

Creating the Future of the Schiller Institute

Insights from Boston College Faculty



The Schiller Institute for Integrated Science and Society

Winter 2022



BOSTON COLLEGE

SCHILLER INSTITUTE FOR
INTEGRATED SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

ABOUT THE SCHILLER INSTITUTE

The Schiller Institute for Integrated Science and Society stands as Boston College's newest interdisciplinary center. Supported by a \$25 million gift from BC Trustee Phil Schiller '82 and his wife, Kim Gassett-Schiller, and led by Dr. Laura J. Steinberg, Seidner Family Executive Director, the Schiller Institute aims to enhance multi-disciplinary, collaborative research to address critical societal issues in energy, health and the environment. To do so, the Institute fosters collaborative, applied and societally impactful research and pedagogy at BC and beyond.

WHY FACULTY CONVENINGS?

At its heart, the Institute aims to foster interdisciplinary collaboration among many stakeholders--faculty, students, community members, administrators, etc. Its mission thus describes “drawing upon the expertise that resides in all eight of BC's schools and colleges.” For this reason, in Spring 2021 Schiller leaders convened BC faculty for four interrelated purposes:

1. Provide faculty with an overview of the Schiller mission and long-term directions;
2. Gather faculty's thoughts about the role that Schiller could play in scholarship and pedagogy, the BC community more broadly, and in advancing the common good;
3. Begin a university-wide conversation about where the university, through strategic investments in new faculty and other resources, can focus its research efforts, with special emphasis in the Schiller Institute's initial research focus areas of the natural environment, energy and health; and
4. Begin the process of creating communities of scholars on campus with shared research or pedagogical interests, particularly for the purposes of developing new interdisciplinary academic programming or developing new research collaborations focusing on some aspect of the natural environment, energy or health.

Over the course of the year, Dr. Steinberg and Schiller staff led 14 virtual and 5 in-person meetings in which 171 BC faculty from 30+ departments and 8 schools participated. During each convening, faculty members learned about Schiller's plans and goals, asked critical questions, and connected their own interdisciplinary interests to the work of Schiller within the topics of health and public health; natural environment and energy; new interdisciplinary curriculum, public engagement, and student programs; and society, well-being and the common good.

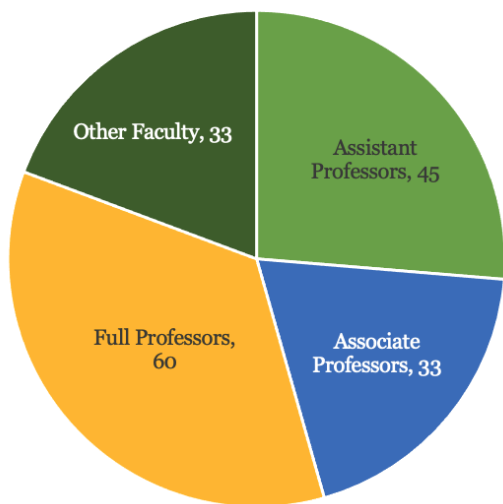
OVERVIEW OF THIS REPORT

This report summarizes the characteristics and interest areas of faculty who participated in convenings and, thus, are helping to shape the Schiller Institute (p. 2). It first identifies key insights that arose from faculty discussions of Schiller and its focus areas of energy, health and the environment (pp. 3-5). Next, this report identifies faculty interests related to key Institute areas of focus (pp. 5-7). Last, this report concludes with directions for the future (p. 8).

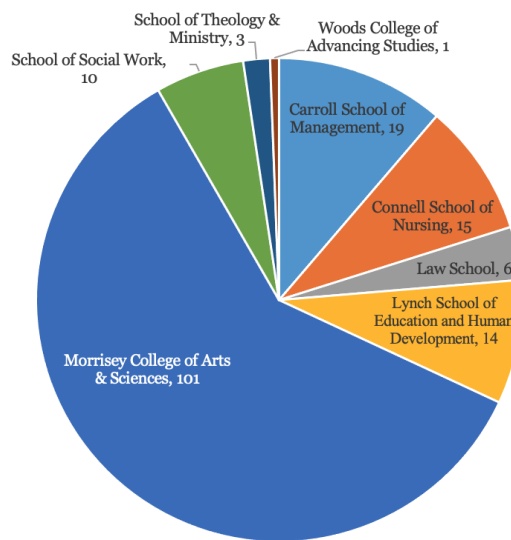
WHOSE INPUT IS SHAPING THE SCHILLER INSTITUTE?

BC faculty came together across all corners of university to shape the future direction of the Schiller Institute. In Spring 2021, 152 faculty from 8 schools attended and participated in virtual convenings, with the majority coming from the Morrissey School of Arts & Sciences. An additional 19 faculty from across campus attended in-person sessions during Fall 2020. In total, convening participants comprised a variety of faculty appointments and 15 department chairs.

Convening Participants, Appointment Type



Convening Participants, School



When asked to signal interest in various topics prior to convening, 62.5% of participating faculty were interested in natural environment and energy; 78.5% in health and public health; 88% in society, well-being and the common good; and 87.5% in interdisciplinary curriculum, public engagement and student programming.

WHAT DO BC FACULTY HAVE TO SAY?

At each convening faculty shared questions, concerns and commentary on current and future directions for the Schiller Institute. These coalesced into seven broad areas that highlight the key takeaways and inquiries of BC faculty: 1) enthusiasm at BC for interdisciplinary research and spaces, 2) suggestions for promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, 3) student engagement at Schiller, 4) Schiller’s role in promoting the public good, 5) faculty hiring at Schiller, 6) the mission and direction of Schiller, 7) opportunities for funding through Schiller.

“A refreshing vision [with] legitimacy and power and respect for each scholar.”

1. Enthusiasm at BC for Interdisciplinary Activities and Spaces

Many faculty conveyed a growing interest in and enthusiasm for interdisciplinary research, teaching and learning. At Boston College, they noted that such work was already underway across campus departments and schools. Yet they also saw Schiller, and its new interdisciplinary research building, as exciting and novel spaces to spur greater collaboration. In this way, Schiller was seen as part of a “refreshing vision” that could provide “space and time and structure” for faculty to come together across disparate campus departments and locations and “gain exposure outside of siloes.” Faculty were also excited by the prospect of new resources and personnel, including maker spaces for students, new faculty hires and novel sources of funding, to promote interdisciplinary activities.

2. Suggestions for Promoting Interdisciplinary Collaboration

To tap into existing faculty enthusiasm for interdisciplinary activities, enhance current collaborations and spur new interdisciplinary work, BC faculty provided many suggestions for Schiller. These included holding interdisciplinary conversations or “summits”; hosting forums or colloquia on interdisciplinary research topics; creating centers or working groups around topics; auditing current BC programs and faculty research areas to map emerging areas of interdisciplinary expertise; co-sponsoring policy briefs; hosting informal faculty get-togethers such as coffee breaks or lunch-and-learns; organizing poster sessions; and more.

3. Student Engagement at Schiller

Having already witnessed high student engagement with Schiller programming on environmental racism, among other efforts, many faculty prioritized getting and keeping students involved in Schiller and interdisciplinary activities. Interdisciplinary coursework was central to this process, and faculty sought to promote such coursework beyond the BC core at higher levels of study. Faculty also pondered the role of Schiller and interdisciplinarity in promoting students' meaningful careers--and experiential learning opportunities that engage the broader Boston community. Additionally, faculty looked forward to Schiller's undergraduate Global Public Health minor program evolving into a major and inquired about future credentialing opportunities for graduate students.

“How can Schiller leverage existing [interdisciplinary] models and bring them in?”

4. Schiller's Role in Promoting the Common Good

Within the context of Boston College's broadened mission and aims, many faculty saw direct ties between future directions for Schiller and promoting the public good. These ties drew from many disciplines as faculty considered the role of human-centered engineering, theological notions of “what it means to be well” and other traditions in promoting community well-being and providing opportunities “to improve the world, improve communities.” Whether through a focus on improving public health, creating green energy solutions, mitigating climate change or harnessing technology for social betterment, faculty saw many ways in which Schiller's could promote the public good and contribute to fulfilling the broader Boston College mission.

5. Faculty Hiring at Schiller

Questions surrounding who “Schiller faculty” are and will be abounded for BC faculty. Faculty sought to understand the substantive areas in which faculty would be hired as well as how and when collaborative hiring processes would take place. Multiple faculty were eager to suggest standout mid-career scholars that might benefit the work of Schiller, while other faculty inquired about tenure processes for Schiller faculty, efforts to increase faculty diversity and opportunities to affiliate with Schiller for current BC faculty. Faculty also wondered about future staff hires at Schiller and the Institute's place within BC's broader academic hierarchy.

6. The Mission and Direction of Schiller

Faculty were eager to clarify the mission and substantive focus areas of Schiller as well as ponder its future aims, scope and plans. Multiple faculty were surprised to learn that Schiller is closely aligned with yet distinct from the new Engineering Department; others were excited to learn that the Institute, in addition to focusing on its substantive areas of energy, health and the environment, also sought to “catalyze” interdisciplinary engagement across the BC campus. Looking toward the future, faculty conceptualized a growing role for Schiller in BC’s interdisciplinary efforts as well as community-facing efforts at addressing complex social problems.

“Is Schiller trying to catalyze bringing people together?”

7. Opportunities for Funding from Schiller

Faculty were interested in ongoing (at the time) and future funding opportunities emanating from Schiller. Many faculty who participated in convenings had applied to receive Schiller Institute Grants for Exploratory Collaborative Scholarship (SIGECS), nearly \$410,000 of which were awarded in May 2021. In addition to this opportunity, faculty inquired about potential future funding for external training, graduate students and more general grant support for interdisciplinary projects from Schiller.

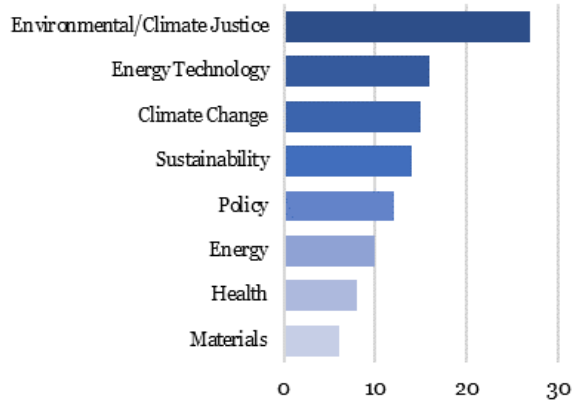
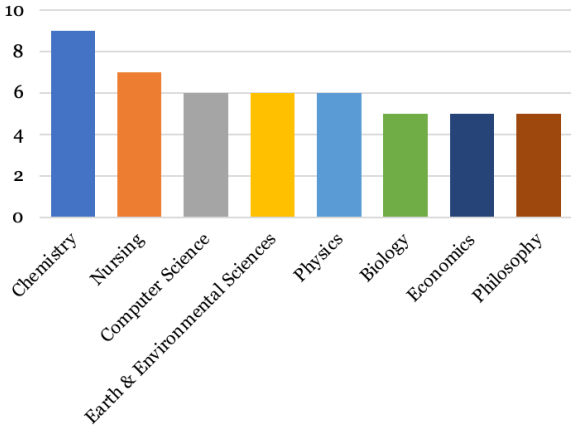
WHAT FACULTY INTERESTS EXIST WITHIN SCHILLER AREAS OF FOCUS?

At the conclusion of each convening, faculty completed a survey assessing their level and sub-areas of interest within four key Institute areas of focus: 1) natural environment and energy; 2) health and public health; 3) society, well-being, and the common good; and 4) new interdisciplinary curriculum, public engagement, and student programs.

The figures on the following pages summarize interest in each of these areas by academic department as well as prominent sub-areas of interest within each area. The numbers on the axes of these figures represent the sum of faculty who signaled interest in each topic (in “High-Interest Departments”) and who referenced a particular sub-area of interest (in “High-Interest Sub-Areas”).

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

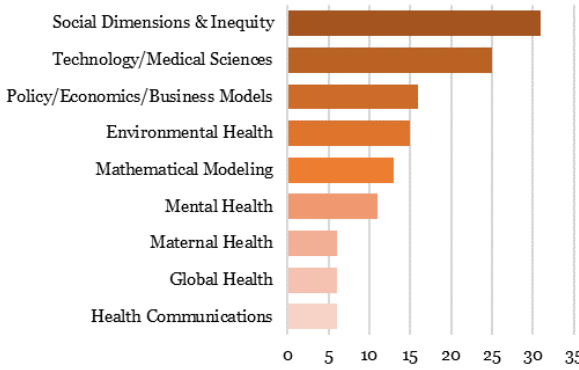
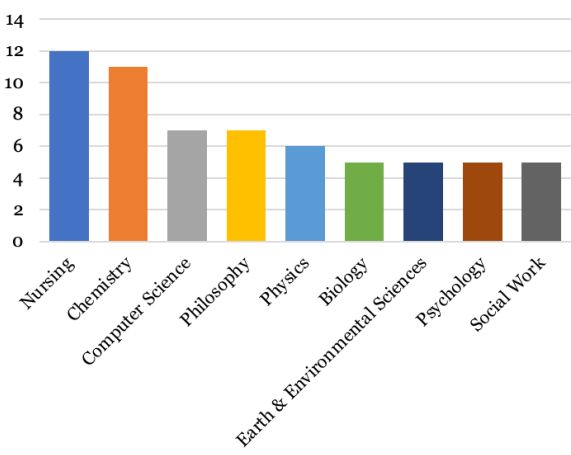
High-Interest Departments | High-Interest Sub-Areas



Other sub-areas: Water resources, environmental history, ecosystems, computer & simulation

HEALTH AND PUBLIC HEALTH

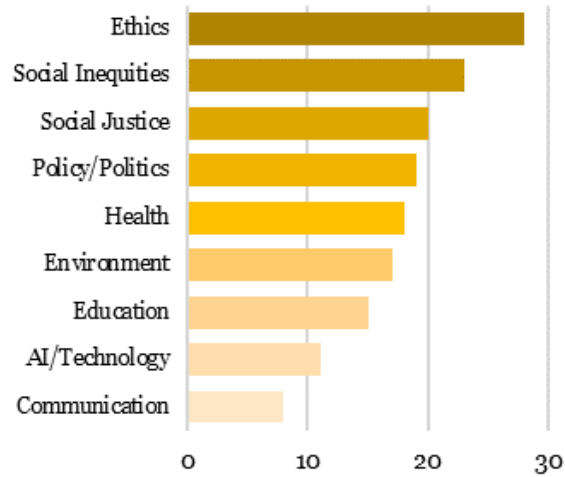
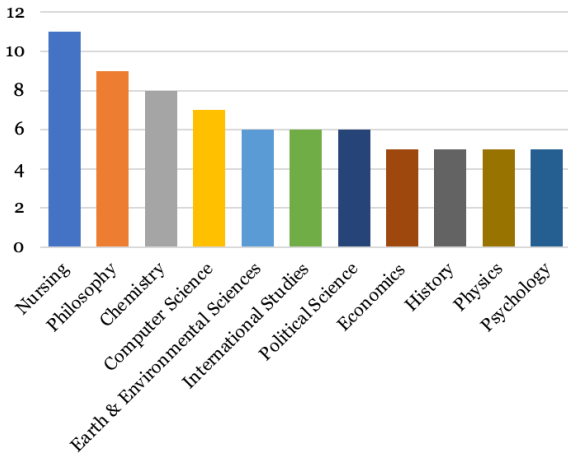
High-Interest Departments | High-Interest Sub-Areas



Other sub-areas: Occupational health, service provision/provision of care, aging

SOCIETY, WELL-BEING, AND THE COMMON GOOD

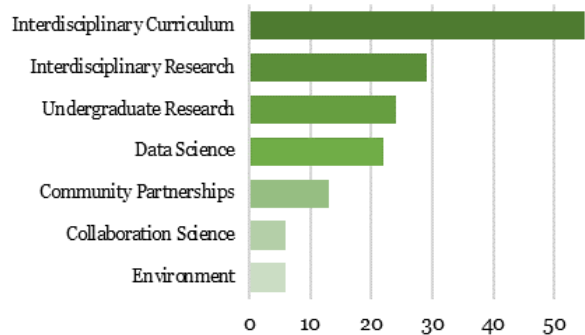
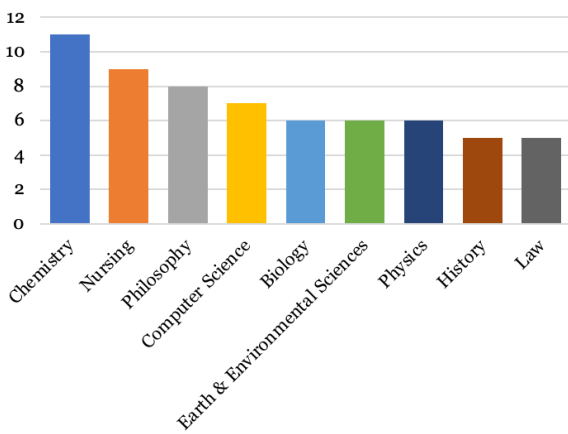
High-Interest Departments High-Interest Sub-Areas



Other sub-areas: Aging populations, impact of research

NEW INTERDISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM, PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, AND STUDENT PROGRAMS

High-Interest Departments High-Interest Sub-Areas



Other sub-areas: Pipeline programs, interdisciplinary undergraduate majors, formative education, humanities, science for non-majors, interdisciplinary PhDs

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

As these findings suggest, Boston College faculty are already helping to shape the future of the Schiller Institute in many key areas. In moving forward, these faculty insights will help guide the Institute's future goals, initiatives and decision-making.

Among other things, the Institute plans in the near future to convene faculty topic-based interest groups, engage current faculty in Schiller faculty hiring, create an affiliation program for current BC faculty, expand funding opportunities for BC faculty and students exploring interdisciplinary topics, and spearhead new and innovative programming.

In these and other ways, the Institute seeks to place Boston College faculty at the heart of creating the future of the Schiller Institute for Integrated Science and Society.