pieces, “The Ethnography of Inscriptive Speech” (with Bambi B. Schieffelin) in *eFieldnotes: Makings of Anthropology in a Digital World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015) and “How to Become a Magician in Paris” (with Loïc Marquet) in *World of Work* (Cornell University Press, 2015). In addition, he published “Analogy as Legerdemain: Tricks, Politics, and the Trope of the ‘Magic Negro’” in the interdisciplinary online journal *The Enemy*.

Professor Moran-Thomas published “Creation of Emergency and the Afterlife of Intervention: Technologies of War and Cure” in *Health and Humanitarianism: Ethnographies of Practice* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). As noted above, her book *Metabola: Planetary Health and the Global Diabetes Epidemic* is under contract with the University of California Press.

Professor Paxson published “La Vita American del Formaggio: La Negoziazione dei Valori di un Prodotto Artigianale in una Società Industriale” in *Annuario di Antropologia*, an Italian anthropology journal. She also published “When Chèvre Was Weird: Hippie Taste, Technoscience, and the Revival of American Artisanal Food-Making” in *Groovy Science: Science, Technology, and the American Counterculture* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

Professor Silbey published “The Elephant in the Room: Constraints and Consequences of a Four-year Undergraduate Engineering Degree” in *Engineering Studies* (2015). With Carroll Seron, Erin Cech, and Brian Rubineau, she published “Persistence Is Cultural: Professional Socialization and the Reproduction of Sex Segregation” in *Work and Occupations* (2015). In 2015, she co-published (with Joelle Evans and Ruthanne Huising) “Accounting for Accounts: Crafting Ethnographic Validity Through Team Ethnography” in the *Handbook of Qualitative Organizational Research*.

Professor Walley published “Transmedia as Experimental Ethnography: The Exit Zero Project, Deindustrialization, and the Politics of Nostalgia” in *American Ethnologist* (2015). Her co-produced film, *Exit Zero: An Industrial Family Story* also premiered at the Margaret Mead Film Festival in New York City.

Presentations

In November 2015, Professor Buyandelger gave a talk titled “Broadcasting Female Candidates in the Mongolian Parliamentary Elections” on a panel addressing migration, materiality, and political subjectivity at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in Denver. In March 2016, she was the keynote speaker at the annual conference of the Association for Central Eurasian Students, held at Indiana University.

Professor Helmreich gave a plenary lecture, “For and Against Sound,” at *Periods and Waves: A Conference on Sound and History*, at Stony Brook University in New York in April 2016. He delivered an earlier version of this paper at the Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Music at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in January 2016. In November 2015, he gave a talk titled “Music for and Against the Cochlear Implant” on a panel addressing acoustic methodologies at the AAA annual meeting in Denver. In addition, he served as a discussant at this meeting for a panel focusing on image as method. At the meetings of the Society for the Social Study of Science, also in Denver, Helmreich presented a paper on the work of anthropologist S. Lochlann Jain. In June 2016, he gave a talk titled “The Wave Lab” during the *Oceanic Ecologies and Imaginaries* workshop at the University of California Humanities Research Institute in Irvine, CA.

In November 2015, Professor James gave a talk titled “The Matter of Black Lives: Hauntology, Necropolitics, and the ‘Spectral South’” on a panel honoring Byron J. Good and Mary-Jo Delvecchio Good at the AAA annual meeting in Denver. She also served as a discussant at this meeting for a panel on “Faith-Based Movements and Civic Participation in Urban Peripheries.” In addition, she chaired the panel “Is Female to Male as NGO Is to the State?” at the AAA meeting in Denver. She gave a talk on global health and medical humanities for the Freshman Pre-Orientation Program at MIT. In February 2016, she gave an invited lecture, “Health as a Human Right or Human Rights and Health? Reflections from an Anthropologist of Haiti,” at Mbarara University of Science and Technology in Uganda.

Professor Jones delivered the Lerner Distinguished Lecture in Religious Studies at New York University in October 2015, speaking on “From Tricks to Truth? Magic as Religious Metaphor.” Also in October, he presented “Imitation and Individuation: From Toddler Talk to Internet Memes” at New York University. In November, he gave a talk titled “Decredentialing Credentials: MOOCs, Hackathons and the Case for Amateurism” on a panel held at the AAA annual meeting in Denver. He also served as a discussant at this meeting for a panel with the theme “Consolations of Concealment.”

Professor Moran-Thomas gave a talk titled “‘Healthy Living Made Fun and Easy!’: Ironies of Education in the Global Diabetes Epidemic” on a panel addressing ethics and expertise at the AAA annual meeting in November 2015. She also served as a discussant at this meeting for a panel called “ToxiCities: Exploring Contamination.” With medical anthropologist Adia Benton she presented “What Is Adherence, and When Should It Apply to Policy Makers?” at the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene in London in September 2015.

As noted above, Professor Paxson gave a keynote lecture at the Critical Consumption conference in April and presented the Gehman Lecture in March. In addition, she was a panelist at “Gut Reactions” at Princeton University in March. She gave a talk titled “Moving Perishables across Borders in the Economy of Qualities” on a panel held at the AAA annual meeting in November. She also served as a discussant at this meeting for a panel on “Microsocialities.”

Professor Silbey gave three talks in connection with her visit to Australia: “Governing Inside: Interpreting Regulation and Compliance,” “Tracking the Signs of Law in Everyday Life,” and “The Struggle for Accountability: Systems, Science and Surveillance,” all at the University of New South Wales Faculty of Law in September 2015. She also presented “The Struggle for Accountability: Systems, Science, and Surveillance” at Stanford University’s Center for Advanced Studies in Behavioral Sciences in October 2015.

Professor Walley gave many lectures after the screenings of her film *Exit Zero*, including presentations at the University of Chicago and Indiana University. She also gave a talk titled “Rethinking Anthropological Engagements with Class in 21st Century Capitalism” on a panel focusing on generating capitalism at the AAA annual meeting in November. *Exit Zero* was at the center of a panel held at this meeting, “The Strange Familiarity of Exit Zero: A Conversation with Christine Walley,” on which Walley served as a discussant.

Contributions to MIT and Outside Communities

Anthropology Program faculty members served on a wide range of committees and boards at MIT. Professor Buyandelger served as the concentration advisor for Anthropology during the academic year. She also worked as a faculty mentor and liaison for the MIT-Mongolia Program and joined the MIT Faculty Newsletter Committee. Professor Helmreich continued as head of Anthropology and served on the Kelly-Douglas Prize Committee, the HASTS Graduate Admissions Committee, MIT’s Visiting Artists Committee, and the MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology Symposium Committee. Professor James was a member of the Committee on Prehealth Advising, the Committee on Community Giving at MIT, the Task Force on the Future of Libraries, and the Institute for Medical Engineering and Science Global Health Workshop Planning Committee. She also served as a faculty mentor to Amy Moran-Thomas. Professor Jones was on leave during the academic year. Professor Paxson served as a minor advisor, the Anthropology undergraduate officer (spring), and a faculty mentor to Manduhai Buyandelger. In addition, she was an advisor to predoctoral fellow Brandyn McKinley. She also served on the Commencement Committee, the Advisory Committee on Graduate Stipends, and the Kelly Essay Prize Committee. Professor Silbey was on leave during the academic year but still served on the Institute for Data, Systems, and Society Curriculum Committee. Professor Walley served as the Anthropology undergraduate officer in the fall and was involved with MIT’s First Generation Program.

Outside MIT, Professor Buyandelger was a reviewer for *American Ethnologist*, *Ethnos*, and Cornell University Press. Professor Helmreich served on the editorial boards of *American Ethnologist*, *Environmental Humanities*, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, the

Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, and *Science as Culture*. Also, he was a member of the advisory boards for *Culture, Theory and Critique* and *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, and Technoscience*. He was a reviewer for *BioSocieties*, *Current Anthropology*, *Environmental Humanities*, *Leonardo*, *Political Geography*, the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *Social Studies of Science*, and *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*, as well as for Duke University Press, the University of California Press, and the University of Minnesota Press. Professor James was a reviewer for *Anthropological Theory and Territory, Politics, Governance*. Professor Jones served as an NSF Dissertation Grants in Cultural Anthropology panelist and was a reviewer for the University of Chicago Press and the University of California Press. Professor Moran-Thomas was a reviewer for *Medical Anthropology*.

Professor Paxson served on the editorial boards of the *Oxford Companion to Cheese*, *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, and *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*. She was a member of the advisory boards of the Cheese of Choice Coalition and the *Graduate Journal of Food Studies*. She was a reviewer for *American Anthropologist*, *Gastronomica*, the *Journal of Rural Studies*, *Science as Culture*, *Social Studies of Science*, and *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*. In addition, Paxson was an NSF individual research grant reviewer and reviewed grant applications for the Radcliffe Institute and Northern Illinois University. Professor Silbey continued her work as an editor for Cambridge University Press and served on the editorial boards of *Quantitative Sociology*, the *Annual Review of Law and Social Science, Regulation & Governance*, and *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*. Professor Walley was chair of the AAA Committee on Labor Relations and served as an elected representative on that committee. Also, she was a board member of the Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science and reviewed NSF proposals. She served as a reviewer for the *Forum for Development Studies and Human Organization* as well as Harvard University Press and the University of California Press.

Stefan Helmreich

Program Head and Elting E. Morison Professor of Anthropology