Brittney Edmonds, Department of English. “Black Inque(e)ries: Space and Time in Post-Stonewall NYC, 1969-1981” focuses on the contours, movements, and tenors of black queer bodies in New York City from 1969 to 1981. That blackness and queerness manifest so variously, in human bodies, in human politics, in social spaces, and in political rhetoric, is testament to their endurance as modes of disciplinary classification and their requisition as sites of potentially liberatory identification. This seeming plasticity—the ability for both blackness and queerness to be purposed to differing, sometimes contradictory ends—inspires my research to find moments, if ever, when blackness and queerness are less yielding, when human bodies, geographical space, political necessity, and temporal specificity fix, however fleetingly, their coordinates. By focusing on black queer bodies, and further locating them within a particularly charged historical period—beginning in 1969 following the Stonewall Riots to 1981 before the widespread public acknowledgment and admission of the AIDS epidemic—my research attempts to apprehend blackness and queerness in moments of crisis and upheaval, and too, in moments of resistance. Through engagement with various ephemera (ranging from club flier to queer manifesto to lesbian weekly), my project seeks to answer questions about identity formation, community constitution, and the political limits and potentialities of this unique period.

Nika Elder, Art and Archeology. Nika Elder’s dissertation, Show and Tell: Representation, Communication, and the Still Lifes of William M. Harnett interprets the eclectic work of the late-nineteenth-century American artist within his cultural context. It analyzes the drawings and paintings he created over the course of his twenty-six-year career in conjunction with the intellectual discourses that they reference to suggest that Harnett attempted to depict humanity without recourse to the body. He employed man-made objects, syntactical compositions, and laborious techniques to enact and thus embody the cognitive process. A Summer Research Prize from the Program in American Studies generously supported the research and writing of two chapters, which draw on fields as diverse as anatomy and semiotics, physiology and the decorative arts.


Dael Norwood, History. Dael Norwood’s dissertation, Trading in Liberty: The Politics of the American China Trade, c.1784-1862 investigates how Americans’ Asian commerce served as a motive and a medium for politics in the early republic. Tracing changes in the material reality and ideological import of the China trade through contemporary published materials, the files of mercantile firms, and the archives of the American and British governments, Trading Liberty reveals that the capital, goods, and people that made up the China trade became intertwined with the struggles over states’ rights, slavery, and expansion that defined the early American state. Support from the Program in American Studies enabled Dael to complete his research at government archives in Washington D.C. and in merchants’ papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society.
Rebecca Rosen, English. Rebecca Rosen's research on women's commonplace books and scribal canon formation began in Philadelphia and continued this past summer during her research in the Boston area, with the majority of her research taking place at the Houghton Library, the Massachusetts Historical Society and the American Antiquarian Society. There she conducted a comparison between colonial and eighteenth-century Boston and Philadelphia sources in order to better understand how women's manuscript writing practices evolved in the early Republic across geographic and religious lines. During research, two separate projects evolved: one which looks at women's commonplace books in the two cities as serving different but overlapping literary purposes, and another on the development of early American autobiography as a process of individual and collective writing. The wealth of material in these archives--starting with commonplace books, but including documents such as land grants, records of sermons delivered and census counts in Puritan and Native American communities--shows the elaboration of local canons and values, as well as the collective illustration of a community's members, from the copied passage to the list as life writing.

Roy Scranton, English. Roy Scranton’s research on Harry Mathews and his connections to both the New York School poets and the Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle has developed into multiple projects. The main project resulting from his research, Dear Moon Governor, will be an edited volume of the selected letters between John Ashbery and Harry Mathews, including an introductory essay discussing Mathews’s friendship with Ashbery, his role in the so-called New York School, and the transatlantic coteries in which they moved. The second project, Talking With Harry, will be to document and edit the long interview Roy conducted with Mathews this summer in Grenoble on his career, work, life, and coterie. In addition, Roy’s research at the Houghton Library at Harvard, at the Annenberg Library at the University of Pennsylvania, and in conversation with Mathews himself, thanks to the gracious support of a Summer Research Prize, has fed and will feed into other work on postwar American literature.