

Fall 2018

## Kahn Chronicle: Fall 2018

Smith College, Kahn Liberal Arts Institute

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## Faculty, Staff Invited to Apply for 2019-20 Yearlong Projects

### Information Sessions for *TranslationS* and *Fear*, Sept. 18, 26

In 2019-20, the Kahn Institute will host two yearlong projects, one that will explore the power of fear to motivate both constructive and destructive behavior; and one that will analyze the phenomenon of translation in a wide variety of forms.

Both *Fear* and *TranslationS* will seek to consider multiple disciplinary perspectives while posing questions that help define concepts around these broad topics. See page 3 for a complete description of each project.

Smith faculty and staff, and Five College faculty, are invited to apply online for a fellowship in the projects (see project application information below). Students will be invited to apply for the projects in January 2019.

The Kahn Institute also invites all faculty and staff, as well as Five College faculty, to attend upcoming Information Sessions on *Fear* and *TranslationS*, as follows:

#### **TranslationS Information Session, Tuesday, Sept. 18, 5-6 p.m., Kahn Institute**

*TranslationS* draws attention not only to the traditional practice of translation in the literary field, but also to its role in a wide range of disciplines, as well as to its capacity to animate conversation across disciplines.



Apply for *TranslationS* by Thursday, October 18, online at [https://smith.edu/kahninstitute/2019-20\\_TranslationSAPP.php](https://smith.edu/kahninstitute/2019-20_TranslationSAPP.php).

#### **Fear Information Session, Wednesday, Sept. 26, 5-6 p.m., Kahn Institute**

*Fear* aims to address the power of fear—to destroy or subvert, but also to create, while facilitating collaboration among scholars from a range of disciplines.



Apply for *Fear* by Thursday, October 18, online at [https://smith.edu/kahninstitute/2019-20\\_FearAPP.php](https://smith.edu/kahninstitute/2019-20_FearAPP.php).

## Five Short-term Projects to Watch for at the Kahn This Fall

The Kahn Institute invites faculty and staff to apply for short-term projects taking place this fall, as described below. Applications and complete project descriptions are available online at [www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/current.php](http://www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/current.php) (scroll to bottom of page).

### **1. Drones: Power, Play, Policy and Pedagogy**

—September 28-29

Organized by Jon Caris, *Spatial Analysis Laboratory*, and Greg White, *Government*, this two-day project will seek to understand drones in a broader context with scholars who can prime the discussion through a comparative analysis of emerging technologies. Apply online: <https://www.smith.edukahninstitute/2018DronesAPP.php>.

### **2. Putting Pen to Palm Leaf: Buddhism and Contemporary Literature**—October 13 and November 10 (March 30 and April 24, 2019)

Organized by Jay Garfield, *Philosophy*, this four-part project throughout the academic year will host a series of eminent writers whose work explores or is inflected by themes deriving from Buddhism. Apply online: [https://www.smith.edukahninstitute/2018-19\\_PalmLeafAPP.php](https://www.smith.edukahninstitute/2018-19_PalmLeafAPP.php)

### **3. Toward a Global Liberal Arts**

—October 27

Organized by Rosetta Cohen and Rebecca Hovey, both with the *Lewis Global Studies Center*, this project will seek definition and understanding of the “global college” and the “globalizing” of the liberal arts.

### **4. Creativity and the Creature: Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* at 200—November 2-3**

A two-day Kahn Institute symposium celebrating one of literary history’s most iconic and durable novels, published by 20-year-old Mary Shelley on January 1, 1818. (See box, page 2, for more details.)

### **5. Data, Knowledge, Pedagogy: The Age of Machine Learning**—December 7-8

Organized by Jeffrey Ahlman, *History*, and Bozena Welborne, *Government*. An exploration of the growing emphasis on machine learning for scholarship, pedagogy, and knowledge production.

# 2018-19 Long-Term Projects

## Student Fellowships Awarded

The following Smith students have been awarded fellowships in connection with the Kahn Institute's 2018-19 long-term projects

### Food

Fellows in the yearlong project *Food*, organized by Nancy Sternbach, *Spanish and Portuguese*, and Paul Wetzels, *Center for the Environment (CEEDS)*, address questions that resonate across many fields with scholars of food from across the liberal arts curriculum in this collaborative and sometimes hands-on exploration.



Student Fellows in *Food* are:

- Susannah Howard '19, *Geosciences*
- Noa Randall '19, *Engineering*
- Elsa Weintraub '19, *Environmental Science and Policy*
- Lark Wicinas '19, *Environmental Science and Policy*
- Emily Whittier '19, *Study of Women and Gender*

### Refugees

This yearlong project, organized by Darcy Buerkle, *History*, and Gregory White, *Government*, draws together faculty and students from a wide range of fields whose work intersects with the subject of forced displacement, 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.



Student Fellows in *Refugees* are:

- Zoya Alam '19, *Government*
- Isabel Cordova '19, *Art*
- Khulood Fahim '19, *Government*
- Vivian Nguyen '20, *Government*

## Kahn Hosts Symposium Celebrating *Frankenstein* at 200, Nov. 2-3

The Kahn Institute invites the Smith and Five College communities, scholars from near and far, and the public to join in a 200th anniversary celebration of one of literary history's most iconic and durable novels, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, published anonymously by 20-year-old Mary Shelley (1797-1851) on January 1, 1818.

"Creativity and the Creature: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* at 200" is a two-day symposium (with a prologue



Image: Frankenstein's lab, from Barry Moser's *Frankenstein*, Pennyroyal edition; courtesy of Barry Moser and Smith College Special Collections.

screening of James White's *The Bride of Frankenstein* on Halloween, Wednesday, October 31) that will host a compelling group of scholars, artists and writers whose work intersects with Shelley's "hideous progeny." These speakers bring a wide range of provocative perspectives to this investigation of Shelley's novel and its continuing impact today.

View a complete symposium schedule at <https://www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/frankenstein.php>.

## Some Scenes of Summertime at the Kahn Institute



# 2019-20 Yearlong Project Descriptions

## Faculty and Staff Now Invited to Apply

### *Fear*

**Organizers:** James Lowenthal, *Astronomy*; Kevin Rozario, *American Studies*

On the eve of the 2016 presidential election, an influential *Rolling Stone* article concluded that we were living in “An Age of Fear.” Author Neill Strauss was bemused by this, noting that by most measures, “around the globe household wealth, longevity and education are on the rise, while violent crime and extreme poverty are down.” So why is fear so widespread? How does it shape personal behavior and public policy? The stakes in these inquiries are high, because what we call “fear” is so easily triggered and manipulated. As sociologist Barry Glassner argues, “we are living in the most fear-mongering time in human history.”

Fear is a necessary biological defense mechanism, protecting against real threats. But because fear often overwhelms reason, diminishes compassion, and cultivates division, it has obvious social effects, too. There are compelling correlations between fear and a susceptibility to authoritarianism. But fear also has activating properties, not least in propelling efforts to understand how the natural world works in order to address threats ranging from climate change to extinctions. This yearlong Kahn project aims to address the power of fear—to destroy and subvert, but also to create. What is fear? Who benefits from fear? Who promotes it, and why and how? What are the hidden costs? What are the alternatives? How is a culture of fear viewed through different lenses? How does fear figure into current events on campus, in the U.S., and worldwide?

Apply for *Fear* at [https://www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/201-20\\_FearAPP.php](https://www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/201-20_FearAPP.php)

Fear of traumatic memories or even uncomfortable discussions in college classes leads to calls for trigger warnings. Fear of terrorists leads to massive wars; fear of foreigners to razor wire-topped walls and widespread abuse and discrimination. Fear of the dark leads to light pollution. Fears of climate change, resource exhaustions, species extinctions, and perhaps even human life itself inspire technological innovation, bio-engineering, and the building of underground shelters, as well as political activism and artistic production.

This is a topic that cries out for collaboration: among neuroscientists and biologists (who study the fear centers of the brain, the amygdala), psychologists (who study trauma and emotions), political scientists (who study the manipulation of fears for political ends), economists (who study the monetization of fear in advertising and marketing), media studies scholars (who study the political and social effects of 24-hour news cycles, talk radio, and attention-grabbing smart phone feeds), historians, anthropologists and sociologists (who show how fears have been mobilized and manipulated in different times and places), scientists (addressing climate change, diseases, extinctions), philosophers and cultural critics (who examine the meanings and desires involved in representations of fear; after all, we are also talking about the pleasures and anxieties that draw audiences to suspense thrillers, horror movies, comedy, and even soap operas).

### *TranslationS*

**Organizers:** Nalini Bhushan, *Philosophy*; Janie Vanpée, *French Studies*

As the myth of the Tower of Babel reminds us, translation has always been part of what makes us human. All human communication involves translation whether we are aware of it or not. Translation is the space in which language, culture, history, politics and difference collide and sometimes cohere to make meaning. Indeed, most transactions, whether political, commercial, linguistic, diplomatic, social, religious, or literary rely on translation to relay meaning. Yet the work of translation has often remained hidden or unacknowledged. Today, advances in AI, cognitive science and neurology, as well as the successes and failures of machine translation, have brought renewed and urgent attention to the linguistic, literary, philosophical and ethical questions that translation raises. More and more disciplines recognize that translation in some form lies at the heart of their inquiries and methods. Our yearlong Kahn seminar, TranslationS, draws attention not only to the traditional practice of translation in the literary field, but also to its role in a wide range of disciplines, as well as to its capacity to animate conversation across disciplines.

Translation means “to carry across.” Translation thus lends itself to both a literal meaning and practice, and a metaphorical resonance. What is it that we carry across from one discipline to another? From one language or culture to another? From one historical epoch to an-

Apply for *TranslationS* at <https://www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/2019-20TranslationSAPP.php>

other? What are the distinctions among translation, adaptation and interpretation? How does translation intersect with discipline and interdisciplinarity? Does translation hasten the demise of endangered languages and cultures, or does it help them survive? What ethical questions arise when translating or interpreting for those displaced or seeking refuge from war and violence?

Translation also poses distinct questions for the natural sciences. For instance, is visualization an effective form of translating the plethora of statistical data that we collect? How do vocabularies from more familiar areas of science translate into other, less familiar areas of science? Can models from one sensory domain—vision—be productively translated into models that inform another sensory domain—taste/smell? How can linguistics and language acquisition elucidate the work of translation that operates in language learning and bilingualism? How does translation negotiate between natural languages and artificial languages? Marquez remarked that the English translation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was better than the Spanish original. What, if anything, transcends—or completely defies—translation? We invite scholars from all divisions and disciplines to join us on a year-long project exploring how translation functions in their work within and across disciplinary borders.



# A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

## A View from the Porch

A year ago, I wrote the fall director's note on the porch of what was then the brand-new home of the Kahn Institute on Henshaw Avenue. Today, hot and humid as it is, I'm happy to be inside. But the real pleasure of being inside today is listening to the student fellows in our research workshop working with their faculty facilitators and each other. For the nine student fellows, the Kahn staff, and the three attentive faculty mentors, these three days are the focused, pleasurable honing of two potential yearlong projects down to one. As we introduced ourselves at our welcome dinner, we learned that every student fellow is either a double major (some across divisional lines), has a minor, a concentration or is pursuing a certificate of some kind. These are students who are Kahn-ready, already self-wired to be interdisciplinary and to demand of themselves that they acquire and pass on knowledge in multiple ways. In some ways, they are the turbo-charged version of any Smith student, who might take a poetry class in the morning, a government seminar in the afternoon, and a chemistry lab at night, with some co-curricular engagement in between (good-bye dinner time!). They are the mountain goats of academia, and the Kahn is unique among our peers in weaving them into the work of Smith's think tank.

The Kahn is proud to enable the work that is incubated here—books, essays, prints, mobile parklets, dances, poems, experiments, or ideas that find their way into a scholar's or maker's work in less concrete ways—from the epiphany to the slow realization. When our work is new, it is exciting and it is vulnerable, and bringing it out to share with others is both necessary and potentially scary. If we do not care, we are not vulnerable. But there's no one embarking on a Kahn project who isn't prepared to take that risk, and to foster the work of others. In a political climate in which too many national leaders around the world encourage siloed living, thinking, feeling, and action, our work here is not only interdisciplinary, it's open and fluid in so many of the other ways that matter to human beings, whether they're working academically or simply living in their communities.

For an institute that never demands that our fellows produce anything at all, other than a profound commitment to the weekly meetings and the conversations engendered there, it is particularly heartening in these times to think about the incredible utility most of the fellows' projects have. In the student workshop presentations,



I saw 100 percent of the fellows producing projects that could have significant effect in the world. A student in the *Refugees* project is working to highlight the leadership of women refugees, and redefining leadership as she goes. Another, in *Food*, is working on how to make kelp the next kale—with wonderful consequences for the planet. All of them are pushing themselves on projects that are high-level scholarship that could lead to high-level change. The faculty are likewise plugged into the problems of the world, and many take them on directly in their Kahn work.

The rhythms of short-term Kahns are different, but no less intense or productive. Our first one of the fall is *Drones: Pedagogy, Policy, Power, Play*, a look at the use of drones that is not about warfare or traditional surveillance. Our last of the semester is *Data, Knowledge, Pedagogy: The Age of Machine Learning*. In between are three more: *Toward a Global Liberal Arts*, a collaboration with the Lewis Global Studies Center; a second iteration of 2016-17's *Robed Warriors* series, called *Putting Pen to Palm Leaf: Buddhist and Contemporary Literature*; and, finally, among the largest short-terms we have mounted, a symposium commemorating the 200th anniversary of the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, one of the most generative texts in the history of literature, published January 1, 1818, when Shelley was 20 years old—the same age as so many of our students. *Creativity and the Creature: Mary Shelley's Frankenstein at 200* will bring together writers, artists, filmmakers, and scholars from a wide variety of academic disciplines to ask: how can Shelley help us to think through contemporary questions about race, gender, sexuality, disability, identity, bioethics, reproduction, the environment, the human and the nonhuman?

Last year we delighted in the fruit of the apple tree in the Kahn's backyard. As apple trees often do, this one is taking the year off (a very generous sabbatical policy indeed!) But our colloquium room still bears fruit, and the porch is always ready to welcome all, especially on Friday, September 21, for our first Porch Party of the year (4:30-6 p.m.).

Read the *Kahn Chronicle* Online:

[www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/chronicle](http://www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/chronicle)