



12 January 2017

To the Hopkins Community:

Last week, the Tabb Committee delivered its final report on the Humanities Center department to Provost Sunil Kumar and me.

I am deeply grateful to Dean Winston Tabb and members of the committee. They worked tirelessly to prepare a thoughtful, deliberate, unbiased, and thorough report. Their dedication to the School of Arts and Sciences is deeply appreciated.

I am sharing the report now because I know that many faculty members and students are eager to see it. Please know that reaching a final decision on the changes called for in the report will take some additional time. The Provost and I plan to give the report the serious review it deserves and seek advice and counsel from the Homewood Academic Council, the Krieger School's vice deans, and other involved parties.

We will consider carefully all of the committee's recommendations and options in order to determine the best path forward for the humanities in the Krieger School. However, consistent with the report, we would like to provide reassurance that departmental closure will not be considered.

I look forward to completing this important process and want to reiterate that we are committed to maintaining and enhancing the robust humanities scholarship that thrives here at Johns Hopkins.

Sincerely,

Dr. Beverly Wendland, James B. Knapp Dean
Krieger School of Arts and Sciences

Committee Report and Options for the Humanities Center
3 January 2017

The charge to the Humanities Center Review Committee was to assess the Humanities Center and to present options designed to ensure continued strength in broad and interdisciplinary scholarship and education in the humanities in the Krieger School. We did not understand our charge as carrying out another evaluation of the Humanities Center, nor have we done so. It was left to the committee to decide whether to rank the options in order of preference, and we have decided not to do so. The committee was also charged with making every effort to complete its work by mid-December. We studied recent external reviews of the Humanities Center and the copious internal correspondence relating to the matter, read the numerous letters submitted by faculty, students, alumni and friends of the Humanities Center, and interviewed nearly three dozen involved parties--including tenure-track, non-tenure track, and emeriti faculty of the Humanities Center, several humanities chairs and professors, graduate students from both the Center and other humanities and social sciences, as well as members of the administration. We have taken into consideration also the recent actions and documents of the Faculty Assembly and of the local AAUP chapter, as well as the petitions and other expressions of support for the Humanities Center, and examined the relevant discussions at the Academic Council.

Based upon the information we have obtained, the committee suggests three options for further consideration by the Dean of the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences. Before presenting these options, however, we felt it necessary to provide both an analysis of the context for the responses regarding the Humanities Center, and a brief overview of the evolution of the Center from its founding to the present.

Context for the Controversy over the Humanities Center

One of the Committee's tasks has been to disentangle the multiple issues that have come to bear on the present discussion of the Humanities Center. We believe that the tone and extent of the discussion have been significantly amplified by the unfortunate contingency of several ancillary factors. Many of these other issues are at best distantly related to the matter at hand, yet form an important context for the heated discussions and actions that have transpired. The question of the Humanities Center has become, and in some cases has intentionally been made, a *proxy* for many other issues--in particular for actions over the past five years that have been perceived as threats to the humanities in general. These latter, as much as they need to be abstracted from decisions about the Center, should be recognized in their own right even though they lie beyond the remit of the Committee. Recent events regarding the humanities, both at Hopkins and elsewhere, and even the results of the recent presidential election, have combined with questions about the Humanities Center to produce a "perfect storm" that has at times detracted from

clear-headed discussion. The unprecedented temperature of the resultant controversy is surprising in comparison to analogous past experiences.¹

Several contributors to the heat of the current discussion became evident during the Committee's work. The first of these is the completely understandable fear, especially among smaller departments, that should the Humanities Center be closed, they might well be next on the chopping block. This concern was explicitly voiced during the interview process. Such fears have been intensified by the well-publicized and unacceptable defunding of the humanities elsewhere, particularly in the UK, and a growing worry that such attacks on the humanities are spreading to American institutions. Both at Hopkins and elsewhere, the matter of the Humanities Center thus merged with that of the humanities more broadly. This effect is clear in correspondence the Committee received wherein many writers were under the impression that *all* humanities at Hopkins were under threat of closure. Others argued for the maintenance of the Center based on the crucial role of the humanities *in general* rather than on that of the Center specifically. Unfortunately, some factions at Hopkins exploited this connection for their own purposes, as in the silent transformation of the initial "Hands off the Humanities Center" campaign into the broader and more alarmist "Hands off the Humanities" motto. It is understandable how several earlier developments affecting the humanities might be read, rightly or wrongly, as a succession of actions designed to diminish the profile of the humanities at Hopkins, and the current consideration of the Humanities Center seen as a continuation thereof. While these concerns need to be disentangled from the matter at hand, it is also true that future developments in regard to the humanities at Hopkins will continue to be interpreted against this background for some time to come.

Additionally, the perennial issue of faculty governance was also paired with that of the Humanities Center. But it is worth noting that the administration's handling of the present issue, despite some missteps, has been quite consultative and been carried on with deliberation. The existence of this Committee, discussions with the Academic Council, consultations with individual faculty and with the Humanities Center itself, even if considered imperfect by one or another standard, indicate such consultative deliberation. While it is the prerogative and duty of the Dean and of the Academic Council to examine departments and their directions critically, it might be useful to craft some procedures to be followed when major realignments such as closure or merger of a department, center, or program are being contemplated. Such guidelines may relieve current anxieties and prevent future tensions.

We also believe it is important to note aspects of this process over the past few months that have been counterproductive from our perspective. While we acknowledge their understandable discomfort during this lengthy process, it is disappointing that some

¹ Several departments and centers have been summarily closed or merged by decanal fiat--History of Science in the early 1990s, German in the early 2000s, the Villa Spelman in 2004, and most recently, Geography and Environmental Engineering last month. Yet only the *possibility* of closure or merger of the Humanities Center has provoked a response far more vehement than the *actual* closure or merger of any of these other departments and centers. This preamble presents contextual reasons for this divergence.

graduate students acted in ways that were not constructive. For example, their public actions (including the website petition) could easily be read as calling for action against an administration supposedly bent on broadly destroying the humanities at Hopkins. We do not believe this was Dean Wendland's goal. Her tenure has seen the introduction of new interdisciplinary humanities programs, the expansion of the Program in Film and Media Studies, a moderate increase in the number of humanities faculty, and the launch of the Alexander Grass Humanities Institute, which will strengthen and bring more attention to the humanities at Johns Hopkins. We are concerned that the graduate students were misled in their understanding of the situation. In our meetings with the students, they did not always demonstrate understanding of the details of the situation, and sometimes made arguments that undercut their own goals, and sometimes expressed themselves in ways that were not appropriate. More generally, although we admire their passion and desire to be engaged, we do not believe that their actions had an overall positive effect and we are concerned that some of the actions of these graduate students harmed their own reputations and that of the university. We believe that the situation could have provided a "teachable moment" regarding how to engage calmly and rationally with controversy, but unfortunately, the students may not have had proper faculty guidance in doing so.

Finally, a further complication has been the formation of the Alexander Grass Humanities Institute while discussions of the Humanities Center were underway, such that the former was seen by some as a replacement of the latter, on the presumption that the two entities could not coexist. We also encountered the rumor that the Humanities Center was to be subsumed within the AGHI; a claim for which we could find neither basis nor rational origin. Our investigations did find that in 2014 a former vice-dean did in fact link the future AGHI with the existence and name of the Humanities Center, but while also saying that the school would like to have both the department and the new Humanities Institute. More importantly, the AGHI and the Humanities Center are very disparate entities. The Humanities Center, regardless of its name or origins (see below) is presently a degree-granting academic department with faculty and graduate students, course lists, and a particular intellectual catchment while the AGHI is a center for programming distributed broadly across the humanities. One cannot replace the other, nor can one be imagined to prevent the existence or productivity of the other. Instead, all the humanities--including the Humanities Center (which currently has a representative on the AGHI governing board)--should benefit from the AGHI.

Background of the Humanities Center:

Several interviewees expressed confusion as to why the Humanities Center has been the object of scrutiny. To answer this question it is necessary to consider the origins and evolution of the Center. Its historical evolution has left it an idiosyncratic structural entity, but also points the way towards measures to make it more effective.

The Humanities Center was established in spring 1966 as a consortium of ten humanities departments. It was run by a director--the distinguished Charles S. Singleton

(for whom its creation was part of a retention package)--and an Executive Council of three humanities professors elected to three-year terms by the humanities faculty at large. All humanities faculty, graduate students, and postdocs were members of the Humanities Center. The Center ran a year-long interdisciplinary seminar on a topic chosen by the humanities faculty, in which all interested faculty and students participated, and whose proceedings were published as a volume. It also invited and funded postdoctoral fellows, sponsored interdisciplinary courses for both undergraduates and graduates, as well as joint PhDs between departments. It embraced topics across the entire breadth of the humanities and from antiquity to the contemporary. Its aim was "not to form a separate enclave but rather to foster genuine cooperation across departmental lines."² In short, the Hopkins Humanities Center was founded as a meeting place for intellectual exchanges and projects among the faculty and students of all humanities departments.

Over time, many parts of this foundation fell away. The Center began to hire its own faculty rather than being staffed by professors from other departments, and no longer considered all humanities faculty and graduate students its members. The seminar series evaporated. The Center began to admit its own graduate students and to grant its own PhDs. The governing Executive Council was abolished and its powers concentrated in the director. By 2002, its initial expansive chronological and subject breadth had contracted to the modern era and its intellectual remit to predominantly literary topics such as comparative literature, critical theory, and its own unique definition of intellectual history. These changes sequentially transformed the Humanities Center from a cross-departmental *center* into a *department* of its own. Yet that transformation remained incomplete. The Center is still run by a director rather than a chair. The undergraduate major in Humanistic Studies withered away in 2005 with the graduation of its last student.³ The committee perceived that the sense which some members of the Center have of their own place, and that of the Center, in the ecology of the humanities at Hopkins seems to depend to a large extent upon the Center's original contours, without acknowledging that those contours--like those of other departments--have changed profoundly. For example, the Center was founded as a comprehensive consortium of humanists at a time when interdisciplinary work in the humanities was the exception rather than the rule, while today the Center functions as its own discrete department and most humanities faculty at Hopkins engage as a matter of course in interdisciplinary and interdepartmental work of various sorts.

The most significant changes to the Center have occurred along with a change of directorship--from Singleton to Richard Macksey, from Macksey to Michael Fried. Thus the recent retirement of Fried and Ruth Leys represents a fresh opportunity to reevaluate and possibly realign the Center. It is clear that the Center has moved far from its original purpose and plan. This evolution should not be viewed negatively, and any artificial

² Report of 19 January 1968, p. 4; University Archives, RE 02.001 Office of the President, series 9, box 32, Humanities Center 1967-69.

³ We note here also that the Great Books program, originally an initiative within GRLL, was run very ably by Dr. Elizabeth Patton for some years within the Humanities Center where it accounted for a large percentage of the Humanities Center's total undergraduate enrollment. Great Books is now no longer under the Humanities Center.

attempt to restore its original purpose would at present be impossible as well as otiose (given the foundation of the AGHI), yet there remains the need and the opportunity to reexamine the Center's future directions and role within the larger horizon of the humanities at Hopkins.

Options for Moving Forward:

Following our extensive research and interview process and our discussions of the information thus obtained, the Committee presents here three options for moving forward. As mentioned above, we chose not to rank these options in order of preference, but have instead listed them here in order of increasing level of change to the existing Humanities Center.

All of these options entail scenarios in which the Humanities Center, in whole or part, remains as a discrete unit which should be fully transformed into a department, led by a chair (not a director) and conforming to all the other characteristics and obligations of humanities departments in the Krieger School, both administrative and academic, including a strong undergraduate degree program. Based on the information we gathered, we are not presenting an option of completely terminating the Humanities Center and dispersing its entire current faculty, or the unit as a whole, into another department or departments as one of the options.

Importantly, the formulation of these options is based on a set of principles that emerged as important guidelines during our interviews, research, and discussions. These principles articulate positive characteristics that are valued and thus worthy of being maintained and/or further developed where necessary. These principles are summarized as follows:

- The department should have and articulate a specific and well-defined academic focus and educational mission at both graduate and undergraduate levels.

Throughout its history the Humanities Center has redefined its identity; it is now a propitious time for doing so again, with due consideration of the principles enunciated here and special consideration of and input from the younger faculty in the department. This redefinition is a prerequisite for launching searches for new faculty, that is, such hires should build towards a coherence and depth of mission. The undergraduate major should be relaunched in a way responsive to the feedback delivered to the department by the representative of the Academic Council: namely that the major have a clear focus rather than being too broad or diffuse and that the requirements not rely overly heavily upon the offerings and faculty of other departments (this is especially important now that Great Books is no longer seated within the Humanities Center). The committee recognizes that at some periods in the past the commitment to undergraduates was weak at best, resulting in the evaporation of the major; this must not be the case in the future.

- The department should fill a niche not filled by other departments

Given the small size of every Hopkins department in the humanities, it is necessary that these departments be complementary. In practice, this means that efforts and aims should not be duplicated, but rather strengthened by cross-departmental synergies.

- The department should remain interdisciplinary but needs to extend its inclusivity in an active, positive fashion, to embrace varying approaches, schools of thought, faculty, and departments that have sometimes remained excluded, or at least unwelcomed, in the past.

Everyone with whom the committee spoke extolled the importance of interdisciplinary research and collaboration in the humanities, and we heard many examples of how that works at Johns Hopkins – some of which included the Humanities Center and some of which did not. Every humanities department at Hopkins depends upon interdisciplinary thinking and collaborations, yet the Humanities Center does provide a special place for locating such work. This is not to say that this function has always been exercised optimally in the past; we heard from several interviewees that they were excluded from the Center. With suitable changes and greater openness and breadth, however, the Center has the potential to act more fully and effectively as a site for special interdisciplinary activity and for topics and research that fall between established departments. The challenge in 2016 and beyond is to determine how best to nurture and advance such collaborations. It might be useful for the department to put more emphasis on dual PhDs, which have been granted occasionally in the past, as a method of both drawing other departments and faculty closer and for broadening the expertise, experience, and attractiveness on the job market of its graduates.

- The department must have a leadership that is fully consultative, inclusive, and committed to the forward-looking evolution of the department into a more effective and powerful unit.

Regrettably, the committee found that at various points the departmental structure did not reflect the type of consultative inclusivity that should characterize a Hopkins humanities department. There may be unintentional historical reasons for this fact such as its anomalous structure as a “center” with a “directorship” rather than as a full department and the dismissal of its original Executive Board. Nevertheless, this situation cannot continue in the future. The choice on the part of some faculty to act largely independently from the whole, or, in the words of one member of the Center, to “circle the wagons,” has resulted in a fractured department which needs to be healed in order to move forward.

With these principles in mind, we present the following three options for moving forward.

- **Retain the Humanities Center with its current name.**

This option does not imply maintaining everything exactly as it has been. It became clear from several sources that not only has the past activity of the Center,

despite certain notable strengths, not been optimal, but also that the actions of the past months have rendered the status quo untenable. This situation should be seen as an opportunity for productive change and growth. That process would include rethinking the Humanities Center's particular role and remit amid the other humanities departments, and it is to be hoped that the Center's assistant and associate professors, in whom the committee has great confidence, would play a key role in this process. This option would also include discussion of the hiring for the two lines vacated by senior retirements with future-oriented, broad-minded scholars willing to work on strengthening and transforming the department. It would also include ensuring a functioning and inclusive leadership within the department that would facilitate serious planning and the strengthening of connections to all Humanities Departments and to the newly formed Alexander Grass Humanities Institute. If this course is chosen, it might be useful to form a short-term, ad hoc, consultative and non-voting board chosen in consultation with the Dean and with significant input from the associate and assistant Humanities Center faculty to help with their deliberations. It would be important to ensure that the views of the associate and assistant professors are fully represented. This board would sunset upon the hiring of new faculty.

• Retain the Humanities Center renamed as the (Interdisciplinary) Humanistic Studies Department, Comparative Critical Theories and Societies Department or another similar title that more clearly conveys its identity and focus.

Having included renaming the department as an option, we would like to note that the name "Humanities Center" was a constant theme throughout our deliberations. For some, both internal and external, Humanities Center is a strong "brand" that "everyone" understands. Many current and former graduate students emphatically stated that they came to Johns Hopkins specifically because of the "borderless" uniqueness of the Humanities Center. Yet, we also know from interventions received mainly--but not entirely--from people outside Johns Hopkins, that *not* everyone understands Hopkins' particular use of that term, which elsewhere is used to describe a coordinating entity, rather than a department – similar to the Singleton Center in KSAS. Clearly, there are arguments to be made on both sides of this issue – our committee heard many of them. On the one hand, a name like "Humanistic Studies" would be more accurately descriptive of the reality of the department, and is the field cited on its BA and MA.⁴ On the other, renaming might cause confusion among those who do understand the idiosyncratic meaning of "Humanities Center" at Hopkins. Renaming might serve better to advertise the interdisciplinary work of the department in the future and be an opportunity to

⁴ The Committee also notes that the subject titles of PhDs granted by the Humanities Center differ from that of the BA and MA. A further positive realignment would be to bring the title of all degrees into conformity, that is, as degrees in Humanistic Studies. Such realignment would serve better to focus and identify the department and its catchment for the future. This topic is presumably the purview of the Academic Council. The current awarding of PhDs in "Intellectual History" is seen by some as problematic, first because the Humanities Center has its own particular definition of intellectual history and second because intellectual history is not the exclusive domain of the Center. Many intellectual historians exist in History, History of Science and Technology, Classics, GRLL, and elsewhere. It might not seem appropriate that a degree in intellectual history is awarded by a department that includes only a small minority of the intellectual historians on campus.

“relaunch” the department, although renaming would diminish the “brand” among those familiar with its past.

Issues that would need to be considered for this option include whether the current faculty view the department's trajectory as consistent with this name, and if so, how future hires in the lines from recent retirements would fit this trajectory and strengthen ties with the other humanities departments and the AGHI.

It should be noted that the realignments of the department and other considerations specified in option 1 pertain with equal force to this option.

• Transform the Humanities Center into a Comparative Literature Department, building on the expertise of current faculty and using vacant faculty lines to recruit strong scholars in this specific, interdisciplinary field.

The younger faculty of the current Humanities Center self-identify predominantly as scholars of Comparative Literature although they apply interdisciplinary approaches to their scholarship and teaching, as do most humanities faculty. They cover a variety of geographical and linguistic specializations as well as theoretical approaches. Comparative Literature is one of the fields cited on PhDs currently granted by the Center.

This option would involve the most significant realignment of the department. Nevertheless it could result in a clearer focus and greater depth for the department by building upon the current strengths of its faculty without sacrificing the important interdisciplinary dimension. It would however require a “buy-in” from the faculty who would be charged with identifying potential directions of growth and hiring. While collaborating with other humanities departments, as stated above, this new department would need to establish strong, mutually-collaborative relationships with English and with German and Romance Languages and Literature.

This option entails consideration of the same issues regarding a name change as option 2 and the same departmental realignments as option 1.

All three of these options are proposed in a hopeful, optimistic spirit, and we hope that one of the options we have proposed can be implemented fairly rapidly to bring the period of uncertainty to a close. The proposed options assume that with the addition of two new faculty members the department will quickly come together as an effective unit, as it was in the past. However, it is possible that difficulties will arise that stand in the way of this happy ending. We understand that the recent uncertainty about the future of the department has demoralized essentially the entire faculty. Additional departures may ensue or there may simply be internal dissension that makes forward progress, including high-level recruiting, problematic. In that case in a year or two the issues addressed by the present committee may need to be addressed again in light of the new conditions; at that time the options may well be different.

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Sheridan Dean of University Libraries & Museums

Howard Egeth
Professor, Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences

Barbara Landau
Dick and Lydia Todd Professor of Cognitive Science
Director of the Science of Learning Institute

Lawrence M. Principe
Drew Professor of the Humanities
Dept. of the History of Science and Technology and Dept. of Chemistry
Director, Singleton Center for the Study of Premodern Europe

Appendix

Interviewees

The committee interviewed the following individuals, either singly or in groups, during the course of our deliberations. We also consulted with Provost Sunil Kumar before we began our work.

Dean Beverly Wendland

Vice Provost Chris Celenza

Humanities Center Faculty: Hent deVries, Paola Marrati, Leonardo Lisi, Anne Eakin Moss, and Yi-Ping Ong

Humanities Center Faculty emeriti: Michael Fried and Ruth Leys

Krieger School Humanities Department Chairs and other faculty: Shane Butler, Stephen Campbell, Nathan Connolly, John Marshall, Christopher Nealon, Elizabeth Patton, Deborah Poole, Glenn Schwartz, Molly Warnock

Humanities Center post-doctoral fellow: Avraham Rot

Humanities Center graduate students: Katherine Boyce-Jacino, Samantha Carmel, Benjamin Gillespie, Ezqi Ince, and Benjamin Stein

Other KSAS graduate students: Arash Abazari, Joseph Giardini, Luce de Lire, Casey McNeill, and Hannah Wallenfels

Authors of previous Humanities Center external reviews: Professors Homi Bhabha and Akeel Bilgrami