

Fall 2017

Kahn Chronicle: Fall 2017

Smith College, Kahn Liberal Arts Institute

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Recommended Citation

Smith College, Kahn Liberal Arts Institute, "Kahn Chronicle: Fall 2017" (2017). *Kahn Chronicle*. 6.
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LOUISE W. AND EDMUND J. KAHN LIBERAL ARTS INSTITUTE

Kahn Chronicle

Volume 20, Issue 1 • Fall 2017

New Home, New Features for Kahn Institute—21 Henshaw Ave.

The new Kahn Liberal Arts Institute, housed at 21 Henshaw Avenue—a retrofitted “house” formerly used as a faculty residence—features numerous upgrades and distinctions from the institute’s former residence on the third floor of Neilson Library: a wrap-around porch, a blossoming apple tree in the yard, a large conference room available for reservations by the college community, lots of natural light streaming in, and tin-covered gabled roofs, to name a few.

The Kahn Institute moved into its new home in July.

And while the relocation may have been borne from necessity (as Neilson Library undergoes a three-year renovation), Kahn Institute staff members plan to accentuate their new home’s attributes, starting with a **Welcome to the New Kahn celebration** on Thursday, September 28, 4:30-6 p.m. (see accompanying box).

All are invited to the celebration, which will kick off the Kahn’s “Parties on the Porch,” a monthly series of friendly gatherings (on the wrap-around porch as weather allows) for faculty and staff, featuring light music, light snacks and libations, including the “Kahn-tail,” a specially invented concoction including apple garnish from the tree.

Subsequent Parties on the Porch will take place 4:30-6 p.m. on Thursdays, October 19, November 9, and December 7.

The new Kahn residence also offers several quiet nooks and cozy corners ideal for students to study, read or curl up and

chill, with stuffed chairs, pillows and comfy furniture (check the Smithscape app for availability).

Of course, the main mission of the Kahn Institute has not changed: producing and administering faculty research projects, both yearlong and short-term, throughout the academic year.

“Our yearlong projects are a chance for faculty fellows to experiment intellectually, to challenge ourselves, to move outside of our comfort zones and take risks among others who want to support those risks as they also take risks,” notes Alexandra Keller, professor of film and media studies, who assumed directorship of the Kahn Institute this summer (see page 4). Keller has participated in several Kahn projects. “As a project participant and a co-organizer, I have found it transformational to my own thinking to work with colleagues from very different disciplines. The Kahn is a unique institution for its capacity to make community out of a very diverse group of people mutually supporting each other’s equally diverse projects.”

This year’s long-term projects are *War*, organized by Mlada Bukovansky, professor of Government, and Cornelia Pearsall, professor of English Language and Literature; and *Destroy then Restore: Transforming our Lands and Waters*, organized by Ann Leone, professor of Landscape Studies, and Andrew Guswa, director of the Picker Engineering Program.

Stop by 21 Henshaw any time to check out the Kahn!



Party on the Porch!
at the Kahn Institute’s New Home
21 Henshaw Avenue (Across from Henshaw Complex)

Welcome to the New Kahn
Thursday, September 28, 4:30-6 p.m.

Faculty, Staff Invited to Apply for 2018-19 Projects, Attend Info Sessions

In 2018-19, the Kahn Institute will host two yearlong projects, each of which will explore, from multiple disciplinary angles, topics of global and growing concern: *Food* and *Refugees*.

See page 3 of this edition to read full descriptions of each project. Smith faculty and staff, and Five College faculty are invited to apply for the projects online.

For more information on next year’s projects, the Kahn Institute invites all faculty and staff, as well as Five College faculty, to attend upcoming Information Sessions, as follows:

- **Food Information Session, Monday, Sept. 25, 5-6 p.m., Kahn Institute, 21 Henshaw Ave.**
- **Refugees Information Session, Thursday, Oct. 5, 5-6 p.m., Kahn Institute.**

These information sessions will provide details about each project as well as procedures for applying and participating in Kahn projects, and more.

Refreshments, including wine and cheese, will be served.

Fall 2017 Neilson Professor Lecture Series

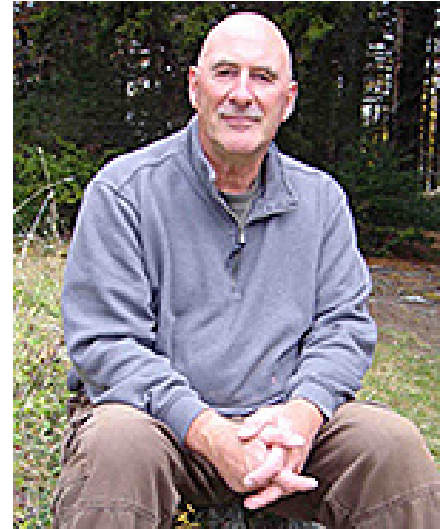
DESIGN MATTERS: Landscape Practices, Pedagogy, Projects for the New Environmental Reality

Niall Kirkwood, the fall 2017 William Allan Neilson Professor, and Professor of Landscape Architecture and Technology at Harvard University Graduate School of Design, has spent his career studying landscape, the built environment and land use and reuse around the globe.

Before joining the Harvard faculty in 1992, Kirkwood held faculty appointments at Beijing University, China Tsinghua University in Beijing, Korea University in Seoul, and has served on the advisory council at the School of Architecture University of Hong Kong. He is also a licensed architect and landscape architect with 16 years of experience carrying out land reclamation and urban development projects in Scotland, the European mainland, the Middle East, and the United States.

Kirkwood is hosted by the Landscape Studies Program and the Picker Engineering Program, with support from the Kahn Institute. He is participating during his fall professorship as a Faculty Fellow in the yearlong Kahn project *Destroy then Restore: Transforming our Lands and Waters*.

Kirkwood delivered his first of three Neilson Professor Lectures, "Flying Toilets and Oysters Shells: Landscape Design Practices for the New Environmental Reality," on September 14. He will give two more lectures (see below), open to all.



Upcoming Neilson Professor Lectures, Fall 2017



The Fifth Industrial Revolution: An Index of Current Landscape and Engineering Teaching and Research
Tuesday, October 17, 5 p.m.
Weinstein Auditorium, Wright Hall



Poetics of Construction: Seeing, Judging and Thinking in the Contemporary Landscape
Monday, November 13, 5 p.m.
Weinstein Auditorium, Wright Hall

Preeminent Speakers Visiting the Kahn this Fall as Guests of War

Occasional visits by outside experts around the world are essential components of Kahn Institute long-term projects.

The Kahn is honored to host two pre-eminent speakers this fall as guests of the 2017-18 project *War*, who will deliver lectures related to topics being explored throughout the year.

Monday, Nov. 6

Claire Finkelstein, Professor of Law and of Philosophy, and Director, Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law, University of Pennsylvania Law School.



Monday, Dec. 11

Valerie Plame, former covert CIA operations officer, author, speaker and national commentator on topics including cyber security, national security, and nuclear proliferation.



2018-19 Yearlong Project Descriptions

Faculty and Staff Now Invited to Apply

Refugees

Organizers: Darcy Buerkle, *History*; Gregory White, *Government*

The complexities and tragedies that accompany present-day refugee crises reverberate with the history and memory of other historical periods. Indeed, the history of forced migration is imbricated in the history of most nation states, and the experiences



of refugees today hold deep resonances with the struggles of human beings in the past. Studying the refugee crisis and its effects in this broader context can help to provide those of us working in a variety of fields with a deeper comprehension of contemporary issues, an understanding that extends to scholarship, pedagogical strategies for the classroom, and more informed

advocacy. Current events challenge norms once taken for granted; they demand an engagement of those previously held presuppositions along with an understanding of the refugee crisis specifically that is both theoretical and historically informed.

This Kahn project seeks to draw together faculty from a wide range of fields whose work intersects with the subject of forced displacement.

Apply for *Refugees* at https://www.smith.edu/kahn-institute/2018-19_RefugeesAPP.php

ment. We hope to consider this complicated subject not only through the lens of historians and contemporary policy scholars, but also from the perspective of economists, social workers, psychologists, educational theorists, and artists. How does the invocation of history function as a policy tool—and hindrance—in contemporary discussions of forced migration? To what degree do first-person accounts and other related and cultural production impact public policy? How do experimental writings, documentary films, and ethnographic narratives influence our perspective on forced migration? How do economic policies exacerbate or ameliorate the movement of people and/or their reception in host countries? What is the status of institutional norms and, for example, notions of sovereignty regarding forced migration across disciplines? In all our discussions, we hope to engage with our source material through macro-level and/or systems-level analyses; we will focus, for example, on the construction of borders (national and other types) by considering the ways that the narrativization of those borders affect security discourses and the formation of the political subject.

This topic has specific and renewed urgency today. We hope that faculty across the Five Colleges will join us in this year-long effort to understand and act on what is, without question, one of the major crises of our times.

Food

Organizers: Nancy Sternbach, *Spanish and Portuguese*; Paul Wetzel, *Center for the Environment (CEEDS)*

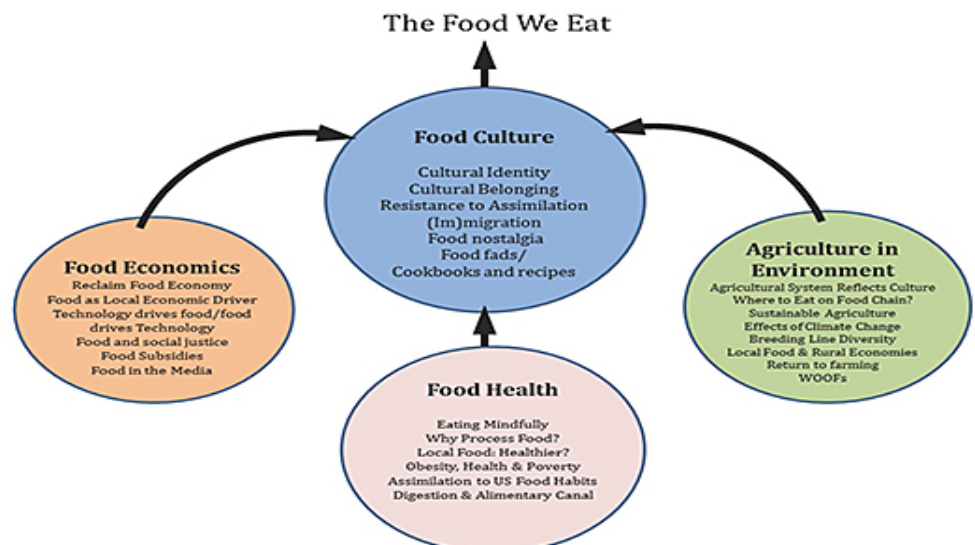
The academic study of food matters now more than ever. Once the discourse only of anthropologists, food has become a growing area of research and discussion in disciplines ranging from sociology to biology, literature to politics. As the image below suggests, the connections between food and agriculture, economics, human health and culture are both complex and crucially important in a world of both abundance and scarcity, climate change and border disputes, vanishing cultures and broadening appreciation for all things indigenous and local.

In this Kahn, we invite scholars of food from across the liberal arts curriculum (as well as those who have an emerging scholarly interest in the topic) to join us in a collaborative and sometimes hands-on exploration of this subject. Our goal is to address questions that resonate across many fields: What are the intersections of food production, preparation and consumption with those of sustainability, economic development, and agriculture? How does food change after (im)migration? How does food impact identity formation, cultural belonging and resistance to assimilation? How do we analyze local vs. organic, slow food vs. fast food, nostalgia, and representation? How can we preserve food memory, as well as food itself? From where do recipes emerge and what is the

Apply for *Food* at https://www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/2018-19_FoodAPP.php

socio-cultural importance of a cookbook? What are the intersecting aspects of a just and equitable food system and climate change? In the spirit of Kahn, we also welcome those whose work runs against the “liberal” political grain of the academy, arguing, for example, for the value of synthetic foods or critiquing the slow foods movement.

Where does your food interest fit into our chart? How can we enlarge the questions and categories with your own interest? Join us in thinking about food in all its dimensions.



A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

A New Home in Every Sense—Complete with Sandbox!

I'm sitting on the wraparound porch at 21 Henshaw Avenue, a tree full of ripening apples spitting distance away. This is the new home of the Kahn Institute, and as I write my first note as director of the Kahn, I'm aware of the traditions and continuities of the institute, as well as the possibilities for innovation and invention. That we are an interdisciplinary, collaborative, and creative sandbox has not changed. But we are no longer symbolically nestled at the top of Neilson Library, where its brain might have been. Now we're in a freestanding, newly renovated structure that used to be faculty housing, and the notion of the Kahn as a home has already become part of our reimagining of how we do our work here.



We've had our first Student Fellow Research Workshop here, transformed utterly by the new space. Over three intense days, 10 Student Fellows from our two yearlong projects, *War and Destroy then Restore: Transforming our Lands and Waters*, worked with the Kahn staff and faculty facilitators to hone and refine their proposals. We worked in spaces that had been bedrooms, sitting rooms, bathrooms, and the kitchen (which it still is). We stopped in hallways and on stairs to untangle problems. The formerly domestic space retains its intimacy. Everyone involved was indefatigable and determined to start on the strongest possible footing. We marveled at the distance the Student Fellows had traveled from already interesting initial ideas to powerfully communicated questions. I was excited by the possibilities held in each of their culminating presentations. But more, the fellows already seemed to be full-fledged "Kahnies," listening carefully and with open minds to each other, and offering focused, creative and generous criticism. And this was only the beginning of the year. Our cake celebration at the finale was the sweeter because we had the deep satisfaction of belonging to a shared intellectual community—one for which we'd just laid a strong foundation.

I have been a participant in short-term Kahn projects, and a fellow in yearlong projects, and have co-organized both. And no matter the length, no matter my relationship to the project, I have always found my thinking transformed by the experience. What and how I engage with the world is always noticeably different—and unpredictably so. As far as I can tell, this makes me quite typical of those who move through the Kahn.

The Kahn has always had the capacity to cloister. We leave

behind the performance driven demands of academia and enter a space in which we are truly free to play and experiment. Scholars have incubated important work in the Kahn, but our explicit purpose, to support "research without boundaries," exceeds publication, performance or exhibition. We foster thinking together, pure and simple. Before the last presidential election, academics may have worried most about the corporatization of higher education. The assessment of outcomes matters, but it can never be the place where we start as scholars and teachers. In the current political climate, truth itself is under siege. The entirety of Smith is engaged in speaking truth to power—in speaking truth, at all. In this endeavor, the Kahn seeks to be a place of restoration.

But the Kahn is also a place of worldly connections. We come from many disciplines, many methodologies, and from many global localities. From that diversity, we build common purpose and celebrate the risks of going beyond what we know and how we know. Every time a Kahn fellow stretches and says good-bye to the comfort zone, and nothing bad happens, we enlarge the terms on which intellectual conversations really happen for their own sake. There is a quiet euphoria in that, a sense that risking together is fundamentally human.

The Kahn is the most enjoyable sandbox I can imagine playing in. There are no bullies to kick sand in your face, but there are plenty of new friends and colleagues who are also new teachers, collaborators, and critics who will challenge your orthodoxies. Many of us spend so much time shaping the discourses of our own fields that we unknowingly stop being active at seeking to move beyond the disciplinary borders some were encouraged to work so long to master and, even, to patrol. The Kahn is a place of free play and open-endedness.

I invite you to join us on the porch, and make yourselves at home.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the 'x'.

Alexandra Keller, Professor of Film and Media Studies

Read the *Kahn Chronicle* Online:

www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/chronicle