

American Culture 2025

Annual Newsletter



*2026 American Culture
turns 90*



Editors:

Magdalena J. Zaborowska & Jeff Craft

Desktop Publishing:

Sándor Mátyás Fazakas



Images on the back cover:

K. Ian Shin - Imperial Stewards: Chinese Art and the Making of America's Pacific Century

Lisa Nakamura - Technoskepticism: Between Possibility and Refusal

Clare Croft - Jill Johnston in Motion: Dance, Writing, and Lesbian Life

Magdalena J. Zaborowska - Baldwin The Life Album

Bethany Hughes - Redface: Race, Performance, and Indigeneity

Sigrid Anderson - Land of Sunshine Race, Gender, and Regional Development in a California Periodical

Clare Croft (edited by) - The Essential Jill Johnston Reader



Table of Contents



4	Message from the Chair
7	The Department of American Culture turns 90!
8	Serving our Undergraduate Students in American Culture
	More Than a Field of Study!
9	How Latino Studies at U of M expands our understanding of America
	Leading the Way:
12	A Conversation About Asian Pacific Islander American Studies at Michigan
	Why Didn't We Learn This Before?
16	Four surprising truths about The Native American Studies Program
	Building Community, Creating Space
18	A Conversation with Charlotte Karem Albrecht, Director of Arab and Muslim American Studies
	American Culture Graduate Student Achievements
21	Nominations, Awards, & Completed Dissertations
	American Culture Department Graduation
22	Martin Friedman Remarks – May 2, 2025
25	American Culture Class of 2024 & 2025 Graduates





Message from the Chair

Dear AC Community:
Friends, Graduates, Colleagues, Students, and Staff,

As temperatures drop, we continue to bask in the warm light of fantastic achievements by members of our multivalent, talented, and hard-working community. This past year, American Culture won the 2024 Department Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education—an honor that has inspired a new gateway course we are currently designing. The department has also been undergoing a transition that reflects our continued commitment to cutting-edge intellectual inquiry, knowledge production, and pedagogy. We are embracing the challenges of the day as opportunities to grow, and we thank all of you who believe in us for your trust and support.

Supporting Our Mission in Our 90th Year

In our 90th year as one of the best American Studies departments in the nation and beyond, we invite Michigan alumni and students to embrace and support our values and mission with strength and resolve. We need your help more than ever to expand our undergraduate offerings, advance our ethnic studies programs, nurture our students' research, and meet challenges to higher education in this precarious historical moment.

Please consider helping us grow successful, culturally attuned leaders like *Elizabeth Zomeri*, our 2025 AC Honors graduate. Elizabeth's thesis presentation on young adult literature and girls' education received an enthusiastic reception. Now transitioning to graduate school, she was able to travel to Harvard University's archives last winter semester to complete her research thanks to supporters like you.



Your financial gifts help us recognize student achievement (we welcome named awards for academic excellence!), invite distinguished speakers (imagine a lecture series or an endowed chair named for you!), recruit new undergraduates and faculty, and co-sponsor student-centered events. Preparations for our 90th Anniversary Symposium, "AC Undergraduates in the 21st Century," planned for Winter 2026, are already underway under the leadership of Professor Kristin Hass with assistance from Mica Nimkarn, a second-year doctoral student. We hope you can attend! Learn more about us at lsa.umich.edu/ac.

Leadership and Transitions

We began this academic year—my second as AC Chair—during a challenging moment in U.S. and world history, with new officers and staff hires, some of them ongoing. Last fall, we adopted "core faculty" as the term for all budgeted instructors in the unit and began a series of monthly research colloquia



where faculty present their work and receive support from our vibrant intellectual community.

New Officers for Fall 2025:

Dr. Scott Larson (Lecturer IV) serves as our new Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS). Scott also sits on LSA's Curriculum Committee, and he and AC's Undergraduate Committee are working hard to grow our undergraduate enrollments, majors, and minors.

Professor Susan Najita continues as Director of Graduate Studies for two more years, aided by Graduate Coordinator **Katia Kitchen**. Congratulations to the Graduate Program for winning support from Rackham's Faculty Allies program and for creating new resources for doctoral students, faculty, and Graduate Student Instructors.

Professor Stephen Berrey serves as Associate Chair this fall, with **Bethany Hughes** stepping into the role in winter.

With many colleagues on research leaves this year, we thank all those who have volunteered their support for the many tasks we must accomplish.

Ethnic Studies Programs

Our ethnic studies programs, which presented two exciting symposia last academic year sponsored by a Mellon Foundation grant AC received in 2023, welcome several new directors:

Professor Amy Stillman leads **Native American Studies (NAS)** this fall, with **Professor Bethany Hughes** taking on the role in Winter 2026. NAS has applied to change its name to **Native and Indigenous American Studies (NAIS)** to better reflect the scholarship, teaching, and developments in the field.

Professor Melissa Borja has assumed leadership of Asian/Pacific Islander American (A/PIA) Studies.

Professor Charlotte Karem Albrecht directs the Arab and Muslim American Studies (AMAS) program

Professor William Calvo-Quirós leads Latino/a Studies.

Our fantastic temporary program support staff member, **Kailee Lewis**, worked tirelessly last year on events and streamlining administrative support for all these programs. In November, she has shifted to the permanent position of Student Services Assistant and we thank her for continuing to make AC even better as part of our intrepid staff team.

Since August, we have been fortunate to work with temporary Chief Administrator **Jeff Craft** and Executive Assistant **Ann Titus**.

Recently our staff team was joined by **Lois Hunter** in the role of Executive Assistant and **LaToya Sherman** who is starting as the American Culture Chief Administrator in January 2026

New Faculty

We welcome two new colleagues this academic year who will offer new courses and enrich our intellectual community:

Associate Professor Regina Mills joins Latino/a Studies, teaching in the fields of Afro-Latino literary cultures and online gaming.

Sylvia Ryerson, a Michigan Society of Fellows awardee, will contribute to teaching on media in working-class, Appalachian carceral communities.

Faculty Scholarship and Tenure

I am excited to report that we have completed a manuscript workshop for **Professor Cherry Meyer**, jointly appointed in AC/NAS and Linguistics, and have sent two tenure cases to the college: **Professor Umayyah Cable** (AC/AMAS/FTVM) and **Professor Ian Shin** (AC/A/PIA/History). Their recently published books — *Mainstreaming Palestine* (University of Minnesota Press) and *Imperial Stewards*, (Stanford University Press) respectively—add to the rich roster of faculty publications continuing our tradition of excellent and groundbreaking scholarship.

Recent Faculty Publications:

Clare Croft

Jill Johnston in Motion: Dance, Writing, and Lesbian Life (Duke University Press 2024)





The Essential Jill Johnston Reader - edited by Clare Croft-
(Duke University Press)

Matthew M.L. Fletcher

Stick Houses: Stories
(Michigan State UP, 2025)

Bethany Hughes,

Redface: Race, Performance, and Indigeneity
(New York University Press, 2024)

*Awards: The Labriola Center's National Book Award, The
2024 George Freedley Memorial Award for "exemplary
work in the field of live theatre or performance." and The
Association for Theater in Higher Education Award.*

Lisa Nakamura et al:

Technoskepticism: Between Possibility and Refusal
(Stanford UP, 2025)

Magdalena J. Zaborowska:

James Baldwin: The Life Album (Yale UP, 2025)

Graduate Student Achievements

A huge batch of faculty and graduate student prize winners make us proud. (see page 21)



Faculty Honors:

Professors *Stephen Berrey, Umayyah Cable, and Nancy Khalil*, along with *Ph.D. candidate Pau Nava*, received the coveted UM Institute for the Humanities Fellowship for 2024-25.

Professor Juan Cole recently won the Michigan Humanities Award, and has been named the Richard P. Mitchell Distinguished University Professor of History.

Looking ahead

We are training all our students to thrive in a globally connected world that requires thorough knowledge of new culture industries, dexterity to smartly apply rapidly changing technology to their learning needs, and continued understanding of the movements, circuits, migrations, meanings, and lessons of social and cultural differences among peoples that make us all a rich human tribe.

American Culture continues to be a fantastic place to learn, to teach, to exchange ideas, and to produce new knowledge. We are all in this together, and we thrive on collaboration and intellectual exploration. No matter our challenging times, AC is continuing to make the world better! ||

*Warmly and in solidarity,
Magdalena J. Zaborowska
Chair, Department of American Culture*



The Department of American Culture turns 90!

Want to help us celebrate?

In 2026, the Department of American Culture will mark its 90th anniversary! We are planning a year of celebrations that highlight the history, vitality, and future of American and ethnic studies at Michigan. Our commemorations will include major events and a year-long series of profiles of our remarkable alumni.

The community will gather to reflect on the accomplishments of the past 90 years, celebrating the enduring impact of American Culture and the broader fields of American Ethnic Studies. Looking ahead, participants will imagine the future of these disciplines, charting a path for continued growth and relevance.

Our Celebration begins in Spring 2026, April 2nd & 3rd

Thursday, April 2, 2026

Will launch the anniversary year on campus with our annual **Betty Ch'maj Distinguished American Culture Lecture**. We are thrilled to announce that **Professor George J. Sánchez** will deliver the Ch'maj lecture.

Professor Sánchez is a leading scholar of American studies and ethnicity, as well as history, at the University of Southern California, where he serves as Vice Dean for Diversity and Strategic Initiatives in the Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences. A former Chair of American Culture at Michigan in the early 2000s, he was instrumental in shaping the model of American Studies that has defined our department. His lecture will reflect on that history—examining the strengths and limitations of Michigan's model, and considering how it has influenced the field nationally.

Friday, April 3, 2026

On April 3rd, students, alumni, and faculty will gather for a day of conversations and presentations reflecting on 90

years of innovation in American Culture and imagining the future of American and ethnic studies. Graduates of our PhD program will come back to campus to participate in these Friday panels with current graduate students and faculty.

Both days will also feature poster sessions showcasing research by undergraduate and graduate students.

The Celebrations continue: Fall 2026

We will continue the celebration at the **American Studies Association (ASA) annual conference in Chicago, IL**.

For decades, Michigan's Department of American Culture has been a vital presence at ASA. To honor that history, we will host a 90th anniversary reception bringing together alumni, faculty, current students, and colleagues. This will be an opportunity to reconnect, celebrate, and envision the next chapter of our collective work.

Celebrating Our Alumni: 90 Stories for 90 Years

Our alumni are at the heart of our story. Beginning in **January 2026**, we will launch a social media campaign featuring **90 profiles** drawn from our extraordinary network of more than 1,700 American Culture alumni.

These profiles—researched and curated by brilliant AC graduate student **Mica Nimkarn**—will highlight the diverse paths, contributions, and achievements of our graduates. Follow along on Instagram as we celebrate their stories and the impact of an American Culture education.

Join us throughout 2026 as we honor the past, celebrate the present, and shape the future of American Culture at The University of Michigan!



Professor George J. Sánchez



April 2, 2026 | 7PM | Palmer Commons Great Lakes Room





Serving our Undergraduate Students in American Culture



Scott Larson

|| Hello readers, I'm excited to take this small corner to introduce myself and my new role as Director of Undergraduate Studies in American Culture.

My name is Scott Larson, and I have served as the undergraduate advisor for American Culture since I came to the University of Michigan in 2017 after completing my PhD in American Studies at The George Washington University in Washington DC. Over these past years, I've worked with students across all of the majors and minors in our program, and this year I was also elected to the LSA curriculum committee. Over the past years, I've also been fortunate to supervise seven cohorts of American Culture honors students, some of whom have gone on to complete PhD dissertations on work begun as undergraduates in our department!

This year I'm also stepping into the role of Director of Undergraduate Studies, which has been a wonderful opportunity to expand my work with undergraduate education in American Culture. As director, I'm working to enhance our recruitment and support of undergraduate majors and minors and also to support faculty development of exciting courses that help prepare our students to pursue a wide range of career interests. Our undergraduates have an extraordinary range of career goals from community organizing, education, law, and public policy to museum and library work, and more!

The most wonderful part of my job is always working with our undergraduate students, and I'm joined in my work by **Cel Torres**, who is an undergraduate peer advisor this year in American Culture and Ethnic Studies. Cel is a senior diving deep into the captivating worlds of political science, communications, and media, and is a vocal advocate of the American Culture department. They are a proud graduate of Cesar Chavez Academy High School in the vibrant Southwest Detroit and joined UMI with the Summer Bridge Scholars Program in 2022. Cel is now busy recruiting and advising new students to our program while applying to graduate schools.

Scott Larson Lecturer IV; AC Undergraduate Advisor



Some of our work this year includes organizing a "**So you want to go to graduate school**" lunch where students can get firsthand information from panelists with a range of different graduate school experience and expertise. In conjunction with the upcoming 90th Anniversary of the American Culture Department, we're also planning to connect our current students to a range of our outstanding Alumni. I'm proud to be part of the 90th year of Undergraduate education in American Culture, and looking forward to building a vibrant future in the department. ||

Cel Torres, Undergraduate Peer Advisor



More Than a Field of Study!

How Latina/o Studies at U of M expands our understanding of America



Professor William Calvo-Quirós teaches a class on monsters. Not just the kind with fangs and claws, but also those that haunt America's past—the violence of discrimination based on race, class, and gender that still shapes our present. As he tells his students haunted houses in horror movies can only break their curse by understanding the origin of the act of violence that created the curse only the return to the origins of the violence, perform a ritual, and change people's behavior. How can this 'method' be used to heal, to unify our nation?

"America is haunted by our past," he says. "We will not change if we don't embrace laws and practices that help people recognize each other, to get into contact with each other. But we also need to educate each other."

As the new director of Latina/o Studies at Michigan, Professor Calvo-Quirós brings this unflinching honesty to his vision for the program. Latina/o Studies isn't just about understanding one community—it's about understanding what it means to be American in the 21st century.

An Integral Part of America

There are 68 million Latines in the United States. That's more than the entire population of Italy. Yet many students arrive at Michigan never having learned about Latina/o history, culture, or contributions during their K-12 education—despite Latine helping define America even before the nation took its current shape.

"We are an integral part of who we are as America," Professor Calvo-Quirós emphasizes. "Despite being such an intricate part, most students had not received any education about the history, or the present, or the value of Latino's culture"

That moment of discovery—when students first encounter Latina/o Studies—becomes transformative. *"One of the first things we encounter is this sense of 'Oh, my story matters. My family life matters,"* he explains. Through their history, as well as the struggles surrounding lowrider cars, the myth of the chupacabra, and the significance of the Virgen de Guadalupe—suddenly, students realize that their lived experiences have academic significance.

This recognition infuses students with enthusiasm. They're not just learning about a culture that's always new, constantly evolving, always adapting. They're learning about themselves, their families, and their place in American history.

Beyond Undergraduates

Latina/o Studies at Michigan serves a constituency far larger in scope and intent. The program offers a major, a minor for undergraduates, as well as a certificate for graduate students. However, its reach extends into communities, families, and professional fields across the country.

Professor Calvo-Quirós describes a student who took his Latinas in the United States class and interviewed her mother for the final project. Years later, her sister enrolled in the same course. *"She said, 'I saw how wonderful it was for my sister to interview with my mom. We talked, and it helped us understand the sacrifice my mom had made. But I can't interview my mom because my sister has already done so. I'm going to interview my grandma.'"*

This multi-generational impact extends beyond individual families. Latina/o Studies graduates work throughout Michigan's administration at multiple levels. Alumni lead Latino departments and research institutes at major universities—like Dolores Inés Casillas (an alumna of the AC graduate program), who researched the intersection of sound, radio, and Latino culture in Los Angeles and now directs Chicana and Chicano Studies at UC Santa Barbara. Others have become crucial scholars across disciplines, from psychology and feminist studies to law and education. *"The stories about the influence of those who have gone through the University of Michigan go beyond what we'll probably ever know,"* Calvo-Quirós reflects.

The Challenge of Change

But the program faces real challenges. In the past decade, 60-65% of Latina/o Studies faculty have moved to other universities. While such transitions are natural in academia, they create curricular gaps and require constant adaptation. *"One challenge is us,"* Calvo-Quirós acknowledges candidly. *"We need to figure out how to adapt. How does a program adapt?"* The rise of AI has changed how students learn. As he explains, the demographics of Latina/o communities continue to evolve, shifting from the Mexican-American and Puerto Rican experiences, to the recognition of students whose families come from Central America, specifically Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador; but also those who are from the Caribbean, and South America... as well as those who are bi-racial and bi-cultural.

"If we don't have a curriculum that recognizes them, we have failed them," he says. *"We emphasize the notion of tacit exclusion, highlighting that they feel unwelcome, unrecognized, and invisible."*





The broader challenge involves making the case for why ethnic studies matters—for example, to students in fields like engineering or law whose parents might ask, "What are you going to do with an American Studies degree? You need to be a lawyer, a doctor, or an engineer, because we need to pay the bills."



Professor Calvo-Quirós's answer is practical: understanding culture makes you better at any profession. *"If you're a lawyer, you're going to encounter diversity not only in terms of the body of lawyers that you have, but also in your clients. If you're sensitive about culture, you may understand that the law may be applied equally to everybody, but people are different. That same law is interpreted one way, or felt differently, because of culture or personal history."*



Associate Professor William Calvo-Quirós, Director of Latina/o Studies

color, the only Latino, at that moment, the border becomes that person."

This expanded understanding of borders helps students recognize how they navigate multiple worlds daily. Geography alone can't define the Latine experience. Not when Facebook reaches South America, not when a non-Hispanic/Latino couple adopts a child from Guatemala, not when Hollywood and East L.A. sit a few miles apart but occupy different universes. As he adds, *"Culture, race, and ethnicity, as well as class, gender, and the notions of citizenship, always contextualize people's notions of the border and otherness."*

"We're in difficult times because we're in times of transformation," Calvo-Quirós says. "But transformation can be good, and crises can be good, because crisis signifies that the world as it is, is not working, and we need to do something about it."

Community-Engaged Learning

The program also incorporates a practical component. Students take internships with community organizations, where they learn to apply classroom knowledge in practice. In one of his classes, they've created Google Maps documenting murals in Lansing, complete with artist information and historical context, demonstrating the beauty of Latino heritage in Michigan.

Faculty work extends beyond campus—creating connections with ethnic studies programs at other Michigan universities, implementing policies to support communities, and contributing to K-12 curriculum development. The work recognizes that Latina/o Studies serves not only students but also their families and communities.

This year, the program has brought together on its Latino Studies board not only staff, faculty, and students, but also individuals who have previously attended the University of Michigan. *"Alumni are like windows that keep us connected to the world outside," Professor Calvo-Quirós explains. "They keep us fresh. They bring what is happening."*

Living within the Border

One of Latino Studies' most powerful insights involves rethinking what "border" means. It's not just the political line dividing nations, for example, the United States and Mexico. The border appears in Chicago during immigration conflicts, even though Chicago sits as far from the U.S.-Mexico border. It exists in Detroit's Mexicantown—near the Canadian border, not Mexico, yet, *"when you drive in that neighborhood, you are in some piece of Mexico, in some piece of Latin America. For us, the border is people's bodies and the practices (real and imaginary) around them,"* Professor Calvo-Quirós explains. *"If a student is in an engineering class and he or she is the only person of*

The Latine alumni community recently gathered for an open house and football tailgate—two days of celebrations, food, and reconnection. *"It was so wonderful to see some of those students now with children, thinking about how they're going to succeed, what's going to happen with their kids,"* he recalls. *"They are part of who we are."*

An Evolving Identity

Even the terminology continues to evolve: Hispanic, Latino, Latina, Latine, Chicano, Boricua, Nuyorican, Latinx, and Centro-American Americans. Each term reflects a growing understanding of the community's complexity.



Language can't unify the community—not everyone speaks Spanish, and many Latines speak Portuguese, French, or English. Religion doesn't work either—there are Muslim, Jewish, and non-religious Latines. Class doesn't capture it. Neither does the traditional family model, which excludes queer experiences and chosen families.

"Part of the evolution of the field has been expanding to include all these people," Professor Calvo-Quirós notes. The program has adapted, to recognize intersecting identities—gender, sexual orientation, class, religion, disability, and English as a Second Language (ESL) status.

"It's like a diamond with many facets," he explains. "Depending on where you are, different facets take precedence over the other. At one point, my identity as a faculty member is more salient. Another moment, it's being Latino, or an immigrant, or ESL. But they are all part of who I am as an American

Creating Space for Dialogue

Perhaps the program's most important work involves creating space for difficult conversations in polarized times. Many students arrive at Michigan encountering people different from themselves for the first time—not through TV or films, but in real life. The stereotypes they've absorbed collide with actual human complexity.

"Part of the work we do is going to the encounter of these students where they are. We need to talk with all students, because America is a large community of people who need to live together, to recognize differences, and we want to bring the best of each one." Professor Calvo-Quirós says.

In highly polarized times, talking about differences feels dangerous. Students don't know how to embrace these difficulties. "We need to move beyond cancel culture to an embracing culture and forgiving culture. Let's ask questions, figure things out. Sometimes we will make mistakes."

The program creates space where students can be vulnerable, ask hard questions, make mistakes, learn, and recognize that the majority of children born in the United States today come from mixed-race parents into a mixed-race cultural experience. It also helps them understand that dialogue and recognition of difference will be essential for every community, institution, or corporation to survive.

"You cannot understand America if you don't understand the struggles and the beauty of dialogue among us, because we're different," Professor Calvo-Quirós insists.

Looking Ahead

Latino Studies at Michigan stands at an exciting inflection point. With new leadership, renewed alumni engagement, and a clear vision, the program is positioned to meet this moment of transformation. The challenges are real—faculty transitions, evolving student needs, societal polarization—but so are the opportunities.

"We're just in that unique time," Professor Calvo-Quirós says with characteristic optimism. The program continues to adapt, to expand its understanding of what it means to be Latino, to train students for fields from engineering to law to the arts, to conduct research that shapes how America understands itself.

For prospective students wondering whether Latina/o Studies matters for their career, for alumni seeking ways to stay connected, and for faculty across disciplines looking to understand contemporary America, the program offers something essential. Not just knowledge about one community, but insight into how we navigate difference, build understanding, and create a future where everyone belongs.

As Professor Calvo-Quirós puts it simply: "*Latina/o Studies is more than just about students and faculty. It includes this vast community, including people who have already graduated and moved to other places.*" It's a program that recognizes students not as isolated individuals but as members of families, communities, and a rapidly changing nation that needs their perspectives now more than ever.

The work of exorcising America's haunted house via love, care, dialogue, understanding, and justice continues. Latino Studies at Michigan is doing its part—one student, one family, one conversation at a time.

LATINA/O STUDIES COURSE REQUIREMENTS

LATINA/O STUDIES MAJOR (30 CR)

LATINOAM 213: Intro to Latina/o Studies
AMCULT 498 Capstone - Choose your own "Track"

- Comparative ethnic studies
- Gender & sexuality
- Migration & transnationalism
- Community Engagement
- Arts and Media

LATINA/O STUDIES MINOR (15 CR)

5 Courses
ASIANPAM 213: Intro to Latina/o Studies
4 electives
Courses can fulfill Distribution & College Requirements
Share 1 course with a major



This conversation occurred between Events and Communication Coordinator Sandor Matyas Fazakas and Professor William Calvo-Quirós via Zoom in December 2020.





Leading the Way: A Conversation About Asian Pacific Islander American Studies at Michigan

As one of the nation's premier programs in Asian Pacific Islander American Studies, the University of Michigan's A/PIA Studies program stands at an important crossroads. We sat down with Professor Manan Desai, (M Desai) the outgoing director, and Professor Melissa Borja (M Borja), the incoming director, to discuss what makes this program special, the challenges and opportunities ahead, and why ethnic studies matters now more than ever.

What are A/PIA Studies?

M Desai: In a very simple way, Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies engages the lives and histories of people of Asian and Pacific Islander descent in the United States. That can be through immigration, or through colonialism, in the case of many of the Pacific Islands. It is a distinct field from area studies, which stems from an interest in those Asian nations in and of themselves.

It's pretty simple to articulate because it's about Asian Americans who found themselves in the United States, and that history is diverse. With Pacific Islander studies, it's a little bit more complicated because there are stories of immigration, but it's also about the U.S. Empire in the Pacific. That itself is a distinct field that sometimes we have to articulate.

M Borja: I think one thing we can and should continue to do is emphasize that the Asian Pacific Islander American experience at the University of Michigan is the University of Michigan experience. In other words, we can't separate out the fact that Asian Pacific Islander Americans have been part of this university's story in the past and continue to be a vital part of it.

story of Asian Pacific Islander American life is not limited to California and New York. Asian Americans are here in the Midwest, and we bring an important perspective, a reminder that our communities are everywhere, we're thriving everywhere, and we're a powerful presence everywhere.

Looking at the undergraduate experience, what has been most inspiring about working with students in this program?

M Desai: One particular scholarly project really stands out. About five or six years ago, a group of students active in the United Asian American Organizations noticed a significant gap in our records: there wasn't much historical material documenting Asian American life and activism on campus.

Taking the initiative, students like **Anna Dang** ('20), **James Lee** ('20), **Mira Simonton Chao** ('23), **Chelsea Padilla** ('23), and **Aarushi Ganguly** ('24) led the charge to change that. With support from colleagues like **Marie Ting, Ian, Melissa,** and myself, they collaborated with the Bentley and U of M Libraries to secure funding—including support from A/PIA Studies—to build a digital collection. It's now live on the library website and continues to grow. What makes this special is that it wasn't a faculty-led mandate; these undergraduates created a primary resource that the entire academic community now uses. It's a wonderful legacy left by our alumni.

M Borja: I agree. I constantly see examples of our faculty teaching students to be thoughtful, responsible, and caring

What drew you to A/PIA Studies at Michigan?

M Borja: I had no idea when I was growing up that the University of Michigan had one of the best programs and communities of scholars dedicated to the study of Asian Pacific Islander American life. I think it's interesting that, as someone who grew up as an Asian American in the 1980s and 1990s in Michigan—which was a time when there was a lot of anti-Asian racism—it would be the University of Michigan that would call me back to do teaching, research, and leadership around Asian Pacific Islander American issues.

I'm really proud to be directing this program because it is one of the best in the country, and it's in my home state. I also think it's exceptional because it shows us that the

Professor Amy Stillman's last hula class December 2025.



community members. The broader impact of our program is most visible in what our students achieve after they graduate. For instance, I recently ran into a former student in Washington, D.C., who is now working at A/PIA Vote, an organization dedicated to Asian American civic engagement. Seeing her work was a powerful reminder that our students are our most significant intervention in the broader world.

What draws students to A/PIA Studies today?

M Desai: Very simply, it's the courses. If students find our courses and get to explore themes and questions around race, history, colonialism, and identity—how one's identity is intersected by and shaped by these larger forces—I think that usually draws students in. A course I would highlight is Amy Stillman's hula class, which I think is an amazing class and we'll never be able to replace. That's a course that really introduces students who may have connections to Native Hawaiian culture, but many students don't. They come away not only learning these elements of hula but also the broader history of it, the culture behind it, and its meaning.

M Borja: I think the greatest value that we bring to the department, to the university, and to our communities is the fact that this program comprises really brilliant, decent, and good human beings. My colleagues are amazing people who are talented, generous, and kind. This is why people keep coming back when they take a course with us. Our faculty and graduate students are passionate about teaching, mentoring, and lifting the next generation of leaders in this field, and we invest heavily in those relationships.

The University of Michigan is big, and time and time again, I encounter students who say, "I wish I had found A/PIA Studies earlier, because I have found teachers and mentors and life guides who have had a really meaningful impact on my development as a scholar and as a human being." I hear this over and over again.

Can you share a memorable story about how students have carried forward what they learned?

M Borja: I have a funny story. I had a former student who was deeply involved in research on Asian American issues. She first wandered into my class as a first-year student. She thought she had signed up for a freshman seminar on the history of the internet. It was an error—she ended up in my course instead, which was about a completely different topic. But she stayed because she liked the people.

She ended up doing really well in the course. She worked with me as a research assistant for four years. She co-authored a peer-reviewed journal article with me. She presented her research at the Association for Asian American Studies conference in Denver as a junior in college. She got a Fulbright, and she's now studying for her PhD in London. She has flourished because of the investment that our faculty made in her development and growth.

How are you fostering community among students and connecting with alumni?

M Borja: We've undertaken some new efforts in the past couple of years that I hope to continue. Things like making sure that we have moments to gather together and build relationships with one another as a community. Especially after the pandemic, so many of us were hungering for reconnection after being apart for so long.

We have gatherings where we simply have a meal together. But also gatherings where we can celebrate each other's scholarship. One of our colleagues just published a book this summer, and we'll have a chance to celebrate that accomplishment. We've also benefited as a community in the past by sharing works in progress. For example, graduate students sharing proposals that they're working on for an upcoming conference. Working together as a community to refine our ideas and support one another is really important.

M Desai: Joey Song, a PhD candidate in English, implemented something that brought together undergraduates and graduates in a shared symposium of research. It wound up being a symposium that has happened twice—first in 2023, and most recently earlier this year. It's now called PEARS, and it was an opportunity for undergraduates and graduate students to present their research.

That was really cool because it became a way for undergraduates to understand what graduate education in ethnic studies looks like. What does it mean to do research in these fields? What does it mean to present it? It was a really fantastic event that brought together undergraduates, graduates, faculty, and other community members to share the research that we do, rather than just a cultural event. It was about showcasing the creation of knowledge.





How are alumni staying connected to the program?

M Desai: In the past year, credit to the Alumni Association—the University of Michigan Asian and Asian American alumni group. They recognized the work that A/PIA Studies does, especially the public-facing work that colleagues like Ian Shin and Melissa Borja were doing around COVID-19 and anti-Asian discrimination. That got on the radar of a lot of alumni, some who may not even have been ethnic studies or A/PIA Studies alumni, but who felt an affinity to the work we do.



That group actually helped create an endowment for A/PIA Studies. That was a huge thing for us. That endowment supports student education in A/PIA Studies. One opportunity is to find creative ways to use that funding to support student efforts.

M Borja: The University of Michigan has the most faithful, loyal alumni I have ever encountered in my life. I say this as someone who teaches at Camp Michigania every summer, which is a family camp for alumni. People love the University of Michigan because it is an example of excellence at a time when we need excellence. I've always been impressed by how eager U of M alumni are to support this amazing institution.

One thing that's been super exciting to me is seeing how Asian American alumni have been activated in the past few years. One of the most important things I hope to do as A/PIA Studies Director is continue telling stories about the work we're doing, the success of our students, the groundbreaking research of our faculty, and the commitment we all have to our community. When people know what's actually happening, they are even more enthusiastic about supporting the university and its programs.

Can you give an example of how alumni are engaging with the community?

M Borja: Curtis Chin, who went to Michigan, is the author of the book *"Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant,"* which has gotten a lot of attention in the past year. I was recently moderating a book talk he gave here in Indiana, which was co-sponsored by the Alumni Association and organized by an Asian American alum of the University of Michigan. It was really cool to see this celebration of Asian American literary success in Carmel, Indiana.

I was gratified to see that the book was actually chosen as the book of the summer by Camp Michigania. I just loved seeing that all these Michigan alumni gathered to relax and have fun at Lake Walloon in Northern Michigan were reading a book about someone reflecting on their experience as an Asian American person in Michigan.



What are the biggest challenges facing students in ethnic-studies today?

M Desai: I think there are some practical challenges for undergraduates first to find our courses, to realize that there are courses in something like Asian Pacific Islander American Studies. High school education for most students doesn't include things like that, so they don't know to look for it.

The other challenge is that I've noticed among our undergraduates: some students double-major with a minor—they're trying to maximize their tuition dollars to get as many degrees as possible. As a result, there's a lot of financial pressure on students to come away with something practical. One of the challenges is to show students that learning ethnic studies and being involved in these fields can benefit them, regardless of the field they choose. You don't have to become an ethnic studies professor. You might be involved in museums or libraries, or you might become a doctor, but you have a certain insight into the frameworks that help us better understand the communities we live in.

M Borja: There are a lot of challenges facing us right now from a lot of different vantage points. We're living in a time when Asian American communities and Pacific Islander communities are seeing institutions that are important to them undermined, institutions that do such basic things as making sure they can vote, have health care, and have access to resources to help them become citizens and be safe. There's a lot of political chaos right now.

How are you helping students navigate these challenges?

M Borja: My biggest commitment right now in helping our students navigate this moment is to give them, number one, hope, and, number two, practical skills for responding positively and productively to these challenges.

I think if you live in this moment, it can be easy to feel demoralized, adrift, and overwhelmed with worry and anxiety. But it's very fortifying to stop and take a moment to learn from our ancestors and from our predecessors.



Japanese Americans who were incarcerated during the Second World War faced all sorts of injustice, and they found all kinds of creative ways to insist on fair treatment, their rights, and their dignity. They came out on the other end carrying those commitments forward by standing up for the rights and fair treatment of different communities. It's really powerful for us to learn about our past, to draw lessons and inspiration from that, and think about how we can apply those lessons to our current moment. It's like a blueprint—people have survived hard times before, and we can learn from them.

In terms of practical things, I am a very practice-oriented professor. My two courses this semester are both community-engaged. In my community service and learning class, my students have internships with community organizations that do great work in southeastern Michigan, organizations like Mexican-town Development, Rising Voices, and ACCESS. Through our courses, students have the chance to work in a community organization and learn how they are running issue campaigns on the ground and delivering social services. There is nothing more powerful than a learning experience than actually doing. We gain clarity and wisdom through doing.

I teach students practical skills for talking with people across the boundaries of political difference. I teach workshops on how to counter disinformation and misinformation. I teach students skills for self-reflection on how to be involved in community work and how to assess where their interests and values align with the needs in the world. I teach them how to have one-on-one conversations with other people to better understand what their community members need and value. These are skills that will serve them well, both professionally and as good community members and citizens.

What excites you most about the future of A/PIA Studies at Michigan?

M Borja: The thing that is most exciting to me is the awareness that different players in our A/PIA Studies community—the students, the faculty, and alumni—have a greater understanding of the importance of our program and the value we bring to our communities and the broader world.

I find it really exciting that amid the chaos of this moment, we are still thriving, that we're here and going strong, and we're a lead

M Desai: It's hard to predict the future. Students constantly surprise us with their initiatives. I couldn't have predicted that undergraduates would feel invested in documenting the history of Asian Americans. Still, they did it, and that led to the creation of a digital collection at the U of M Library, which in turn led to different courses and to integrating those materials into new classes. That was not something I could have predicted. Following what students are paying attention to usually helps us move forward.

Looking Ahead

The transition from Professor Desai to Professor Borja represents not just a change in leadership, but a continuity of values—a commitment to listening to students, honoring the past while building the future, and maintaining the program's position as one of the nation's premier centers for Asian Pacific Islander American Studies.

As Professor Borja noted, this is a moment that calls for both hope and action, for drawing on the resilience of past generations while equipping the next generation with the tools they need to meet the challenges ahead. And as Professor Desai's tenure demonstrated, some of the most powerful innovations come from students themselves when given the support and space to pursue their passions.

The story of A/PIA Studies at Michigan is, ultimately, a story about community—about faculty who care deeply about their students, students who push boundaries and create new knowledge, and alumni who remain connected to and invested in the program's continued success. It's a story that belongs not just to Asian Pacific Islander Americans, but to everyone who believes in the transformative power of education and the importance of understanding our diverse histories and experiences.

As the program moves into its next chapter, one thing is clear: the future of A/PIA Studies at Michigan is bright, built on a foundation of excellence, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to serving students and communities.

A/PIA COURSE REQUIREMENTS

ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN STUDIES MINOR (15 CR)

5 Courses

ASIANPAM 214: Intro to A/PIA Studies

4 electives

Courses can fulfill Distribution & College Requirements

Share 1 course with a major



Manan Desai Associate Professor





Why Didn't We Learn This Before?

Four surprising truths about The Native American Studies (NAS) Program



For many of us, our K-12 education on Native American history and culture was a brief and disconnected series of facts, often "boiled down to a couple of programs" during a heritage month rather than a sustained exploration. This "token, superficial" glance at centuries of complex history, vibrant cultures, and contemporary realities leaves significant gaps in understanding and empathy that one can carry into adulthood.



A university education presents a profound opportunity to fill those gaps. Yet, within the vast catalog of courses at a large institution, many students remain unaware of the transformative knowledge that lies just outside their chosen major. They may not realize that fields like ethnic studies offer not just historical context but also dynamic, urgent perspectives that are shaping modern society.

In a recent interview, Professor Amy Stillman, the Director of the Native American Studies program, shared several powerful insights into the undergraduate experience in the field. Her observations reveal the profound impact these courses have on students, the surprising challenges programs face, and the exciting future that lies in connecting ancient knowledge with modern problems. Here are four key takeaways that challenge what we think we know about ethnic studies today.

For Many Students, It's a Radical and Mind-Blowing First Encounter. For a significant number of undergraduates, enrolling in a Native American Studies course marks their first "detailed and sustained exposure" to the histories, cultures, and populations of Indigenous peoples. The opportunity to engage with books and articles written by Native American scholars is often a radical experience, one that stands in stark contrast to anything they encountered before college.

This deep dive is often "mind-blowing" because the field itself is so dynamic. For Professor Stillman, the excitement is twofold: she sees the impact on her students, and she gets to teach a body of scholarship that is vibrantly contemporary. "Many of these readings that I assign have been written only in the last 10 to 15 years," she notes. "So none of this was available when I was a graduate student." This context adds another layer to the students' common, powerful reaction — the discovery of a whole world of knowledge that is not only new to them, but sometimes new to academia itself.

NAS COURSE REQUIREMENTS

NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES MINOR (15CR)

- 5 Courses
- 1 intro course
- 4 electives

Courses can fulfill Distribution & College Requirements

Share 1 course with a major.

"...the question we get so often, and this goes across the board for the ethnic studies programs, is *Why didn't we learn about this? Why do I not know about this?*"

The Program's Biggest Challenge Isn't Apathy, It's Visibility

"...one of our challenges is that by the time they find the intro course, they're in their senior year. They have no time to finish enough courses for the minor, you know. So how do we reach students?"

Contrary to what some might assume, the primary challenge facing Native American Studies isn't a lack of student interest; it's a "visibility problem." Students from every corner of campus—including the Ross Business School or the College of Engineering—are drawn to the field. The issue is that undergraduates often focus their time on *popular majors* that are thought to be good tracks for getting into good jobs, and they discover these courses too late.

Professor Stillman notes it's common for students to find an introductory course in their senior year, with no time left to pursue the minor. The solution isn't convincing students of the field's value, but reaching them earlier through student recruitment and first-year orientation. When a program fails to address these types of visibility problems, more than just a minor is lost. It represents a missed opportunity for a truly well-rounded education, where future engineers and business leaders graduate without the critical perspectives that could inform a more sustainable and just world.

Traditional Knowledge is Proving Invaluable in Modern Fields

There is a growing interest in Native American Studies from an unexpected quarter: students in STEM and environmental fields. Undergraduates studying ecology and sustainability are increasingly recognizing that Indigenous knowledge systems offer practical, time-tested



approaches for their future professions in areas such as natural resources management and land management.

This trend highlights a powerful convergence of disciplines. As Professor Stillman explains, students "are beginning to find out that there are courses in Native American and Indigenous knowledge systems" that can connect directly to their scientific training. The value of ethnic studies, then, is not as a theoretical, humanistic discipline, but as an active, exciting nexus where ancient wisdom and modern professional training meet to solve contemporary problems. It's a moment of discovery that students are just now beginning to unlock.

Society is beginning to recognize that Indigenous knowledge is highly valuable across various fields. Yet they're only beginning to realize that there are courses in Native American languages and Indigenous knowledge systems.

The Future of the Field Lies in Connecting What's Already There

Large research universities are hubs of innovation, but their size can lead to "silos," where incredible, related work happens in isolation. This internal fragmentation is the institutional counterpart to the "visibility problem" students face; the knowledge exists, but the pathways to connect it are underdeveloped.



Amy Stillman Arthur F. Thurnau Professor; Outgoing Director of Native American Studies

Professor Stillman points to two clear examples: The University's botanical gardens are running a project that engages students and community members in "plantings of indigenous plants." Yet, she notes, "the connection hasn't yet been made between the botanical gardens program and the students and teachers in the classroom, who learn and teach about indigenous culture and practices and it should. It needs to."



A major Ojibwe language research project exists at the School of Education, but the Native American Studies program, which has its own language group, only recently learned of it. Discovering it sparked an immediate realization that it would be "a natural thing to bring these groups together."



The vision, therefore, is not about creating new resources from scratch, but about becoming institutional weavers, strategically connecting the vibrant threads that already exist to create a stronger, more coherent educational fabric.



By building partnerships—combining Indigenous studies expertise with botany knowledge, for example—the university can create richer, more impactful learning experiences.

Looking Beyond Your Major

The insights from Professor Stillman paint a clear picture: fields like Native American Studies are dynamic, relevant, and offer transformative perspectives hidden in plain sight. The future of a meaningful education depends on actively seeking these connections—between disciplines, between modern professions and ancient wisdom, and between the disparate parts of the university itself.

The undergraduate experience is at its richest not when it is confined to a single track, but when it crosses boundaries to create a more complete education. It leaves one to wonder: What essential knowledge might be waiting for you just one classroom over from your required courses?

**Eko niizhwaasmidana-shi-nswi-nsa-bboonigag,
gii-Nishinaabemowin bi-kinoomaadim zhinda
kinoomaagegamigoong.**

**Wiijigaabwitooshinang aabjita'aang
wii-ni-kendamaang nda-nweninaa.**

**If you would like to read this last paragraph,
enroll in our introductory Ojibwe class in Fall 2026**





Building Community, Creating Space A Conversation with Charlotte Karem Albrecht, Director of Arab and Muslim American Studies



As the new director of the Arab and Muslim American Studies (AMAS) program, Professor Charlotte Karem Albrecht brings both scholarly expertise and personal connection to her role. An associate professor of American Culture and Women's and Gender Studies, Karem Albrecht is a historian of sexuality, gender, and race in Arab American communities. She is also Lebanese American herself and often incorporates her family history into her classroom. We sat down with her to discuss what makes AMAS unique, the challenges facing ethnic studies today, and her vision for connecting students and alumni.

What draws students to Arab and Muslim American Studies? What makes it stand out in the landscape of university education?

I believe one of the most important aspects of ethnic studies that attracts students is its ability to offer meaningful frameworks for understanding the world. For some, this might be their own experience, but all of them tend to recognize the importance of the theories, ideas, and histories in our fields because they are living with them.

The classroom environment is unique and different from other fields in several ways. It enables students to confront challenges they haven't been able to address before. I believe it is especially important because of its overall impact on people's lives, how it influences their growth as individuals, helps them find their place in the world, and shapes how they connect with others.

Another aspect that draws students in is a sense of community, especially if they're lacking it elsewhere.

As the new director, what inspires you most about this program?

AMAS is trying to build up an intellectual and social community, but we really do have a legacy, a history as a space building for students. The students who are minoring in the program really feel that and want more of it. They're finding community in student organizations around the university. Still, the difference is that this provides them with an educational component, a connection to faculty, and professionalization opportunities they may not get in those spaces.

That's where my emphasis is. I'm focusing on community building—we had a student social in November that

doubled as a backpacking event. We told students about the minor and shared classes they can enroll in for winter. Still, they also got to meet faculty, graduate students, and an alumni speaker who's currently a law student at U of M and graduated from the program a couple of years ago.

I want it to be a space where people can come, connect, and learn about the minor, and even if they can't fit it into their schedule, I want them to feel they have a space there. I'd like to foster more ways for undergraduates to connect with alumni from the program.

What are your strategies for building that sense of community?

It begins with individual attention to students and proactive outreach. I want to encourage them to visit my office hours or just stop by to say hi. I plan to start offering advising appointments in the winter. Part of that involves recognizing and showing genuine interest in them as people, beyond just students, as individuals with a lot going on in their lives.

In our classes, they're connecting what they're learning to things happening on campus, in our nation, or in the world.

Charlotte Karem Albrecht
Associate Professor; Director of Arab & Muslim American Studies



I want to really open up a space to allow that to enter into the conversation, to welcome them to make those connections, to have conversations about it.

Getting to interact with faculty more can be a really sustaining thing in the program. That's one of the things I've enjoyed a lot—just getting to have conversations with the undergraduates about what they're learning, what they're interested in, what's going on for them on campus.

Can you share an example of how AMAS education has impacted an alumna's career?

There's a journalist - Andrea Sahouri—she may have been one of our first ethnic studies majors, but she definitely took AMAS classes—who I think of as an incredible example. She applied what she learned in the ethnic studies and American Culture courses. She saw a comprehensive and incredible application of the concepts she learned in the media landscape, implementing them with real conviction about what it means to be a journalist and what it means to be in media in this moment, in this country.

She's won awards for her work and has done extensive reporting on policing and police brutality. It was incredible to see because you don't always know how students will carry that into their careers. You can tell they're engaged in the classroom, but how they apply it can be completely different once they take ownership and figure out what that looks like in their careers or lives. I find it really exciting.

I have a student now who just keeps wanting to do research in our class. He did it throughout the summer, and now he's working in the fall semester and wants to publish things. It's all his.

What are the biggest challenges facing students in ethnic studies today?

The most significant challenge that students face in ethnic studies is the active, concerted effort to suppress ethnic studies education at all levels of education in the United States.

We're in the classroom talking about these things, knowing that at other universities someone might be penalized for it. I talk to my students about this so they understand how significant this knowledge is. The opportunity they have in these spaces is precious, and it's worth committing their full efforts towards it.

In AMAS in particular, much of our discussion revolves around the misrepresentation of Middle Eastern people and of Islam and how the experiences of Arabs and Muslims in the United States are tied to the oppressive nature of international politics and U.S. imperialism around the globe. There is a history of suppressing the exploration of these topics, particularly related to Israel and Palestine. It's a theme that both sparks great interest and causes discomfort. Students are genuinely eager for it in the classroom because there are few environments where

they can learn, talk, think, and ask questions about these issues. One of my students said to me at the end of our class that *"it was a safe, open environment for everyone to learn and grow and that this was, for her, a really unique experience in our current world."*

Most often, students are told that these topics are too complicated, too tricky, or too risky to discuss. It always results in suppressing inquiry. Some students fear that talking about it will cause them to lose benefits or face difficulties in future employment. These are real material challenges for our ethnic studies program, stemming from the lack of clarity and support for these populations within broader frameworks. It touches on the core of the project that we call The United States.

How do you encourage students to connect what they learn to issues in the wider world?

Honestly, I don't have to. They do it for me. In class, I used to anticipate that I had to present the structure of how we would get from point A to point B to point C and make those connections. Now, students are bringing up point C directly when I'm still introducing point A.

I'm thinking specifically about the recent student protests. It's been such a part of their experience at the university and in the world over the last few years that they have a lot of questions. They want to know: Why is this received so poorly by the mainstream? Why is it not okay to ask these questions? Why is it being considered harmful to another group of people? Where does this sentiment even come from? Why do we experience these things? Do others feel like we do?

My job ends up being to help them unravel the story and history, connect these issues to theories about how race, religion, and social dynamics interact in our society, and then link that to global politics.

Often, this means students are thinking about their education outside the classroom. They're not just, *"Oh, that class is interesting, and I'm going to go about my day."* They're really grappling with it in their everyday lives. They often say things like: *"This history is so significant, and I never knew it."*

What role do you see for alumni in the program's future?

Right now, the program is not super connected with alumni, so I'd love to create an alumni network for AMAS alums. We have many people who've gone to law school, medical school, and many other fields. I want to learn what alumni are doing, create mechanisms for them to stay in touch, to be involved if they choose, and to support the program.

I'd really love to host a panel featuring AMAS alumni to discuss what they're doing and how they've put their AMAS training to use in their careers and lives. My hunch is that alumni would like opportunities to support the





program. Some might want to be in mentorship roles. I think that would be a really excellent opportunity for the students in our program.



These programs always benefit from financial support to insulate them from the day's politics. At a given moment, things might be stable, but there are never perpetual guarantees. I know how much this program has meant to people who've gone through it.



How are you integrating student voices into the program?

We're refocusing our programming on undergraduate students' needs, considering the pressures they face and the requirements for career attainment. We're making it more explicit that what AMAS does can help them in any career choice, regardless of the field. This is another reason connecting with alumni is so crucial.

We're also doing things like sending out surveys asking them what swag they wish to see. We're creating spaces that are comfortable for students to be in—there's always going to be food, a relaxed atmosphere, and opportunities for them to connect. We encourage people to mix and talk to people they haven't met before.

We also have faculty who are highly engaged and focused on students. All our faculty maintain strong relationships with undergraduate students. Every single faculty member knows their students well, understanding what's going on in their lives and supporting their goals for graduate school or other university-related matters—we're writing letters of recommendation or character support letters. The range of support varies because we truly know these students and recognize how remarkable they are. All faculty members aim to support the whole person, and this program provides an opportunity for us to do just that.

For alumni interested in staying connected to AMAS, reconnecting with the program, or learning about opportunities to support current students, we'll be sharing more information in the coming months about alumni engagement initiatives. The intergenerational connections between those who've been shaped by ethnic studies education and those currently finding their way through it are crucial—not just for individual students, but for the continued vitality of these essential fields of study.

AMAS COURSE REQUIREMENTS

ARAB AND MUSLIM AMERICAN STUDIES MINOR (15 CR)

5 Courses

200- level core course

4 electives (2 must be in AMAS or AMCULT)

Courses can fulfill Distribution & College Requirements

Share 1 course with a major

Please let us know how you'd like to stay connected to the Arab and Muslim American Studies Program. Scan the QR code and fill out the survey!



American Culture Graduate Student Achievements Nominations, Awards, & Completed Dissertations

At the University of Michigan, our Department of American Culture graduate students engage in rigorous coursework, conduct important research, support our faculty and our graduate students through teaching and camaraderie.

To support their important work, Rackham and the Department of American Culture provide fellowships and grants while graduate students are also encouraged to apply to external fellowships that support their vital research. Below are just some of the results of our graduate students' diligence in applying for funding and undertaking the demanding and rewarding work of being a graduate student.

Let's celebrate their remarkable achievements!

Graduate Student Honors (Internal) Awardees

Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship (awarded to those with advanced dissertation projects):

Sena Duran, Kyle Lindsey, Alice Mishkin, Emily Na, Kerry White

Rackham Humanities Fellowship

Loveleen Brar and Kathleen Brown

Sweetland Writing Institute Fellowship

(dissertation process support)

Dejan Duric and Jasmine Ehrhardt

Rackham One-Term Fellowship

Michael Briar; Sena Duran, Irene Inatty, Kate

O'Connor; Jasleen Singh

Institute for Humanities Fellowship

Julianna Loera-Wiggins

Student-Identified Rackham Doctoral Intern Fellowship

Traci Lombre

Graduate Student Arts Research Grant

Charlotte Juergens

Irving Stenn, Jr. Fellowship in Public Humanities and Museum Pedagogy

Glenesha Berryman

Graduate Student Honors (External) Awardees

Amherst Memorial Fellowship

Mica Nimkam

Abraham Lincoln Brigades Archives' George Watt Memorial Essay Prize and 2024 Robert J. Donia Human Rights Center Graduate Student Fellowship

Kathleen Brown

ProQuest Distinguished Dissertation Award Honorable Mention:

Juan Rodriguez Barrera (alum)

ACLS Leading Edge Fellowship

Belquis Elhadi (alum)

2024-25 Miriam Jiménez Román Fellow

Aurelis Troncoso (alum)

2026 Digital Humanities Summer Institute (DHSI) in Montreal, Quebec, Canada

pruneah Kim

Susan Najita
Associate Professor, AC Director of Graduate Studies



Graduate Program Nominations

Our Graduate Program, led by Professor **Susan Najita** and steered by the steady hand of **Katia Kitchen**, has also nominated students for Rackham and other prestigious awards

Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship Nominations

Glenesha Berryman, Loveleen Brar; Henry Chen, Jasmine Ehrhardt, Charlotte Juergens, pruneah Kim, Kyle Lindsey, Alice Mishkin

Rackham Outstanding GSI Award Nominations

Henry Chen, Sena Duran, Jessie Neal, Brooklyn Oxandaboure

Lipschutz Award Nomination

Kathleen Brown

ProQuest Distinguished Dissertation Award Nomination

Emily Na (alum) and Kerry White (alum)

Rackham/Sweetland Dissertation Writing Institute Nominations

Mona Hagmagid, Kyle Lindsey

Completed Doctoral Dissertations and Oral Defenses

Irene Inatty (Winter '25)

Traci Lombre (Winter '25)

Adrian King (Winter '25)

Emily Na (Spring '24)

Pau Nava (Spring '25)

Kate O'Connor (Winter '25)

Megan Rim (Spring '25)

Cengiz Salman (Spring '24)

Jasleen Singh (Winter '25)

Kyera Singleton (Summer '25)

Aurelis Troncoso (Fall '24)

Kerry White (Winter '25)

Katia Kitchen Graduate Coordinator





American Culture Department Graduation

Martin Friedman Remarks

May 2, 2025

I want to start by congratulating the students: *You are graduating from one of the world's great universities.* I like to think Michigan's willingness to wrestle openly with its multiple goals of leading in research, education, and public service puts it in the national spotlight.

When I was a student here more than four decades ago, I never fully appreciated what a special place Michigan was. Few academic institutions share its scope of excellence and its leadership across so many domains, including in the field of American Culture, an area of study arguably founded at Michigan in 1875 when Moses Coit Tyler had the audacity to teach the world's first course on "*American Literature*" and to study the subject in the context of American history. An alternative view traces the field's origins to the mid-1930s, when five professors across multiple humanities and social science departments organized the interdisciplinary study of American Culture; this also happened at Michigan.

Instead, I'm here because of a joke - or, more accurately, a facetious comment - that I often make when asked what I had studied in college. I usually respond, "*I was pre-unemployable; I have a degree in American Culture*". I made this remark last fall when I had lunch with the chair of the department, after which she asked me if I would speak to you today!

I'm going to tell you a bit about my path. I hope it reassures you - and your nervous parents - you made an excellent choice when you decided to major in American Culture.

I graduated in 1982 and, much to my surprise, I am now approaching the end of a 43 year career in finance, mostly spent, metaphorically, "*on Wall Street*" (although the closest to Wall Street I actually worked was about three blocks away). I originally expected to work "*in the real world*" for a couple of years before returning to school to get a Ph.D. in American History. I haven't yet made it to step 2 of my plan.

One of the house's few extravagances was its subscription to the New York Times. On Sundays, in addition to job postings in its classified section, the Times included fancier ads in the business section, generally aimed at finding senior executives and other experienced workers. During the fall semester before I graduated, a display ad appeared, looking for intelligent, analytical, motivated, soon-to-be



Martin Friedman delivering the commencement speech at the Department of American Culture's Graduation reception May 2, 2025

So how does someone with no connections, who is finishing a degree in American Culture, get to Wall Street? Like almost everything else in life, serendipity, curiosity, and openness all play important roles.

During most of my time in college, I lived at Stevens Coop. Even if you are familiar with Michigan's student housing coops - another area in which Michigan is a world leader - you are likely unfamiliar with Stevens. Purchased in 1944, Stevens was the first student-owned and -managed cooperative house anywhere. Sadly, a fire destroyed it twenty years ago.

college graduates. No company was named, but the \$26,600 starting salary caught my attention. For a little perspective, as an out-of-state student, based upon information I found in the online archives of The Bentley Library, I estimate the total cost of my Michigan undergraduate education was approximately \$32,000 - that's total cost - not just tuition - for all four years of college. I was intrigued, so I put together a resume for the first time and sent it, together with a multipage cover letter, to the post office box listed in the ad.



Although I expected to hear nothing, about a week later, I arrived home from the Graduate Library - I was working on my thesis at the time - to find a message that someone had called from Morgan Stanley. The next morning, before returning the call, I called my parents. After they recovered from the shock they experienced when I reported I had applied for a job, I asked "So what's Morgan Stanley?" My dad said, "Morgan, like JP Morgan", to which I replied, "I know him: Robber Baron, Gilded Age". He continued, "It's an investment bank", leading me to ask, "What's an investment bank?". He gave me a brief explanation and suggested I visit the business school library and look at Morgan Stanley's annual report before returning the call, which I did.

The phone call with Morgan Stanley went well, primarily because I was too naïve to be nervous. It ended with an offer to fly me to New York the next week for further interviews. Let me cut this already too-long story short by saying I didn't get the job. I'm not sure if it was the ill-fitting borrowed suit - or the Hush Puppies on my feet - but it turned out I wasn't Morgan Stanley material.

This "near miss", however, put the idea of getting a similar job into my consciousness. Moving to New York a few months later, I supported myself doing clerical work and proofreading, while I applied to training programs at commercial banks and investment banks. After spending a few hours taking tests and being interviewed at Manufacturers Hanover, which at the

time was the fifth largest bank in the country, the recruiter reported I had tested very well and she had laughed a lot during the interview, which apparently was unusual. She said she would invite me back to meet her colleagues, but only if I agreed to read several books she recommended, so I would have a clue about what banks actually did. She also required me to go to Brooks Brothers, speak with a person she had already contacted, and purchase and wear the uniform he would provide.

I followed her instructions and was soon hired into the bank's training program. While surprising at the time, but not so much in retrospect, the American Culture major from the University of Michigan and the art history major from Princeton finished at the top of our class, as performance was inversely correlated to prior business experience or preparation. Ask me later and I will explain why.

The training program led to a few years of lending money to small businesses, followed by working on leveraged buyouts of middle market companies, followed by financing telecommunications and media companies. During this latter period, I transitioned from lending money to advising and investing. Around the time when most of today's graduates were born, I went to work with a few friends at a small boutique investment bank they had recently started. We soon decided to focus on internet infrastructure - not the content, but the plumbing - data centers, networks, and the technologies that make it work - an emerging area then. We

built a successful little company, which we sold a few years ago. During this period, I spent much of my time investing in new data centers and in emerging technology providers. I currently manage these investments, serving on the boards of several private companies.

So, what does any of this have to do with studying American Culture? A lot. Everything you really need to know about business, you could probably learn in two weeks - one week if pressed for time. The concepts are pretty easy - risk vs reward, the time value of money, some basic accounting, how a few financial instruments work, what happens when things don't go according to plan. On the other hand, the skills and talents you need to increase your chances of being successful are more difficult to acquire and these skills were developed - or at least nurtured - by studying in the Department of American Culture.

Armed with my American Culture degree, I have spent my career solving puzzles and telling stories.

Unlike the problem sets presented in school, it turns out most problems don't fall into neat buckets and they are rarely presented in ways in which you know in advance what approach you should use. Given its interdisciplinary nature, studying American Culture provides you with a wider set of tools than people have who focus only on a single discipline. As an American Culture major, you have an intellectual Swiss Army knife, allowing you to attack questions from a variety of perspectives, making you



Martin Friedman and department Chair Magdalena J. Zaborowska at the Department of American Culture's Graduation reception May 2, 2025





far more likely to have useful approaches than people who show up carrying only a bottle opener or a fish scaler, especially since you have learned to use multiple tools simultaneously.



Now, I admit I underweighted quantitative approaches during my time at Michigan. If you also avoided these areas, congratulations; there were far better ways to spend your limited time here. Still, I recommend adding a few quantitative tools to your toolbox. Learning how to model problems using Excel - even taking a serious statistics course - is likely to prove valuable no matter what you choose to do. You can learn these skills online or at a community college. Otherwise, you will be missing some important tools.

But puzzle solving is only part of my job. Telling interesting stories in compelling ways - in writing and through conversations - is how I spend most of my time. These stories are often complex and nuanced. The messages are sometimes disappointing and the people with whom I engage have their own interests, experiences, perspectives, and goals.

Successful engagement means being a passionate advocate with a clear, well-developed and well-presented argument. But it also means listening carefully, constantly seeking and incorporating new information, and developing creative solutions. I learned how to do these things when I took Historical Approaches to American Studies with Professor Alan Wald, when I wrote my honors thesis, and when I stayed up late arguing with classmates and housemates.

I love talking with people about what they do, what they believe, and what they think. Intellectual curiosity is a hallmark of studying American Culture. While it is comforting to converse with people with whom I share common values and experience, I have found it more valuable to speak and work with people who bring different perspectives from my own. Being challenged by people with opposing views helps strengthen my arguments; it often helps me appreciate the

greater complexity of a problem, and - while I can be pretty pigheaded - it can sometimes lead me to change my position. Scott Page, who teaches at Michigan in five different departments across LS&A and the Business School, wrote a wonderful book entitled *The Difference*, which explores how diversity leads to better outcomes - it is both rigorous and readable. I recommend it as worthwhile post-graduation reading. It will also help you build your quantitative tool set. If you are feeling particularly ambitious, take his online course, *Model Thinking*, joining me and more than 200,000 other students who have benefited from it.

I want to take a minute to talk about serendipity and openness. I discovered American Culture when registering for classes just before the first semester of my freshman year. When I discovered the honors section for the class I wanted to take was full, I scabbled to find an open honors section quickly. As I sat on the floor in Lorch Hall (then called the Old A&D Building), I came across a course description for American Studies 201 - "*American Values*" - which had an honors section with an open seat. David Papke, a passionate and charismatic teaching assistant, who had just arrived in Ann Arbor, taught the section. David decided, the section would meet at his apartment at 912 Mary Street on Thursday evenings and go as long as people wanted. Many graduate students soon joined us and sponsorship from a sympathetic

professor extended the section as an independent reading seminar for another semester. A friendship made in the section led me to Stevens Coop, where I encountered the New York Times ad, which, thanks to the intervention of one sympathetic recruiter, whose name I do not remember, led me to an interesting and successful career, which led me to be here, now, speaking with you all today.

No, I didn't plan this path. On the other hand, although it was contingent on events over which I admittedly had little control, I leveraged opportunities as they were presented, and I embraced exploring new territory, willing to move in direction I had not anticipated.

Graduating from college is exciting. It is also unsettling and, at this uncertain moment, arguably more so today than it has ever been previously. Twenty years from now, many of the students graduating this weekend will work in professions and in industries that don't even exist today. What you will do - and how you will do it - are likely to be very different from what any of us now expect. But engaging and important work will continue to involve solving puzzles and telling stories. With your American Culture degree from the University of Michigan, you are well-prepared to meet whatever challenges lie ahead. Congratulations in advance on all you will accomplish!

Spring Commencement 2024, Credit: VP Communications, Regents of the University of Michigan
Creator: Connor Titsworth, Campus Multimedia Specialist (Michigan Commons)



Class of 2024 Graduates

Minors

Arab and Muslim American Studies

Hanin Alhubaishi
Naazir Hamzavi
Omar Adel Khanfar
Ilyas Rasheed
Aya Fadi Yahya

Latina/o Studies

Luis Jimenez
Karen Tineo
Sami Tarif Bazzi Onton
Mayra Gutierrez
Irene Lopez

American Culture

Jaedan Morgan Harris Brown
Astana Gaffney
Elizabeth Anne Goodman
Jordan Hunter
Audrey Claire Jeffords
Esther Marie Launstein
Spencer Philip Lukas
Nora Pasche
Mia Brooke Roub
Liana Chushan Lau
Grace Lucille Queen
Audrey Elizabeth Beach
Liv Kroeger
Nathaniel John Sheehan

Native American Studies

Brendan Ireland
Claire Jessica Arp
Alana Nicole Gale
Jalen Greene
Jake Hopper
Alexandria Williams
Paige Elizabeth Cushman

Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies

Hunter Divinagracia
Juan Carlos Alvarado Feraro
Hope Victoria Fuller
Amanath Khandaker
Wendy Qian
Katherine Yeonsue Song
Melodie Wong
Jason Lin
Madison Morelli
Minh-Thu Hoang Nguyen
Kimberly Pham
Alice Yang
Jeanne Peijin Yang
Madeline Young
Rachel Yae-Ram Yum

Bachelor Degrees

American Culture

Justin Arment
Emma Dwoskin
Sarah Dziadzio
Connor William Earegood
Max Fields
Hannah Danielle Gorman
Owen Klein
Fionnan Zarmina Claire Noori
Makari Jaimon Paige
Thomas David Paris
Brenna Prescott
Kathryn Salogar
Amanda Morgan Wasserman
Zoey Hannah Weinstein

American Culture Ethnic Studies Sub Major

PinYi Lee
Jacqueline Rose Moreno

Latina/o Studies

Mallery Bee
Jacqueline Lopez-Bravo
Chris Genaro Medina
Luisa Esther Sanchez



Class of 2025 Graduates



Minors



Arab and Muslim American Studies

Jenna Al-Nouri
Hanin Alhubaishi
Hadi Riad Fayad
moamen shukeir



Latina/o Studies

Cristina Xiomara Barriente
Mariangeli Collado
Christian Loredó-Duran
Xamantha Palomino
Naomi Esther Rodriguez
Zadia Torres



American Culture

Madison Gillis
Liv Kroeger
Natalie Ann Larson
Silvie Rowe

Native American Studies

Kaya Marilyn Beaudoin
Baylee Carlisle
Lily Jane Carlson
Kali Aurora Rain Lyons Fleischer
Nolan Patrick Mugwa Fletcher
Kylie Rice
Gabrielle Scott
Noemi Tehauno

Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies

Alyssa Caldito
Sarah Yanwei Truszkowski
Amanath Khandaker
Hannah Kim
Wendy Qian
Carly Salazar
Arianna Seay

Bachelor Degrees

American Culture

Hannah Gorman
Abigail Kelleher
Abigail Schreck
Alexandra Swirsky
Elizabeth M. Zomeri

Latina/o Studies

Cithlaly Betancourt
Elaine Garcia Vargas
Andrea Gonzalez

American Culture Ethnic Studies Sub Major

Anh Duong-Tran
Jacqueline Moreno
Ellie Omori-Sampson
Emma James Weinberger

Graduate Degrees

Ph.D. in American Culture

Irene Inatty
Traci Lombre
Jasleen Singh
Aurelis Troncoso
Kerry White



Keep in Touch

U-M American Culture, Arab and Muslim American Studies, Native American Studies Latina/o Studies Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies graduates and undergraduate alumni are encouraged to share news about their careers, publications, and life changes with the U-M American Culture community.

Read our AmCult Magazine

Join our Am Cult Community email group

Lifetime E-mail Forwarding

Engage with us on Social Media

Support the Department of American Culture & the Ethnic Studies Programs.

The department and its ethnic studies programs offer innovative research and teaching in both graduate and undergraduate courses that represent the culturally diverse fabric of modern American society.

Department of American Culture & Ethnic Studies administration and staff:

Chair — **Magdalena J. Zaborowska** | amcult-chair@umich.edu

Associate Chair — **Bethany Hughes** | amcult-assoc.chair@umich.edu

Director of the Undergraduate Studies Program — **Scott Larson** | amcult-dus@umich.edu

Director of the Graduate Studies Program — **Susan Najita** | amcult-dgs@umich.edu

Ethnic Studies Programs

Director of Arab and Muslim American Studies — **Charlotte Karem Albrecht** | charka@umich.edu

Director of Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies — **Melissa Borja** | mborja@umich.edu

Director of Latina/o Studies — **William Calvo-Quirós** | wcalvo@umich.edu

Director of Native American Studies — **Bethany Hughes** | drbh@umich.edu

Cassandra McMahon

Ethnic Studies Communications Coordinator

Chris Medina

Ethnic Studies Events Coordinator

Kailee Lewis

Student Services Coordinator

Katia Kitchen

Graduate Coordinator

LaToya Sherman

Chief Administrator

Lois Hunter

Executive Assistant

May Jean Dong

Academic Program Specialist

Sándor Mátyás Fazakas

Events and Communications Coordinator



American Culture **Ethnic Studies Programs**



Arab & Muslim American Studies Program



Latina/o Studies Program



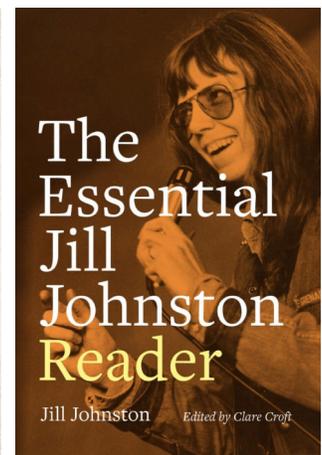
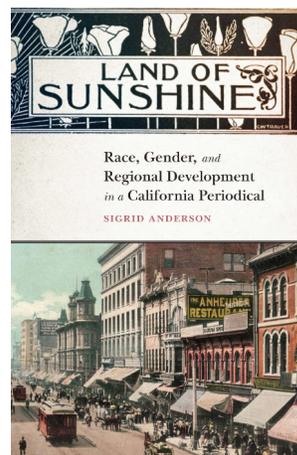
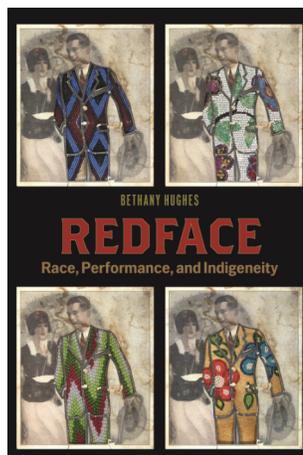
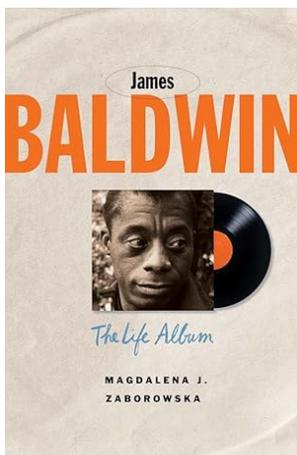
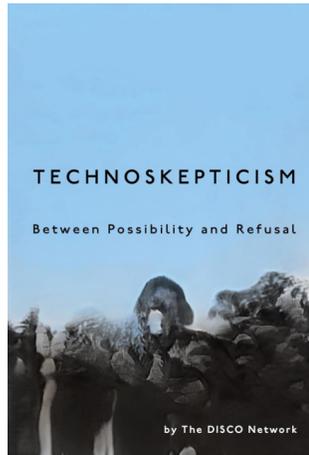
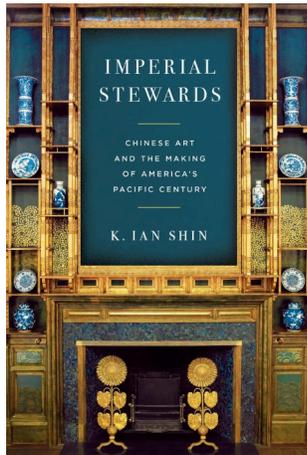
Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies program



Native American Studies Program



2024 & 2025 Faculty Publications



Visit us on line: lsa.umich.edu/ac

Or in the office: 3700 Haven Hall, 505 S State St, Ann Arbor, MI 48109 Office hours 8:00 AM - 4:00PM