

Anthropology

Personnel and Administrative Changes

During academic year 2023-2024, Anthropology welcomed Sonya Atalay as Visiting Professor and Dina Asfaha as SHASS diversity postdoctoral fellow. Assistant Professor Héctor Beltrán was awarded a 1957 Career Development Chair and promoted to Associate Professor without Tenure. Atalay was appointed to Full Professor, and both Amy Moran-Thomas and Bettina Stoetzer were promoted to Associate Professor with Tenure. These four appointments and promotions will take effect July 1. Full Professor Christine Walley was named SHASS Dean's Distinguished Chair.

This academic year was Heather Paxson's last as Program Head, as she prepares to undertake the role of Associate Dean for Faculty in SHASS beginning July 1.

Highlights of the Year

Beltrán and Full Professor Stefan Helmreich each published new books. Full Professor Manduhai Buyandelger and Stoetzer each won multiple prizes and awards for their recently published books.

Anthropology hosted numerous guest lectures and public events throughout the year. In September, Dr. Sherine Farouk Hamdy gave a colloquium lecture entitled "Comics and Multimodal Anthropology." Full Professor Graham Jones hosted magician, artist, and researcher Jeanette Andrews for a two-part event workshop at the MIT Museum: a performance entitled "On Wonder: In Plain Listen" followed by "Designing the Impossible: The Magic and Creative Solutions Workshop." In October, Aslı Zengin gave a colloquium lecture: "Violent Intimacies: The Trans Everyday, Extralegality and Police Violence in Turkey." Jones hosted cartoonist and University of Wisconsin-Madison faculty Lynda Barry in November for a sold-out talk at the MIT Museum: "Drawn Together: An Evening with Lynda Barry." In March, Jones hosted artist Rose Salane for a conversational event: "Rose Salane: The Art of the Archive." Later that month, Visiting Professor Sonya Atalay presented "Braiding Knowledges to Transform Science: Climate Change, Cultural Places, and Food Sovereignty research at the Center for Braiding Indigenous Knowledges and Science." Also in March, lecturer Lauren Bonilla organized a presentation by students and instructors in the MIT Climate and Sustainability Consortium (MCSC) seed-award project "Anthro Engineering Decarbonization at the Million-Person Scale" about their efforts in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. In April, Moran-Thomas hosted a screening and Q&A with several people involved in the making of the documentary film "Hollow Tree." Jason De León of UCLA gave a talk about his latest book, "Soldiers and Kings: Survival and Hope in the World of Human Smuggling." Walley hosted a screening and Q&A with the directors of the documentary film "The Anti-Social Network," which was then released on Netflix. Buyandelger hosted Elan Abrell at the end of April for a talk: "The Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Animal-Centered Ethnography."

Senior Administrative Assistant and Undergraduate Academic Administrator Carolyn Carlson was one of six winners of the SHASS Infinite Mile Awards, given yearly to staff.

Individual faculty achievements include:

Beltrán was featured in an [MIT News piece](#), “Writing code, and decoding the world” (Peter Dizikes), following the November publication of his *Code Work: Hacking across the US/México Techno-Borderlands* (Princeton University Press).

Buyandelger won the 2022 Onon Prize, awarded in October 2023, at the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit (University of Cambridge, UK). She also received the Mongolian Anthropology Association’s Best Book Prize, the Mongolian Writers Association 2023 Golden Quill Pen award, and an honorable mention for the 2024 E. Gene Smith Prize, awarded by the Association for Asian Studies East and Inner Asia Council, for her 2023 book *A Thousand Steps to Parliament: Constructing Electable Women in Mongolia* (University of Chicago Press).

Helmreich was featured in an [MIT News piece](#), “Dreaming of Waves” (Peter Dizikes), following the October publication of his *A Book of Waves* (Duke University Press).

Paxson was one of 5 MIT Faculty Fellows appointed by the Provost to participate in the Ivy-plus Faculty Advancement Network’s year-long Institute on Inquiry, Equity, and Leadership in the Academic Department.

Stoetzer was awarded three prizes for her 2022 book *Ruderal City: Ecologies of Migration, Race, and Urban Nature in Berlin* (Duke University Press): the Diana Forsythe Book Prize, the German Studies Association Best Book Prize in History and Social Sciences, and the William A. Douglass Book Prize in Europeanist Anthropology. She also received the 2024 Ruth A. and James Levitan Prize in the Humanities for her project “Unsettling Refuge: Disrupted Mobilities in Multispecies Worlds.”

Full Professor Susan S. Silbey won the 2023 Frank E. Perkins Award for Excellence in Graduate Advising.

Walley’s Southeast Chicago Archive and Storytelling Project won the prize for Best Interactive Media at the Society for Visual Anthropology’s Film and Media Festival in November.

Anthropology received internal funding for projects this year. Manduhai Buyandelger received an Experiential Learning Opportunity (ELO) grant alongside Mike Short (Engineering) for “Anthro-Engineering Million-Person Decarbonization in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia”. Graham Jones received funding from MIT’s Center for Art, Science and Technology (CAST) to further develop his class entitled “Drawing from Human Experience.” He was also able to secure some funds from CAST to bring guest artists to MIT. Susan Silbey was the recipient of funds from MIT’s Office of Open Learning to continue developing content for her MITx class on Qualitative Research Methods. Professor Silbey also received funds from MIT’s Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing (SERC) for a project entitled “Designing and Evaluating Regulatory Mechanisms to Empower and Constrain AI Supply Chains”. Bettina Stoetzer received

funds through the SHASS Dean's Office via a Dean's Grant for "Indigenous Climate Futures in the Pacific Northwest".

Teaching and Curriculum

In fall, Assistant Professor Héctor Beltrán taught one of Anthropology's most popular undergraduate subjects, "Technology and Culture," as well as "Hacking from the South." He was on Junior Leave in spring. Buyandelger was on Sabbatical leave in fall and taught two undergraduate subjects in spring: "How Culture Works" and "Images of Asian Women: Dragon Ladies and Lotus Blossoms." Helmreich co-taught "The Anthropology of Sound" with CMS Professor and Anthropology affiliate Ian Condry in fall. This subject is co-listed with STS and new this year, with CMS. Helmreich taught Social Theory and Analysis, one of the HASTS PhD Program's required classes, in spring. Jones taught a new undergraduate subject "Drawing Human Experience" in fall, as well as "The Meaning of Life" and "Seminar in Ethnography in Fieldwork," in spring. Moran-Thomas offered "Disease and Health: Culture, Society, and Ethics" during fall. She co-taught the new undergraduate subject "Living Through Climate Change" with Stoetzer, and "The Social Lives of Medical Objects" in spring. Paxson offered "Food, Culture, and Politics," a CI-M subject, in fall. Silbey taught "Designing Empirical Research in the Social Sciences" in spring. Stoetzer taught "Introduction to Anthropology: Comparing Human Cultures," one of our core subjects, in fall and "Race and Migration," a CI-H, in spring. This subject is co-listed with Women's and Gender Studies (WGS). She also co-taught "Living Through Climate Change" with Moran-Thomas in spring. Walley offered the CI-H subject "What Is Capitalism?" in fall and co-taught "DV Lab: Documenting Science through Video and New Media" with Chris Boebel for undergraduates and graduate students. That subject is co-listed with STS. STS Associate Professor Dwai Banerjee taught Anthropology's "Cultures of Computing" in spring. Lecturer Franco Rossi offered the popular "Technology and Culture" in spring. Post-doctoral fellow Dina Asfaha offered "Africa and the Politics of Knowledge" in fall. Lecturer Lauren Bonilla co-taught the special topic "Anthro-Engineering at the Million-Person Scale" with Professor Mike Short (Course 22).

Faculty participation in HASTS and other doctoral programs in DUSP and Sloan continues to be robust with faculty members serving as graduate student advisors and on numerous dissertation committees. Beltrán served on five students' dissertation committees: three HASTS students, one at Universidad Iberoamericana in México, and one at Cambridge University (UK). Buyandelger served on three dissertation committees (two outside MIT). Helmreich served on 16 doctoral committees. For six of the doctoral committees, he is principal advisor. Ten are HASTS students, and six are outside MIT. Jones served on four HASTS students' dissertation committees. He also advised the linguistic anthropology post-doctoral associate and one UROP. Moran-Thomas served on four HASTS dissertation committees. Paxson advised two HASTS PhD students and served on one additional HASTS student's dissertation committee. Silbey served on eleven dissertation committees (five as principal advisor) for students in HASTS, CSAIL, and Sloan; she advised two UROPs. Stoetzer served as dissertation committee member for three students outside MIT. Walley served on seven dissertation committees (two as principal advisor) and advised one undergraduate major. She also supervised a visiting postdoctoral scholar.

Publications

In addition to *Code Work*, Beltrán published “The Ethno-Stack” in the SAGE Handbook of Global Sociology (Gurminder K. Bhambra, Lucy Mayblin, Kathryn Medien, and Mara Viveros-Vigoya, eds).

Buyandelger’s book *A Thousand Steps to Parliament: Constructing Electable Women in Mongolia* was published in Mongolian translation. She also published the article “Economic volatilities, gold mining, and subjective transformations in Mongolia” in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*.

In addition to *A Book of Waves*, Helmreich published the article “Erase the Waves” in the journal *Archiv für Mediengeschichte*, as well as “A Book of Sea Species,” the postface for the book *Elusive Partners: Contemporary Anthropological Perspectives on Marine Species*. He also saw publication of an excerpt of his book *Alien Ocean* in the book *Oceans* (Syperrek and Wade, eds). He had a book chapter published in French: “Sur la plage” in *Expériences, Interactions, Gestions* (Clavel, Levain, Revelin, eds; translated by Levain).

Jones published “The Magic of Conversational Automata” with Satran and Creanga in *Anthropology News* and “Intelligence as Agency: Evaluating the Capacity of Generative AI to Empower or Constrain Human Action” with Satyanarayan in [An MIT Exploration of Generative AI](#).

Moran-Thomas published “On the Appearance and Disappearance of Difficult Histories: What Does it Take to Sustain Public Memory?” with Susan Reverby in *American Journal of Public Health*.

Walley published a mini-documentary “The Closing of the Mills” as part of the Southeast Chicago Archive and Storytelling Project, in collaboration with the Southeast Chicago Historical Museum; and a review of the book *As Goes Bethlehem* (Schennum) in *Journal of Working Class Studies*. She saw the Chinese edition of *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago* (published as *No Land to Count On* by Tao Zhi Yao Yao Culture Co., Ltd., translator Yiming Zhang with Fei Yan). She also published a [website](#) of student-created documentary work for her class DV Lab: Documenting Science through Video and New Media (co-taught with Chris Boebel and teaching assistant Sasha Goldberg).

Presentations

Beltrán presented several talks throughout the year. In July, he presented “Labor and Technology” at the Data Fluencies Research Development Workshop for the Social Science Research Council and the Digital Democracies Institute, co-chaired with Ifeoma Ajunwa, in Vancouver. At the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in Toronto in November, he presented “Technologies from the South as Method and Challenge” and “Pivoting across the Techno-Borderlands,” and chaired the session “Digital Selves, Datafication, and Transhumanism.” In April, he presented “Borders,” an invited presentation for “Life in Pixels: Conversations on Living with Media and Technoscience Today” with Juan Llamas-Rodriguez, Iván Chaar López, and

Ranjodh Singh Dhaliwal at the University of Notre Dame (virtual). He also gave a book talk in April: “Code Work: Hacking across the US/México Techno-Borderlands” at the University of California, Berkeley.

Buyandelger gave several lectures. In August, she presented “Mongolian Democracy and Women in Politics,” an invited lecture to the East Asia and Pacific Area Studies Program at the State Department’s Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, Virginia (remote). In October, she gave the Onon Prize lecture, “Crisis in Animal Rescue: Urbanization in a Multispecies World,” at the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit at the University of Cambridge, UK. Later that month, she gave the keynote address, “Rescues at the Margins: Spreading Compassion for Animals in Anthropocene Mongolia,” at the First Scientific Conference of Mongolian Researchers in the USA at the Embassy of Mongolia in Washington, DC. She also presented this talk remotely in December as an invited lecture at the Young Scientists Program at the Institute for the Study of Mongolian Dinosaurs. Also in December, she presented “Why Do Mongolians Love Elections? Electoral Structures, Campaigning, and New Economies of Democratization” at the MIT workshop “Directions of Polarization, Social Norms, and Trust in Societies: Perspectives from Behavioral Sciences,” and “A Thousand Steps to Parliament: Constructing Electable Women in Mongolia,” an invited video presentation for the Assembly of Women Parliamentarians, organized by the Mongolian Parliament to mark the Mongolian translation of her book of the same title.

Helmreich gave several talks this past year. He presented “Ocean Waves, Ocean Science, Ocean Media” (from *a book of waves*) in July 2023 at the Fluid Knowledges Group at the University of Leiden, Netherlands; in March 2024 at the Department of Anthropology, New School University in New York City; and in April at both the Collège de France in Paris and at the 28th International Science Festival in Gothenburg, Sweden. He also presented “Waves Dangerous, Domesticated, and Diagnostic” (*from A Book of Waves*) in February in the European Association for Social Anthropologists’ Anthropology of the Seas Network webinar (remote), and in April at the Social Anthropology Department at the University of Bergen (Norway) Paris-Norway Institute in Paris. In September, he presented “2Q23: Latour’s Double Visions” at “Thinking After Latour,” a symposium organized by STS and the Harvard Department of the History of Science; and “What Can Waves Tell Us?” for the 43rd Museum of Modern Art Research and Development Salon in New York City. At the annual meetings of the AAA in Toronto, he presented “Line Boil,” discussant commentary for the panel “Fieldwork Technologies”; a music video entitled “What Is Life?” for the event “Disco Ethnography”; and “Waves Against Sea Level” for the panel “For and Beyond Sea Level.” In December, he gave discussant commentary entitled “Membranes” at Uncommon Senses IV: Sensory Ecologies, Economies, and Aesthetics at Concordia University in Montréal (remote). Finally, in March, he presented “Massive Movie Waves” as part of the panel “Digital Ocean: Image, Address, Dispersal, Streaming + Storage” at the annual meeting of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies in Boston.

Jones presented “Beyond Transition: Linguistic Anthropology as Transformative Praxis” as an executive roundtable panelist at the annual meetings of the AAA in Toronto, in November.

Moran-Thomas gave two talks in fall: “Metabolic (In)justice: Nutrition and Nourishment in the Teeth of Racial Colonial Capitalism,” a roundtable presentation at the annual meetings of the AAA in Toronto; and “Redacted Reckoning: An Anthropology of Institutional Silences After Tuskegee Researchers’ Experiments in Guatemala” at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard. In spring, she gave an invited talk at Boston University: “Oil in Stereo: Ancestry through Infrastructure.”

Paxson gave several talks this year. In July, she gave a public lecture entitled “Jasper Hill Farm’s Experiments with Scale: Notes from an Anthropologist” at the Cheese Science Fair at the Highland Center for the Arts in Greensboro, Vermont. At the annual meetings of the AAA in Toronto in November, she presented the paper “The Metabolic (Micro)politics of U.S. Food Import Safety Regulation” as part of the panel “Metabolic Politics.” In April, she presented “Protecting Perishable Values: Timescapes of Moving Living Cheese across Oceans and Borders” at the seminar “Anthropology of Life” at the Centre Universitaire de Norvège in Paris. The following month, she presented “Microbiopolitics, Now: In Scaling Production, Food Safety Regulation, and Beyond” at the University of Sussex, UK. In June, she gave the keynote lecture, “On Form, Type, and Method: Hybridity in Foods and Food Studies (with Cautionary Tales from Cheese),” at the Biennial Perugia Food Conference at the Umbria Institute in Perugia, Italy.

Silbey presented the paper “Between Law and Safety: Comments on Licensed Maintenance Engineers and the Construction of Legality in European Civil Aviation” as well as the invited seminar “Designing Empirical Research about Law and Society” at Lund University in Sweden. In June, she presented three papers at the annual meeting of the Law and Society Association in Denver: “The Making of Lawyers’ Careers,” “Discretion, Trust and Regulation,” and “Presidents Speak! The Origins, Evolution and Future of Law and Society.”

Stoetzer gave a book talk, “Ruderal City,” in September for the Floating University in Berlin, Germany (remote). At the annual meetings of the AAA in Toronto in November, she participated in the roundtable “Ecologies of War, Displacement, and Justice in More-Than-Human Worlds.” In December, she presented “Ruderal City: Racial Formations and Urban Nature in Berlin” via Zoom for the Institute for Landscape and Urban Studies at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zürich. She presented “Rideral Ecologies” at the Rachel Carson Center at Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich, Germany in January; “Ruderal City: Ecologies of Migration and Urban Nature in Berlin” for the Anthropology of Life Seminar Series in Paris, France in April; and “Seeding Livable Futures” at the Displacement and (Im)mobilities Colloquium Series at George Mason University in Fairfax Virginia in May.

Walley presented the paper “Telling Stories through Saved Objects: The Southeast Chicago Archive and Storytelling Project” at the NYU Culture and Media Symposium “Studying, Producing, Curating, and Building Media Worlds” in September. At the annual meetings of the AAA in Toronto in November, she presented an interactive media exhibit of the Southeast Chicago Archive and Storytelling Project. In June, she presented “Gender, Deindustrialization, and “Deaths of Despair” (co-authored with Dr. Arthur McIvor) at the *Deindustrialization and the Politics of Our Time* conference at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland. Also in June, she was a roundtable participant: *Deindustrialization with a Human Face? Roundtable on Jill Schennum’s “As Goes*

Bethlehem: Steelworkers and the Restructuring of the Industrial Working Class.” Working Class Studies Association, State University of New York–Old Westbury (remote).

Contributions to MIT and Outside Communities

Anthropology faculty members served on a wide range of committees and task forces at MIT. Beltrán served as the Anthropology faculty representative to the HASTS Program Seminar in fall. Buyandelger served on Anthropology’s Howe Prize committee for undergraduate writing and on two internal promotion committees (one as chair). She also participated in curriculum development for Course 21E, focusing on climate change, with Dr. Lauren Bonilla and Prof. Mike Short (Course 22); and she organized the inauguration of the MIT Mongolian Student Association. Helmreich also served on the Howe Prize committee, on four internal promotion committees (one as chair), on the Committee on Programming Initiatives for SHASS, and as a faculty mentor in Anthropology. Jones served as Concentration advisor for Religious Studies, as Undergraduate Officer in Anthropology, on the Anthropology curriculum committee, on two internal promotion committees (one as chair), and as mentor to junior faculty. In addition, he served on the Faculty Complaint Review Panel, the SERC Action Committee, and the HASTS Colloquium Committee. Moran-Thomas served as HASTS program admissions representative and as advisor to a SHASS Diversity Postdoctoral Fellow. She also finished her term as the SHASS Dean’s Representative to the subcommittee on the HASS Requirement. Paxson was Head of Anthropology, which carried with it service on the Anthropology Curriculum Committee and the HASTS Steering Committee. She continued to serve as Anthropology’s minor advisor and as an advisor to first-year undergraduates. She also served on the HASTS Graduate Admissions Committee and joined the Faculty Advisory Committee of the Vice Provost for Faculty Development. . She served on the Institute Faculty Policy Committee, on the MISTI Global Seed Funds Evaluation Committee, and as a mock interviewer for the Distinguished Fellowships Committee. Silbey continued to serve as Anthropology’s transfer credit advisor and on the Faculty Advisory Committee for MITx. She also served as a faculty mentor, on the Compass Committee (designing a new collaborative HASS course), on the Institute Council on Environmental Health and Safety, on the Committee on Undergraduate Program (CUP), on the Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing (SERC), and on the Committee on Toxic Chemicals. She also served this year on the search committee for Vice President of Open Learning. Stoetzer served as Anthropology’s faculty representative to Program Seminar and on a search committee for a lecturer in WGS in spring. She continued to serve on the WGS Curriculum Committee, as the SHASS representative on the MIT Energy Council, as a Burchard Faculty Fellow, and as a mentor for a SHASS Diversity Predoctoral Fellow. Walley served as Anthropology’s concentration advisor, which carries with it a seat on the curriculum committee, as Anthropology’s representative to the HASTS Program Seminar, and on two internal promotion committees (one as chair). She continued to serve as mentor to a faculty member, a SHASS diversity predoctoral student, and a postdoctoral fellow. She served on the Institute Committee on Student Life and on the Kelly-Douglas Jury Prize Committee.

Outside MIT, Beltrán continued to serve on the Association of Latina/Latino Anthropologists (ALLA) Graduate Student Paper Award Committee and on the editorial

board for *Studies in Computing and Culture*, a book series at Johns Hopkins University Press, in fall. Helmreich served on the editorial or advisory boards of *Environmental Humanities*; *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, and Technoscience*; *Culture, Theory, and Critique*; and *Current Anthropology*. He is involved in five arts, media, and science initiatives outside MIT: as collaborator on the Ocean Memory Project, a science, arts, and humanities network supported by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine with funding from the W.M. Keck Foundation; as project participant in the Getty Institute Standard Pacific Time Research Grant, “Oceanographic Art + Science: Navigating the Pacific,” awarded to the University of San Diego Institute of Arts and Humanities, PI Lisa Cartwright; on the advisory board of “Smart Forests,” funded by the European Research Council; “BLUE: Multispecies Ethnographies of Oceans in Crisis,” funded by the Danish Research Council; and as an external collaborator on “Media Seas of the High North Atlantic” at the Oslo School of Environment. Jones continued service to several editorial committees and scientific advisory boards such as the Society for Ethnographic Theory; *Annual Review of Anthropology*; *Circus: Arts, Life, and Sciences*; the Global Council for Anthropological Linguistics; *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*; *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory*; and *Ateliers d’Anthropologie*. Moran-Thomas served on the Committee on the Use of Race and Ethnicity in Biomedical Research, part of the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) Health and Medicine Division. She continued to serve on the editorial boards of *Current Anthropology* and *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*; as a collaborating Co-Organizer for the Harvard-MIT Friday Morning Seminar in Culture, Psychiatry, and Global Mental Health; and as an active member and contributing participant to the Open Oximetry Collective. Paxson participated as a Fellow in the Ivy-plus Faculty Advancement Network (FAN) Institute on Inquiry, Equity and Leadership in the Academic Department. She reviewed grants for the Wellcome Trust (UK) and the National Science Foundation. Silbey continued to serve on the editorial boards of *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*; *Regulation & Governance*; and *Legalities: The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Law and Society*. She also served on a workshop planning committee for NASEM. Stoetzer. She also continued to serve as steering committee member of the NGO Observatoire Terre-Monde.

Heather Paxson
William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Anthropology
Margaret MacVicar Faculty Fellow

More information on the Anthropology program can be found at anthropology.mit.edu.

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