



Center for the Humanities at Tufts

The humanities departments at Tufts, currently numbering 12, have been driving and nurturing intellectual inquiry on campus since the university was founded in 1852. Now they have an attractive and inviting center where philosophers, painters, musicians, historians, language and book lovers, and scholars delving into all manner of human creativity gather to share thoughts, present papers, conduct research, engage in probing discussions, and reflect on the riches of our global cultural heritage.

The Center for the Humanities at Tufts (CHAT) is the institutional expression of the importance that the university places on the pursuit of great art and ideas in all forms. More than that, it is a lively place that is sparking activities that engage the entire campus. Director Jonathan Wilson, a past head of the English department and director of the creative writing program, sees the center as a hive of activity that serves faculty while drawing students with a wide variety of interests to public lectures and symposia. By promoting innovative and collaborative study in the humanities, as well as fomenting conversations and debates, CHAT is a place where ideas from different disciplines get to cross-pollinate. In so doing, it strengthens both the teaching and the research missions of Tufts as a whole.

Working with a modest budget, CHAT is proving to be a model of what a budding institute can do even in a national fiscal environment in which cuts to humanities programs are common. It is distinguishing itself by showing that it can use relatively small donations to significantly deepen and enliven intellectual life on campus. "Despite that fact that humanities are in decline across the country, one of the places where they haven't been in decline is Tufts...they are absolutely vital if what we are trying to do is produce educated students," said Wilson, "If you want to understand who we are today, you need to read great literature and look at great art and listen to great music and think about philosophy."

Established in January 2008, the center has just completed what Wilson calls "its first full year up

and running, with its full panoply of effects." The work of the center includes:

- **Organizing Symposia:** Each semester, the CHAT board of directors, which consists of rotating representation from six of the 12 departments to which the center caters, chooses themes around which to organize events. This year's foci were "The Humanities and Human Rights" and "The Role of the Public Intellectual: Writing about Literature and Music."
- **Hosting Fellows:** CHAT has several categories of fellows who bring their individual passions to the center to collectively create an atmosphere of exploration and intellectual excitement. They include visiting fellows, who are prominent scholars from other places; faculty fellows who get an office in the CHAT building as well as a research award to support a current project; graduate fellows, who receive support for their dissertation research; and Mellon postdoctoral fellows, who come to the center for two years to teach and further their research.
- **Tuesday Seminars:** Several times each semester, CHAT fellows offer their insights on a piece of the human experience during a brown bag lunch gathering. Recent topics have included Aztec art, Filipino music, Muslim social film, and a new perspective on war crimes.
- **Bringing Speakers to Campus:** CHAT helps to enliven intellectual life across the campus by bringing in people who are prominent in their fields to give public lectures. These have included literary critic James Wood and music critic Alex Ross, both of the *New Yorker*; authors Lydia Davis, Francisco Goldman, Adina Hoffman and Jonathan Rosen; and writer and academic Ian Buruma.

Center for the Humanities CONTINUED

HUMANITIES DEPARTMENTS AT TUFTS

- Anthropology
- Art & Art History
- Classics
- Drama & Dance
- English
- German, Russian & Asian Languages/Literature
- History
- Music
- Philosophy
- Religion
- Romance Languages
- Visual and Critical Studies

TESTIMONIALS

“CHAT is fulfilling its promise of creating a strong institutional footprint in the humanities that will both strengthen and complement the university’s vision of civic engagement. It is injecting the power of the knowledge and understanding produced by the humanities into public debate and policy. CHAT is a critical harmonizing force for the distinctive educational mission of Tufts.”

--R. Bruce Hitchner

Professor of Classics and International Relations and Chair, Department of Classics

“CHAT is an excellent space to support intellectual life at Tufts. I count myself among the faculty who are immensely grateful to those who worked to make this a reality.”

--Jeanne Marie Penvenne

Associate Professor of History and Core Faculty, International Relations

“The addition of CHAT to the Tufts campus has been a godsend for those of us in the humanities. In an age in which the value of any discipline that doesn't produce hands-on practical results has been put in question, the first-rate programming CHAT provides confirms Tufts' commitment not only to research breakthroughs, but also to the life of the mind.”

--Nancy Bauer

Chair, Department of Philosophy

“The Center for the Humanities has been a phenomenal resource, and done much on multiple fronts to invigorate interdisciplinarity and scholarly discussion on campus. In short, CHAT plays an absolutely vital role in the intellectual life of the campus.”

--Kris Krishnan Manjapra

Assistant Professor, History

“The caliber of the speakers and scholars CHAT has brought to campus has been extraordinary. To have someone like Professor Susannah Heschel in residence this year is truly special. Under Jonathan Wilson's leadership, CHAT has made a significant contribution to the intellectual life of this campus. I look forward to seeing it continue to thrive.”

--Barbara Wallace Grossman

Chair, Department of Drama and Dance and Associate Professor, Theatre History, Dramatic Literature and Criticism, and Directing