

College of Social Sciences and Humanities

Vision and Strategic Framework

Who We Are: Human-Centered, Public-Facing, Globally Minded

CSSH is the university's hub for humanistic and social scientific inquiry. In the age of agentic AI, our college emphasizes human centrality through the study of contextual knowledge and the ethical and institutional frameworks that shape human behaviors. We bring together the methods, frameworks, and questions of the social sciences and humanities to analyze phenomena no single discipline can address alone. We study how humans, across time and place, create meaning and continuity through cultural production, and how they organize the economy, society, and political institutions to govern collective action. Our teaching foregrounds student voices, active learning, rigorous empirical analysis, and civic engagement. We form thinkers and citizens prepared to build more just and meaningful communities and to understand the richness and multiplicity of human culture and activity. Central to this mission is equipping students with the analytical competencies and moral imagination to navigate novel contexts, evaluate trade-offs and evidence, debate responsibly across difference, appreciate human creativity, and exercise the kind of independent judgment on which civic life and the flourishing of culture depend.

Our Research

Research in CSSH seeks to understand human society, culture, and institutions, through empirical and interpretive research across the social sciences and humanities, and through work done by humans for scholarly and public audiences. As part of this mission, we: connect technical and scientific disciplines to the political, economic, and social questions they generate; develop policy proposals and other interventions that enhance civic engagement; and curate and interpret the linguistic and cultural forms that generate meaning, shape narratives, and provide value and significance to human lives.

Our Teaching and Learning

Teaching in CSSH provides frameworks for asking sophisticated questions about complex problems; for analyzing economic, social, and political institutions; and for understanding human cultural production. CSSH classes offer not only critical perspectives but also experiences of wonder, curiosity, intellectual vitality, and human connection. CSSH courses equip students to grapple with meaning and to understand the difference between information and understanding. Through our graduate programs, distinctive for their experiential depth, we shape the next generation of scholars, public intellectuals, and practitioners in the social sciences and humanities. In an information-saturated world, we cultivate fundamental capacities for students across Northeastern: critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and sustained engagement with complexity.

Our Contributions to the Global University System and Industry Engagement

CSSH's global engagement is distinctive in its collaborative scope. Our faculty and students work with international governmental bodies, companies, cultural institutions, and NGOs. This breadth extends the university's global reach and impact. Because meaningful public and private sector engagement includes not only traditional industry but also governing bodies, multilateral institutions, and civil society, CSSH is deeply connected with Northeastern's other colleges throughout the university. Engagements around technology ethics, security, and policy are part of a broader portfolio that emphasizes citizenship and social impact.

Where we Lead

Research, Scholarship and Teaching AI Cannot Replicate

CSSH faculty produce work that helps societies navigate change and create conditions for human flourishing. Our interpretive scholarship – understanding texts, institutions, and cultures, and making judgments on value-laden questions – resists automation. While AI can generate information instantly, we teach and study something more fundamental: how to move from information to understanding. Through close analysis, interpretive flexibility, and sustained engagement across difference, our students develop the capacity to sit with uncertainty, identify what matters, and arrive at answers that reflect their own values, judgment, and understanding of the world.

Understanding Technology's Human Dimensions

As the university commits to human centrality as its organizing principle for education in the age of agentic AI, CSSH supplies the disciplinary substance behind that commitment: the historical, social scientific, ethical, and interpretive work of determining what centering the human requires. Our study of the social, economic, ethical, and governance implications of old and new technologies, and their impacts on cultural production, makes our work central to the university's ambitions to lead in human-centered AI. CSSH has been at the forefront of building digital practices into humanistic and social science scholarship and evaluating their impact. Through interdisciplinary research infrastructure such as the Center on Crime, Race and Justice, and the Ethics Institute, Humanities Center, and Policy Innovation Hub, we develop new methods of inquiry, presentation, and public engagement that extend the reach and civic relevance of our work. CSSH brings the interpretive and analytical frameworks, historical depth, and ethical reasoning that technological innovations require for meaningful implementation.

CSSH at the Center of the Higher Education's Most Urgent Challenges

The challenges reshaping higher education – the rise of AI, democratic erosion, loss of public trust in expertise, and threats to academic freedom – are precisely the challenges CSSH has spent decades preparing to meet. Our faculty teach and study questions of democracy, resilience,

inequality, migration, and the social consequences of technological change. We respond to contemporary disruptions by producing rigorous, public, and consequential scholarship; modeling intellectual humility and respectful disagreement; and defending the premise that knowledge pursued for understanding is a democratic and human necessity. The rise of agentic AI does not just add to this list of challenges. It is why human centrality can no longer be assumed, and why CSSH is indispensable to how the university meets this moment. CSSH affirms its commitment to academic freedom as an essential part of who we are.

The Future of CSSH

CSSH will be a national leader in demonstrating the value of higher education in the age of AI: a set of opportunities that blends applied and basic research; bridges the practical, theoretical, and creative; and insists that our approach to understanding technology continues to center human agency. In an age of agentic AI, when human centrality can no longer be taken for granted, it must be continuously reaffirmed – and that reaffirmation is what we do in CSSH. Our ambition is to build a model of higher education that foregrounds the irreducible importance of human meaning, judgment, and values and, in so doing, helps to reestablish public trust in research, teaching, and scholarship.