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Summer 2020

## Humanities Center Annual Report 2019-2020

Humanities Center, University of San Diego

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UNIVERSITY  
OF SAN DIEGO  
**HUMANITIES**  
**CENTER**

2019-20

# Annual Report





## Letter from the Director

It has been a year of enormous challenges for us all at the University of San Diego and throughout the world, and the activities of the Humanities Center in the 2019-20 academic year had to be substantially altered after the coronavirus pandemic truly began to make its presence felt. I am very proud of the manner in which everyone involved in our work — the element chairs, our students, our guests, and our incomparable coordinator, Lindy Villa — moved with great alacrity to maintain the dynamic quality of the Humanities Center programs. Though our work became predominantly remote, the online content was fresh, our Keck fellows continued their fascinating research, and the work of the humanities showed its resilience and relevance in the face of great difficulties. A glance at the Humanities Center will reveal the multiple ways — such as our recommendation lists, and the two series of videos, *In Good Company* and *A Journey Around My Room* — in which the humanities were brought into our temporarily homebound lives.

It is a mark of the continued vibrancy of the Humanities Center that, even with a year as disrupted and curtailed as this one has been, it is difficult to isolate highlights from the abundance of events put together. However, what has stuck in my consciousness, particularly given the recent and appalling reminders of racial injustice in our country, were events showcasing the work of two extraordinary artists, Colson Whitehead and Ja'Tovia Gary. Whitehead visited us to speak about his novel, *The Nickel Boys*, which subsequently won the Pulitzer Prize. The novel documents aspects of racism that have blighted the history of the United States. We were also honored to be visited by the video artist, Ja'Tovia Gary, who discussed her powerful and heartrending film, *Giverny I: Nègresse Impériale*. This piece, exhibited in the center's gallery, juxtaposed idyllic scenes in Monet's garden at Giverny with video footage of the shooting of Philando Castile during a traffic stop in Falcon Heights, Minn., in 2016. The need to hear, at this particular juncture in our history, the voices of those creative artists challenging us to think deeply about racial injustice is something that should go without saying.

From its inception, indeed, the Humanities Center has been dedicated to diverse perspectives on the human condition. This is written into our mission statement.

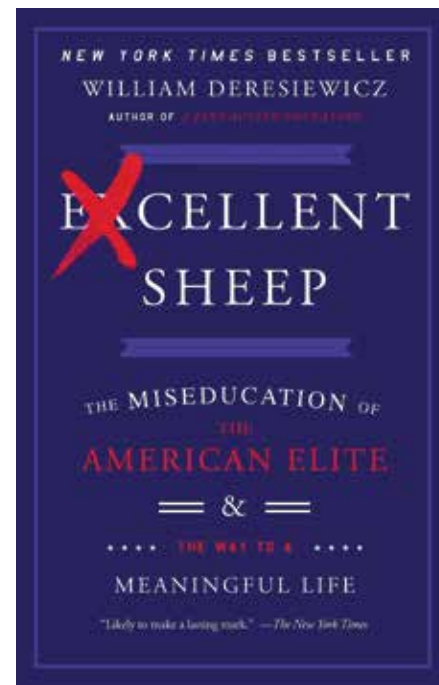
The center's pluralism is also seen in our multi-element foundation, and the 2019-20 accomplishments of each of these elements — Collaborative Research, Digital Humanities, Interdisciplinary Curriculum Development, Public Humanities, and the Humanities Center's Gallery — are outlined in the pages of the report that follow. This is our fourth annual report, and I hope you will enjoy reading all about the wide range of events, activities and programs that we undertook this year.

Lastly, and in the face of the uncertainties provoked by the coronavirus pandemic, it is fitting once more to thank Carol Vassiliadis, whose generous endowment has secured the Humanities Center's place at the heart of the University of San Diego. It remains my great honor to be the first holder of the A. Vassiliadis Directorship and to be at the helm of a center that continues to provide extraordinary intellectual and cultural programming to all the people of San Diego.

Brian R. Clack, PhD

A. Vassiliadis Director of the Humanities Center





## Collaborative Research

This year's Collaborative Research programs included the Knapp Chair of Liberal Arts, the Keck Undergraduate Humanities Research Fellowship and the Faculty Interdisciplinary Research Startup Grants. Each of these programs made significant contributions to the Humanities Center and USD before and through the pandemic.

The Knapp Chair of Liberal Arts hosted Mark Edmundson, PhD, professor of English at the University of Virginia, whose work as a memoirist, essayist, and professor of literature, psychology, and higher-education leadership, made for a series of engaging lectures and seminars. The centerpiece of his residency at USD was a series of three public lectures entitled *Walt Whitman and the Battle for Democracy*. Our second Knapp Chair in 2019-20 was noted and award-winning public intellectual, Dr. William Deresiewicz. In addition to class visits and lively discussion sessions with USD students, he delivered a public lecture on the topic of *Making Art in the 21st Century*.

USD's third cohort of Keck Undergraduate Humanities Fellows worked throughout the academic year on research projects that they admirably completed through the spring semester displacement and presented virtually in May 2020. The Keck Fellows cohort included Kate Burnite (political science) who researched the U.S. democratic project in relation to population density; Julia Gonzalez (visual arts and art history) whose series of paintings explored women's identity, memory, and relationship to their bodies; Cooper Kent (theology and religious studies and physics) who examined Edward Bernays and Sigmund Freud's theories of the subconscious and the possibilities of contemplative practices to counter manipulation of the subconscious; Alexandra Mueller (communication studies) who juxtaposed 20th century landscape photography movements in relation to her own photographs of Southern California urban cityscapes; Noah Pallmeyer (history and communication studies) who excavated San Diego's 1968 bicentennial and critically analyzed



its celebration of colonization; and Henry Tran Quevedo (Spanish and computer science) who researched representations in "narco traffic" television and streaming media shows and initiated development of an interactive fact-checking app through which to engage audiences of the episodes. The Keck Humanities Fellows presented their research experience and findings in two excellent virtual panels.

The Faculty Interdisciplinary Startup (FIRST) Grant supported three projects: Art Builds, a collaborative of engineering, mathematics, and theatre faculty who developed large-scale sculpture installations based on humanities theories and practical design; Letters to Self, a collaboration of philosophy and communication studies faculty using student letter writing to examine experience and identity; and San Diego County Homelessness, a collaboration of political science and international relations; theology and religious studies; and communication studies faculty members who critically examined homeless advocacy and services from an interdisciplinary perspective.





## Interdisciplinary Curriculum

During 2019-20, the Interdisciplinary Curriculum element of USD's Humanities Center continued to support several programs established during the first two years of the Keck grant. The Interdisciplinary Majors and Minors committee, consisting of the directors of the College of Arts and Science's 10 interdisciplinary minors and two majors that are not within departments, built upon past efforts to attract and retain students. Between Fall 2018 and Spring 2020, the number of students in these 12 programs nearly doubled from 140 to 270. This growth is due to the addition of two new minors in Fall 2018 and another in Fall 2019 as well as expanding student interest across a range of interdisciplinary programs.

Our grant from the William M. Keck Foundation helped to support a number of pop-up and seminar courses in the Humanities Center this year. The 2019-20 courses were:

- **I Am the Lizard King, I Can Do Anything**

Jim Morrison, Mark Edmundson, and 21st Century Self-Reliance, taught by Joshua Hall (Department of English); Professor Mark Edmundson from the University of Virginia participated in this seminar during his visit to the center.

- **Global Ecocinema: Theory and Practice**

Taught by Hannah Holtzman, PhD, the center's postdoctoral scholar in critical technology.

- **Homelessness in the United States**

Taught by Mike Williams, PhD, (Department of Political Science and International Relations) and Kate DeConinck, PhD, (Department of Theology and Religious Studies.)

- **International Art Law Introduction**

Taught by Bert Lazerow, JD, LLM, DESS, (School of Law)

- **Mathematics and Knitting**

Taught by Jane Friedman, PhD, (Department of Mathematics)

- **The Wicked and the Divine**

Taught by Beverley Clack, PhD, (Oxford Brookes University, UK) and Robert Lindsey, DPhil, (Cornwall Street Barristers, UK)



- **Death Valley and the Natural Sublime**

Taught by Brian Clack, PhD, (Department of Philosophy) and Beth O'Shea, PhD, (Department of Environmental and Ocean Sciences.)

- **The Human Side of Medicine**

Taught by Dr. Larry Savett (retired physician)

The Wicked and the Divine is especially noteworthy, since it was taught by visiting instructors from the United Kingdom and was scheduled to begin after the USD campus closed in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, Drs. Clack and Lindsey adapted their class to remote delivery and modified the schedule to meet at a time that was suitable for students in the U.S. and the instructors in the UK. The overall outcome was very good, and student evaluations indicated that the class was a strongly positive experience.

We have received several proposals for new pop-up courses in 2020-21, including both new instructors and those who have taught in the Humanities Center in the past and are eager to do so again.





## Humanities Center Gallery

The Humanities Center Gallery is one of six fine art display spaces animating the USD campus. Nested within the Humanities Center itself, this small, elegant gallery typically mounts three to five exhibitions per academic year, with projects that mirror the overall interdisciplinary, public-facing, and student-focused interests of the department as a whole.

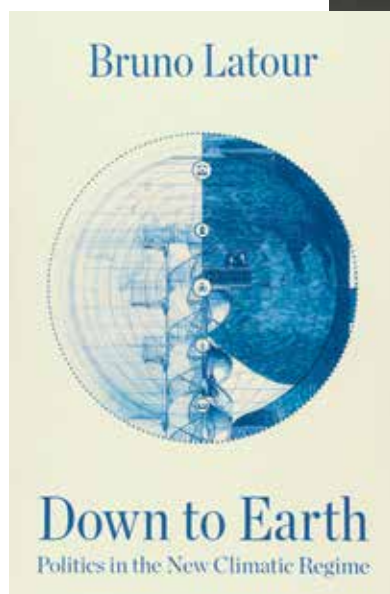
In 2019–20, The Humanities Center Gallery presented four exhibitions (three that took place physically in the center and one, due to the recent health crisis, that had to be presented virtually). Our academic year began with *Screenings 4: Ja'Tovia Gary*. Two of the artist's videos, *An Ecstatic Experience* (2015) and *Giverny I (Négresse Impériale)* (2017), were shown continuously from Sept. 4 to Oct. 17, 2020. In addition to the intense curricular use that this installation inspired throughout academic departments, Gary herself came to USD and delivered a riveting talk about her work, which included a sneak preview of works in progress. The display in the Humanities Center marked the first time that Gary's art was presented publicly in Southern California. Immediately following this, we mounted *Political Skeletons: The Art and Afterlife of José Guadalupe Posada*. Approximately 20 graphic works, including several of Posada's original broadsides of calaveras (skeletal characters), occupied the gallery from Oct. 28 to Dec. 13, 2020. That exhibition was planned in tandem with a suite of critical interpretations of the Day of the Dead, which took place simultaneously in the Humanities Center under the guidance of Associate Professor of Communication Studies Antonieta Mercado, PhD.



*Screenings 5: Susan Hiller* inaugurated the spring semester and featured the first presentation on the West Coast of the late-artist's mesmerizing time-based work, *Lost and Found* (2016). Hiller's video consists of dozens of recordings of individuals speaking dormant or extinct languages to the stark accompaniment of vibrating oscilloscope and blunt subtitles. In a way that mirrors other important works by the artist, *Lost and Found*, considers the haunting of contemporary social space by long-suppressed voices from the past. The final project in our 2019–20 program was *Chicano Park at 50: Renewal and Self Determination through Poster Art*. The exhibition set out to survey the political posters that have been part of Chicano Park Day celebrations since that nationally-recognized space was claimed by the community in Barrio Logan. The project was conceived in close association with Professor of Ethnic Studies Alberto Pulido, PhD, and guest-curated by Cesar Castañeda, an artist with long-standing commitments in Chicano Park. Due to the health crisis and closure of campus, the formal opening of Chicano Park at 50 was deferred until Fall 2020; an online version of the project was quickly created and made available in place of the previously scheduled celebrations at <https://www.sandiego.edu/galleries/>.

In addition to the lecture by Ja'Tovia Gary, public presentations by the Hoehn Curatorial Fellow for Prints John Murphy and Director of University Galleries Derrick Cartwright were offered in conjunction with the *Political Skeletons* and *Screenings 5: Susan Hiller* projects, respectively. The entire team at University Galleries looks forward to the renewal of its collaborations with the Humanities Center next fall.





## Technology and Humanities

### Digital Pedagogy and Scholarship

This year, the Digital Humanities Working group transformed into the Community for Digital Scholarship and Pedagogy, an interdisciplinary group of faculty members from across schools, units and disciplines, who are interested and/or engaged in digital scholarship and pedagogy. In Fall 2019, the community surveyed faculty members across the university about their use of digital technologies and tools in their research, scholarship, and teaching endeavors. Survey findings resulted in the creation of a directory to facilitate networking and collaboration, a listserv to share internal messages and news, and a blog where members can post news and reflect on how they are implementing digital platforms and methods in their scholarship and teaching.

<https://sites.sandiego.edu/comm-dsp/>.

### Critical Technology Studies

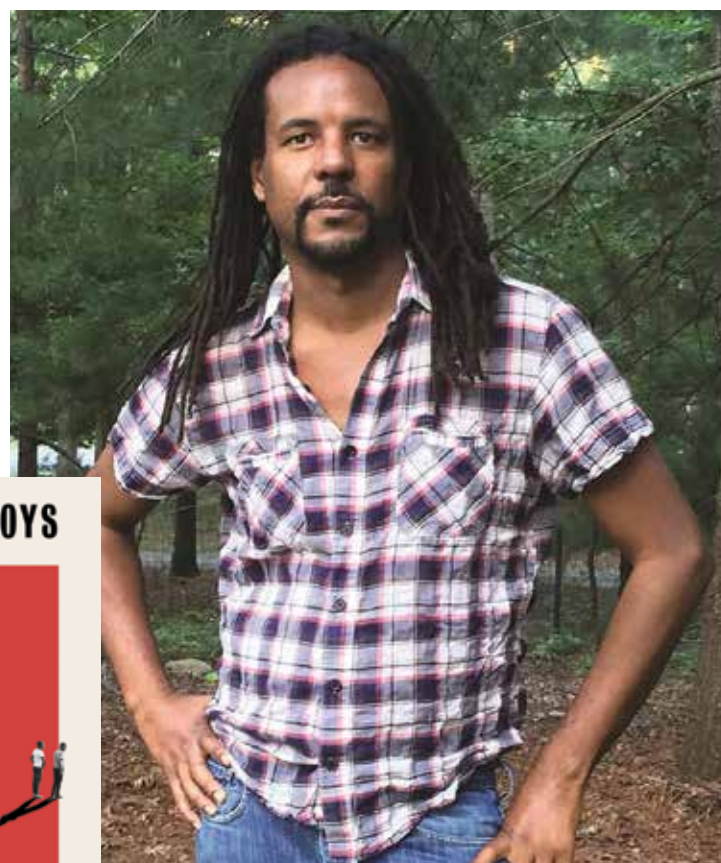
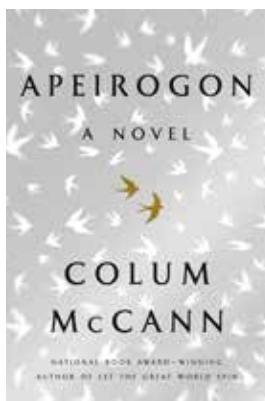
Led by the Keck Postdoctoral Fellow in Critical Technology Hannah Holtzman, PhD, the Humanities Center offered a range of classes and events focused on the interface between technology and human life and society.

A working group was formed for faculty members specifically interested in critical technology studies and artificial intelligence. This group held several meetings in Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 (in-person and virtually) to discuss curricular development, campus-wide critical technology and artificial intelligence initiatives, and the creation of a reading group; in Spring 2020, a reading group for USD faculty members was convened, focusing on Bruno Latour's *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*.

Also planned was a series of events for Spring 2020 around climate change and technology and in

recognition of 50th Earth Day. These events included a series of faculty-led panels on climate change and sustainability across the disciplines in collaboration with Michel Boudrias, PhD, and the Care for Our Common Home Pathway, a keynote lecture by Ursula Heise, PhD, (UCLA) on extinction narratives, an interdisciplinary art-science workshop extinction and cross stitch with USD postdoctoral fellow Wilnelia Recart-Gonzalez, and a film presentation and discussion about insects by artist Jeffrey Stuker. Due to the global pandemic and the closing of campus, these events were postponed to Fall 2020.

In collaboration with USD's Changemaker Hub and the national LookUp.live organization, we created and implemented the Tech-Life Balance Competition for undergraduate students. The competition offers \$8,000 to winning proposals for student-initiated projects that encourage reflection on the use of technology. In Fall 2019, students developed and presented proposals, and Nikta Shahbaz and Sara Badrani were awarded a grant to implement their Challenge Cookies project on campus. This winning team also participated in a virtual Innovators Showcase where they pitched their project to an audience of nearly 100 entrepreneurs, professional experts and peers.



## Public Humanities

The Humanities Center provides opportunities for USD not only to organize and coordinate liberal arts initiatives and programs for our campus community, but also to establish partnerships with the broader San Diego community and beyond. In this manner, the center is engaged in the practice of what is known as “public humanities” — the intersection of civic engagement and the study of the human condition — and manifests its commitment to ensuring the accessibility of the humanities to our wider community.

Since its inception in 2016, the work of the Humanities Center has had a profoundly outward facing and public dimension, and in 2019-20, our vibrant public humanities initiatives continued our engagement with the broader San Diego community. Highlighted here are four significant accomplishments: the Illume Speaker Series; a vibrant set of events centered upon death, immortality, and Día de Muertos; the initiation of a substantial new strand of ongoing programming, focused on the relation of sports and humanities; and the rehoming of the University of the Third Age (U3A) within the Humanities Center.

The Illume series consists of two streams: talks by visiting speakers and authors (often undertaken in partnership with Warwick’s books of La Jolla); and — through the College Lecture Series — a showcase of the remarkable research undertaken by faculty members from USD’s College of Arts and Sciences, presented in terms accessible to a non-specialist audience. Speakers this year included the award-winning novelist, Colum McCann, and USD professors Nadav Goldschmied, PhD, and Lori Watson, PhD. It was a special honor to host the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, Colson Whitehead, who discussed his new book, *The Nickel Boys*, and its attention to the history of racism in America.

One of the most memorable elements of our 2019-20 programming was a series of events, talks and exhibitions focused upon the human understanding of death and immortality. Encompassing a series of

panel discussions on the wide range of disciplinary approaches to the question of death and immortality and a provocative exhibition of the work and afterlife of José Guadalupe Posada (for additional details, see the Gallery section of this report), the centerpiece of this programming was a week-long series of events entitled, *Día de Muertos: Ancestral Tradition and Cultural Transformation Across Borders*. Curated by USD Associate Professor of Communication Studies Antonieta Mercado, PhD, this series of talks and discussions addressed such matters as the meaning and significance of the Day of the Dead and conceptions of death among Native Americans in San Diego and in the civilizations of the Anahuac.

This year also saw the start of a new series examining the links between humanities and sports. Keen to show how these two fields, so frequently kept apart, can be mutually illuminating, the Humanities Center held a number of talks, movie screenings, and panel discussions on this theme. Among the highlights were a lecture by Stanford University’s Blakey Vermeule, PhD, and a panel of mixed martial arts fighters discussing the intellectual, physical, and spiritual dimensions of their craft. The center is grateful to Joshua Hall for his work in organizing this program of events.

Finally, the University of the Third Age, the longest-running community outreach program on USD’s campus, moved its operations into the Humanities Center, and delivered two highly successful and well attended three-week sessions in Summer 2019 and Winter 2020. We are delighted to welcome into the Humanities Center family, the new U3A program director, Nicole Matthews. Designed for an audience of those over 55 years, and reconfigured this summer to an online format as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, U3A stands as an invaluable reminder that learning never ends.



## Alcalá Review

With generous support from the Humanities Center, *The Alcalá Review* published two new issues in 2019-20, each showcasing fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and visual art from the USD student body, including the work of the winners and runners-up of the annual Lindsay J. Cropper Creative Writing contest.

In October, *The Alcalá Review* hosted a Humanities Center panel discussion dedicated to the legacy of Jack Kerouac, marking the 50th anniversary of the late



Beat icon's death, and in November held its Fall 2019 publication party, celebrating the arrival of a new issue with readings from contributors along with USD's own Deniz Perrin-Coombs, who served as featured reader.

*The Alcalá Review* maintains two little free "Open and Read" libraries on campus, thereby promoting literacy and unity through the liberal arts, and regularly contributes presence and enthusiasm to campus happenings throughout the year, ranging from the Alcalá Bazaar and Prints and Pinot to assorted Humanities Center, College of Arts and Sciences, and Department of English events.

<https://digital.sandiego.edu/thealcalareview/>

## There's More Podcast

*There's More* podcast is a campus storytelling initiative that is supported through collaboration between the Humanities Center, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Changemaker Hub. *There's More* collects diverse

stories about how USD community members pursue a purpose-filled life by confronting humanity's urgent challenges. The series highlights USD's liberal arts tradition by exploring the human condition through the practice of Changemaking.

This year, there were five student producers leading this initiative: Ryan Gentry, Daryan Gomez, Amulya Maddali, Noah Pallmeyer and Lily Yates; in addition to the faculty producer, Dr. Jonathan Bowman, of the Communication Studies Department. In the 2019-2020 year, this team continued work on the student-produced podcast online at [theresmore.sandiego.edu](https://theresmore.sandiego.edu), also available on iTunes. There are four podcast storytelling genres: More Human collects stories about impactful moments in the lives of USD community members; More Insight collects creative works from artists in the USD and San Diego communities; More Change collects stories about USD's history and Changemaking practices; and More Dialogue collects meaningful conversations about the USD community.

Content for the *There's More* podcast is created through the independent work of student producers and also through the live monthly storytelling event at the Humanities Center, and these events garnered strong attendance from the campus community. There are approximately four storytellers at each event, with each month's stories being loosely organized around a different one-word theme. Storytellers often interpret the themes playfully and relay real stories from their lives. Monthly themes this year were *Bang*, *Dark*, *Call*, *Apart*, *Flop*, and *Caught*. Storytellers included students, faculty members, staff, and administrators of the USD community.

Stories are recorded and published on our website as part of our *More Human* series. In addition, the collaboration sponsors podcasting training during Olé Weekend for our incoming students, as well as a podcast storytelling class through the Communication Studies Department.

<https://theresmore.sandiego.edu/>





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**HUMANITIES CENTER**

Saints Tekakwitha and Serra Hall, Room 200  
5998 Alcalá Park  
San Diego, CA 92110-2492  
(619) 260-4600  
[www.sandiego.edu/humanities-center](http://www.sandiego.edu/humanities-center)