Summary Report and Recommendations of the HGS Exploratory Committee

The HGS Exploratory Committee was charged in January of 2015 with the task of assessing the “feasibility and desirability of building in HGS a central home for the Humanities.”

After extended consultation with departments and individual faculty, and having sought the input of graduate students from around campus and from the leadership of several institutes important to the Humanities at Yale, we recommend that the University move forward in a visionary and decisive way to realize new strengths in the Humanities through this renovation project. We recognize the potential for this project to help execute President Salovey’s aspirations for “a more unified Yale” and for “a more excellent Yale.”

Our overarching recommendation is that the Provost and the Dean of the FAS form and charge the committee anew and under a new name—the 320 York St. Planning Committee—empowering it to plan public and shared spaces, develop programming and intellectual priorities to be served through specific configurations and facilities, and work with departments to begin planning departmental spaces.

We recommend adjusting the membership of this successor committee while maintaining continuity with the Exploratory Committee: it should include undergraduate and graduate student representatives, faculty representation from a range of humanities departments programs, the University Librarian, and the Director of the Whitney Humanities Center. To be effective the committee cannot be overly large and we assume these categories will overlap. It should plan to conduct focus groups with the community in order to ensure full input.

In addition, we recommend four specific principles to guide the planning this new committee will undertake, based on findings that emerged from our intensive discussions since last January.

1) **Organic Space to Promote Productive Interaction:** Students, faculty and staff would like to see at 320 York St. attractive social space with good coffee and food, open late and open to all, where organic encounters and organized meetings alike are promoted to the benefit of the teaching, mentoring, and research mission of the Humanities at Yale.

2) **A Humanities Destination:** A building that is a home for the Humanities must become an iconic destination for transformative, inspiring, outward-looking, disciplinary and cross-disciplinary events in the Humanities.
3) **A Location for shared Humanities Resources:** A building that can effectively house Humanities departments, programs, centers, and collaborative groups must contain or be close to the resources central to teaching and research in these disciplines. The space must be conceived in such a way as to promote broadly shared access to the benefits of such resources. These include both particular resources such as the Whitney Humanities Center or the Film Study Center as well as general resources such as staff with special expertise, exhibit and other specialized spaces, and technology and equipment.

4) **Best Home for Departments to do their Best Work:** Throughout the Humanities division the committee encountered thriving intellectual and social cultures that have grown up in intimate, human-scaled department spaces. We found that these spaces can promote the informal mentoring, pedagogical peer-support, intellectual conversations, and, in some cases, language practice, that form an essential environment for educating students and for the continual pursuit of teaching and research excellence among the faculty. As a central home for the Humanities, 320 York St. should become the best home for departments to do their best work.

**Consultation Process**

Between the committee’s charge in January, 2015, and the conclusion of its deliberations in mid-September, 2015, the committee consulted formally and informally with several hundred FAS faculty, graduate students, and staff regarding the idea of creating at 320 York St. a central home for the Humanities. This included consultations with 19 Humanities departments and programs, meetings with the Graduate Student Assembly, the Film Study Center staff, the University Librarian, the Director of the Whitney Humanities Center, and the University Planner.