



UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina

Humanities Collaborative Annual Report 2025-26

Qiana Whitted

Director

Maureen Ryan

Associate Director



Mission

The USC Humanities Collaborative creates opportunities and resources for the exploration of human culture, thought, and experience on campus and in our community. Since 2021, we have managed a robust series of programs that include research and creative working groups, public talks, digital humanities workshops, podcasts, and partnerships with local arts and humanities organizations. Our activities bring together faculty and students from across disciplines to generate new knowledge, and we advocate for the meaningful integration of humanistic inquiry in every classroom and profession.

2025-26 Overview

This year, we launched three new signature initiatives: the Humanities Collaborative Distinguished Lecture Series; a residential Faculty Fellows Program; and a new community learning experience called Humanities 101.

We also developed new branding and logos for increased public visibility.

Signature Initiatives

- Mellon Foundation Grant Project *p 3*
- Faculty Research Support *p 4*
- **New:** Faculty Fellows Program *p 4*
- Research and Creative Working Groups *p 6*
- Public & Community Events *p 10*
- **New:** Fall Distinguished Lecture Series *p 10*
- **New:** Humanities 101 *p 10*
- Support for Student Research *p 11*
- Opportunities for Growth *p 11*



Mellon Foundation Grant:

Civic Engagement, Voting Rights, and the Founding Documents at the University of South Carolina

Our third year administering this \$500,000 Mellon grant continued to serve the campus and broader communities with 5 world-class visiting scholars, who gave public lectures and workshops for faculty and graduate students.

The grant supports public talks and events that examine how anti-majoritarian institutions work in tandem with anti-democratic practices in American politics—and how ordinary citizens can come together to challenge and reshape those practices. The year culminated in a **capstone conference in April** with 214 attendees, and 6 keynote speakers in constitutional law, public policy, activism, and filmmaking. Set to conclude in May 2026, this grant has been extended for an additional semester.

MELLON GRANT CAPSTONE CONFERENCE

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER

April 13, 2026-April 14, 2026
tinyurl.com/mellon-usc

April 13 2:10 pm
What was civic education, and what can it become?
Peter Levine
Tufts

April 13 3:50 pm
TITLE TBD
Jedediah Purdy
Duke

April 13 5:30 pm
What can we learn by talking to people different from us?
Joan Blades
Living Room Conversations

April 14 9:00 am
What must we have in common?
Kate Andrias
Columbia

April 14 10:40 am
Can the people still change the constitution?
Astra Taylor
Debt Collective

April 14 1:20 pm
What are third spaces, and why do they matter for democracy and social movements?
Deva Woodly
Brown

Humanities Collaborative
College of Arts and Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Humanities Collaborative
College of Arts and Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

James N. Druckman
Distrust, Polarization, and Disatisfaction

Thursday, February 19, 2026
5-6:30 p.m.
Lumpkin Auditorium, 8th floor of Close-Hipp (1705 College St.)

James N. Druckman, Professor of Political Science at the University of Rochester, will give a lecture based on *Partisan Hostility and American Democracy: Explaining Political Divides* (University of Chicago Press, 2024).

Free and Open to the Public

PART OF THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION GRANT: "CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, VOTING RIGHTS, AND THE FOUNDING DOCUMENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA"

Humanities Collaborative
College of Arts and Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Osita Nwanevu
The Right of the People: Democracy and the Case for a New American Founding

Thursday, January 22, 2026
5-6:30 p.m.
Campus Room, First Floor of Capstone House (902 Barnwell St.)

Osita Nwanevu (New Republic) will give a lecture on his new, bestselling book *The Right of the People: Democracy and the Case for a New American Founding* (Penguin Random House 2025). Nwanevu makes a visionary case for a political and economic agenda to fulfill the promise of American democracy and revive faith in the American project.

Free and Open to the Public

PART OF THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION GRANT: "CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, VOTING RIGHTS, AND THE FOUNDING DOCUMENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA"

Faculty Research Support

NEW: FACULTY FELLOWS PROGRAM

This year, the HC developed a residential Faculty Fellows Program that will support a cohort of researchers who are producing the most innovative and impactful humanities scholarship at the University of South Carolina. This new program puts the HC among peer and peer-aspirant institutions with residential fellowship programs that support research excellence in the humanities. Based on the number and quality of applications, we selected 6 Faculty Research Fellows for 2026-2027 for the following programs:

- **Faculty Research Fellows:** **Saskia Coenen-Snyder** (History), **Greg Forter** (English), **Marko Geslani** (Religious Studies), **Amanda Wangwright** (SVAD/Art History). These fellowships provide tenured faculty with dedicated time through one course release to advance their research and writing on a major project.
- **First Book Research Fellows:** **Emily Ruth Allen** (Music and Southern Studies) and **Melanie Holmes** (African American Studies). These fellowships provide tenure-track faculty with ongoing mentorship and the opportunity to workshop their first book manuscript on campus with colleagues and two invited experts in their field.

BOOK CELEBRATIONS

The HC hosts book launches twice annually for humanities faculty who have recently published books. These take place at community bookstore All Good Books and feature the faculty authors in conversation with one another, with refreshments and copies of the books to sign.



Our most recent launch, above, included **Andrew J. Kunka** (English, USC Sumter), **Anna Swartwood House** (SVAD/Art History), and **Natalie Letsa** (Political Science).

DIGITAL HUMANITIES INITIATIVES

The HC also sponsors digital humanities initiatives led by Kate Boyd, USC Libraries' Director of Digital Research Services and Collections, who supports humanists, social scientists, librarians, and students in using computational tools and methods in their research. This year, we hosted two DH showcases, featuring successful DH projects and hands-on workshops for faculty.



WRITING GROUPS

The HC convenes writing groups to support faculty at various stages of book-writing. Two groups met regularly to share work and conduct virtual mini bootcamps. They also met with USC Press editor Michael McGandy to gain strategies for engaging presses and submitting successful proposals. Progress in these groups include three book contracts (Na Sil Heo, History; Maureen Ryan, SVAD/Film and Media, Abbe Schriber, SVAD/Art History).

Working Groups

The Humanities Collaborative sponsored eight cross-disciplinary research and creative working groups in 2025-2026. These groups offer generative spaces to develop new ideas around a variety of topics and intellectual questions in the arts and humanities.

UNDERREPRESENTED UNIVERSITY HISTORY

This working group brings together faculty, staff, and students from different schools and departments, as well as researchers from partner institutions outside the university, to create a more complete picture of the history of the University of South Carolina. This year we hosted **Joe McGill, founder of the Slave Dwelling Project**, for two days on campus to give a public talk and speak to undergraduate classes.

SOUTHERNGAUGE FILM SERIES

SouthernGauge is a screening series bringing experimental, independent and new media art to Columbia. This group celebrates the underground and the experimental with an emphasis on community collaboration. We hosted 3 successful events this year:

- A **film screening at G.R.O.W.** in Columbia. The program brought together works that investigated movement, space, and the human relationship to travel. (Attendance: 25)
- In collaboration with the Nickelodeon Theater we hosted the **Ann Arbor Film Festival**. The tour presents a selection of award-winning films from the most recent festival season. (Attendance: 30)
- In collaboration with the Nickelodeon Theater's "FemmeFest" film festival, we hosted a selection of films by internationally lauded **filmmaker Jodie Mack**. (Attendance: 30)

WOOD BASKET OF THE WORLD

The Wood Basket Research Group seeks to better understand the range of effects that resulted from South Carolina's historic lumber industry, including economic development, cultural and material production, and environmental degradation.

This year, we:

- Attended the NEH Community Deep Mapping Institute at Michigan Tech in July 2025 for its landmark exhibition, "Forest to Furniture," which the group created last year.
- Published the book *Wood Basket of the World: Lumbering, Commerce, and Conservation in South Carolina's Forests* (USC Press, May 2026).
- Partnered with the William G. Pomeroy Foundation and received funding for 6 **historic markers** to be installed in Fall 2026.
- Will attend the **NEH Deep Mapping symposium** in Sumter, September 28-30, 2026, and its exhibition "Forest to Furniture" will travel to National Building Museum for their semi-permanent (10-year) exhibit, "Seeing Cities," May 2027.

BLACK ARTS WORKING GROUP

The Black Arts Working Group is a reading group that focuses on theories current to Black Studies, the visual arts, and performance studies. Geared primarily toward graduate students and advanced undergraduates across the humanities, this group's goal is to foster deeper inquiry into Black Art by benefitting from voices across traditional disciplines. This year, the group visited the International African American Museum, met regularly to read and discuss texts, and produced a 'zine with all of the readings from the course of the semester.



COMICS AND CULTURAL IMPACT

The Comics and Cultural Impact Group is an interdisciplinary collaboration that works to support the USC community in the study and teaching of comics and to aid in the development and use of USC's significant comics-related resources. This group held meetings and as public events:

- Pat Lawrence and Jorge J. Santos Jr. virtual book talk: **Out of the Gutters: Obscenity, Censorship, and Transgression** (10 present)
- Neale Barnholden virtual book talk on Eisner-nominated **From Gum Wrappers to Richie Rich: The Materiality of Cheap Comics** (10 present)
- Campus visit and book talk by **graphic novelist Jonathan Todd on his book Timid** (30 present)
- **Bag and Board event**, April 23. 50 community members participated and approximately 3,500 comics were rehoused in archival quality materials
- Michael Weisenburg and University Libraries Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections applied for an **NEH grant** to preserve comics collections and enhance accessibility

19TH CENTURY WORKING GROUP

The Nineteenth-Century Studies working group aims to develop collaborations among the outstanding faculty and graduate students working in field. This year the group hosted several faculty reading groups, a public lecture and graduate student workshop from **Victorianist Rachel Teukolsky (Vanderbilt)**, and hosted the **SEC Colloquium on Nineteenth-Century British Literature** that brought researchers together from all over the Southeast.



ARTS-BASED RESEARCH

Arts-Based Research (ABR) is a qualitative inquiry tradition that employs the arts as a means to generate, analyze and/or present research data. This group hosted five virtual lectures by ABR experts, including Dr. Paul Sutton on “The Wisdom of Crowds: C&T’s approaches to using big data to inform arts-based research” (April 28). In total, we had 58 attendees at these lectures from all over the world.

21ST CENTURY EXPERIMENTAL THEORY

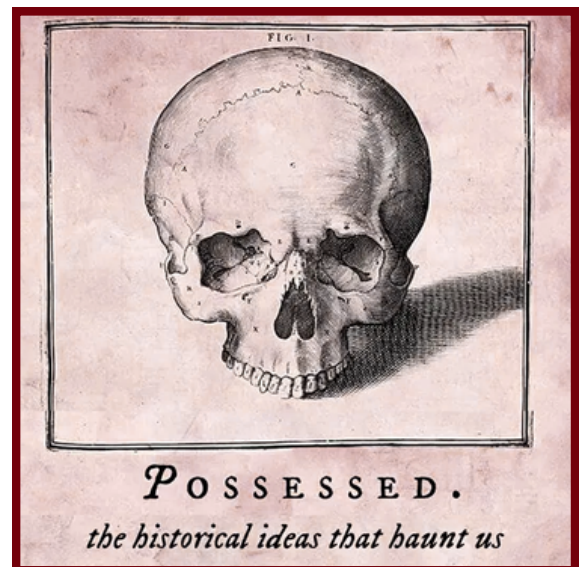
The Experimental Theory Research Group fosters community inquiry around the most exciting contemporary humanist theory. Our events this year:

- Screening of *Jaws* with a discussion of Fredric Jameson's "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" (25-30 participants)
- Discussion of Jacques Ranciere's *Politics of Aesthetics* (25 participants)
- Visit by **theorist Anna Kornbluh (UIC)**, who led a session of Eli's Jelly-Schapiro's graduate seminar, ran a workshop on work by Jodi Dean and Sarah Brouillette, and gave a public lecture (65 attendees)
- Discussion of Achille Mbembe's essay "Virtuality" (30 or so participants)
- Discussion of Joshua Clover's *Riot. Strike. Riot.* (20 participants)
- Visit by **musician David Grubbs (CUNY Graduate Center & Brooklyn College)**, who gave a public lecture and musical performance (30-35 attendees at the talk; roughly that at the performance)
- Screening & discussion of Bong Joon Ho's *Parasite* (10 participants)

POSSESSED PODCAST

Created by **Andrew Berns (HIST)**, **Matt Kisner (PHIL)**, **Mary Nickel (PHIL)**.

Designed as a public humanities project, *Possessed* is a podcast that aims to connect scholarship with broader cultural questions. Developed from an interdisciplinary perspective, *Possessed* is a podcast that explores diverse philosophical, cultural, and historical ideas that continue to haunt us and impact our lives in the present, ranging from the concept of surveillance, to the nuclear family, happiness, and the body.



[This season's episodes are available here,](#)
[with more to come.](#)

Public & Community Events

NEW: FALL DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES

The HC is initiating a new public lecture series to begin in fall 2026 that brings world-class experts in broad humanities fields to campus. On November 10, 2026, we welcome **Dr. Andre Carrington**, Associate Professor of English at the University of California-Riverside and Director of the graduate emphasis in Speculative Fictions & Cultures of Science. He is a scholar of race and fiction in Black and American cultural production. His new book, *Audiofuturism: Science Fiction Radio Drama and the Black Fantastic Imagination*, unearths how radio adaptations of Black speculative texts bring the cultural politics of 20th-century African American literature to the public through sound and performance. Carrington will give a public lecture and meet with faculty.

NEW: HUMANITIES 101



This year, we launched a new community learning experience called “Humanities 101” that offers a free, half-day of sample classes with outstanding USC humanities faculty (above, left).

We also co-sponsored off-campus events, including the Richland Library’s **Read Freely Fest**, a “**Humanities Happy Hour**” with SC Humanities at All Good Books, and a conversation with *New York Times* nature columnist Margaret Renkl (above, right) at the SC State Museum.

Support for Student Research

Our **Museum Learning** programs provide access to Columbia area museums, allowing students and faculty to utilize museum collections in their courses. For three years, the program has provided access to the **Columbia Museum of Art** for hundreds of students, whose access to the CMA extends for the full year. Under Dr. Whitted's leadership, we expanded the program to include the **South Carolina State Museum** for 2026-27, allowing us to serve more students and faculty.

We also activated an idle scholarship that the Collaborative inherited from the now-defunct Digital Humanities Center. With support from the David R. Chesnutt Scholarship Fund, we offered **grants for two graduate students to attend a summer digital humanities workshop** at UPenn. These students will give public presentations on the results of their workshops in Fall 2026.



Opportunities for Growth

The HC continues to expand its research support for faculty and students, helping secure USC's place among world-class R1 institutions. Our focus in 2026-27 is on:

- the productive implementation of signature initiatives
- growing our communication efforts
- seeking external funding, including grants and endowments, for long-term growth