

**Research Committee
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences**

Phase I Report (Spring 2019)

CONFIDENTIAL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An advisory faculty committee was convened to address two questions:

- a) What are the most promising areas of research, including both prominent areas that could be amplified and nascent areas that could grow in prominence?
- b) What are some ways of supporting faculty in their pursuit of research excellence?

Three sub-committees (arts/humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences) worked to address these questions during Spring 2019. With respect to the promising research areas the sub-committees have identified the following:

Arts and humanities

- The transnational
- Information studies
- Social justice studies
- Performance and aesthetic creation
- Aesthetic inquiry
- Public-facing humanities

Natural sciences

- Network and information science
- Planetary micro-to-macro biomes
- Personalized/precision human health and well-being
- Quantum science and engineering

Social sciences

- The transnational/global
- Inequality, social justice and ethics
- Sovereignty
- Data: Knowledge, ethics, and justice

In addition, the need to support faculty excellence, including faculty currently at UVA and those to be hired in the future, was prominent in the discussions with faculty. The following are highlights of the ways the College can support faculty excellence:

- Increasing the amount of time faculty can dedicate to research
- Providing greater support for graduate students and post-docs
- Supporting faculty research through building core infrastructure, providing research funds, and enhancing research administration

The work of this committee is a beginning of a longer process that will continue over the coming months and years. The next phases of the endeavor entail activities such as:

- Engage in a process of feedback and revision of the areas identified
- Gauge UVA's relative strength in proposed research areas
- Create subcommittees of faculty across disciplines with expertise in specific research areas
- Create infrastructures for genuine engagement across disciplines

INTRODUCTION

An advisory faculty committee was convened to begin the process of identifying the most promising areas of research, including both prominent areas that could be amplified and nascent areas that could grow in prominence. In addition, the committee considered how faculty could be supported in their pursuit of research excellence. During Spring 2019, three sub-committees – arts/humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences – worked to address those questions. The sub-committee chairs met regularly to share insights and the full committee met to discuss synergies across areas.

Each sub-committee engaged in a thoughtful exploration of promising areas of research. All sub-committees shared certain aspects of the process in common. First, they began with reviewing chairs' reports discussing current areas of strength and promising areas of research. Following, the sub-committees reviewed proposals submitted in recent years in response to various calls for initiatives, including proposals for institutes, SIF's (strategic investment fund), and cluster hires (both funded and not funded).

In addition, each subcommittee solicited ideas from faculty. While the specific strategies varied, all sub-committees have tended to focus on recently hired faculty (within the past 5 years) in order to glean insights from those new to the University, as they are thought to bring unique perspectives and points of comparison that may not be reflected in department reports.

- *Arts and humanities sub-committee* interviewed 19 faculty one-on-one. The committee focused mostly on faculty at the levels of assistant and associate professor, focusing in particular on faculty relatively new to the university. Two faculty members were selected in larger departments and one faculty member in smaller departments.
- *Social sciences sub-committee* invited all faculty hired in the last 5 years to participate in a focus group. Thirty faculty attended two focus groups that lasted 1.5 hours each. The committee also engaged in one-on-one informal conversations with more senior faculty (5 in total).
- *Natural sciences sub-committee* similarly invited all recently hired faculty to focus group discussions. Three focus groups were conducted, two with untenured faculty (at the time of appointment), and one with tenured faculty. More than 20 faculty participated, with additional faculty sharing comments via email.

The natural sciences sub-committee also gathered information on department funding and publications. They obtained grant expenditures and publications by department from OSP and other sources, which were synthesized by Will Greenland in the Dean's Office. The committee considered the position of UVA relative to peer institutions, where peers were defined as both departments' self-chosen peers and the top twenty departments as indicated by Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D (GERD) reports. This sub-committee also consulted funding agency documents (e.g., [NSF 10 Big Ideas](#)).

PROMISING AREAS OF RESEARCH

Sub-committee deliberations led to identifying a number of promising areas of inquiry. Sub-committees have been cognizant of the investments already made and the ways in which proposed areas connect with existing investments.

ARTS AND HUMANITIES

In addition to the summaries of the 6 promising research areas noted below, arts and humanities sub-committee has prepared detailed examples of potential investments in those areas provided in the Appendix.

1. The transnational is a capacious rubric which attends to global issues and extends research agendas beyond nationally oriented disciplines. While the transnational is already an emergent area of research at U.Va., the following subfields merit particular attention and support: (a) race in transnational frames, with a particular need for a stronger focus on Africa and a strengthening of Latinx studies; (b) environmental humanities, with a focus on climate change and the advent of the Anthropocene, which would complement ongoing scientific inquiries in the College; and (c) global popular culture, with an interest in the circulation of visual art, texts, vernacular expressions, music, digital media, etc.

2. Information studies encompasses disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to issues such as data storage and processing, computation and quantification, systems and organizations, and statistical modeling. Granted that mathematics, biological and physical sciences, and engineering have of course long worked with concepts of information, the humanities show increasing interest in information as a conceptual lens to analyze cultural formations, practices, and histories; to ask questions about epistemology or ethics; and to understand the fraught relationship between the human condition and our technological extensions. Given the proposed School of Data Science and the established place of digital humanities in the College, it is a propitious time for U.Va. to consider future research trajectories that might raise its national and international profile.

3. Social justice studies involves research into the norms, cultures, belief structures, and ideologies that play a systematic role in discrimination and inequitable social structures. This work attempts to describe these patterns of discrimination and inequality in past and present; it also attempts to interrogate and explore normative issues from a variety of perspectives (religious, ethical, philosophical, political, textual, historical, etc.). While the College has made progress in the study of race and gender and has emerging strength in queer and disability studies, its research profile is not yet where it should be. Given that U.Va. bears a distinctive historical burden with respect to the mistreatment of women and people of color, the College ought to intensify further its commitment and strive for excellence in social justice studies.

4. Performance and aesthetic creation has an important presence at U.Va, particularly in the spheres of studio art, film, music, drama, and poetry. Yet there is a clear need for investment to heighten productivity. In addition to addressing substandard infrastructure (office and studio space being particular problems for some departments), faculty believe that selective hiring and

increased opportunities for interdisciplinary work could enhance U.Va's national and international standing.

5. Aesthetic inquiry deals not only with the longstanding problem of the beautiful, but with all judgments of value in our relationship to the natural and constructed worlds that we inhabit and transform. The study and teaching of aesthetics is broadly evidenced across humanities departments, with discernible strengths in poetry, critical music and sound studies, and film and television. U.Va. is increasingly well-positioned in this area, and faculty believe that the College ought particularly to continue to support innovative, cutting-edge scholarship.

6. Public-facing humanities refers to scholarship which addresses pressing contemporary issues, engages non-academic actors and domains, and aspires to have a direct and lasting impact on the contemporary world. Two notable areas that are promising for research are public life in the Americas and the study of Charlottesville (and, more broadly, the Commonwealth). It is a particularly opportune time to bolster humanistic research that engages with the city of Charlottesville and the central Virginia region. Such work would complement the University's current efforts to address the maldistribution of resources and opportunities in our communities.

NATURAL SCIENCES

Redefining targeted cross-disciplinary areas every 2-3 years can be counter-productive, and will not provide the consistent commitment or resources to build competitive performance and reputation with our peers, who often are investing in similar strategies. New topical areas in the natural sciences are not defined or designed as orthogonal to existing priorities, but are intended to leverage and extend them.

1. **Network and information science:** These unified fields integrate topics such as coding, complexity, topological projections, and network dynamics, spanning the domains of a wide range of disciplines with a common base in graph theory. It provides a framework to support modeling, characterizing, and analyzing a broad range of real-world problems and systems including neural processing and cognition, language and social networks (both online and in person), biological networks (neural, vascular, arboreal), environmental network systems, epidemiological, physical systems, and transportation systems.

Network and information science makes connections across fields, complements existing talent in mathematics, statistics and multiple other departments in the College of Arts and Sciences and across schools, and also has the potential to make relevant contributions to present university institutes (ERI, GIDI, Brain Institute, Data Science) and proposed initiatives, including quantum computing, planetary micro-to-macro biomes, personalized health and well-being, and biocomplexity. The university's recent investment in the Biocomplexity Institute and elevation of Data Science to school status provide important leverage and opportunities for new faculty recruitment and collaboration with existing faculty.

2. **Planetary micro-to-macro biomes:** Living systems scale and integrate self-reproducing phenomena from molecular to global levels. The microbiome has emerged as a fundamental driver, diagnostic, and response to human and environmental systems, and are inextricably

integrated with, and as part of ecosystem, geophysical and societal dynamics and histories. Living systems can now be studied and integrated with big data resources ranging from genomic through earth and planetary system measurement and modeling approaches. This initiative would include both natural and synthetic biological systems, integrated within environmental and social context.

Understanding the linkage and integration of micro-to-macro biomes to other co-evolving systems including social networks, community structure, disease ecology, food and trade systems, broadens the concept described in “Understanding the rules of life,” (one of the NSF 10 Big Ideas), to interact with initiatives in social science, biochemistry, synthetic biology, and life on other planets.

3. ***Personalized/Precision human health and well-being:*** Tailoring the understanding and treatment of individual to community health and well-being, based on genetics, environment, and social factors is an emerging approach and emphasis requiring expertise and synergy between academics from multiple departments and schools. Integration of biological markers for prediction and assembly of large cohorts for validation will be particularly important as will embedding this information within environmental and social systems. The goals and approaches of this emphasis complement and extend University Institute investments, initiatives from national and international health agencies, research in individual, community and environmental sensor networks, and analysis of individual to community behavior domestically and internationally.

Direct links and partnerships between faculty in Biology, Psychology, Environmental Science, Chemistry, a set of social science programs, SEAS and SOM, the new School of Data Science and the Biocomplexity Institute would facilitate new cross-disciplinary programs and research with funding resources from multi-directorate NSF initiatives, NIH, NIEHS, EPA and other agencies.

4. ***Quantum information science and technology:*** Quantum Information Science (QIS) is poised to revolutionize information technology based on quantum mechanical principles and phenomena. Devices based on quantum phenomena will be able to process information in radical new ways and provide new approaches to computing, communication and sensing. An additional element is quantum materials which can enable quantum computing through the physical realization of Q-bits, while at the same time leads to a new era of energy-related devices and technologies and revolutionize storage and processing of data as conventional technologies are bound to reach their inevitable limit in the coming decades. To realize these advances will require deep knowledge into how quantum engineering works, providing new and exciting opportunities for both fundamental and applied research. Meanwhile, QIS and quantum material research will provide great opportunities for university-wide effort, both within A&S and with SEAS.

Recognizing the potential high impact of QIS and quantum materials, nations around the world are already investing in this effort, as indicated by the National Quantum Initiative Act, and the new funding opportunities at Department of Energy and National Science Foundation.

SOCIAL SCIENCES

1. The Transnational/Global

There was a strong sense among faculty that much of what is at the cutting edge of social science research addresses the transnational and global nature of the contemporary condition. In a very real way, the local is always already the global in our world today. Several important sub-themes came up in our discussion, and these included human mobility (e.g., immigration, refugees, internal migration), global capitalism (e.g., labor, finance, and its history), climate change, and global complexity and the post-nation-state.

The transnational and global could potentially intersect with any discipline within the social science, and many within the humanities and at other schools. The most obvious connections would be between political science, media studies, anthropology, sociology, economics and history. This would also easily connect to pan-university initiatives such as the soon to be founded Democracy Initiative, GIDI, and ERI.

2. Inequality, Social Justice, and Ethics

Just as in much public discourse we hear everyday (e.g., in the media or in politics), there was general agreement among almost all faculty that the College needs to invest in research that critically addresses the area of inequality, social justice, and ethics. In a sense, this area could appear in almost any research project, though a few particular subthemes were continuously mentioned, and these were critical studies (race, gender, queer), data ethics and justice, economic inequality, and medical and health ethics and justice.

Inequality, Social Justice, and Ethics intersects well with existing research in political science, WGS, anthropology, economics, and sociology, as well as several others in the humanities and across Grounds. For example, this research focus would draw connections with the Carter Woodson Institute, the Curry School, the Center for Data Ethics and Justice, and Bioethics.

3. Sovereignty

Perhaps as a counter-response to the increasing globalization of our world, the question of sovereignty is once again a central area of research in the social sciences. Indeed, in some ways this area of concern has arisen out of all three of the other research areas delineated here. Still, a few particular sub-themes came up regularly, and these include a crisis of democracy, indigeneity and sovereignty, nationalism and populism, and cyber-sovereignty.

Sovereignty intersects with a number of departments and programs in the College and across Grounds, including, for example, anthropology, political science, media studies, philosophy, and the Carter Woodson Institute. Pan-university initiatives such as the Democracy Initiative, the Data Science Institute, and ESI would also link well with this research focus.

4. Data: Knowledge, Ethics, and Justice

The arrival of big data and the technologies it drives has given way to a number of important research concerns within the social sciences. Indeed, increasingly the technologists and engineers have come to realize the importance of collaborating with social scientists and those in the humanities for considering and implementing socially conscious, humane, and ethical data use and data-centric technologies. The following subthemes were considered particularly

important: ethics and justice of (big) data and data-centric technologies, effects of these on politics and social life, knowledge production and expertise, and the effects on the practice of social sciences, and the arts and humanities in general.

The various concerns around data and data-centric technologies connect a number of units in the social sciences, humanities and across Grounds, and would include, media studies, philosophy, engineering, law, and the Center for Data Ethics and Justice. Importantly, with the founding of the new School of Data Science and its Center for Data Ethics and Justice, there is a real opportunity for the College both to make an important and necessary impact on the data sciences, as well as benefit from its founding.

INVESTING IN EXCELLENCE

Enabling excellence necessitates optimizing faculty time and productivity, including faculty who are currently at UVA as well as faculty to be hired in the future. Discussion in this section focuses on issues important for increasing research productivity and attracting and keeping the best faculty at UVA.

I. Research time: teaching, bureaucracy, and equity

There was broad and intense agreement among the faculty that the best investment the College could make in its future in terms of both research and education is the freeing of time for current faculty. While time is important for everyone it is effectively the core infrastructure for arts/humanities and many social sciences.

Attending to faculty time has surfaced a number of specific recommendations:

- Reducing time spent on administrative tasks. Faculty time is increasingly absorbed by dealing with bureaucracy having to do with SIS, Workday, Collab, etc. Faculty time spent doing these tasks is faculty time not spent on research. There is a need to hire more administrative personnel to reduce the reliance on faculty for this work and allow faculty to focus on research and teaching.
- Reducing teaching loads. Faculty, especially those in social sciences and arts/humanities, expressed concerns that while UVA is an R1 university, in practice, the emphasis on undergraduate teaching puts constraints on faculty that are similar to those at a non-research college. Especially given a lack of staff support and large bureaucratic demands on faculty time, it is crucial to evaluate faculty teaching loads. Faculty, as well as several departmental reports, called for reduced teaching loads.
- Flexibility regarding teaching and research time. Some faculty, particularly in arts/humanities, expressed interest in having the flexibility to “bundle” courses – as opposed to having teaching equally allocated across semesters, this would allow faculty to concentrate their teaching in one semester, and thus give them an opportunity to focus on their research at certain “crunch” moments (finishing a manuscript, articles, projects, etc.).
- Equity in service. The College needs to engage in a strong and meaningful attempt to rectify the maldistribution of service commitments in departments. All faculty members have responsibilities here; it is not an “opt-in/opt-out” matter. Efforts must also be made to ensure that “invisible” service, which often falls on the shoulders of women and people of color, is recognized and given credit.
- Equity in salary. Equity in salary across ranks deserves careful attention. Faculty who are inadequately compensated in relation to their peers often take on additional teaching responsibilities (summer classes, J-term classes, COLA, etc.). Additional teaching responsibilities, much like an excess of service work, cuts into the time that is available for research. A rationalization of the salary structure in the College, then, could pay dividends in terms of increased research activity.

II. Graduate students and postdocs

Faculty research excellence and productivity is in part related to our ability to compete for and attract excellent graduate and post-doctoral students, and increasing their productivity. Some of the specific recommendations in this area include:

- Reduce the amount of teaching graduate students are expected to do, especially in the social sciences and arts/humanities
- Fund additional graduate and post-doctoral fellowships and top-off awards in the disciplines that have the capacity to absorb additional graduate students/post-docs and where that would have a payoff for faculty research productivity
- Identify and provide needed professional skill development, especially in natural sciences, such as science communication and writing and analytical and data science skills
- Finally, faculty identified the relative isolation of Charlottesville as a barrier to networking and team development. Recommendations in this realm include
 - Improve funding and opportunities for travel to research conferences/workshops and research collaboration
 - Co-fund research seminars/workshops at UVA to bring people in for premier events

III. Research Support

a) Labs/equipment

The issue of core infrastructure is most strongly felt in the natural sciences. Faculty noted a number of areas of inventory needs and improvements required for core facilities – which needs to be cost-shared, tech supported, and optimized for research support. This includes computing infrastructure, special instrumentation, animal facilities, etc. Although infrastructure needs for the social sciences may not be as prevalent as in the natural sciences, there are some specific fields that are in desperate need of infrastructural updates (e.g., archaeology lab). Instead of making specific recommendations, we highlight the urgency of surveying faculty needs and assessing the adequacy of existing facilities to meet those needs.

b) Research funds

While physical infrastructure is less important for many faculty in the social sciences and arts/humanities, faculty in those disciplines ought to be given standing unrestricted research funds (e.g., \$3000 per academic year). Such funds ensure that resources will be readily available to purchase research materials, attend conferences, travel to archives, etc.

c) Research administration

The College has recently made notable improvements with respect to research administration, but a number of areas continue to require attention, including:

- Pre-award – additional resources to help faculty pull together high-quality proposals including basic forms, boilerplate documents, graphic design, proposal editing, which

- conflicts with creative and careful project proposal that will be competitive for agency review panels.
- Post-award – better facilities for faculty to access current state of grants, burn rates, better breakdown of start-up packages, improved dashboards building on those already available in other units and universities. This system is still too opaque and requires investment.
- Increase the overall capacity of OSP, particularly with regards to smaller and less common grants/funding sources.

OUR COMMITMENTS

Regardless of what areas of research are pursued in the future, the committee posits that two issues must be at the forefront of our considerations: being a public facing institution and addressing diversity and equity.

I. Public Facing Scholarship and Participatory Research

A public university ought to be public facing. That includes a range of endeavors from conducting publicly relevant research to fostering relationships with the local community. In this realm, each subcommittee has identified specific areas in need of attention.

Arts and humanities subcommittee has identified public-facing humanities as one of their research areas (see above). In addition, the committee judges it an opportune time to bolster humanistic research that engages with the city of Charlottesville (and, by extension, the central Virginia region). Such research would support the University’s ongoing effort to address the maldistribution of resources and opportunities in Charlottesville and would distinguish the University as a leader in the broad sphere of public life. The subcommittee recommends that thought be given to establishing a center – and perhaps also a professorship – focused on research into the relationship between the city, the university, and the region.

Natural sciences subcommittee has focused on the central role of not just performing transformational research, but communicating that research, establishing its value to broad communities, and (where appropriate) helping translate fundamental science into applications and policy. Translational research is more central in SEAS, SOM and a set of professional schools, and CAS would require additional resources and personnel to improve and build on its current capacity. Communication of research accomplishment was identified by a set of our focus groups as an area where we often find ourselves behind peers, with co-author universities taking the lead in media releases and advertising of joint products. We need to be able to better popularize, publicize and explain our research findings. One potential is to employ masters level graduates/science writers with sufficient science/technical expertise within our major research areas. A similar core of Master’s level personnel may be able to accelerate translational impacts of fundamental research.

Social sciences subcommittee noted that it should be a mandate of the College that research has a public face, which could take several forms (e.g., policy, community engagement, public performance, public education). The public should not be considered in narrow terms such

as Washington D.C. or Richmond, but should span the spectrum of our research specialties – from Charlottesville and its region to villages and cities in France, Uganda, Papua New Guinea and beyond. Although some particular research topics (e.g., racial and/or economic inequalities, data ethics and justice) tend to lend themselves to public scholarship almost naturally, as it were, there was a strong sense among faculty that research as such should have a public face.

II. Diversity and Equity

The importance of diversity and equity is prominent in the research areas identified by social sciences and arts/humanities. Both sub-committees emphasized the importance of bolstering and further developing research areas that explore the experiences of diverse populations. Moreover, bringing diverse perspectives to scholarly conversation should be central to all research areas. Thus, for example, critical race studies should not simply be a theme of a few research projects or one or two classes, but should be integrated across departments.

In addition, all subcommittees identified the important role of hiring diverse faculty. That means not just hiring faculty who conduct research related to diversity and equity, but diversifying all faculty in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, and social class regardless of the research area (and the same should be done for the student body as well).

Diversifying students and faculty in the STEM fields has long been considered a challenge (and ample NSF funding is available for such initiatives, which can be matched with endowment or institutional funds). One strategy is to develop “pipelines” with explicit programs starting pre-college and providing enrichment and communication partnerships through undergraduate, graduate, post-doctoral and faculty levels. Partnership with the Curry School, state agency and local school districts (and community colleges) to strengthen STEM educational resources and university access should be extended to help create the pool of qualified applicants to UVA and other R1 colleges and universities. For students at UVA, programs can be created to “place” and fund students within lab groups and provide faculty, postdoctoral and graduate mentors, while providing support for professional enrichment, advising, skill development and networking.

NEXT STEPS

The committee's work provides the foundation for the discussions related to supporting research excellence as well as identifying promising areas of research that are poised to garner national prominence. This is the beginning of a journey that necessitates a reflection on both where we are and where we hope to be.

Further considerations of the specific areas identified require at least two additional steps. First, although the committee consulted numerous documents and points of view in constructing the recommended areas, these necessitate vetting by faculty more broadly. The feedback process can facilitate refinement and prioritization of the various areas. Moreover, the committee has not examined our relative strength in these areas relative to peer institutions. Currently existing sources of information are not conducive to this task (as they are organized by departments, not areas of inquiry, and often rely on questionable metrics or methods). The College will need to consider whether/how the relative strength of the various research areas can be evaluated.

In addition, the College needs to consider the most promising ways of going forward. One approach is to simply hire and make investments within individual disciplines, without any connections across departments. That can be a lost opportunity. While it is not necessarily readily apparent from the way the areas of inquiry are organized in the preceding pages, there are many potential spaces of connection across disciplines, from environmental sciences to health and well-being. To facilitate cross-disciplinary work and identify more specific areas of inquiry that span across disciplines, we recommend creating subcommittees of faculty across disciplines whose work focuses on specific research areas. These committees can help to articulate the connections, build bridges in terms of different terms/frames used across disciplines, and identify specific teams of faculty who are poised to collaborate on a shared set of research projects.

If facilitating collaborations across disciplines is part of the strategy going forward, the College needs to create spaces and infrastructures for genuine engagement across disciplines. There is limited opportunity for faculty across disciplines to engage in shared conversations (e.g., it seems that even cluster hires were pretty much just hired to work within departments, without any infrastructure connecting them across departments). Moreover, some faculty noted that when interdisciplinary opportunities are presented, they are largely modeled after a natural science lab approach to research, which can be antithetical to the methodology in other disciplines. A different kind of organization and interdisciplinary collaboration is needed. For example, the College could create broad interdisciplinary groups. Those groups could meet monthly to hear an invited speaker or a presentation by a member of the cluster, provide research funds to its members, and have shared spaces where they can engage in conversations and build collaborative ideas. The specific research questions asked and methods pursued should be interdisciplinary and emerge through discussions within clusters.

Finally, the committee recommends that the College dedicate time, energy, and resources to foster research productivity of current faculty. The future of the College rests not only on faculty we hire but first and foremost on faculty who are already here, and who need adequate support to enhance their productivity. Moreover, there is a need to dedicate time to both understanding and ameliorating existing inequalities in service burdens and pay.

APPENDIX

Arts and Humanities Committee Extended Report

1. The transnational

Transnational and transcultural studies stand out as vibrant areas of research across various departments (Art History, African and African American Studies, French, English, MESALC, German, EALLC). “Transnational” is a capacious rubric that encompasses research agendas that reach beyond nationally oriented disciplines. While not a term often used by faculty, it serves as useful catch-all and includes the following areas of research: race, migration and diaspora studies; border and refugee studies; global popular cultures; environmental and planetary ecologies; collaborative and global ethnography in the field of medical anthropology; comparative philosophies of religion and race; poetics and politics of translation; south-south comparative and trans-geographic aesthetics; the worldwide circulation and consumption of Asian and African cultural production; global flows of capital and mobility; environmental disasters and population displacements; and global sound and performance studies.

Based on the gathered information, the subcommittee discerns interest in and suggests investment in the following areas.

(a) Race in transnational frames: Africa, Latinx studies, and beyond

Many departments note the growing importance of studying racial politics in transnational frames, with African Studies and Latinx Studies having particular importance.

Sometimes research on Africa at U.Va. seems scattered, with Woodson, Anthropology, and IHGC functioning as “hubs.” Yet faculty across the College work on various aspects of African modernity, with environment, languages, urbanization, musical traditions being particular concerns. The aesthetic culture of the continent also holds interest for French, English, Woodson, German, MESALC, and Art History. These departments hope to augment their focus on Africa in various ways, covering issues like postcolonial African literature, African migrant politics in Europe, African cinema, philosophies of race, the comparative practice of African religions in Africa and the Caribbean, the rise of Islamophobia, and population and resource extractions in light of environmental crises.

However, there are obvious gaps. The English Department has no one who studies African literature. Art History lacks faculty who consider African art forms. French has only one Africanist. Most notably, Woodson lacks a critical mass of Africanists. A series of hires, then, would quickly bolster U.Va.’s research profile.

Latinx Studies is another area – one named by Spanish, American Studies, English, Media Studies, and Music – with transnational dimensions, especially in relation to migration and race. Tactical hires could give U.Va. more research clout while also increasing the presence of Latinx faculty.

Other related areas of scholarship on race and transnationalism that merit mention are Turkish studies (German, MESALC) and Chinese and Japanese influences on other parts of Asia and the globe (EALLC, Institute of World Languages, Asian Cosmopolitanism Lab).

(b) Environmental humanities; environmental studies broadly conceived

Many departments identify environmental humanities as an important emergent area of study in local, national, and transnational frames (we think particularly of Spanish-Italian-Portuguese, French, English, IAAS, Religious Studies, Slavic, and Anthropology).

Environmental studies is currently distributed between the department of Environmental Sciences and the programs in Environmental Thought and Practice (ETP) and Environments and Sustainability in Global Studies (ES-GS). The disciplinary divides between scientific and socio-cultural studies are sharp, with the former being very strong. Less strong and less well-organized are socio-cultural studies of the environment, housed in ETP and ES-GS.

Generally, research on environmental crises – from the effects of environmental degradation to Anthropocene narratives to the bioethics of climate change and the medical and humanitarian consequences of ecological shifts – is an urgent site of cross-disciplinary work. U.Va. ought to commit more resources to the study and the shaping of social and cultural attitudes about climate change. A consolidation of ETP with ES-GS is one option. U.Va. might also promote integrated research on environmental topics by investing in humanities scholars who work in this area and putting them in dialogue with counterparts in the social sciences and the sciences. Beyond adding faculty, U.Va. could consider supporting active research clusters, making postdoctoral appointments, and organizing field expeditions in transnational environmental humanities.

(c) Global popular culture

Some of the most exciting interdisciplinary work in transnational frames is on the circulation and influence of global popular culture. “Global popular culture” refers to any cultural form that circulates beyond its national context and influences another culture. It cuts across film and cinema studies; social media platforms; popular and vernacular music; digital and experimental media; studies of women, gender, and sexuality; art and studio art; theater and performance; and translation studies.

Cutting-edge fields in the arts and humanities, such as experimental film and digital media and digital music technologies, deserve particular note. MESALC, for instance, has a scholar of film history who studies the circulation of film across the Middle East and South Asia. Also significant are faculty who focus on the popular transmission of ideas about sexual orientation and gender equity. Music, finally, has faculty studying the circulation of popular music using digital tools. To build capacity, the University could hire faculty who work explicitly on popular cultural forms. These hires could have diverse foci, ranging from experts on the graphic novel or zines, scholars of contemporary Japanese culture, researchers on global film (with a focus, perhaps, on Iran and Nigeria), and global performance studies.

2. Information studies

Information Studies is a broad rubric encompassing a number of disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to issues such as data storage and processing, computation and quantification, systems and organizations, and statistical modeling. While applied mathematics,

biological and physical sciences, and engineering have long worked with concepts of information, the humanities have shown increasing interest in considering how information provides a productive conceptual lens through which to analyze cultural formations, practices, and histories; to ask questions about epistemology or ethics; and to understand the fraught relationship between the human condition and our technological extensions. One sees the significance of an “informatic” approach to scholarship in the development of Information Schools within library science, in the recent histories of information and information ages, in the emergence of digital humanities, and in new theories of media and technology. To a certain extent, one can argue that concepts of information have always been part of humanistic scholarship, even if they were not always named as such (consider how bibliographic and lexicographic practices underwrite traditional philology).

The study of information and information-based research tracks across the entire University and stands out as a strong concentration of research and teaching. This can be seen both in the recent creation of the School of Data Science and the long history of digital humanities in the College (think of the Scholars Lab, IATH, the Library, the venerable tradition of bibliographic scholarship in English and at the Rare Book School; think also of the establishment of the Humanities Informatics Lab at IHGC, which funds working groups in Human and Machine Intelligence, Surveillance and Infrastructure, Smart Environments, and Network-Corpus). The recent meeting of the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes at UVA focused on the theme of humanities informatics suggests that this is an emergent field of inquiry at other universities as well.

3. Social Justice

Work under this broad heading involves research into the norms, cultures, belief structures, and ideologies that play a systematic role in discrimination and inequitable social structures. Such research seeks not only to describe these patterns of discrimination and inequality, but also to discuss the ways in which such patterns are fundamentally unjust.

In the arts and humanities, U.Va. is strong in race in relation to carceral studies (especially through faculty at the Carter Woodson Institute) and in studies of race in the American South (especially through Woodson and American Studies). Media Studies is increasingly interested in the way in which race interacts with media cultures, and Religious Studies has strengths in exploring the interaction between race and diverse faith traditions.

Research in gender studies is on the rise in a wide range of disciplines. WGS demonstrates growing research excellence and is especially strong in exploring intersectional issues pertaining to gender, sexuality, and race. Gender is also a topic of increasing interest throughout the humanities, where the understanding of gender norms, concepts, and roles – topics traditionally overlooked in many of the humanities – are being incorporated into established areas of study (the departments of Art History, Classics, French, Music, Philosophy, and Religious Studies are notable in this respect).

Although queer studies is not as widespread or as strong as gender studies, it is a growing area of research excellence. There is also an emerging cross-faculty interest in disability studies, as evidenced by the newly-formed Disability Studies Initiative, which includes faculty from A&S, Curry, and the schools of Architecture and Medicine.

Despite these evident and emerging strengths, the College is not as strong as it ought to be. U.Va. carries a distinctive historical burden with respect to its treatment of women and people of color, and its legacy of slavery and eugenics makes the burden regarding race especially weighty. We believe that the College has a unique obligation to intensify further and to seek excellence in its coverage of race and gender studies.

4. Performance and aesthetic creation

Studio Art, Music, and Drama have an important presence at U.Va. For many engaged in scholarship, artistic production and performance, issues of diversity and equity hold especial importance.

In Studio Art, there is an opportunity to raise the profile of the department both regionally and internationally by hiring two faculty members, one of them a sculptor of international reputation; and to build on the contributions of Kevin Everson and Bill Wylie in film and photography respectively.

Music brings several strengths to U.Va. and Charlottesville communities and contributes vitally to the ritual, ceremonial, and recreational dimensions of life on Grounds. Music has also been at the forefront of innovations in scholarship (gender, feminist, and queer theory) and in the intersection of music and technology. In the latter area, there are promising interdisciplinary collaborations with dance, architecture and engineering. Further, in addition to maintaining and consolidating current strengths in American music (increasingly envisioned as transnational, through Afro-diasporic and Global South soundings), Music is becoming a fertile space for new media performance and composition practices and for interdisciplinary collaborations in experimental arts at U.Va.

Drama is poised to contribute to existing synergies in interdisciplinary research, performance, and artistic production. As with the other creativity-based departments, there is an opportunity to support interdisciplinary research in performance and theater and to enhance diversity (in the dual sense of under-represented groups and intellectual specializations). The hiring of research scholars in performance and dance studies might be accomplished through a cluster hire, pursued through interdisciplinary partnerships across grounds (e.g. with Woodson, American Studies, Media Studies, English). The arts and humanities subcommittee was encouraged to view top performance and theater departments at University of Washington and UCLA as models for potential growth.

Several faculty raised the issue of infrastructure, citing stretched capacities in office space (Music), the loss of studio space and a projected dearth of office space (Studio Art). Another area of infrastructural support mentioned was the need for staff to undertake regular repairs of equipment. Infrastructure requires particular attention if there is to be an interdisciplinary hub of research and performance that Studio Art, Music and the Department of Drama, and other relevant programs.

5. Aesthetic inquiry

Aesthetic inquiry is fundamental to the study of the humanities. It deals not only with the longstanding problem of the beautiful, but with all judgments of value in relationship to the

natural and constructed worlds that we inhabit and transform. The study and teaching of aesthetics is broadly evidenced across humanities departments, with discernible strengths in poetry, music and sound studies, and film and television. Much of this is humanities-specific, though there is potential for significant synergy with Media Studies in the latter two areas. Specific mention should be made of Rita Felski's work in critical theory and aesthetics, which does not belong solely to any of the three areas identified below, but represents one of the most prominent ways in which UVA has steered humanistic discourse in recent years.

(a) *Poetry*. Jahan Ramazani directs the Center for Poetry and Poetics, which has showcased contemporary debates in lyric studies (Virginia Jackson "vs." Jonathan Culler) and emerging areas of poetics (thus symposia on "Poetry and Race" and "Poetry and the World"). Poetry is studied not only by faculty in English, but also by faculty in Classics, East Asian Languages, French, German, MESALC, Religious Studies, and SIP. It should be noted that a number of faculty are distinguished poets in their own right. Mention should also be made of *New Literary History*, edited by Bruce Holsinger. Although this journal is not poetry-specific, it is one of the leading criticism journals in the field and has made signal contributions to debates in the study of poetry.

(b) *Critical Music and Sound Studies*. Going beyond traditional music history and performance, there is growing interest in critical music and sound studies. These may be understood as the theoretical and cultural study of sound and listening, but they also include popular histories of music and sound. This is evidenced in the McIntire Department of Music, and in English, Religious Studies, and Media Studies. The Rap Lab, founded by A. D. Carson, is one exciting new project in this field, as is the podcast series created by the Religion, Race, and Global Democracies Lab.

(c) *Film and Television*. Media Studies has a number of faculty who work on film and television, and there are a number of scholars engaging film and television across departments (particularly in Woodson, East Asian Languages, French, German, MESALC, and SIP). This is an area that has significant strength but has somehow flown under the radar, perhaps in part because Media Studies takes a more communications and sociological approach to the study of film and television, while humanities scholars are often trained in more formalist methodologies.

6. Public-facing humanities

The rapid pace of social, political, cultural, and environmental change and UVA's longstanding commitment public service has led to a heightened interest in public-facing scholarship. We define this phrase broadly as academic work which: (i) addresses some pressing contemporary issue or issues; (ii) intends to engage and affect non-academic actors and domains; and (iii) aspires to have a direct and lasting impact on the contemporary world.

In terms of current interests and prospect for growth, the following areas merit mention:

(a) *Public life in the Americas and beyond*. If [Engaged UVA](#) identifies a number of "community partnerships" between professors and staff and local, national, and international initiatives, it is complemented by a heightened interest in public-facing humanities research and outreach in A&S. The recently launched [Democracy Initiative](#) is obviously noteworthy on this front. On the departmental level, Religious Studies stands out as unusually active. In addition to the long-

running [Project on Lived Theology](#), recent years have seen the emergence of the [Mormon Studies](#) program, the Luce-funded project on [Religion and its Publics](#), the [Religion, Race, and Democracy](#) lab (the inaugural lab for the Democracy Initiative), and the initiative in [Religion, Politics, and Conflict](#). Recent hiring in Religious Studies has proceeded along a somewhat parallel track, with particular interest in the issues of religion and race in the USA.

(b) Charlottesville and the Commonwealth. The committee judges it an opportune time to bolster humanistic research that engages with the city of Charlottesville (and, by extension, the central Virginia region). Such research would support the University's ongoing effort to address the maldistribution of resources and opportunities in Charlottesville – a maldistribution to which it has contributed – and would distinguish the University as a leader in the broad sphere of public life. Both [Charlottesville 2017](#), edited by Claudrena Harold and Louis P. Nelson and the Holsinger Photo Project (see [here](#)) are notable instances of such work. Other examples include President's Commission on Slavery and the University, the JUEL ("Jefferson's University: Early Life") digital humanities project, and the Nau Civil War Center's "Black Virginians in Blue" project on African American men from Albemarle County who fought for the Union army in the Civil War. In the future, we recommend that thought be given to establishing a center – and perhaps also a professorship – that carries out research into the relationship between the city, the university, and the region.

(c) Performance studies. U.Va. does a great deal, both locally and beyond, to support dramatic and musical performance. But U.Va. is less consistent with respect to "performance studies," broadly construed. Investments could be made here, supporting research (for instance) in global music history, dance, world art, and American art.

(d) Hidden needs and hidden possibilities. Through interviews, reviews of departmental reports, and discussion, a number of areas of research merit greater acknowledgement, consideration, and/or support. Chief among them are: Spanish language studies in relation to the fields of medicine and business; medical humanities; and "socially relevant philosophy," having to do with race, sex, gender, and disability.