

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE *Current*

October 7, 2024

[Keith Hamm](#)

Talk on AI and the creative process kicks off Interdisciplinary Humanities Center yearlong public event series

Transitions, transformations, shifts and dislocations. Change, as they say, is the only constant, that underlying force of historical events, social movements, advancements from one zeitgeist to the next.

"We are living in a state of global flux — political, environmental, social, cultural," said Susan Derwin, director of UC Santa Barbara's Interdisciplinary Humanities Center (IHC), which has announced the launch of its Key Passages public events series for 2024-25. "We wanted to spend the year exploring significant experiences of change, at different scales, and to understand how people negotiate change under various conditions and in liminal states and stages.

"The speakers in Key Passages will be examining transitions and transformations that have altered thought, shifted cultural paradigms and impacted the course of diverse histories," she added. "We are also going to be focusing on key passages in a textual sense — in works of literature and musical compositions, from across cultures and traditions — that have made us think differently about the world and our place in it and even pushed us to consider worlds beyond the ones we know."

The Key Passages inaugural event, "[AI: A New Passage to Human Creativity?](#)" features UCSB's [Sowon Park](#), an associate English professor specializing in cognitive literary criticism. As Park explores the impact of artificial intelligence on the production of fiction and, more broadly, on creativity itself, her talk will ask a range of AI questions related to writing, she said, including, "Can computers create? In what way, if any, has Chat GPT-4 changed the way people write fiction? And what makes literature written by humans different in kind from AI-generated fiction?"

"Looking ahead," Park added, "I see the use of Chat GPT being normalized as a popular writing tool, especially for writing in foreign languages, which will have a cascade effect from a world literary point of view."

The IHC's public series are [traditionally inaugurated](#) by UCSB faculty members, Derwin noted. "We thought a presentation by Sowon of her recent work on AI and creativity would be an ideal way to launch the year. Last spring she was the head judge in a writing competition in which the submissions ranged from literary works that were entirely AI-generated to stories composed without AI — she has very interesting things to say about the outcomes of that competition."

Free and open to the public, the event takes place from 4–6 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 10, in the McCune Conference Room on the sixth floor of the Humanities and Social Sciences Building. An audience Q&A and reception will follow.

The Key Passages fall lineup also includes:

- "[When Life is a Shipwreck: Key Passages in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night](#)" brings in Julia Reinhard Lupton, Distinguished Professor of English at UC Irvine, to examine the navigations of life changes and social bodies at the heart of the playwright's most beautiful and sonorous romantic comedy, penned more than 400 years ago.

Lupton's talk takes place 4–6 p.m., Nov. 7, McCune Conference Room, 6020 HSSB, and is cosponsored by the Hester and Cedric Crowell Endowment. An audience Q&A and reception will follow.

- Abduweli Ayup will share his journey as a linguist, educator, activist and poet detained in China for 15 months on charges of inciting separatism after opening Uyghur-language kindergartens. "[Key Passages Talk: When The Uyghur Language Confronts Atrocity](#)" takes place 4–6 p.m., Nov. 19, in the McCune Conference

Room.

In 2025, the series will include:

- Kathleen Woodward, a renowned scholar at the University of Washington and leading public humanist, will discuss her work at the intersection of critical age studies and environmental humanities.
- Harvard University historian Vincent Brown will cover transatlantic history and the Middle Passage.
- Stephanie McCarter, classical languages professor at The University of the South, will discuss her new translation of Ovid’s “Metamorphoses” and her strategies for rendering difficult themes related to sexuality, gender and the body.
- Judith Zeitlin of the University of Chicago will present her work on “The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature” and its transformation into an opera libretto.
- Claudio Benzecry of Northwestern University will examine the global transformation of materials into goods – specifically shoes – and ideas.

For updates on all Key Passages events, visit the [IHC](#).

Tags

[Artificial Intelligence](#)

Media Contact

Keith Hamm

Social Sciences, Humanities & Fine Arts Writer

(805) 893-2191

keithhamm@ucsb.edu

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we

draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.