



The Berkman  
Center for  
Internet & Society  
at Harvard University

## Fifteen Lessons

from the

# Berkman Fellows Program





## **Part I: Foundations**

<i>How the Fellows Program works</i>	<b>10</b>
<i>What constitutes success for the Fellows Program: the Center's view</i>	<b>12</b>
<i>What constitutes success for the Fellows Program: the fellows' view</i>	<b>14</b>

## **Part II: Lessons Learned**

<i>01 Don't select fellows. Select a community.</i>	<b>16</b>
<i>02 Cultivate the culture</i>	<b>16</b>
<i>03 Transfer the knowledge</i>	<b>17</b>
<i>04 Aim for a cohesive diversity</i>	<b>19</b>
<i>05 Provide just enough structure</i>	<b>20</b>
<i>06 Get bodies in a room</i>	<b>21</b>
<i>07 Let the sociality emerge</i>	<b>22</b>
<i>08 Encourage interest groups</i>	<b>23</b>
<i>09 Stand for something</i>	<b>24</b>
<i>10 Build stuff</i>	<b>24</b>
<i>11 Partner up</i>	<b>26</b>
<i>12 Hire a remarkable staff</i>	<b>26</b>
<i>13 Be Harvard</i>	<b>27</b>
<i>14 Acknowledge your issues</i>	<b>28</b>
<i>15 Learn from your lessons</i>	<b>30</b>
<i>Appendices</i>	<b>32</b>

## A good day to be a Berkman Fellow

On any particular Tuesday morning in the spring semester of 2015, in the Victorian house the Berkman Center shares with a handful of other Harvard organizations, you would have been likely to find Berkman Fellows hanging out in one of the rather small public areas, laptops open and earbuds plugged in, or talking with other fellows in the kitchen or lounge area. Others might be working at home, attending a class or event at the University, or enjoying Cambridge — especially if the Tuesday was after this winter's epic high tide of snow had ebbed.

At noon the fellows gather for the Tuesday talk, usually featuring a guest or a fellow. The attendees from the Center and the community routinely overflow into the Center's small lounge. Attendees try to finish the lunch the Center provides before the speaker throws the session open for discussion.

At two o'clock, the fellows assemble for the only regularly scheduled time for all of them to be alone together. The format varies, and the discussions are usually spirited.

At four, the fellows drift into smaller informal groups. Some go back to their individual work or to the collaborative projects at the center of their fellowships. It's quite possible that an email has been sent to their mailing list inviting any and all to assemble for a meal at a local restaurant or, increasingly commonly, at the one of fellows' homes where a meal will be prepared, usually collaboratively.

At the end of the day, the fellows will have worked at their own paces, had lively conversations with colleagues, been stimulated by a talk from an expert likely out of their own field, engaged in cross-disciplinary discussions in a group of the whole, discovered a new shop or pub in Harvard Square, deepened social bonds at an informal dinner, and been stretched in purposeful and serendipitous ways.

## Aims and plan of this report

This report was funded by the Ford Foundation, long a supporter of Berkman Center programs and events, to explore what makes the Berkman Fellows program successful. The aim is to derive lessons that can be applied to other institutions.

We approached writing this report as a journalistic task, interviewing a cross-section of fellows, faculty, and staff, including during a group session at a Berkman Fellows Hour. From these interviews a remarkably consistent set of themes emerged.

The Fellows program has evolved over time. We focused on the current state of the program in this report, using past experiences only to illuminate success factors and opportunities for growth.

It was written by David Weinberger—a former fellow (2004-2009) and current senior researcher at the Center, and member of its Fellows Advisory Board—with the active collaboration of Berkman staff, fellows, and faculty.

# **Part I: Foundations**

# “It got started around this table,”

recalls Prof. Charles Nesson, sitting on the porch of his house in Cambridge, Massachusetts. “Around the table were Fern—my partner and spouse—and Myles Berkman, and me. Myles agreed it would be a wonderful thing to have a center to explore and expand the Internet and society... And that was it.”



Berkman Center founder Charles Nesson (photo: arcticpenguin, 2009)

It was 1995, back when Yahoo was a hand-curated listing of sites, and it was still unusual to see a business advertise its Web address. But to Prof. Nesson and that small, original Berkman cohort “it seemed obvious that we were moving into a different environment in which We the People could connect.”

The Berkman Center for Internet & Society began as a seminar. “People who knew something talked together, totally informally,” recalls Prof. Nesson. That first cohort included Jonathan Zittrain and Lawrence Lessig (now the Roy L. Furman Professor of Law at Harvard Law School), soon joined by the likes of Wendy Seltzer (now at the W3C), Chris Kelly (formerly Facebook’s Chief Privacy Officer, now an investor), and Alexander MacGillivray (now Deputy US CTO).

In 1995, the Center got seed money from the Provost and a private donor. “Then we got the gift from Myles,” in 1997, marking the official creation of the Center, with Prof. Jonathan Zittrain as a co-founder (Prof. Zittrain is now Faculty Chair of the Center, following a long tenure by Prof. William “Terry” Fisher.)

The Fellows Program was part of the original design. “Totally key,” says Prof. Nesson. In fact, the program was a central reason for administratively forming as a center, as Prof. Zittrain explains: “From the very beginning there were people we wanted to work with who would not fit the parameters of a traditional appointment. That at the university level is what a fellowship is able to do.” Or, as Prof. Nesson puts it, “It effectively gave the Faculty Director the power to say to anyone, ‘I dub thee a fellow of the Berkman Center.’”

The first fellow so dubbed was an unusual choice for an academic research center: John Perry Barlow. A Wyoming cattle rancher and poet, to the wide world he



Berkman Center co-founder Jonathan Zittrain (photo: arcticpenguin, 2008)

was best known as a lyricist for the Grateful Dead. But to the world of the Web, he was known as a visionary and activist for an open Internet. “John just lit me up,” says Prof. Nesson, with “a piece he wrote about copyright breaking out of its bottle....It was about the balance between the forces of openness and of closedness in a rhetorical environment.” Prof. Nesson reflects for a moment. “I could see that we shared a vision.”



John Perry Barlow, the inaugural Berkman fellow (photo: Joi Ito, 2007)

Barlow’s activism deeply appealed to Prof. Nesson. “It was clear that what we were talking about did not exist yet,” and thus needed willing hands as well as inquisitive minds. “The academic idea of sitting back and observing was inadequate to it.”

That presented a challenge that the Center is still cognizant of: balancing the open-mindedness of a scholarly research center with the activist’s willingness to commit to a position – “scholarship with impact,” as the Center’s mission statement puts it. “Complete openness means you live in a desert,” says Prof. Nesson, “and complete closedness means you live in a cave.”





Members of the first Berkman Center cohort (from L to R): Alexander MacGillivray, Charles Nesson, Lawrence Lessig, Jonathan Zittrain, Wendy Seltzer (photo: Farnsworth/Blalock Photography)

With the initial fellows, and especially under the influence of Jonathan Zittrain, the Center at first focused primarily on projects that required writing software to gather research. “Originally it was Zittrain and [Ben] Edelman building something to see how China saw the Net,” says Prof. Nesson, “and therefore we could see China by seeing what they censored.” The original set of faculty and fellows “was incredibly productive of things that make a difference in the world,” he says, using Creative Commons as another example.

Prof. Zittrain points to some other early fellows to illustrate what the early days were like. Andrew McLaughlin “had an interest in working on Internet issues, but was not interested in pursuing an academic career.” After a stint at Google and in the White House, McLaughlin went on to become the CEO of both Digg and Instapaper. Molly Van Houweling did want to become an academic, and went on to a career at the University of Michigan Law School and then UC Berkeley. Wendy Seltzer has been an

activist, software developer, and law professor, and is still involved with the Chilling Effects (Lumen) project that she was instrumental in creating during her years as a fellow. Andrew Shapiro wrote *The Control Revolution* mainly while a fellow and has gone on to be a strong voice in the business community for environmental activism. Joseph Reagle did early work on the intersection of computer agents, social protocols, Internet culture, and democratic/anarchist principles, and went on to teach at Northeastern University and write about online and geek culture. As for John Perry Barlow, Prof. Zittrain says, “He’s a great example of an individual fellow who would come roaring into town every so often, stir the pot wonderfully, and then be off to his other adventures.”

Although the evolution of the Fellows program has been continuous, Profs. Nesson and Zittrain think it can be divided into something like eras.

Prof. Zittrain characterizes 1998-2002 as a time of “individual targets of opportunity”: “Young

people wanting to make a mark, participate in our activities, and accelerate their careers.” Wendy Seltzer, who started at the Center in 1997, adds that the informal goal was “to find ways to associate with people and keep them around.”

The next era began in 2002 when Terry Fisher became the Faculty Chair and John Palfrey was appointed Executive Director of the Center (Palfrey went on to become Head of School at Andover). Research projects became more organized and managed. The standard model for the Center became to draw up proposals, submit them to funding agencies, and then hire the staff and fellows required. “That institutionalized the process,” Prof. Nesson says. The Center grew in visibility and influence as it was able to support larger, more complex projects, many of them international in scope.

Prof. Zittrain thinks of this era, running through about 2008, as “The Island of Misfit Toys,” a metaphor supplied by former fellow danah boyd, and borrowed



1 <https://youtu.be/5SH1j1luFOw>

from a 1964 stop-motion Christmas special.<sup>1</sup> (danah went on to become a principal researcher at Microsoft's New England Research and Development (NERD) Center, and founder of the Data & Society Research Institute.) Strong individual contributors were brought in as fellows, working on a wide range of projects primarily on their own. Colin Maclay, who came as a fellow in 2002 and became Managing Director in 2005, recalls, "Most people in that era were people we had met and wanted to hang around Berkman even though there was ostensibly an open process." (Maclay went on to direct the Harvard Business School's Digital Initiative and is now part of the Fellows Advisory Board.)

During this period, the fellows started to develop a strong sense of community and mutual support. They tended to be resident in Cambridge, but the building that housed the Center at that time had very limited common space.

The sense of community became stronger after Ethan Zuckerman, a former fellow who started in 2003, suggested designating Tuesdays as a time when all the fellows were expected to come to the Center to hear a lunchtime guest speaker and to hang out together (Ethan went on to become the Director of the MIT Center for Civic Media and is part of the Fellows Advisory Board.) This contributed to the development of a stronger sense of fellowship in which individual contributors worked collaboratively on projects formally and informally. For example, in 2004-2005, former

fellow Rebecca MacKinnon, fresh from CNN, joined with Zuckerman to create Global Voices, an international blog aggregator (MacKinnon went on to direct the Ranking Digital Rights project at the New America Foundation; Global Voices currently has 1,400 writers and publishes in 35 languages.)

In 2008, the Center transitioned from a Law School initiative to an inter-faculty initiative of Harvard University as a whole. Under the leadership of Prof. Urs Gasser, the current Executive Director of the Center (who first entered the Berkman community as a fellow) the latest era has seen significant growth in the number of fellows, from about a dozen in 2003 to thirty-four in 2008 to over 50 in 2015. As Amar Ashar, the Center's Manager of Strategic Initiatives reports, "The Fellows Program has evolved to align with the strategic priorities that Urs helped take to heart and accelerate." This includes continuing the emphasis on international diversity and collaboration begun under Profs. Palfrey and Fisher, an increased focus on data-driven and inter-disciplinary research, and on some larger-scale projects that have entailed carefully defining

roles, responsibilities, and reporting structures. At the same time, Prof. Zittrain has made "staying weird" a strategic objective— shorthand for supporting strong individual contributors whose interests might have difficulty finding a home in more traditional academic environments.

This new era has also been marked by two explicit aims in the process of selecting fellows. First, the Center has increasingly required fellows to commit to being resident in Cambridge during their tenure. This was done in order to increase the interactions among the fellows and to build community.

Second, the Center has focused on increasing the diversity of the fellows. It has been very successful in terms of gender: over half of the current cohort is women. The Center has made significant strides in increasing global representation, especially from Europe, Asia, and the Americas. The Center continues to work on increasing racial and geographic diversity.

As Prof. Gasser says, "This is a deeply human story. It's really about human beings."<sup>2</sup>

2 At its tenth anniversary, the Center compiled a useful timeline of its history [cyber.law.harvard.edu/berkmanat10/Timeline](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/berkmanat10/Timeline)

Guests, both in-person and remote, enjoying the Berkman Tuesday Luncheon series event (photo: Doc Searls, 2006)



# How the Fellows Program works

The Fellows Program is embedded in a research center at which serious scholarly work is already underway. Some of the fellows work directly on those existing projects, although most come in with their own projects. Nevertheless, there is a pervasive sense that one is living amidst persistent, high-quality research programs that provide implicit models for fellows as well as being a source of information and ideas.

Fellowships are for one academic year (September-May) although the term can be extended, especially if the fellow is working on a multi-year institutional project. Harvard University does not permit fellowships to be extended indefinitely.

There are two main types of fellowships: employee fellowships and non-employee fellowships.

**Employee fellows** are paid a stipend to work on one of the Berkman Center's institutional research projects or initiatives led by the Center's faculty directors, which are the "tent poles" of the Center. They provide some persistence to the intellectual life of the Fellows Program, connecting people and ideas across different areas of the Center. Effectively, the fellowship is their 'day job'. There

are two tiers of stipends for full time employee fellows, \$48,000 and \$64,000, depending on the experience, expertise, and background of the fellow. The number of employee fellows each year varies depending on the needs of the Center's projects, but typically ranges between 8-10.

**Non-employee fellows** contribute to the research, life, and activity of the Center primarily through advancing research of their own design while in the context of the community. Non-employee fellows often have other jobs or appointments during their fellowships, while being committed to actively participating in Center activities. Non-employee fellows may contribute to and learn from the Center's projects. Most non-employee fellows receive no direct funding or stipend through the Berkman Center, but rather have obtained funding through other means, such as an outside grant or award, a home institution, or other forms of scholarship. As the Center's *About* page says, "Some fellows receive partial stipends based on the nature of their responsibilities

and their relation, relevance, and application to Berkman's funded projects."<sup>3</sup>

Fellows are expected to actively conduct research and contribute to the Center's intellectual community. They often start with working on the research they proposed in their application, although non-employee fellows are free to modify or even replace their initial projects. There are no strict requirements for non-employee fellows' output.

Fellows are expected to reside in the Cambridge area for the full term of their fellowship. They are encouraged to come to the Tuesday lunchtime talks and are expected to attend the two-hour Fellows Hour later that afternoon. Fellows are encouraged to work out of the Center and are welcome to use the Center's open workspaces or to work wherever they feel most comfortable. There are some dedicated offices for shared use and co-working by the fellows, although non-employee fellows are not given their own individual dedicated desk or office.

<sup>3</sup> See "About the Program and Fellowships," [cyber.law.harvard.edu/getinvolved/fellowships/about](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/getinvolved/fellowships/about)

Employee fellows work on a number of important projects and initiatives at the Center and help strengthen its global networks. Recent examples include a report on designing successful governance groups co-authored by staff fellow Ryan Budish as part of the Internet Governance project, a report on emerging privacy issues in K-12 education, authored by the Student Privacy project team, including project fellows Paulina Haduong and Leah Plunkett, as well as the Digitally Connected network led by fellow Sandra Cortesi in collaboration with UNICEF. Employee fellows also contribute to a National Science Foundation project on Privacy, the Municipal Fiber and Media Cloud projects, as well as the work of the Cyberlaw Clinic. In the past, fellows played key roles in the Center's Open Access project and the Open Net Initiative.

### Staffing and Funding

The Berkman Center is led by an active board of Faculty Directors, chaired currently by Jonathan Zittrain. The Executive Director, Urs Gasser, is a faculty member who in this capacity reports to the Board.

There is a permanent staff of around forty. A small but significant staff reorganization last year established project leaders for clusters of projects.

The Center's core activities are funded by the Berkman family, Harvard Law School, and the MacArthur Foundation. General support comes from foundations, non-profits, and governmental agencies. Individuals and corporations also contribute unrestricted gifts.

The Center does not confer degrees or offer courses for credit.

There are several types of relationships that extend the community beyond the circle of current fellows, including:

**Affiliates:** Former fellows or people with whom the Center would like to maintain a relationship.

**Faculty Associates:** An affiliate with a faculty appointment at another school.

**The Fellows Advisory Board** consists of a small group of former fellows who have maintained involvement with the Center.

looking for matches to existing research areas as well as for individual contributors whose expertise and interests will add to the mix. The Center strives for a balance across multiple factors, always thinking about the applicants' effect on the community. In fact, the selection process aims at selecting a community, not individuals. While Rebecca Tabasky, Manager of Community Programs, says, "We try to find people who are no less thoughtful than the luminaries, but who are yet to be discovered," she also emphasizes the personal

characteristics the Center looks for.

While reviewing the new applicants, the Center also works to identify which current community members will maintain an affiliation the following year.

Many of the promising new candidates will receive a phone call from the staff that is intended not only to share information about the program and to gather some more information about the candidate's interests, but also to identify people who are particularly collaborative. Amar Ashar, Manager of Strategic Initiatives, says, "We look for markers that they know how to build things together with others, and are enabled by being in a community."

Executive Director Urs Gasser stresses the seriousness with which the Center approaches the selection process: "Every year we have a multi-dimensional mapping exercise, grouping people into clusters and trying to figure out who are the connectors to other clusters. There's quite a bit

## The selection process

Each fall, the Center puts out an open call for fellowship applications. The Center then works to get the call heard widely, asking people in its community to share the opportunity with their extended networks. Although the application site has a lot of information, including a FAQ<sup>4</sup> page, the staff fields many questions from prospective applicants.

The staff does an initial, thorough review of the applications,



Harvard Square, in winter. Most Berkman fellows are expected to be Cambridge-accessible for the duration of their fellowship (photo: eandjsfilmcrew)

<sup>4</sup> [cyber.law.harvard.edu/getinvolved/fellowships/faq](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/getinvolved/fellowships/faq)

of planning and engineering involved.” But this is in service to a humane commitment: “Ultimately it’s all about people and the spirit you can help create around them.”

The staff sends their fellowship recommendations to the Board of Directors for review and approval. This part of the review and selection process takes place in early spring.

Once the Board of Directors has approved the fellowship selections, there are still additional steps:

Offer letters are sent out to prospective fellows, and fellows must affirmatively confirm that they accept the fellowship and its conditions. Because people’s situations can change between the time they apply and the time they receive the fellowship offer, it is important for prospective fellows and the Center to work through

any questions or issues fellows have. Rebecca Tabasky often has another round of queries and conversations from prospective fellows at this stage in the process. Sometimes people who have received fellowship offers decline; others end up accepting roles as faculty associates or affiliates, for which the expectations are more fluid.

All told, the fellowship selection process takes nearly a full academic year.

## What constitutes success for the Fellows Program the Center’s view

What makes a year successful from a fellow’s point of view is not necessarily the same as what makes the Fellows Program a success from the Center’s point of view. We will consider each separately, although they of course overlap.

Indeed, Executive Director Urs Gasser considers the overlap to be at the heart of the Fellows Program: “At the highest level, the way I look at it, the program is successful if over time we can keep some sort of symbiotic balance between what the fellows give to the Center and what they receive from it.”

### Impact

When asked what constitutes the success of the Fellows Program for the Center, Prof. Zittrain points immediately to the “impact on the world.” Examples include Chilling Effects (Lumen), StopBadWare, Internet Monitor, Perma.cc, Media Cloud, the OpenNet Initiative, the Global Network of Centers, the Harvard Open Access Project, and others, some of which were initiated by fellows, but all of which were significantly shaped by the fellows supporting them.

The impact of the program goes beyond the effect of institutional

projects like those. It is felt also in how the Center’s resources and the cohort’s engagement make the fellows’ independent projects more effective. This can happen because the fellows are able to test ideas at the Center, convene collaborators from other institutions, refine public and scholarly communications, learn from the methodologies of the institutional projects and one another, and interact with the faculty.

Creative Commons is an example of another criterion of success: the Center’s willingness to let ideas grow and fail: “Creative

Commons gestated here and went through some transitions,” Prof. Zittrain points out. “In some ways, it failed several times before it succeeded.”

The willingness to take risks means, he says, that “you have to look at the portfolio” to assess the success of the Fellows Program as a source of research and development. “Some projects don’t pay out for five or six years.”

### Quality of research

The Center has high standards for the quality of the research it pursues as an institution and the research done by its fellows. That research can take many forms. Rob Faris, the Center’s Research Director, says, “As with many other aspects of the Center, its definition and practice of research challenges traditional boundaries. It encompasses traditional academic methods and approaches, but it also includes experimental approaches, tool-building, and a willingness to take on novel and risky areas of inquiry.” He adds, “The flow of ideas between fellows and the core research teams productively blurs the lines between them, which brings together rigorous methodologies and fresh approaches and perspectives.”

Faris says, “The Center is defined by its research. And the active involvement of the fellows community makes it unique.”

### Quality of conversation

Jon Murley, Financial Manager, says, “A lot of the success boils down to the vigor of the intellectual community. There are amazing conversations,” which he attributes to “the passion people have for what they’re doing.” In interviews for this report it was often stated that for the conversations to be successful they have to present multiple perspectives and engage people more than just intellectually.

The quality of that conversation depends upon not only the strengths and character of the individual fellows but upon the work that forms the common basis for social interchange at the Center. As Wendy Seltzer says, “The people who have more success here are the ones who are willing to talk about anything with anyone and to think in different ways.”

To get the most from this spirit of openness, the Center strives for multi-modal diversity in each cohort of fellows.

### Effect on other networks and centers

The Center sees the Fellows Program as a way to seed research, collaborative projects, and activism throughout the Internet ecosystem. This occurs through collaboration with other groups; the inevitable diaspora of fellows every year; the spread of ideas

through open-access publishing, open source software, and publications in a variety of media; and through partners such as the Global Network of Centers that the Berkman Center was instrumental in founding.

In addition, fellow Malavika Jayaram points out that one of the greatest successes of the Fellows Program is how many other similar centers it has inspired, often involving former Berkman fellows. For example, former fellow danah boyd credits the Center with helping to influence Data & Society, the “think/do tank” she founded.

### Staying weird

Especially as the Fellows Program has grown, there has been an explicit emphasis, including in Prof. Zittrain’s inaugural talk to the staff and fellows, on “Keeping Berkman weird.” The presence of non-academic fellows, including musicians and other artists, is a point of pride, as well as a point of distinction. Zittrain points to the Center’s collaboration with rofICON, a series of conferences celebrating the very non-academic side of Internet culture.

### Quality of life

Prof. Nesson says that when evaluating the success of the Fellows Program in institutional terms, he prefers not to focus on a list of accomplishments but instead to look at whether the program is “really satisfying, with really interesting people” who are “engaging with issues of the Internet and society on many fronts.”



# What constitutes success for the Fellows Program

## the fellows' view

The Berkman community members interviewed for this report expressed a remarkably consistent idea of what constitutes a successful fellowship from a fellow's point of view.

### The work

Success consists in making progress on the project one came in with—or the version of that project that emerged over the course of the year.

### Cohort

“The program has felt the most successful when it has felt the most coherent, when there is a real cohort,” says fellow Andrew Lowenthal. “That creates the strong relationships that enables projects, ideas, conversation, collaborations...”

### Engagement

Former Managing Director Colin Maclay says a successful fellow is engaged with the community, “sharing ideas, reflecting on the ideas of others, and ideally producing something from those sets of ideas.”

### Continuing network

The success of the program is measured also in its plugging fellows into a larger network, including the alumni network. The primary vehicle for this is the very active BerkmanFriends list-serv that brings together current appointees, alumni, and other

friends of the Center. Recently the Center has begun hosting alumni events, including an informal meetup in San Francisco and a brunch with alumni in Menlo Park.

As fellow Sands Fish says, “I see the success of the fellowship as having a network that I can communicate with.”

That network extends beyond Berkman and beyond one's term as a fellow. Former fellow Kit Walsh says, “Connections mean you're situated going forward outside of the Center. The benefits continue.”

### Diversity

Fellow Willow Brugh, Community Leadership Strategist at Aspiration, points to the encounters with people she would otherwise not have met. “Without serendipity, difference, contention we can't change anything.”

What counts as diverse of course depends on where one starts. Fellow Emy Tseng, who comes from a background of government and philanthropy, comments, “Being able to participate in an academic community but not as an academic has been very valuable.” Fellow Ellery Biddle, with a background in nonprofits and journalism, notes that she also had never been part of academia before. “The idea of teaching never seemed like a

realistic possibility, and it does now.” Fellow Matthew Battles, Associate Director of metaLAB, a digital humanities research team, says, “I've particularly enjoyed learning from attorneys, an extraordinary immersion in a kind of discourse I haven't participated in.”

### Freedom

The freedom to explore one's interests even if they change in the course of the exploration has been an important criterion of success for many fellows. Fellow Primavera De Filippi says that she “would not have had the courage to pursue” her blockchain research if she had not felt supported in that exploration. In fact, she found this liberty to be transformative: “I did things I would have not done before because I didn't believe they would have taken off.”

### Credibility

Former fellow Hasit Shah notes that “it opens doors”: “If you can say you come from a place like this, it helps.”

Or, as Willow Brugh puts it: “Before I moved to Cambridge, I was fairly bad ass. I was having plenty of the impacts that I hoped to have. But becoming an affiliate of the Center showed me what as a blue-haired woman it's like to have institutional credibility.”

# **Part II: Lessons Learned**



# 1 Don't select fellows. Select a community.

Having moved well past the “Island of Misfit Toys” phase in which fellows were generally invited to apply, the Center takes extraordinary care to choose from among the hundreds of applicants. There are far more qualified applicants than positions. So the Center selects not just individuals but a community.

This means working extraordinarily hard to bring together a diverse group of people who will learn from one another, collaborate in unexpected ways, and who are likely to feel a strong commitment to the success of the others in their cohort.

Tabasky notes that selecting a community means that every year's cohort is different in interests and style, even though about half of the fellows are continuing from the prior year. “Every fall we have a little bit of an identity crisis,” she says lightly, adding that that's a healthy thing, an opportunity to learn and grow.

## 2 Cultivate the culture

“We're a human network first and foremost,” says Amar Ashar, Manager of Strategic Initiatives, echoing a sentiment commonly expressed at the Center.

If so, then, as Executive Director Gasser asks, “How do you create a protocol, a culture, a spirit that puts the emphasis on being open, being kind, being good listeners, being engaged, being willing to learn from one another?”

Former Managing Director Colin Maclay attributes the initiation of this “warm and supportive” culture to its origins: “Charlie [Nesson] and JZ [Zittrain] dropped in some really valuable DNA. JP [John Palfrey] also set the tone.” (Others credit Maclay's role as well.) Prof. Zittrain agrees: “I guess it starts with a few nice apples. Whatever you'd say about our early principal players, they're all really nice. Terry [Fisher] is a nice guy. Charlie's a nice guy.” He adds, “There's a sense of play, which is for lols, not lulz.” (Translation from Geek: it's for fun, not at the expense of others.)

Certainly the screening of applicants for those who work well in communities contributes to the positive culture.

As with everything else, there is a balance to be struck. While fellow Primavera De Filippi says that despite Harvard's reputation among some, “Berkman is an extremely friendly academic environment,” some fellows think that it can veer into being too kind. For example, former fellow Kit Walsh says, “There was a time when people were being

too nice to guests who were presenting what they were working on. The real criticism, constructive criticism, would happen at dinner after Fellows Hour, and the speaker might not get the benefit of that.”

How does the Center maintain this culture?

It selects for it.

It consciously communicates this to incoming fellows, especially at the onset of the year. “The early weeks are when the DNA replicates and the spirit is re-emphasized,” says Executive Director Gasser.

It is modeled by the faculty, staff, and continuing fellows.

The cohort moderates itself. For example, on rare occasions, one fellow may take another aside and suggest that a fellow’s perceived aggressiveness or competitiveness could be channeled into a more productive type of criticism.

**Most of all, the Center’s faculty, staff and continuing fellows are aware of it and value it.**

# 3

## Transfer the knowledge

Many of the fellows are at the Center for one year, although some remain longer as fellows or may transition into an active faculty associate or affiliate role. Despite this, explicit steps have to be taken to transfer knowledge and culture.

First is setting expectations even before the new fellows arrive. Rebecca Tabasky says:

“We share information upfront and in different ways—in our call for applications, during interviews, in our offer letters, and during our orientation and onboarding activities—about what people can expect from the Center during their fellowship, whether it’s about our support of their individual research, opportunities for collaborations, access to Harvard resources, or information about tangible benefits like office space or funding.”

At least as important in setting expectations, she says, is letting applicants know that while they should expect deep rich conversation, if a topic they think is important is not being discussed they are responsible for making those discussions happen. Indeed, Tabasky stresses, fellows need to feel ownership of their experience at the Center.

The Center has increased its onboarding activities over the years. In addition to the introductory materials provided, every year there is:

An awe-inspiring round of self-introductions on the listserv

A full day community kickoff

A series of Berkman 101 orientation sessions

A public open house during which Berkman projects are presented in a “science fair” fashion

A full day “Festival of Ideas” focused on highlighting the work of incoming fellows, as well as some bigger Center-wide research questions to which everyone can contribute thinking.

**Various other community-building activities that emerge throughout the year**

The first Fellows Hours are traditionally spent on introductions of both new and returning fellows and their work, as well as deliberate socializing, conversation, and planning about the mode of community activities and what people want to do alone and together.

Throughout the year, the staff checks in with the fellows, and does much guiding, advising, and wrangling. The faculty also make themselves available for advice and conversation.

The continuing projects and research initiatives provide models from which incoming fellows can learn the approaches, processes, pedagogy, and research design typical of the Center. In fact, several interviewees stressed the importance of those continuing institutional projects for the success of the Fellows Program. Incoming fellows are put into an environment where faculty and other scholars are engaged in high-quality research. That context is not something that has to be reinvented every year.

Still, when Community Manager Tabasky says, “The Center attracts people who are natural leaders. The job of the Center is to get out of the way,” that’s both true and a humble diversion from the serious investment in time the Center makes in helping the cohort to form a community of researchers.

# 4

## Aim for a cohesive diversity

The Center is committed to diversity not only as a matter of basic fairness, but for intensely pragmatic reasons as well.

“We’d been working on diversity for a while,” says Colin Maclay. “If you’re in Law and Technology, you’re in white male dominated fields.” The effort intensified in 2009 as the Fellows Program scaled up.

Because, as is commonly the case, the applicant pool does not itself represent diversity across all factors, the Center tries to enlarge the pool by both broad and targeted outreach. The broad outreach consists of public calls on the website, through the Center’s networks, and via social media. The targeted outreach consists of coming up with programs to ameliorate specific weaknesses and reaching out through specific networks. For example, the Global Network of Centers provides a network that reaches into many parts of the world. The Center also identifies specific people who might be interested in applying.

Over the past five years, the Center has succeeded in raising the percentage of female fellows to 53% in the most recent cohort. Rebecca Tabasky, who was on the front lines of the effort, says, “Now we can say that we’ve achieved gender parity, which feels really good.”

The Center has likewise increased international representation, a priority of Executive Director Gasser, among others. The 2015-16 cohort has a significant number of fellows coming from Central and South America, and has made some gains in representation from Africa.

Rebecca Tabasky points to the often less-noticed diversity of purposes. Some fellows are aiming at careers as academics. Others are heading toward, or from, the business community, or are writing software or trade books. That means that if fellows share an interest in, say, privacy, they can collaborate unhindered by competitiveness. “The brass ring”—the prize they’re aiming at—“is different enough that they are happy if the other person gets their brass ring.”

The diversity of ideas and standpoints is of course also vital. The Center maintains a culture in which contrary ideas are welcome for open debate. As a community, however, it shares not only interests and norms of discourse, but also support for the potential of the Internet to promote values roughly aligned with those of secular Western educational institutions such as Harvard: free inquiry, access to ideas, giving free reign to curiosity, equal opportunity for each to flourish, and the power of collaboration. People with other views are of course read, discussed, and invited in to give talks.

This comes with the Center’s commitment to activism and to projects—software, services, events, organizations, etc.—that make a difference in the world. Primavera De Filippi, a fellow, puts it like this:

“You have people coming from different standpoints, but they share this common thread, which are the Berkman values. As you talk you understand that even though we come from different worlds, we are all trying to reach the same thing, and that’s where we stretch ourselves. We shouldn’t be all the same, but we also need not to be so different that there isn’t this beautiful mesh.”

The value of an open Internet crosses political lines. As Colin Maclay happily notes, “We invited in the head of the [George W.] Bush campaign’s technology platform, and he says, ‘I love hanging out with you guys. This is my tribe!’”

Dan Gillmor, a former fellow, says, “The Center has a mission-oriented goal which involves making sure that the Internet and its potential will survive,” while also ensuring that contrary opinions are well represented.

Tabasky captures the balance when she poses the question that the Center constantly asks itself: “Are there other ways to bring in as much cohesive diversity as possible?”

Cohesive diversity.

## 5 Provide just enough structure

Berkman fellowships are offered to people who can be trusted to flourish in an atmosphere that gives them maximal freedom to explore. For this to happen, they have to “own their own experience,” as the program tells the incoming cohort. “You’re responsible for making this experience work for you.”

The program nevertheless needs structure—just enough to serve as a platform to support them in their efforts. As Executive Director Gasser puts it, “The structure of the program remains a work in progress...which is a feature, not a bug.”

Around 2009 or 2010, when the number of fellows was growing, the leadership of the Center recognized that more structure was needed. The processes by which fellows were selected and brought onboard were reviewed by Executive Director Gasser, Managing Director Maclay, Community Manager Tabasky, and the Faculty Directors. There were retreats and focused discussions with staff, fellows, and others. From this came a more formal set of administrative structures. “We recognized we can draw some rules,” says Tabasky, “but they’re rarely going to be hard and fast. There will always be squish on the other side.” Then, more formally: “We didn’t want to be locked into those structures.”

The fellows' time is left quite unstructured, especially compared to other fellowship programs at Harvard and elsewhere. The only scheduled weekly meeting for fellows is the Tuesday afternoon Fellows Hour. What happens during it is left to each cohort, with guidance from returning fellows. Email messages are sent each week to the fellows to let them know what is on the agenda. Rebecca Tabasky also points out that this emphasizes the importance of Fellows Hours.

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<sup>5</sup> This year the Center decided to establish the norm that discussion on the Berkman Friends list is private. Before that the rules said it was public, but conversations proceeded as if it were a private space, with no publication of posted comments without first getting the poster's permission. It was de facto private, an expression of the participant's implicit will.

Listservs are channels for continuing connection. These include one for the current cohort, and another for former fellows and invited friends. They are well-used and have seen some remarkable, long exchanges on focused topics.<sup>5</sup>

Former fellow Ethan Zuckerman points to the way the culture has evolved especially after the Fellows Program was firmly established in the early 2000s. "Part of the success of this program," he says, "is that it has developed cohorts that have felt empowered to build their own institutions and culture," at times taking relatively sharp turns over the course of just a few years.

The Center recognizes that it's important to maintain a balance of structure and openness. It errs on the side of openness.

There is no formula for this. As Faculty Chair Zittrain puts it, "You have to follow your nose."

## 6

## Get bodies in a room

Community is both a good in itself and an enabler for the sort of collaborative work that the Center favors. To enable community, the Center has concluded that some degree of residency has to be required.

In its very first days, the aim of the Fellows Program was to assemble a loose cohort of individual contributors, requiring residency would have been an obstacle: you wouldn't get a John Perry Barlow to be a fellow if it meant abandoning his ranch. That of course changed as the program scaled up.

Even with its commitment to imposing minimal structure on the Fellows Program, the Center has embraced the residency requirement with enthusiasm because it builds community and enables the type of serendipity that only happens when two bodies find themselves seated next to each other at a table. As Prof. Zittrain says, "The more we can be in residence, the better."

Although physical space at the Center is very limited, additional room has been created as open study areas. There is continuing debate among the fellows about whether those should be deemed quiet rooms or not, a debate that is likely to continue no matter how it is decided.

As the residential requirements have increased, the types of non-resident affiliations have as well. These currently include affiliates, faculty associates, and friends on the mailing list. “We do this to let non-resident folk shake up the conversation,” says Rebecca Tabasky, “and to maintain a wider network.”

One possible and unexpected benefit of the limitations of physical space: fellows have taken the initiative in the past few years to find ways to socialize outside of the Center, resulting in a lively social scene....

# 7

## Let the sociality emerge

The Center provides many opportunities for social engagement. But over the past three years there has been a noticeable uptick in the social occasions Berkman fellows create for themselves. The mailing list for current fellows frequently has posts organizing ad hoc social events, including outings and dinners at fellows’ residences.

These events build a sense of community. They enable fellows to get to know one another better. They are an occasion for deeper dives into topics that might not be of more general interest. They enable a more personal discourse, with more risk-taking than public engagements make comfortable. They enable more inter-disciplinary, serendipitous discussions. They make people better collaborators.

This sociality arose organically. It is now part of the culture and has already been passed on from one cohort to another, primarily by the continuing fellows.



# 8

## Encourage interest groups

**Angry Tech Salon**  
reading/discussion group

**Interdisciplinary cooperation**  
working group

**Quiet Wriot**  
working in silence together

**Book Club**  
a critical circle of fellows writing books

**Privacy law reading group**

**Hacker culture reading group**

**Networked Storytelling**  
explores “narrative experience in networked life”<sup>6</sup>

6 <http://metalab.harvard.edu/2013/12/voices-in-the-data-stream-hacking-networked-storytelling/>

These are some of the groups created by fellows. Some have been going on for more than five years, their continuity provided by fellows who stay for more than one year. Some, like the Book Club, include former fellows years after their terms concluded.

The groups work differently, depending on the participants’ intents and interests. For example, here is how the Angry Tech Salon described itself in an email to the fellows:

ATS is a discussion group that attempts to encourage high quality conversation by putting theorists in contact with recent events. We pick a weekly theme, read academic papers and popular press articles, and talk about how they interrelate. The ‘angry’ in Angry Tech Salon is a joke. So is the ‘tech’ and the ‘salon’. We’re really in to: calming (critical?) conversations about contemporary culture.

Sara W and Tim M are the conveners, but generally every week someone new takes responsibility for picking the readings and facilitating the discussion. Since this is the first week of Season Two, Sara & Tim will take care of leading it and as a group we’ll pick out topics for the rest of the term.

Everyone is welcome. We ask only that you read the mandatory readings below.

The Cooperation Workshop, another highly successful group, is a bit more formal in its structure:

The Cooperation Workshop group is a small, user-driven forum for discussing empirical research on cooperation. Several, but not all, of the participants are fellows at the Berkman Center.

Some weeks, we have seminar sessions which are public talks with an invited guest and will involve a presentation and a seminar discussion over about 75 minutes. They will be clearly marked below and advertised on a series of email lists.

Most of our sessions are workshop sessions where the basic model is that each week, one participant will distribute work for discussion and feedback from the group...

These groups enable interests to achieve a diversity, specificity, and depth beyond what

can be achieved in a Fellows Hour or Tuesday lunchtime discussion. Some of these groups achieve the intensity of a master class in a topic.

The staff provides the support that's needed (within their capacity), and the existence of these groups is noted enthusiastically during the onboarding process. The fact that they originate with the fellows, and that the fellows take responsibility for running them, makes them even more important; they are very much the fellows' own.

## 9

## Build stuff

The commitment to building things—primarily software and organizations—goes back to the very origins of the Center. “Charlie [Nesson] emphasized that from the beginning,” says Prof. Zittrain, adding that it is a concrete way that the Center can have an impact. As fellow Sara Watson puts it, “The Berkman way is to say, ‘Let’s make something happen,’ instead of just thinking about it or criticizing it.”

Building things has at least three benefits for the Center and the Fellows Program.

First, as early fellow Wendy Seltzer says, “There are lots of pieces of Internet research that can only be done by constructing things and seeing how they work.” She adds, with understatement, “That’s not always supported by academics. If it’s not a paper it doesn’t count in many other places.”

Second, selecting fellows in part for their ability to build things brings into the program people with deep technical understanding that grounds conversations in what is currently practical and a realistic sense of what is achievable.

Third, building things attracts activists and researchers with activist leanings, enriching the mix.

## 10

## Stand for something

“The Center is not going to take positions, and we embrace dissent.”

So states former Managing Director Colin Maclay. For example, during the days of the SOPA/PIPA debate that ultimately led to Google, Reddit, Wikipedia and other major sites “going dark,” the Center’s site stayed open. Indeed, there was vigorous debate among the fellows and the faculty about the meaning and wisdom of online copyright

<sup>7</sup> <http://brk.mn/SOPA>

In 2013, Berkman released a paper mapping the SOPA/PIPA online debate, which was co-written by faculty, staff, and fellows. It can be found here: <http://brk.mn/NetPubSphere>

### **The Berkman Center's SOPA/PIPA statement** <sup>7</sup>

*January 18, 2012:* Today, many U.S. websites are participating in a blackout in order to express their opposition to pending U.S. legislation—House Bill 3261, The Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and S.968, the PROTECT IP Act (PIPA).

The Berkman Center for Internet & Society does not take an institutional position on matters of policy. However, it encourages its faculty, fellows, staff, and community members to express their viewpoints, and invites in-depth conversations on controversial issues. Our goals are to stimulate informed analysis and to catalyze the expression of diverse opinions.

Consistent with this policy, the Berkman Center's website is not dark today. Also consistent with that policy, many members of our community are contributing to the call for action, and others have written on this subject. You can find links to their public comments below.

As well, the Berkman Center and our community aim to track the protest and enable others to participate in the dialogue. Blogs@law offers a facility for engagement by Harvard community members and has a blackout plug-in available. Berkman's Herdict project is tracking today's protests."

and intellectual property policies.

There was less debate, however, about whether the openness of the Net was *prima facie* good, and whether access to the Net ought to be broadened and distributed more fairly. The Center from its beginning has embraced a set of values. Prof. Nesson, in recalling the founding days of the Center, puts it in terms of justice: it is unfair for only privileged groups to have the ability to express themselves and to connect with others.

Standing for something brings crucial benefits: It is a way of taking responsibility for the fact that values inhere at any research center. It affiliates people who are able to accomplish things together over the short space of an academic year. Perhaps most important, it reminds fellows that something is at stake, that their work should make a difference.

The Center recognizes that it is a tricky balance, but one worth striving for. Berkman's commitment to building things entails making decisions about what to build based on their intended outcomes. But as an academic center, Berkman is also absolutely committed to pursuing research regardless of the conclusions to which it may lead, as well as fostering respectful engagements with those who do not share its values. As Executive Director Gasser puts it, "Yes, there is a set of broadly defined core values, but one of the core values is the openness and honesty to look at realities, to study them, and understand them."

He points to two factors that help the Center find its balance. First, "The fellows are key. They keep us honest." Second, "We shouldn't forget the surrounding stakeholders: the foundations, donors, policy makers, NGOs, and partners—external voices who bring their issues to us. That creates another set of checks and balances."

# 11 Hire a remarkable staff

The Center hires staff who are not only highly competent, but who are cut from the same cloth as the fellows. Despite the staff count not keeping up with the growth of the fellows program, there has been remarkably little turnover.

Rebecca Tabasky points out, “there isn’t one full-time person whose sole responsibility is to mind the fellows.” Rather, she says, “it’s baked in to everyone’s responsibilities to consider the community and involve them in ways that make sense.”

The staff houses much of the institutional wisdom, including keeping up with the ever-growing informal network of former fellows. Amar Ashar, Manager of Strategic Initiatives, says it’s crucial to know who is working on what. “I make a concerted effort to talk with every fellow so I know what they’re doing.”

Tabasky began at the Center in 2006 as a staff assistant working at the front desk. Ashar began in 2007 as a Program Coordinator. Berkman’s commitment to staff respect and advancement are a critical part of maintaining a sense of continuity and involvement with the Center’s Fellows Program.

# 12 Partner up

Fellows arrive with their own professional and personal networks. The emphasis on social bonding leads to an inevitable integration of these networks, which can be an important resource for fellows both during their term and afterwards.

The same happens at the institutional level. The Berkman Center has been an eager and supportive partner, working with other universities, non-profits, governmental agencies, commercial entities, and more.

This enables fellows to work on projects that the Center cannot support by itself and brings them into contact with people from a diverse range of backgrounds and expertise. Indeed, the fellows are sometimes the partners: some are given fellowships because they are central to organizations and efforts the Center wants to partner with.

The Global Network of Centers (NoC) takes this spirit to a meta level by networking Internet research centers around the world. Formed at a 2012 meeting at the Berkman Center convened by Executive Director Gasser,<sup>8</sup> the NoC currently has more than fifty Internet research centers as members.

<sup>8</sup> <http://brk.mn/GNOC>

# 13

## Be Harvard

The fact that the Berkman Center is at Harvard University bestows benefits. Most are replicable at least to some degree.

Harvard's convening power is awesome, enabling projects that otherwise would be difficult, and bringing fellows into contact with leading voices from outside the program. But any fellows program has convening power, especially if it becomes known for putting on worthwhile events. Colin Maclay says, "When you ask someone what a Berkman event's like, they say it's fun, really smart people, engaging, unique." That sort of reputation makes it much easier to get people to come to an event.

The Center has found it relatively easy to attract partners, undoubtedly in part due to the Harvard name. But none of those partnerships would have succeeded if the Center—and its fellows—had not been friendly, open, respectful, and a fun partner. These are qualities available to all centers, and for which Harvard has not always been noted.

Because of the Center's origins at Harvard Law School, it has always enabled fellows to look at their work in light of policy. But every fellows program is embedded in an environment that has its own strengths. Former fellow Dan Gillmor advises, "What's the unique advantage that your location has, including in expertise? Leverage that."

Being part of Harvard means the Center has access to administrative resources that help it function at a high level. For example, the Center works with Harvard's International Office to secure visa paperwork for international community members. The program also benefits from University resources such as libraries, extracurricular opportunities, and the wider intellectual community.

Prof. Zittrain notes: "It helps to be at a major research university that culturally has a *laissez faire* attitude. There are a lot of rafters for the mice to run around in here." Other centers can likewise strive to create open spaces in terms of expectations, norms, and structure.

# 14

# Acknowledge your issues

## Self-awareness is crucial

Staff and faculty engage in frequent discussions about the status and direction of the Center. Fellows are solicited for feedback at multiple times during their terms, and the openness of the Center to queries, suggestions, and criticism is stressed throughout.

## Scaling

As the Center has scaled up the number of fellows as well as the ambitiousness of its projects, it has experienced some growing pains.

Community bonding became more of an issue as the Fellows Program scaled. The Center addressed this by increasing the onboarding activities and creating more events at which the fellows can get to know one another. The self-generated fellows groups and social structures have also helped.

The growth in staff supporting the program overall (as opposed to staff supporting institutional projects) has not been proportional to the increase in the number of fellows. A recent reorganization added some needed resources and structure.

Space has been at a premium. The Center started out as “smart people in a hallway,” as the lore has it. But if the Center had enough room for fellows’ offices and more common space, it would be transformed, quite possibly in positive ways: more conversation, more serendipity, more social groups, more social cohesion.

## Interaction with faculty

Fellows express satisfaction with the responsiveness of the faculty associated with Berkman: if you reach out to them, they will meet with you, and are helpful and supportive. But some of the fellows not tied directly to institutional projects have expressed disappointment that the faculty do not participate more frequently at the Center. (One faculty director also expressed concern about this.) The Center tries to address this when setting expectations for incoming fellows.

## Technical issues

Some fellows, like the proverbial cobbler’s children, think the Center could do better with the technology it uses to connect its physically dispersed members. At particular issue is the technology used to let off-site fellows participate in a video feed of Fellows Hours.

On the other hand, some of the fellows find that participation in Fellows Hours by those off-site is inherently disruptive; they would prefer that the meeting be open only to those who are physically present. The presence of offsite fellows is, in the words of one fellow, “disruptive to groupiness.”

## Funding

The Center’s inability to provide stipends to all but a few of the fellows inhibits its ability to attract less privileged applicants.

On the positive side, it means that many fellows have other fellowships or research appointments, which enriches the conversational mix. That of course does not offset the negative effect on diversity among the fellows, or the ability of fellows to give their full share of mind to their fellowship project.

## Mismatched expectations

The Berkman Center’s consistent experience has been that no matter how carefully and repeatedly it sets the expectations of incoming fellows, they are all somewhat surprised by elements of the experience—most pleasantly, but some not so. This is the case even as the Center has purposefully ramped up its mechanisms for setting expectations, from the online materials, to the communications with applicants, to the multiple and varied onboarding events, to the interactions via the listservs, to the tone of all these interchanges.

In part this is because most incoming fellows have never been part of a fellows program before. In part it is because fellows programs are as unique as the schools that sponsor them and the cities that house them. In part it is because every cohort is different. In part it is because the Center encourages each year’s community to grow in emergent ways. In part it’s because human beings don’t all hear things the same way.

So expect to continue setting expectations, and to step in when it’s clear that false expectations are hindering a fellow’s success.



# 15

## Learn from your lessons

From the very inception of the Berkman Center, the Fellows Program has been core to the Center's vision.

The program has transformed itself several times, each iteration succeeding beyond expectations. There are, however, some constants:

A set of values consistent with the phenomenon the Center studies.

A culture that embodies those values.

A community that forms itself around that culture—but only because enormous attention has been paid to enabling that community to form and reform every year.

A sense of perspective that remembers the human elements, including commitment, supportiveness, spontaneity, emergence, kindness, and fun.

A staff that is as committed to the values and pursuits of the Center as are the fellows they support.

A commitment to the hard work it takes to create an experience for fellows that is organic and emergent. "It is a lot of work," says Executive Director Gasser. "But it's a truly collaborative project. It takes a lot of people who want to make this happen, and who come together to do the work and make their unique contributions."



A small sample of the 2014-2015 class of Berkman fellows, community, interns, staff, and directors take a group selfie (photo: Daniel Dennis Jones, 2014)

## Appendix #1: Fellows data

Community Manager Rebecca Tabasky collected notes on the number and breakdown of fellows, going back to 2007, the earliest year for which records could be found. She stresses that this information is best-effort and may not be fully accurate. Also, it does not include affiliates, faculty associates, or the Fellows Advisory Board

### **2007-2008 Fellows - 34 people total**

5 countries represented (France, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland, USA)  
44% women, 56% men  
(15 women, 19 men)

### **2008-2009 Fellows - 37 people total**

8 countries represented (Brazil, China, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Switzerland, USA)  
35% women, 65% men  
(13 women, 24 men)

### **2009-2010 Fellows - 32 people total**

10 countries represented (Brazil, China, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Jamaica, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, USA)  
34% women, 66% men  
(11 women, 21 men)

### **2010-2011 Fellows - 33 people total**

11 countries represented (Canada, China, Germany, Hungary, India, Jamaica, Japan, South Africa, Switzerland, Taiwan, USA)  
30%, 70% men  
(10 women, 23 men)

### **2011-2012 Fellows - 44 people total**

17 countries represented (Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Mexico, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, USA)  
39% women, 61% men  
(17 women, 27 men)

### **2012-2013 Fellows - 51 people total**

16 countries represented (Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Jamaica, Nigeria, Norway, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Taiwan, United Kingdom, USA)  
45% women, 55% men  
(23 women, 28 men)

### **2013-2014 Fellows - 61 people total**

19 countries represented (Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Jamaica, Mozambique, Netherlands, Nigeria, Palestine, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, United Kingdom, USA)  
39% women, 61% men  
(24 women, 37 men)

**2014-2015 Fellows - 55 people total**

14 countries represented (Australia, Brazil, Chile, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Mozambique, Palestine, Switzerland, Taiwan, United Kingdom, USA)

49% women, 51% men

(27 women, 28 men)

**2015-2016 Fellows - 47 people total**

21 countries represented (Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, France, Greece, India, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Philippines, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, United Kingdom, USA, Zimbabwe)

53% women, 47% men

(25 women, 22 men)

## Appendix #2: Calendar

Below is a typical year's calendar of events and activities engaged in by the Center to select and support a cohort of fellows.

### September

Intros over listservs (current community)

Community onboarding activities, including community kickoff event, Berkman 101 sessions, open house (current community)

### October

Festival of Ideas (current community)

Put out open call for fellowship applications for following year; work hard to spread work through networks (planning for next year's community)

### November

Field inquiries about fellowship applications from prospective applicants (planning for next year's community)

Invite particular candidates to apply (planning for next year's community)

### December

Deadline for applications through the open call (planning for next year's community)

### January

Solicit from current community: 1) an update to be sent over listservs to everyone in community with a mid-year update about what they've done and what they plan to do in spring, and 2) an update to the Berkman management about their hopes for the next academic year and continuation at Berkman (current community / planning for next year's community)

Mid-year in-person check-ins with fellows (current community / planning for next year's community)

Begin to review new applications (planning for next year's community)

## February

Continue to review new applications and conduct interviews and reference checks (planning for next year's community)

## March

Finalize selection of new fellows, propose to the Board of Directors for approval (planning for next year's community)

Finalize selection of reappointments of current community members (current community / planning for next year's community)

## April

Send offer letters to new and returning community members (current community / planning for next year's community)

Send thank you letters to community members becoming alumni (current community)

Begin to work through acceptances of offers, including calls and discussions

## May

Final fellows hour of the academic year; informal Fellows hours continue throughout the summer (current community)

Continue working through acceptances and finalize the cohort (planning for next year's community)

Work on admin, including things like beginning visa paperwork sponsorship, for incoming fellows (planning for next year's community)

## June

Solicit write-ups from the community members for the Berkman Center annual report about activities and research conducted during the year (current community)

## July

Put out public announcement of the next year's community (planning for next year's community)

## August

Wind down the cohort, communicating about transitions people can expect regarding their ties to Berkman, presence on listservs, accounts, and access to Berkman, etc. (current community)

Communicate information about the next year and dates/activities to new and returning community members (planning for next year's community)

## Appendix #3: Berkman '13

*On December 3, 2013, fellow Nate Matias posted about his experiences under the title "Why you should apply to be a Berkman fellow." Its use of animated gifs means it does not translate well to this report. You are encouraged to see it in its original glory.*  
<https://civic.mit.edu/blog/natematias/why-you-should-apply-to-be-a-berkman-fellow>

You should apply to be a Berkman Fellow next year, especially if you're a designer, computer scientist, or researcher of technology. There's one week remaining. Apply here.

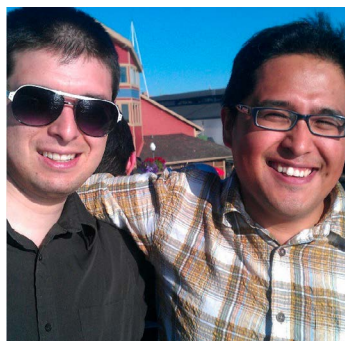
If you haven't clicked on that link and started filling out the application, this blog post is for you. The official link has helpful information about qualifications, funding, and more. Here, I try to explain why makers, computational social scientists, and computer scientists should apply, even if you haven't finished your PhD.



I'm a Berkman Fellow for the 2013-2014 academic year. As a PhD student at the MIT

Media Lab, I'm deeply enjoying the opportunity. This post tells my story, explains what I'm doing now, and answers questions you might have about being a Berkman Fellow. You should also know that is not official advice, and I'm not on the selection committee.

When I first arrived in Boston in 2011, I was starstruck and envious to learn that my colleague Molly Sauter had been Jonathan Zittrain's research assistant. I haven't fully overcome my shyness about chats with people who get lots of media attention, but I am learning to value what I bring to the conversation as a maker & researcher. Over the last two years, Molly and my advisor Ethan encouraged me to visit Berkman events and blog them, which has been a fantastic learning experience. Molly also encouraged me to present my work-in-progress to the Cyberscholars working group, which I eventually came to co-facilitate.



with Andrés at Microsoft Research this summer, where I created NewsPad

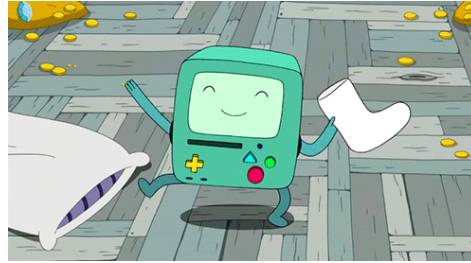
In my two years as a Master's student at the Media Lab, the inspiration and genuine encouragement of people at Berkman influenced major parts of my research. My presentation received amazingly helpful feedback and connections. A blog post I wrote from a talk by Andrés Monroy Hernández has inspired a long collaboration with Andrés and the first inklings of my PhD topic.

Berkman has been an astonishingly encouraging and positive community who have listened to me, respected

me, and supported me even as a random attendee at the public events. It's a community of energetic curiosity, passionate action, and mutual support. Those are the qualities that motivated me to apply to be a Berkman fellow.

### What Do I Do At Berkman?

In a given week, I spend all Tuesday at Berkman, concluding in a wonderful dinner conversation with other fellows. Since I'm based at MIT, I welcome fellows at the Media Lab and sometimes visit Berkman for a meeting or special event. I also try to make it to pub nights organised by other fellows. More formally, I:



**Co-facilitate** the cooperation working group with Brian Keegan. We read each other's papers, offer feedback on projects, review literature, and discuss new research on cooperation and peer production, every Tuesday at 5pm. Join us!

**Blog talks** and participate in discussions

**Participate** in the MediaCloud project in small ways by linking them up with researchers and contributing code from time to time

With Kate, Andy, and Kit, we **created** a January term crash course for coders, startups, & civic hackers to learn basics about legal issues & concerns for makers.

**Link** Berkman fellows with networks & resources in the Boston area, especially among makers and computer scientists. I connected one fellow with researchers who could offer insight on his upcoming startup. I am offering other fellows feedback and suggestions on research methods. I host international experts to share their work at Berkman and enrich our connection to areas like computational social science (example).

Occasionally **facilitate** transatlantic research partnerships and participate in conversations between researchers in the Berkman network and startups. I'm hardly the only person doing this kind of thing at Berkman.



### Q&A

Do You Have to Propose a Grand Project? Jeff Swift asked on Twitter about my driving project and next big thing for me. I don't have one. Some of the fellows are working on their books or setting up their next startup. As a first-year PhD student, I'm building the network and

growing the conversation around the next four years of my work. Facilitation and network building are much less flashy, but they're valued activities at Berkman.

Okay, but what are you actually working on? I'm finishing up work to measure gender representation in online media at a large scale. I'm continuing my work on acknowledgement online. I'm starting a research project on Space Team with the cooperation working group. I made a bot.

One of my year-long goals is to strengthen the role of technology makers, computer scientists, and computational social scientists at Berkman. Email me if you want to work together on something!



What do you wish you'd known before you applied? I already had a good understanding of Berkman before I applied. I think other fellows didn't realise how much the fellowship is up to fellows themselves -- we create our own infrastructure, our own year program, and take responsibility for our own journey. Berkman usually doesn't offer funds, can't offer official Harvard access beyond libraries, and can't usually sponsor visas. And yet the fellowship works amazingly well for people who invest time into the fellowship, articulate their interests, and take initiative with the conversations and resources available.

**update 3 Dec:** Rebecca Tabasky writes, "we do sponsor visas for people who're eligible."

### **Berkman Patterns**

Here are some patterns I've observed while at Berkman:

- The Researcher uses Berkman to grow networks with practitioners, share ideas with people outside their field, and get feedback on new projects
- Sociologists and Communications researchers often use this opportunity to connect more closely with tech research and develop as public intellectuals
- Computer scientists often use this time to link their work with broader social and political issues and connect with companies that have interesting data
- Humanities researchers use the Berkman network and experience with copyright to bring about new technologies and online resources
- The Organisation Leader (or activist) uses a Berkman year to step back for some strategic thinking, get feedback from researchers, connect with funders, and figure out the next thing
- The Public Intellectual gets feedback from experts on upcoming projects, grows in visibility, builds networks, and develops new directions
- The Mediamaker, often someone with a strong interest in Internet business models, copyright, or activism, takes time to reflect strategically and grow the next project
- The Indie is someone who's passionate about a set of values and skills and who works through Berkman as office space, a hub, and a network
- The Institution Person connects with civil society, researchers, and companies to bring new perspectives to their work in government or other large institutions

Some people drop in and out as they can. Others focus on their main project. Some people bounce around looking for inspiration and collaborators. Others master the art of convening events. Many Berkman fellows catch up on their reading.

### **What Makes Berkman So Special?**

It's people. As a fellow, you'll be part of an amazing, supportive network of people who will help you, challenge you, and work with you to make your work more socially conscious, more visible, more effective, and more awesome. If you're excited to be that kind of person for someone else, and if you could use some of that yourself, apply now!



## Appendix #4: Berkman '14

On June 3, 2014, Sara Watson blogged about her experiences as a fellow.

<http://www.saramwatson.com/blog/the-year-at-berkman>

### **The Year at Berkman**

As the summer ramps up, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on some of the things that made my year at Berkman. At the risk of turning this into an exercise in namedropping awesomeness, I thought it was worth sharing some of my favorites for posterity, linked where resources and recordings are available.

**Defending an Unowned Internet and Intelligence Gathering and the Unowned Internet:** In the year after Snowden, we had some very interesting conversations about how we're supposed to think about the fundamental principles of the internet. Only at Berkman could you have two representatives, John DeLong and Anne Neuberger, from the NSA come to talk with Yochai Benkler, Jonathan Zittrain, and Bruce Schneier in a public forum about their policies and practices in an effort to start an important cultural dialog. While the session was full of careful rhetoric (it was just as informative in what they did say as in what they didn't), it was an important step towards opening up the conversation.

**Conversations:** All kinds of people stop through Harvard and drop by Berkman to talk about their work and their latest burning questions about the internet. I got to participate in some of those conversations with Steve Ballmer, Travis Kalanick of Uber, Michael Fertik of Reputation.com, Scott Howe of Acxiom, and Aneesh Chopra. The intersection of industry and academia, of doing and thinking, is strong here, and it's part of what makes Berkman a special place. These conversations gave me a better impression of what is top of mind in industry, but also exposed the points where my work could shift the conversation. I also learned a lot in presentations from Jillian McLaughlin on inappropriate uses of data broker data for scoring consumer credit risk, and Margot Kaminski on robotic surveillance. Lauren McCarthy's lunch talk made me want to develop my own artistic and technical interventions.

**Fellows Hours:** Some of my favorite moments came from the conversations in fellows hours. I got to know my colleagues' interests, and more often got the chance to engage with them about their work. One of my favorite sessions with Kate Darling and Camille François addressed the fuzziness of the definition of robots. David Weinberger led us through the earlier days of blogging, which raised some interesting questions about what it is to develop a voice in the age of Medium, Tumblr, and Twitter. Tim Maly shared some of his work in progress on the ethics of surveillance architectures and got us debating what makes a pair of jeans ethical. Fellows shared their networks and expertise, like the session Bruce Schneier ran on publishing models featuring editors from trade and academic presses who shared details on what they look for in a manuscript (tid-bit: even academic publishers aren't excited to come across the "F word," ie Foucault). Bruce also ran a great session on Op Ed writing skills, which proved immensely helpful and a bunch of people published pieces as a result. Willow Brugh shared her technique and tools for visualization, and helped us think through an idea by fragmenting it visually. Amy Johnson and I also got to run a session on Progress Narratives and Moral Panics, which provided the chance for us to formalize our thinking and offered a new

frame for parsing how we talk about technology and change.

Camaraderie: I count many of my fellows as friends. Some clicked instantly, other friendships evolved through accumulated conversations and shared experiences. Over good food and drink, rotating fellows dinners offered the chance to get to know each other better, sometimes through performance as at Tim Davies' Céilidh dinner. And I got to share my not-so-secret love of karaoke at the end of the year at Charlie's Kitchen. Berkman became a supportive community of people I can count on to read a draft of something I write before I post it, or to talk through a difficult decision and urge me to find my own voice. Parts of my work this year were challenging in unexpected ways, and I'm thankful to have had the support of this inspiring and encouraging group.

Being at Harvard: I really enjoyed returning to Harvard this year. I may be done with my degree, but you can't take me out of school. I went back to things I wish I had done the first time around as an undergrad, exploring courses in the History of Science and the Science, Technology and Society departments here. These courses had a huge influence on the way I think about current tech issues in a broader historical context and developed some of my constructivist instincts. They also confirmed my staunch devotion to interdisciplinary approaches. I also got to try my hand at teaching a couple guest seminars. There was no shortage of events to attend in the broader Cambridge community, including the Topics in Privacy series, sessions through the KSG like Julia Angwin's book talk, and MIT events like Tarleton Gillespie's CMS/W presentation on algorithms and the production of calculated publics. Having spent some time away, I've come to appreciate that the density and diversity of ideas here is like no place else.

Tech Book Club and Angry Tech Salon: I've heard people say that you get out of Berkman as much as you are willing to bring to the table, and I think I hit my stride this spring. Tech Book Club has been going strong each month with a few core members, offering accountability to read books that we have been meaning to get to, and talking about the subjects and about the varied approaches to writing about technical topics. And Tim Maly and I also started Angry Tech Salon, which is developing into something of a space for pairing current events with theory, and seeing what happens as critical conversation unfolds each week.

This is just scratching the surface. There are countless moments that influenced me in smaller, subtler ways, and so many other wonderful events I didn't make it to. So, consider this a completely subjective and inadequate attempt to express my gratitude for being part of this community this year. I'm looking forward to continuing as a fellow in the coming year!

And with that, I will leave you with my interpretation of a dial-up modem, captured as a contribution to the Peak Fellows Hour scavenger hunt last week. The internet is serious business.

## Appendix #5: Berkman '05

*In March 2005, David Weinberger, then a first year fellow, posted on his blog the following description of the program. It is included as a viewpoint from before the Fellowship program had started scaling up to its present size.*

### **My life as a Berkperson**

I struggled to make this a hard-hitting piece that rips the lid off Harvard Law's Berkman Center for the Internet and Society. But the fact is that I'm really happy here, and my fellowship was renewed before I published this. It's a stimulating and kind environment. So, you'll have to make up your own snarky comments.

Before I applied for a Berkman fellowship, I had to ask John Palfrey and Ethan Zuckerman, neither of whom I knew, a whole bunch of damn fool questions. I had no living sense of what it meant to be a Berkman fellow. Do you drink sherry at 4? Just how witty is the banter? Would I get a discount on ascots?

I've been a fellow since July. Here's what it's like.

### **Context**

The Berkman Center for the Internet and Society is a Center within Harvard Law. The professors affiliated with it are all with the Law School, and so are many of the students who take part in the various activities, but I find the overall interests have more to do with policy than law; I spend little of my time listening to lawyers discussing cases in an argot I don't understand.

When you apply for a fellowship, you have to state what project you want supported, and that determines what your activities will be. The site lists five project areas, each prefixed with the word "open": Law, governance, education, commerce and content. Some of the actual projects underway are:

- Documenting Internet "filtering" (=censorship) by various governments
- Trying to increase international awareness in the blogosphere by facilitating "bridge bloggers"
- Encouraging and facilitating the growth of blogs in rights-challenged countries
- Aggregating information about all the groups aiming at establishing international governance of the Internet
- Building software to encourage classroom cross-discipline and cross-border conversation
- The Digital Media Project, looking at the legal, social and economic effects of five possible "scenarios" describing the development of digital media tech and law

The Center combines research and advocacy, which is always a tough balance. While the Center doesn't enunciate official stands on issues, it comes down consistently in favor of keeping the Internet an open space for ideas and innovation.

### **What it's like**

The Berkman Center has its own house, a three-story Victorian on Mass Ave a few blocks (but on a cold day, a very long few blocks) from Harvard Square. It's a funky place, furnished with a dog pound of furniture, just the way your college apartment was.

There's not a lot of space, so only a few people have offices there. The rest of us come in as appropriate and hang around the small-ish downstairs meeting room or perhaps grab a spare computer in a hallway or cranny. (You've gotta like a house with crannies.) I have a home office, so I don't come into the Center to write. I come to hang out with people.

Last year, the Center started a new semi-policy: Tuesdays are fellows days. That's the day to show up. In the morning, fellows hang out in the downstairs meeting room around a table. There are bagels, fruit and coffee, and no topic. It's usually only a handful of us. I think I most see Rebecca MacKinnon, Ethan Zuckerman, Zephyr Teachout, Mary Rundle, Derek Bambauer, Henrik Schneider and Wendy Koslow there. There's never a problem getting a conversation going. Jezos Carruthers, I learn a lot.

Most Tuesdays there's a lunchtime speaker. It's in the same small room, often with an overflow crowd of twenty or so. The speakers range pretty much all over the lot, from a Microsoft lawyer talking about copyright to a report on connectivity in Uzbekistan. Typically the speaker doesn't get through her presentation entirely. The Center provides sandwiches.

Tuesdays are the most structured, but any day of the week you will find interesting people from whom you will learn gobs. Plus, there are speakers, meetings and get-togethers at random times.

### **What you have to do**

Each fellow is expected to present her research at a Tuesday lunch or equivalent and to write something for the Center's journal. The rest of your duties are determined by the project the Center is supporting.

My case is a bit unusual because my project — working on a book about the effect the digital organization of stuff is having on the nature of knowledge (I really have to find a more interesting way of describing it) — is a bit off-topic for the Center. So, I'm supposed to work on the book and also lead a series of Wednesday night discussions.

Fellowships are usually for one year.

### **What you get**

- A stipend that ranges from \$0 to \$42,000. (I'm way at the low end of the scale, and certainly need to keep my day job.)
- A Harvard ID that lets you use just about any of its resources
- A Harvard business card that impresses the hell out of people
- The opportunity to participate in the life of the Center
- No parking privileges

### **The Culture**

I've been in a variety of academic environments, and the Berkman is the most collegial of them. Much of that is due to the personalities of the law professors in charge. The Center's first instinct, in my limited experience, is to support you in your project or line of thought. There is an air of sweetness about the Center, which I did not expect. I mean, these are Harvard law professors. Didn't they see *The Paper Chase*, fer pete's sake?

The Center is multi-partisan in theory. In practice, the Center's heart is clearly pro-grassroots. It's unlikely to file a friend-of-the-court brief supporting the RIAA. (If you're from the RIAA and give a lunchtime talk, you'll be treated with respect, but you'll also be asked tough questions by Harvard lawyers.)

I personally love the mix of scholarship and activism. These are folks passionate about the Internet both intellectually and practically. And it's a "learning community": I have yet to be laughed at (to my face, anyway) for asking dumb questions. The ethos is one of generosity: People will spend forever helping me to understand things.

I see more women there than men.

### **Negatives**

The gender balance feels about right in practice among the fellows (yes, I'm aware of the irony of using the word "fellows" in this sentence), although it's way off at the professorial level. And the atmosphere is definitely not one of macho competition and oneupmanship. There's a fair bit of international presence, and most discussions occur within a global perspective. The racial balance sucks.

It is an academic environment, which often informs the discourse. If that's not your cup of tea, then the Berkman Center is probably not for you. It is, however, also an activist center. I like the balance. You may not.

The range of political and policy opinions among the fellows is fairly narrow. More diversity would help.

I'm having trouble coming up with other negatives. (Oy, that sentence sits there like bait!)

### **In Conclusion**

If you can't tell, I'm enjoying my time as a Berkperson. I'm meeting people I care about and, unsurprisingly, you can't hardly walk through the doors without falling into a conversation that changes the way you think. What more could I ask for? Besides a parking space.



