

90 Years of Supporting the Student Experience



2026-2027
Annual Newsletter

American Culture Ethnic Studies Programs



Arab & Muslim American Studies Program



Latina/o Studies Program



Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies program



Native American and Indigenous Studies Program



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Back Cover:

Umayyah Cable - Mainstreaming Palestine Cinematic Activism and Solidarity Politics in the United States

Yarden Katz - L'Shleimut: A Jewish Radical Tradition Against Capitalist Science and Medicine

Susan Y. Najita - Living Genealogies: Embodiment and Colonialism in the Creation of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

Lisa Nakamura - The Inattention Economy How Women of Color Built the Internet

Table of Contents

- 4 AC Visions for 2026-2027
- 5 Elevating Everyday: Inaugural Post from American Culture's Chief Administrator
- 6 An American Culture Champion
- 8 The 2026 Betty Ch'Maj Lecture
- 10 U-M Hosts National Listening Session to Help Shape a National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture
- 11 Laughter Is the Best Medicine
- 12 "Art, Memory, and Healing" Reclaiming Healing Through Art: Addressing Systemic Violence and Abuse
- 13 Black Muslim Refugee, Militarism, Policing, and Somali American Resistance to State Violence with Dr. Maxamed Abu-maye
- 14 Calls From Home
- 15 Letter from the Director of Undergraduate Studies
- 16 Richard Meisler Award Recipient Frida Salgado 2026 Graduate in American Culture
- 17 Meet your AC Librarian
- 18 Students, Curators, Historians, Doing Hands-on American Culture
- 19 Finding Belonging Through Ethnic Studies Kristina Aguilar 2026 Graduate in American Culture
- 20 AC Grad Students on the Rise!
- 23 From Ann Arbor to Manitoulin, Strengthening Community Ties in Ojibwe Language Education
- 24 AMAS Alumni Spotlight with Jude Yousif Sutton '2026'
- 25 A/PIA Studies Research Awards Honor Student Researchers Exploring History, Identity and Social Change
- 26 Class of 2026 Graduates

AC Visions for 2026-2027

by Magdalena Zaborowska

Writing amidst lovely June weather, following a writing workshop in Northern Michigan, I am astounded once again by the deep importance of "creative" and "arts" to our mission. While away from our bustling campus, I reflected on how these keywords echo in the Department of American Culture (AC) for the 2026-27 academic year. Amidst a tough moment in U.S. higher education and in an increasingly digitized, dehumanizing world, AC champions forging meaningful connections by means of thoughtful use of language and storytelling as we continue thriving as an R-1 academic and teaching department.

Our College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) brings to the table the third keyword: Literature. A rich realm where imagination, language, and narrative cross-pollinate lived experiences of different people, continents, idioms, and cultures, literature fulfills what Nobel laureates Toni Morrison and Olga Tokarczuk identify as our shared need: A "benign access to each other" and the "tender narrator." Reading, writing, and connecting stories across lives and archives help us make sense of our history and belonging and fuel what we do as scholars and teachers. Creativity, language, and expression stand at the heart of interdisciplinary

American studies. Grounded in decades of pedagogical excellence, AC remains at the forefront of this interdisciplinary field, preparing students for personal and professional lives in a complex reality.

We are committed to teaching the whole person through foundational humanities and humanistic social sciences.

We champion expository writing, close reading, fact-based, contextualized argumentation, and innovative communication—all skills as vital to democratic citizenship as breathing. With

our new staff and officers, AC proudly advances LSA Dean Rosario Ceballo's vision to make our college the premier liberal arts institution in the world.

For over 90 years, AC has been training students to learn what no machine can muster: critical thinking, rigorous scholarship, public speaking, and expository writing. Sharing AC's vision for 2026-27 is an honor as our vibrant, multivalent community enters this new academic year. Amidst growing concerns over EdTech's impact on mental health, smartphone addiction, and cognitive offloading that harm students' intellectual and psychological development, we are standing in solidarity as teachers and scholars.

Pedagogy & Curriculum

Led by the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS), Dr. Scott Larson and the incoming Associate Chair, Professor Sandra Gunning, our core faculty will hold pedagogy workshops on student learning in the age of EdTech and AI. We are compiling a resource bibliography, while integrating analog modalities like handwritten assignments, oral exams, and Blue (Green) Books. We are also beginning work on a new large American and ethnic studies course on indigeneity, ethnicity, and racialization.

90th Anniversary and Community Engagement

Our 90th anniversary events, symposia, and Ethnic Studies programming continue through this Fall and Winter. At the American Studies Association (ASA) Convention in Chicago (October 2026), we will host a 90th retrospective faculty panel, a poster session on undergraduate innovation, and a reception on Friday, Oct 23 at 3:30 PM at the Palmer House Hotel. Longtime core faculty member Roland Hwang is leading the creation of the AC Collective to sustain our mission. Meanwhile, our team is expanding outreach to boost community and undergraduate engagement.

Archival Preservation & Grants

We have secured the Betty Ch'maj Legacy Archive, which is currently organized by Prof. Emerita June Howard (AC/ENG/WGS) and is destined for U-M's Bentley Library. AC's first woman Ph.D. (1961), Professor Ch'maj's career demonstrates vital links between American studies research and effective teaching, between the university and communities it serves. The archive will inform new course development and will be available to visitors.



Magdalena J. Zaborowska Chair American Culture

Faculty Hiring & Graduate Expansion

AC is proud to be one of several departments chosen to recruit through LSA's Collegiate Fellows Program (LCF). We are looking forward to welcoming a new colleague in August 2027. We are exploring possibilities of creating an M.A. (4+1) American studies program in collaboration with another unit and an American Studies graduate certificate given the increasing demand for humanities skills among business, engineering, and medical students.

As our faculty continue publishing groundbreaking books, giving talks all over the world, and teaching growing numbers of students across all levels, we invite you to attend our events and to support our commitments.



Thank you for your partnership as we enter this vibrant academic year 2026-2027

Elevating Everyday

Inaugural Post from American Culture's Chief Administrator

Greetings AC Community!
My name is LaToya Sherman,
Chief Administrator for American Culture (AC).



I joined AC in January 2026. The department continues to set a high standard and is elevating every day. Whether you are a student, faculty, staff, alumni or a supporter of American Culture, this inaugural article is designed to give you a retrospect of the department's major milestones, achievements, donor impacts as well as a peek into the academic year ahead. I am pleased to bring you the department's operational updates.

Welcome New Staff to American Culture

AC welcomed Lois Hunter as the Executive Assistant in November 2025 and Ariel (Kyung) Park as the new Student Services Assistant in August 2026. Lois supports the chair and is the go-to person for AC faculty life cycle. Ariel focuses on enhancing the department's student engagement activities for undergraduates as well as provides administrative support to the office. Both Lois and Ariel bring a wealth of experience and we're delighted to have them as part of the team!

Celebrating American Culture Faculty Promotions

Congratulations are in order as we recognize Umayyah Cable in their promotion to Associate Professor and Yarden Katz and Cherry Meyer for a successful third-year review. These well deserved accomplished milestones reflect research, teaching, service and community impact. The AC Chair and greater department thank these individuals for their leadership and looks forward to the outstanding work they will accomplish.

Strategically Planning for American Culture's Future

Investing in the undergraduate student experience is a key priority for American Culture. Longtime core faculty member Roland Hwang is leading the 'AC Collective' initiative, which brings together alumni and others who have been connected to the department's classes, research, and community, as well as worked with its staff, students, and programs. They want to ensure the department continues to grow and prosper. The AC Collective's mission is to secure sustained giving to support the undergraduate student experience in perpetuity.

Scan the QR Code to support undergraduate and graduate needs and awards, activities that enrich our



Lois Hunter
Executive Assistant



Ariel (Kyung) Park
Student Services Assistant

curriculum, including bringing distinguished visitors to campus, faculty recruitment and research, and other initiatives that support our academic mission.

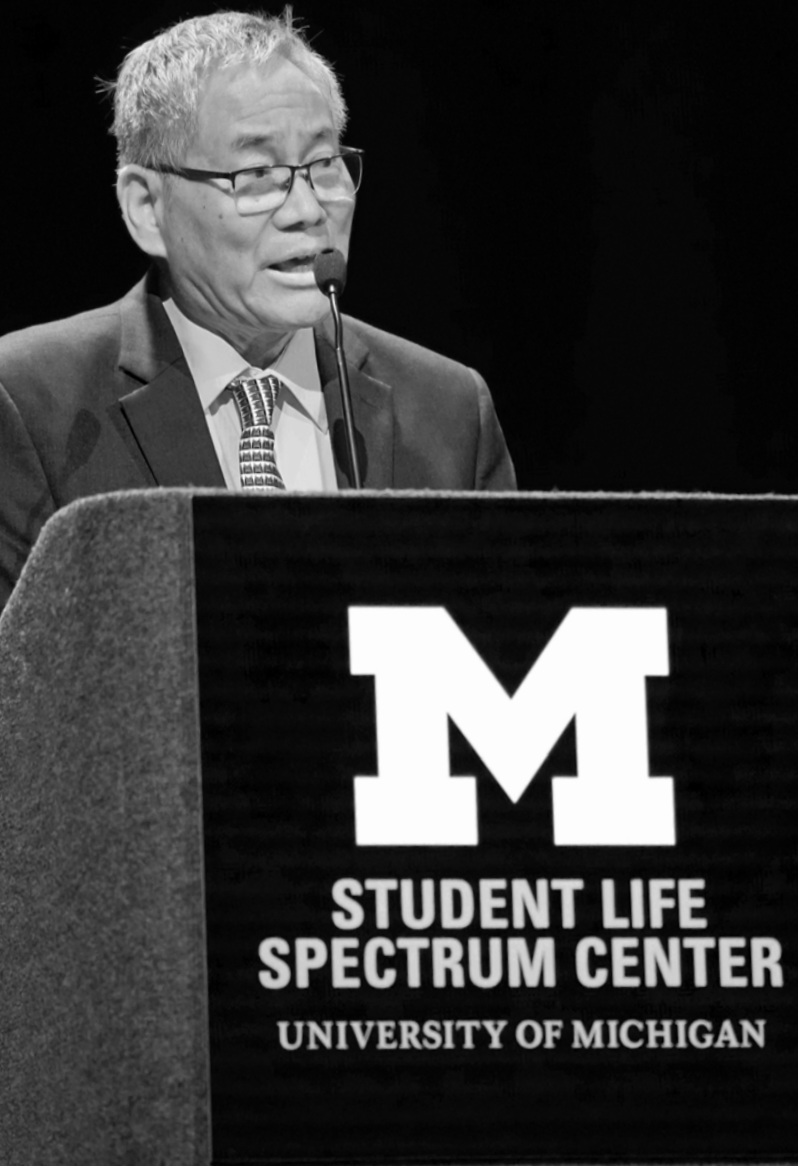
If you have a question, please reach out to:
amcult-chiefadmin@umich.edu.



myumi.ch/3RyMp

An American Culture Champion

What follows are Questions and Answers exchange between AC Events and Communication Coordinator Sándor Mátyás Fazakas (SF) and American Culture Champion and Lecturer Roland Hwang (RH)



Roland Hwang American Culture Champion and Lecturer

"I am grateful to American Culture Chair Magdalena Zaborowska to be named an American Culture Champion. My goal is to work to boost American Culture with enhanced fundraising, visibility, and outreach."

Roland Hwang

SF: How does it feel like to be a donor to the Department of American Culture?

RH: In a word: gratifying. I have taught in American Culture since 1995 and watched it grow from a small program into a Department. This transformation has elevated American Culture's visibility and profile throughout LSA and the University as a whole, as well as increasing interdepartmental collaboration. I am proud to contribute to this development and to support American Culture's continued success.

SF: Why donate to the Department of American Culture?

RH: American Culture studies American stories in all their complexity and diversity. This Department brings together history, literature, film, culture, and lived experience to examine who we are, where we have been, and where we are going as a nation. American Culture's interdisciplinary approach connects ideas across fields—from sociology to law to public policy—giving students the tools to understand how America's history and institutions have shaped our present-day life. Its impact reaches far beyond Ann Arbor. For ninety years, the Department has educated generations of scholars, teachers, historians, archivists, curators, policymakers, lawyers, and community leaders who carry the values and insights of American Culture into their work across the country. A gift to American Culture is an investment in that tradition of inquiry

that helps us better understand America and equips future generations to shape its future.

SF: How will being a supporter of American Culture influence one's legacy?

RH: Supporting American Culture ensures that the Department's mission, research, and teaching can continue for the next ninety years. Through my support, I hope to help preserve and elevate the histories and experiences that have too often been overlooked, while creating opportunities for future generations of scholars to pursue that work. By supporting American Culture, you become part of a legacy that sustains a department dedicated to strengthening critical inquiry, broadening understanding and empathy, and contributing to a more informed and engaged society.

SF: What will one's donation support and how will American Culture students be impacted?

RH: Gifts support the Department's core mission of teaching, research, and public engagement. They fund faculty and student research, support innovative projects that might otherwise go unfunded, and create opportunities to explore novel and much needed projects. Donor support directly expands student opportunities. Additional funding can provide scholarships and research grants that help undergraduate and graduate students pursue their academic and professional goals. Recent examples include the A/PIA Studies awards, which provided scholarship support at both levels. Gifts also enhance the educational experience beyond the classroom, enabling collaboration with other programs and departments across the University to bring preeminent scholars, authors, filmmakers, and practitioners to campus. These events expose students (and the campus community as a whole) to new ideas, connect them with leaders in their fields, and deepen their engagement with the subjects they study.

SF: What is the best way to support students, by creating scholarships or by investing in department infrastructure?

RH: Both scholarships and department infrastructure are essential and strengthen American Culture as a whole. Scholarships and research grants have an immediate impact on students. They allow students to pursue ambitious research, take advantage of academic opportunities, and be recognized for their

outstanding work. At the same time, strong departmental infrastructure is critical to sustaining excellence over the long term. Investment in faculty support, programming, and academic resources helps American Culture attract and retain leading scholars in the field, ensuring that students are learning from and working alongside top-tier faculty. The most effective support balances both investing in students directly while also strengthening the Department's capacity to remain a leading center for teaching and research.

SF: How do you feel about being a supporter of the Department of American Culture?

RH: It is especially meaningful to support a department where contributions have a visible, direct impact. In a smaller unit within LSA, gifts advance teaching, research, and programming in ways that are immediately felt by students and faculty. American Culture's mission to give students the opportunity to study the history and experiences of America's diverse communities is worth supporting. It is an honor to be an American Culture Champion and to support a Department with such a unique place within the University. Go Blue!



Roland Hwang American Culture Champion and Lecturer

The 2026 Betty Ch'Maj At the AC 90th Annivers

by John Cheney-Lippold

The Betty Ch'may Lecture, with former Michigan and current USC Professor George Sánchez, kicked off celebrations around the 90th year of American Culture at the University of Michigan. The lecture was titled "*Rebels for Equity and Justice: Democracy, Latinos, and Higher Education*." This talk was well attended by faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, and the larger university community.

The 90th Anniversary Symposium, organized by our esteemed faculty Kristin Hass, included a poster session outlining American Culture undergraduate/graduate student research and three panels: "*Thinking About the Michigan Model*" of American Studies, "*What Has American Culture Made Possible?*," and "*The Public Life of Our Scholarship*." These panels were chaired by current and emeritus American Culture faculty, and panelists included former American Culture graduate students and faculty brought to Ann Arbor from across the country.

Prior to moving to USC, George Sánchez chaired the then-Program, now-Department of American Culture at Michigan, and has been a leading voice shaping the field of American Studies and Latino Studies. He is past president of the American Studies Association and the Organization of American Historians.

The roster was a kind of living map of the department's reach: panelists with Michigan PhDs from the past 30 years drawn from institutions around the U.S.; and introduced and moderated by current and emeritus faculty.

It was an anniversary but doubled as a defense of the field at a moment when critical thinking, the funding and standing of higher education, and even the word "*diversity*" are under open political pressure. The celebration answered that pressure



Professor George Sánchez at the 2026 Betty Ch'Maj Lecture



Former peer adviser Cel Torres, Professor Silvia Pedraza and a guest at the 2026 Betty Ch'Maj Lecture

aJ Lecture ary



with testimonies from generations of Michigan scholars, from emeritus faculty to recent graduates.

The core audience was faculty and current graduate students, joined by undergraduates and the broader University community. They left with a sense of Michigan and AC's legacy—of both scholarship and of the people who made it—and, I would argue, a renewed conviction about the department's significance to the field and world.

I think we demonstrated how American Culture's interdisciplinary, publicly engaged approach continues to be a generative template the wider academy needs. It's a way of teaching students to think across difference/history/power.

26 Betty Ch'Maj Lecture

Students were present both as audience (at the symposium) and as knowledge producers (via the poster session).

The symposium was an alumni homecoming. Panelists were former PhD students of the department, returning from posts across the country. Their return to Ann Arbor really showed the legacy of Michigan expanding outward in the form of the careers our departmental training produced.

Ninety years in, I think the most urgent/most interesting question is what the next decade of American Studies at Michigan defends and builds. Or, why a field devoted to studying the United States in all its messy complexity and contradiction matters most when our public institutions, critical inquiry, and diversity are being directly contested.



Professor George Sánchez presenting at the 2026 Betty Ch'Maj Lecture

U-M Hosts National Listening Session to Help Shape a National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture

by Melissa Borja

On April 11, 2026, the University of Michigan hosted a regional listening session for the Commission to Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture. Established by Congress with bipartisan support, the Commission has been hosting listening sessions throughout the United States to develop a plan for the museum, with the intention of delivering recommendations to Congress and the President later this year.

The Ann Arbor session was co-hosted by the U-M Asian/Pacific Islander American (A/PIA) Studies Program. A/PIA Studies faculty played a key role in working with the Commission and other university units to plan the event, while A/PIA Studies students shared testimony and volunteered their services in welcoming community members and Commission representatives.

The listening session illustrated the public engagement that is at the heart of the A/PIA Studies program. It gathered together people from diverse backgrounds—researchers, students, museum professionals, educators, and community and business leaders from Ann Arbor and southeast Michigan—and fostered a rich, lively conversation about the vision of the national museum and how it should serve different communities across the country. Melissa Borja, director of the A/PIA Studies Program, emphasized the importance of this museum initiative. “Asian Pacific Islander American history is American history,” she said, noting that a museum can help the public engage with the nation’s complex history in truthful and meaningful ways. She also highlighted the significance of hosting the session in Michigan, which underscored that Asian American and Pacific Islander communities have built vibrant histories not only on the coasts, but also in the Midwest.

By bringing together scholarship, community voices, and public dialogue, U-M helped shape a shared vision for a museum committed to telling a fuller and more inclusive American story.



Tyler Nguyen, an APIA Studies Minor
Graduated in May 2026



Group photo at the National
Listening Session to Help Shape
a National Museum of
Asian Pacific
American History and Culture



2026
Robert F.
Berkhofer Jr.
Lecture

Laughter Is the Best Medicine

by Bethany Hughes

2026 Robert F.
Berkhofer Lecture
April 20th



In April, the Native American Studies Program welcomed Lakota actress, comedian, and writer Jana Schmieding (Cheyenne River) as she delivered the annual Berkhofer Lecture. Schmieding is best known for her breakout role in the Peacock streaming series *Rutherford Falls* where she starred opposite Ed Helms. She also played a supporting role on the award-winning series *Reservation Dogs*. Schmieding's career spans improv, stand-up comedy, television writing, and acting.

Schmieding chose an interview format for her lecture and shared stories of her experiences as a Native American woman in comedy, her television career, her improv experience, and her upcoming projects. She engaged with the audience in a formal Q&A and informally during a reception where many attendees snapped selfies with her.

Each year the Native American Studies Program sponsors the **Robert F. Berkhofer Lecture**, through **the generous support of the Tomshack family**. The lecture series brings in notable Native American writers for a public lecture that is made for a broad audience. Past lecturers include young adult fiction writer Angeline Boulley (Sault Ste. Marie), novelist Tommy Orange (Cheyenne and Arapaho), playwright Mary Kathryn Nagle (Cherokee), botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer (Citizen Potawatomi), and journalist Mark Trahant (Shoshone-Bannock). Each lecturer delivers a talk and also spends time with students on campus. The lecture series serves to highlight the exciting work being done by Native Americans across many genres of arts, entertainment, and media; to connect the campus and city community with the program; to support the development of students through access and engagement with leading figures in various fields; and to create campus conversations that center Native American Studies and Native American creatives.



Jana Schmieding, actress, comedian, and writer
at the 2026 Robert F. Berkhofer Jr. Lecture

"Art, Memory, and Healing"

Reclaiming Healing Through Art: Addressing Systemic Violence and Abuse

by William A. Calvo-Quirós



On March 18, 2026, The New York Times reported on César Chávez's pattern of sexual misconduct and abuse, including against minors. This revelation was both shocking and devastating, particularly given Chávez's esteemed status in Latina/o Studies (LS) and Chicana/o studies, often shaped by idealized narratives. Among the victims was Dolores Huerta, Chávez's collaborator and cofounder of the United Farm Workers, as well as other "unknown" but equally important victims.

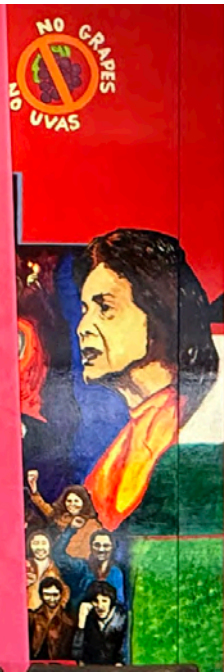
Such news is regrettably not unprecedented. Scholars like Antonia Castañeda have shown how violence against Indigenous women follows a pattern established during the colonial occupation of California by Mexico. Her work traces a through-line between the past and the present.

For our Latina/o Studies Program, it was clear that the principles guiding our commitment to justice, equality, dignity, empowerment, and mutual care remained steadfast. We were reminded once again that these principles transcend any individual, institution, or organization. In reality, movements are always collective efforts, regardless of how charismatic or visible a leader may be.

At the time, a large mural of César Chávez dominated our conference room, prompting discussions not only about its fate but also about how to navigate this troubling moment with dignity. We aimed to transform this painful event into an opportunity for learning and healing, rather than simply reacting with fear.

The mural, created around 1998 by Chicano artist Jeff Abbey Maldonado was made possible through the activism of Alianza, a pan-Latino undergraduate student organization at the time. The piece was entrusted to the LS Program in 2018.

Section of the mural in the Haven Hall conference room



When the allegations against Chávez surfaced, plans for its removal began. Meanwhile, the LS Program chose to cover the mural with pink sheets, symbolizing a connection to the broader history of violence against women, including the femicides along the US-Mexico border. This act both acknowledged the harm done and respected the pain of affected community members, while also raising important questions about memory and violence in the public sphere.

Beyond Heroes: A Community Event

On April 7, 2026, the LS Program hosted a town hall conversation titled "Art, Memory, and Healing." This event fostered open dialogue and collective processing, featuring performances by undergraduate students Sarah Robinson and Alvaro Vega, followed by a guided session led by Sara Villegas, a Senior Staff Psychologist of the Mary A. Rackham Institute. She encouraged everyone to discuss the complex emotions elicited by the recent news.

Former director of Latina/o Studies, Professor Ashley Lucas, spoke about the role of art in confronting trauma, particularly regarding imprisonment and immigration detention. She highlighted the significance of art as a medium for healing and a powerful tool to challenge oppressive structures.

Dean Carlos Jackson of the Stamps School of Art & Design addressed the crowd, discussing the commodification of memory and art's transformative potential. He urged attendees to view community art as an evolving entity, not as a collection of "eternal" pieces, but as works that can be reevaluated, reassessed, and even remade over time to reflect changing values. His notion of "re-creation and redefinition" emerged as a revealing and liberating concept.

The event concluded with an anonymous reflection activity, where attendees responded to questions about their experiences and hopes. They shared their thoughts on sticky notes placed around the artwork, and collectively, these reflections transformed it into a record of grief, solidarity, accountability, and hope.

This gathering was a profound opportunity to unite as intellectuals and community members, emphasizing the necessity of mutual care and unity, despite the challenges we face. A few days later, on April 13, the covered mural, now adorned with sticky notes, was removed and stored on North Campus. The event provided a much-needed space for mourning and reflection on the persistent violence against women and marginalized communities. It reaffirmed the significance of art and community, especially as we contemplate the diverse narratives within our department and envision the world we want to create together. Such discussions of "re-creation and redefinition" are essential as we continue to evolve over the next 90 years.

Black Muslim Refugee

Militarism, Policing, and Somali American Resistance to State Violence with Dr. Maxamed Abu-maye

by Charlotte Karem Albrecht

Over two days at the end of March, the Arab and Muslim American studies Program and the department of American Culture welcomed Professor Maxamed Abu-maye to campus. Dr. Abu-maye is Assistant Professor of African American and African Studies at The Ohio State University. During his visit, he first held a graduate student workshop focused on a chapter from his recently published book, ***Black Muslim Refugee: Militarism, Policing, and Somali American Resistance*** (University of California Press, 2025).



The discussion, with over 15 graduate students from a variety of disciplines, covered topics like the study of Black Muslim communities and the logistics of transnational, ethnographic fieldwork of refugee life. On his second day, Professor Abu-maye gave an engaging presentation that highlighted the personal and collective stories of Somali Americans in San Diego. The talk began with the documentation of refugee life in the Dadaab camp in Kenya and followed communities to their eventual arrival in San Diego, where the dual forces of anti-Blackness and Islamophobia structured their daily lives.

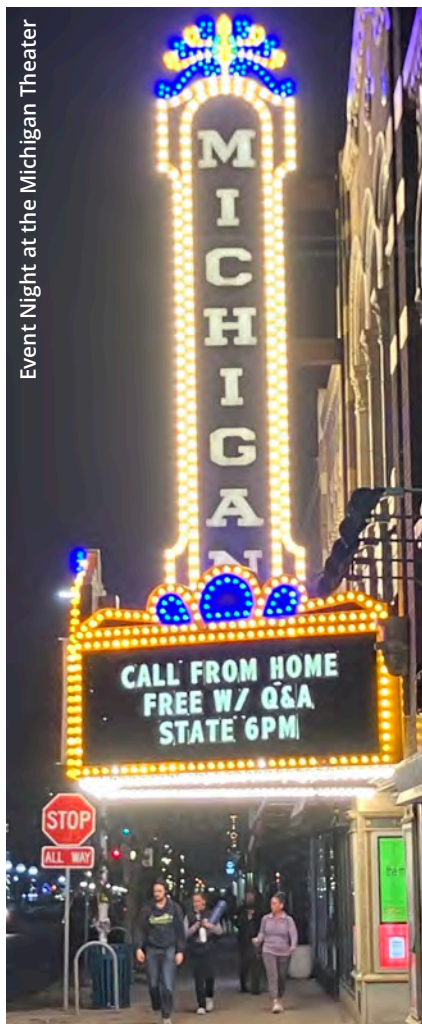
These forces manifested in “war on terror” and “war on drugs” policies that targeted and over-policed Somali communities. He also discussed the 2020 murder of George Floyd and subsequent protest movement as a galvanizing moment for many Somali Americans’ creative capacity to defy these mechanisms of management and control. U-M Somali students who attended noted the rarity of an event focusing on their communities, and several of them stayed after to talk further with Professor Abu-maye.

Professor Maxamed Abu-maye presenting at the Hatcher Library





Sylvia Ryerson



Event Night at the Michigan Theater



Event poster

Calls From Home

by Sylvia Ryerson

Hello AC Community!

I'm excited to take this space to introduce myself, and to share a little bit about my work here in Ann Arbor.

My name is Sylvia Ryerson, and I am a postdoctoral scholar in the Michigan Society of Fellows and an Assistant Professor in the Department of American Culture. I came to the University of Michigan in August 2025, after completing my PhD in American Studies at Yale University with a master's concentration in the public humanities. Alongside my scholarship, I'm also a radio producer and a filmmaker. I see these different modes of knowledge production as being very complementary to one another, and I've always enjoyed moving in between them – which is a big part of what draws me to American studies! I've long found it to be a place that is very welcoming and supportive of transdisciplinary, multimedia work that attends to the most pressing issues in our society today.

My own research focuses on the intertwined histories of resource extraction, mass incarceration, and social movements in Central Appalachia. My manuscript-in-progress, *Listening Past Carceral Power in Central Appalachia*, examines rural prison and jail growth in Central Appalachia from 1980–present day, and the racial and colonial legacies that have enabled this rapid expansion. Over the last half century, the region has become one of the most concentrated areas of rural prison building nationwide. Using the methods of historical, cultural, political, ethnographic, and visual analysis, I examine how multiple processes of dispossession converge in Appalachian prison and jail sites, and how incarcerated people and local communities contest these processes.

Alongside this written work, in 2023 I completed a short documentary film, *Calls from Home*, which profiles a longstanding weekly radio program in Eastern Kentucky that broadcasts messages to those incarcerated from loved ones who are often extremely far away. I co-directed and DJ'd this radio show for many years, and both the film and my book project build from my work in the region prior to graduate school.

This past February 2026, the Department of American Culture co-sponsored a public screening of the film at the State Theater in downtown Ann Arbor, in collaboration with the Carceral State Project, the Michigan Society of Fellows, and other community partners. The event was at capacity, and following the film we had a panel discussion on current efforts to address the issue of mass incarceration across Michigan with leading local advocates Ken Nixon, of *Safe & Just Michigan*, and Chuck Warpehoski, with the *Michigan Collaborative to End Mass Incarceration*. Nixon and Warpehoski powerfully connected the issues in the film to ongoing efforts here in Michigan to support family connectivity, reduce extreme sentencing, and end the appalling reality of mass incarceration in this country.

This kind of public programming, that connects our research to current policy debates and grassroots advocacy, is what is so needed in this moment, and is exactly what this department makes possible! It was an honor to get to share this work with the Department of American Culture and the greater Ann Arbor community, and I look forward to continuing these collaborations.

To listen to a conversation about the event, featured on Stateside on Michigan Public Radio, [click here](#), or scan the QR code!



Letter from the Director of Undergraduate Studies

by Scott Larson

Scott Larson

Greetings, and welcome to our new academic year!

As I write, the Fall 2026 semester is upon us and I've already begun meeting with our majors and minors. Some of them are seniors getting ready to complete their final year of studies and juggling senior projects and preparations for job searches and applications to graduate school. Some of them are just declaring a new major or minor, and excited to talk with me about their classes and research projects, or just where to find the best apple cider donut this month.

This is my ninth year as undergraduate advisor in American Culture, and my second year as Director of Undergraduate Studies. This academic year holds exciting new things for undergraduate studies in American Culture and our Ethnic Studies programs!

This year, we are piloting a *Peer Mentor connection for our First Year Seminars*, which will allow our Peer Mentor to more directly support first year students, and help them feel at home in our department and at UM. In the past, we found that we often encouraged students to come to us, but also that this was a daunting prospect for many of our incoming students. So this year, **our Peer Mentor Brenda Correa** will work directly with Prof. Sara Awartani's Latinx Freedom Dreams first year -- an exciting full-circle moment for Brenda who took this course in her first year, and who went on to become a Latina/o Studies and Political Science double major.



This year, I'm particularly excited to have been selected to design and lead a university-wide teach-in to mark "*55 Years of Action & Resilience*" with the University of Michigan's Spectrum Center, which is the United States' first LGBTQIA+ center on a college campus. This event will showcase student work in American Culture, such as capstone zine projects from my "*Queer Arts of Survival*" class, as well as student work in courses on Student Movement Histories and other capstone courses.

American Culture is also looking to the future of undergraduate education in LSA by building new "*Grand Challenges*" courses, which will help students fulfill a more flexible pathway to graduation. These courses are pedagogically innovative courses that draw on interdisciplinary methods to engage with a wide range of "*Grand Challenges*," from environmental justice, to ethical use of AI, to history and culture of birth control in

America and more. These exciting courses truly showcase how American Culture and Ethnic Studies education is uniquely positioned to equip students with the interdisciplinary skills they need to grapple with pressing issues facing America and the world.

Of course, these are just a few of our new initiatives in American Culture, as we begin another year of exciting coursework, community building, and scholarship here in Ann Arbor.



Brenda Correa

Richard Meisler Award Recipient Frida Salgado

2026 Graduate in American Culture

Frida Salgado is a graduating senior majoring in Economics and Latina/o Studies. Throughout her time at the University of Michigan, she has been involved in a variety of community-based organizations, including Proyecto Avance, the Peer Advisors for the Latino Mentoring Association (PALMA), the Spanish Language Internship Program (SLIP), and the Multicultural Economics Coalition (MEC). Her areas of interest include immigration, Chicana/o/x studies, education, and carceral studies. After graduation, Frida will join the Federal Reserve's Community Development team as a research assistant. She plans to return to school to pursue a PhD in Sociology and hopes to continue working alongside immigrant communities.

Frida applied for the Richard Meisler Award during the Winter 2026 semester. As part of her submission, she included an abbreviated version of her Honors thesis, a project she developed over nearly two years in close collaboration with her advisors and inspired by the experiences and perspectives of many community members.

Frida shares that the process of writing the thesis required her to strengthen her practice of reflexivity. Her research focused on the financial hardships Mexican-American women face during college. While she shared many of the same identities and experiences as her participants, she remained intentional about treating each testimony with care and respect, recognizing the diversity and complexity of narratives within the Latino community beyond her own lived experience.

At times, it was difficult to continuously engage with these lived experiences, as writing about these inequities and unfair realities could be emotionally heavy. Through her work, Frida sought to highlight the

Excerpt from Frida's Richard Meisler Award winning Honors thesis:
*Daughters, Debtors, Degree Seekers:
Mexican Women Navigate the Financial Borderlands.*

This study examines how five Mexican-identified women who are also first-generation college students utilize a combination of formal and informal financial strategies to navigate financial insecurity and barriers within higher education. Specifically, participants relied on: (a) working multiple jobs, (b) borrowing through lines of credit, and (c) engaging in upward-flowing remittances. These shifting financial practices offer a new framework for understanding how Mexican-American women navigate the economic challenges they encounter while pursuing higher education.

Using snowball sampling, I conducted five semi-structured, in-depth interviews with undergraduate Mexican-American women enrolled at a large public, predominantly White institution (PWI) in the Midwestern United States. Findings suggest that participants combine these formal and informal strategies to construct a "borderland economic model" rooted in their lived experiences as Mexican-American women navigating structural barriers within academia.

The strategies embedded within this borderland economic model are shaped by institutional barriers, gendered expectations, and cultural responsibilities. While these practices function as critical survival mechanisms, they often come at high personal costs, including financial debt, physical burnout, and emotional strain. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrate resilient modes of survival that enable them to persist and succeed within educational systems that frequently exclude or silence them.

By blending multiple economic practices, the Mexican-American borderland economic model represents a resilient response to financial adversity. At the same time, reliance on these borderland economies highlights broader structural inequalities that force individuals to adopt short-term coping mechanisms in response to long-term economic constraints. Ultimately, the critique lies not with the individuals or the economic model itself, but with the systemic limitations that make these strategies necessary.



nuanced experiences of Mexican-American students and amplify their voices as they navigate often unpaved and unsupported paths in higher education. She also hopes her work contributes to the broader body of scholarship centering Latino experiences through responsive and community-centered methodologies.

Frida felt immensely humbled to receive the award. When she first began writing her thesis, some individuals within academia warned her that Latino-focused research has historically been published primarily in diversity-focused journals, which are often perceived as less prestigious or impactful than mainstream academic publications. Others questioned whether her study would meaningfully contribute to the growing body of Latino scholarship. For Frida, receiving this award represented more than recognition of her writing and research abilities; it affirmed that research centered on Latino experiences is important, academically rigorous, and deserving of recognition. She hopes to continue advocating for and uplifting Latino communities through her future work.

Meet your AC Librarian

Meredith Kahn

As the Librarian for Gender & Sexuality Studies and American Culture, I provide reference and instruction services for students and scholars working in these interdisciplinary fields of study, teaching them how to do research, and purchasing materials for the library in these subjects. As a liaison librarian, my expertise includes domain knowledge of gender and sexuality studies, American studies, and research methods in those areas. I have an MA in Art History from the University of Colorado-Boulder, and an MS in Information from the University of Michigan. Anyone at the University can reach out to me for help.

The best way to contact me is via email, and you can make an appointment using this link.

mkahn@umich.edu



*A fun fact about the library: The first book ever purchased for what eventually became the University of Michigan's libraries was a volume of John James Audubon's *The Birds of America*. The regents authorized the purchase of this important scientific and artistic work before the University had constructed any buildings or enrolled any students. *The Birds of America* is on permanent display in the Hatcher Gallery Exhibit Room, where the pages are turned regularly to display a new bird for visitors.*



Meredith Kahn, AC Librarian

Students, Curators, Historians, Doing Hands-on American Culture

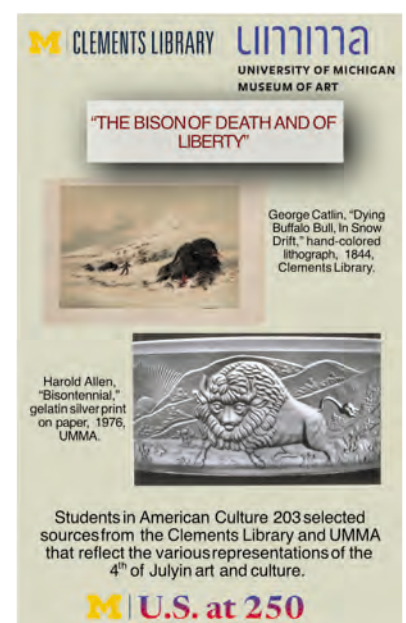
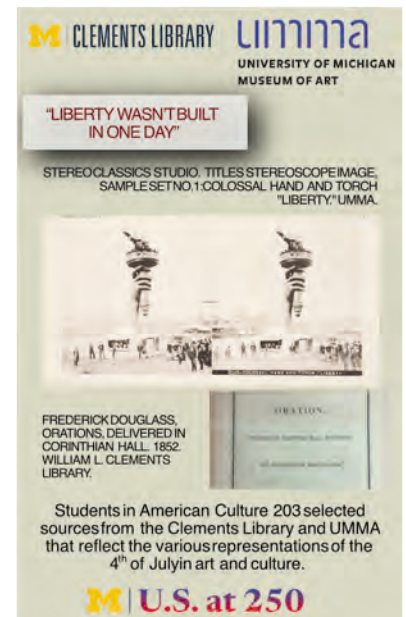
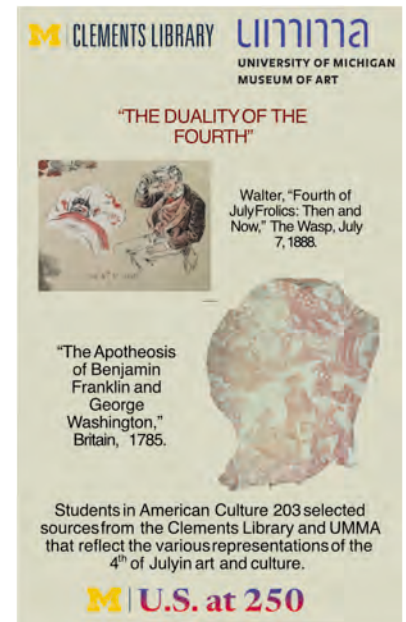
by Scott Larson

This year, 2026, marks the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. This has been accompanied in contemporary American culture with vigorous debate about the meanings of freedom and the political power of historical interpretations, as well as how to mark such a moment. Such fights over public displays of American history demonstrate the high stakes of studying American Culture.

For many years I've taught a course called *"Early American Cultural History."* This may not sound like a terribly exciting course, but this year students had a particularly exciting opportunity. Students worked with archival collections at the Clements Library and holdings of University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA) to investigate how people in America have celebrated, transformed, and critiqued meanings of the 4th of July. Students curated pairs of objects and competed for their selections to appear on public billboards on campus. Not only did this give them a chance to explore Michigan's remarkable collections, but they also got to build real-world skills of archivists, curators and public historians – work that American Culture graduates go on to do.

As the current students researched these collections, they got advice and assistance from Clements Librarian Maggie Vanderford and from a recent graduate, alum Elizabeth Zomeri (American Culture '26), who is currently pursuing graduate education in archives management at Simmons University. Elizabeth started on this path several years ago when she first visited the Clements library as a student in my class. As she later shared: *"From that semester onwards, I ensured that my academic journey included courses necessitating archival visits, which gradually transformed my interest into a passion for making meaningful contributions to the field of library and information science."* Coming back to the class where she had once nervously ventured into the archives, Elizabeth met with student groups, gave advice about curating exhibits, and voted on the jury panel selecting our competition winners.

These three winning groups, whose billboards are pictured here, explored an exciting range of objects and texts. They thought deeply about how different people in America used things like textiles and satirical prints to honor and lampoon the holiday; how orations and statues called for fuller enactments of the Declaration's promises; and even how cultural representations of Bison transformed the animal from a target of settler colonial eradication into a symbol of American freedom. Representatives from these winning groups also presented their research at a Clements Library panel, and they shared how their experience with hands-on research shaped their historical understanding of American Culture. Hopefully these students' future plans as aspiring history teachers and public policy professionals will include their own return visits to Early American Cultural History.



Finding Belonging Through Ethnic Studies

by Kristina Aguilar

Days before starting our first year, my roommate, Kiley, and I laughed over a YikYak meme showing Big Bird sitting awkwardly in a college classroom. The photo caption read “me sitting in classes this fall after tricking admissions into letting me into this school”. Kiley and I had met at a Campus Day and quickly bonded over our shared disbelief at being admitted to Michigan. We discussed how everyone seemed to know inside jokes that we weren’t in on, but we also shared the same excitement about moving away from our hometowns. I came to Michigan eager to study psychology on a pre-law track. However, I quickly became disheartened at how my introductory psychology classes predominantly highlighted Eurocentric perspectives. I sat quietly in 200-person lectures, with the same thought ringing in my head: what am I, a Latina with a disability from rural Massachusetts, doing here at a large, prestigious PWI?

My sense of belonging shifted in my Intro to Latina/o Studies Class, where I had my first-ever Latine teacher. Professor La Fountain-Stokes took the time at the beginning of every lecture to call out our names one at a time to record attendance. In pronouncing our names correctly, he reminded us all that our identities mattered at this institution. I learned about the untold histories of Latin American countries, including Cuba, where I family immigrated from. Following this course, I was motivated to combine my psychology major with American Culture, specifically the Ethnic Studies sub-major. By combining these majors, I have been able to bridge the gaps between the fields to better understand how sociocultural factors shape the behavior of all people, not just those whose identities are prevalent in psychology textbooks.

I joined the Race, Achievement, Culture, and Education Lab in the Department of Psychology, where I learned the term to express how I was feeling at the start of college: Impostor Phenomenon. Impostor Phenomenon (IP) describes the persistent feeling that one’s accomplishments are not deserved, often leading to the attribution of their success to ‘luck’ rather than their own abilities. My research within the lab focused on the structural factors contributing to IP and protective strategies for Latine students experiencing IP in higher education. Through American Culture, I learned how to challenge the broad categorization of

Latine/Hispanic as a race in psychology research and instead examine the diversity within Latine communities. In the methodology, I integrated core theories learned in American Culture of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s intersectionality, Yosso’s Cultural Wealth Model, and Latina/o/x Critical Race Theory (LatCrit).

For me, American Culture has been equally about the processes of learning and unlearning. I have learned about the communities often left out of history lessons, while also aiming to unlearn the biases and misconceptions perpetuated in these same lessons. I pursued classes in American Culture in search of a community that accepted who I am now, and where I came from. In my capstone course, I had the opportunity to take another course with the same

professor as my first course in my major, Professor La Fountain-Stokes. This felt like a full circle moment, where I was able to apply my interest in the legal system with Latina/o studies in my final research paper, “From Underground to the Super Bowl Stage: Reggaeton’s Resistance to Legal Repression in Puerto Rico.”

I am incredibly proud to be a graduate of the University of Michigan, and I recognize that this accomplishment



Kristina Aguilar 2026 Graduate in American Culture

resulted from years of my own hard work. Thinking about the difficulties in my own transition to college, I hope to continue supporting others in feeling confident that they have the tools to succeed because of their background, not despite it. While I still aim to attend law school, I am first pursuing a Master of Social Work from the Michigan School of Social Work as a Dean's Mission and Child Welfare scholar. Law school commonly does not consider the clinical skills necessary to utilize trauma-informed care in the courts. Therefore, I hope that the combination of these degrees, like my combined undergraduate degrees in psychology and American Culture, will allow me to better serve communities disproportionately impacted by the legal system. As I continue into a career in public service, I carry with me the lessons learned in American Culture, to recognize individual humanity and challenge the systems that shape the lives of young people.



Erica Kanzinger - Mother, Kristina Aguilar - Author, Aster Aguilar - Sister

AC Grad Students on the Rise!

Meet our American Culture PhDs
on the Job Market

Susan Najita, Director of Graduate Studies | Katia Kitchen, Graduate Coordinator

Many of our American Culture Graduate Students are imminently pursuing academic jobs or plan to be on the job market next academic year. They have been working diligently to complete their research, write their dissertations, and present their work to their grad committees. Below, we present their dissertation titles and their significance to their respective fields.

Michael Brier

"Informants in Residence: a History of the Smart Home, Participatory Data Extraction, and the Reconfiguration of American Homes"

Fields: Critical Data Studies, Surveillance Studies, Political Economy

Informants in Residence traces the history of cloud-based smart home devices in the United States, demonstrates how these systems have changed the US surveillance architecture both qualitatively and quantitatively, and elucidates key political consequences of these changes. Weaving together findings from archival research, interviews, and media analysis, the dissertation contributes novel evidence and insights to scholarship on surveillance, critical geography, political economy, and privacy decision-

making in the age of AI-infused big data infrastructures.

Kathleen Brown

"Nurturing an Antifascist Future: US Women and the Aid for Spain Movement (1936-1939)"

Fields: Feminist History, Radical Social Movements, and Transnational American Studies

Through extensive archival research in the United States and Spain, my dissertation is a recovery project that analyzes the contributions of a cohort of antifascist women who visited refugee camps and children's homes during the Spanish Civil War and returned to the United States to educate their audiences on the dangers of ascendent fascism. I conceptualize their work as a type of feminist antifascism, and these women were particularly concerned with the fate of women, children, and radicalized groups and responded by building antifascist consciousness and organization across women's labor and social networks.

Henry Chen

"Domesticating Difference: Racial-Sexual Citizenship and the Longue Durée of Chinese Exclusion"

Fields: Asian American Studies, Gender & Sexuality

Studies, and U.S. History since 1865

My dissertation examines the gender and sexual politics of Chinese Exclusion in the United States from 1875 to 1965. Drawing insights from Asian American Studies, Gender & Sexuality Studies, and U.S. History, the project charts how merchant- and middle-class Chinese Americans critiqued Exclusion by appealing to American sensibilities around gender, the family, and the home. At the same time, the project surfaces dissident histories of Chinese migrant sexuality—including interracial common-law marriages, sex work, and same-sex intimacies—that posed challenges to this project of racial-sexual uplift.

Sena Duran

"Race, Sex, and Fantasies of the Nation: Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA) Women in the U.S. Adult Film Industry"

Fields: Critical Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA) American Studies, Women of Color Feminist Sexual Politics; Digital Studies

This dissertation critically centers sexuality as an analytic of SWANA American studies and feminisms by taking the understudied archive of adult film as a case study. Through an expansive archival study, I argue that professional adult films produced in the U.S. from the 'video era' of the 1980s through the internet economy of the War on Terror period challenges familiar suppositions of SWANA women's sexualities in U.S. popular and political culture, instead exposing a complex landscape of racialized sexual curation rooted in notions of citizenship, U.S. empire, religious sexual normativity, and the shifting landscape of SWANA racialization within projects of U.S. national security.

Dejan Duric

"Imagining Elsewhere: Youth, International Schooling, and the American Horizon in Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina"

Fields: Linguistic anthropology, Youth and education, Transnational American Studies

This dissertation examines how youth at an international school in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina imagine their futures amid ongoing ethnonational division, and how the United States—as cultural imaginary, educational pipeline, and aspirational horizon—comes to dominate where those futures are placed. It brings the anthropology of youth and education into conversation with American Studies' interest in U.S. cultural power as it is encountered and reworked far from the metropole.

Jasmine Ehrhardt

"Making the High-Tech Prison: Media, Infrastructure, and Counter-Narratives of the Digital"

Fields: Prison, Technology, Mediamaking

My dissertation explores the knowledge production,

analysis, and media practices of imprisoned radicals and abolitionists, and their relationships to digital technology behind bars. Drawing on archival research on the US anti-prison movement as well as qualitative research methods in digital media studies, infrastructure studies, and comparative ethnic studies, "Making the High-Tech Prison" contributes to existing scholarship in critical prison studies that foregrounds the activism and organizing of imprisoned radicals across US prisons and jails, and it contributes to digital studies through examining the ways that the carceral state has absorbed and deployed digital media and technology for the purpose of political repression and capital accumulation.

Charlotte Juergens

"Memorials That Work: COVID Remembrance in America, 2021-2024"

Fields: American Cultural History, Memory Studies, Publicly-engaged scholarship

Charlotte's dissertation examines COVID memorials as sites of memory and healing, exploring how memorials can best serve bereaved communities in times of crisis. This dual-medium dissertation includes both a full-length written component and a feature-length documentary film, titled *Breathing Room*.

Michelle pruneah Kim

"Visceral Consumption: Digital Food Cultures and Asian American Racialization"

Fields: Critical Food Studies, Digital Humanities, Critical theory

As a critical food scholar, pruneah Kim is invested in honoring the lived experiences and expertise of queer and diasporic communities' use of food as a world building strategy. Her dissertation project explores how food and digital food media act as key technologies of racial formation that make Asian American racialization a visceral object of consumption in the everyday. In situating viscosity as the privileged site through which seemingly abstract and immaterial logics of colonialism and postcolonialism are registered materially and intimately in our everyday, visceral consumption accounts for how viscosity becomes a critical site through which racial consumption occurs, especially in our computational present.

Kyle Lindsey

"Black Digital SpaceTime: Content Creators Crafting Online Futures"

Fields: Digital Studies, Black Feminist Thought, Cultural Studies

My dissertation engages platform studies and black feminist cultural criticism to understand the cultural productions of "*creator-critics*," content creators

whose cultural productions focus on staking claims about the infrastructure and culture of the social media platforms they use. Through close reading their contributions, I argue that black creator-critics undertake various strategies to preserve the temporalities of blackness as adherents to Big Tech, be they CEOs or other content creators, march us towards their narrow ideas of the future that would flatten them.

Julianna Loera-Wiggins

"Sucias: Latina Stand-Up Comedy in Chicago"

Fields: Latina/x Feminisms, Performance Studies, Ethnography

Julianna's dissertation explores gender and identity through the lens of subversion through an ethnographic study of the Latina stand-up comedy scene in Chicago. Sucias argues that comedy is a politicized form of transgression that disrupts dominant narratives of race, gender, and class through performing the "cultural deviant." In taking an unserious performance genre seriously, Sucias focuses on the performing collective Las Locas Comedy to examine how Latina comedians complicate notions of Latinidad and enact strategies of resistance.

NEW American Culture PhDs

Michael Brier

Sena Duran

Alice Mishkin

Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship Awards

Henry Chen

Rackham Humanities Research Fellowship

Charlotte Juergens

pruneah Kim

Rackham One-Term Fellowship

Glenesha Berryman

Dejan Duric

Charlotte Juergens

Julianna Loera-Wiggins

Institute for the Humanities Graduate Student Fellowship

Jasmine Ehrhardt

Rackham Doctoral Intern Fellowship

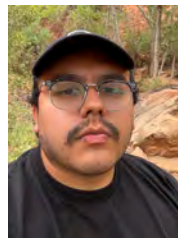
Jasmine Ehrhardt

Sweetland/Rackham Dissertation Writing Institute

Kathleen Brown

Welcome 2026 AC Graduate Cohort

Christian Garcia (he/him) earned an MA in Latin



American Studies from California State University Los Angeles after completing a BA in Chicana/o Studies with a minor in History from California State University Channel Islands. His research draws on media studies, migration studies, and urban history.

Garcia's proposed project examines the development of a community of street vendors in Pico-Union, Los Angeles who migrated to the US to flee political and socioeconomic violence in Central America. He also takes great interest in film and media studies to analyze neoliberal depictions of immigrants in American films. His hobbies include exercising, sports, traveling, and cooking.

Karla García (ella/she/her) earned a

BA in American Studies and

Educational Studies from Macalester

College. A Mellon Mays Scholar and

Moore Undergraduate Research

Fellow at UNC, García's research

draws on the fields of Latinx Studies,

transnational feminism, and

religious studies with a

methodological emphasis on ethnographic

fieldwork. Her proposed project examines Latinx

religious placemaking in the Midwest and how

marginalized communities create a sense of "home"

in church spaces. García's current research explores

the role of women in the Catholic Church and how

shifts in ritual affect belonging among marginalized

people. García enjoys hiking and camping in

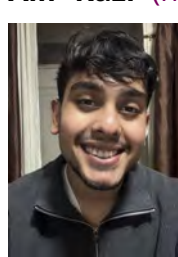
Minnesota, especially with her dog Chata. She also

enjoys cooking, trying new foods, and visiting local

coffee shops.



Alif Kazi (he/him) earned his BA in English and



Sociology with minors in History and

Asian American Studies from Hunter

College in New York. A Mellon Mays

scholar and Mellon Public

Humanities Scholar, Kazi's research

draws on Asian American Studies,

literary studies, and material culture

studies. His proposed research

examines how South Asian diasporic subjects

negotiate class, caste, and racial identity through

the consumption and use of everyday material

culture. Alif enjoys creative writing, trying new

foods, meeting new people, and at times, playing

video games. He also enjoys listening to video

essays and stationary cycling.

From Ann Arbor to Manitoulin

Strengthening Community Ties in Ojibwe Language Education

by Kayla Gonyon



Alphonse and me have been up to a lot of activities with students and community members. In spring of 2025 we were awarded an LSA Technology Services Level II Grant, which allowed us to hire three community members as assistants to help us develop advanced-level Ojibwe curriculum. This includes Julia Tehauno, who in Fall 2024 began working with Alphonse on a Nishnaabemowin translation of the script of the film *Princess Mononoke*, called "*Maandaakwenhs Mononoke*." Julia is a board member at the Nokomis Cultural Learning Center in Okemos, MI. With this grant, we were able to pay Julia to turn the script that she and Alphonse spent over five months translating into subtitles for the movie that we can show in our classes. In the year since then, Julia has been refining this script, and we plan to use it in creative and interactive activities in the Ojibwe classes. Julia is also organizing a dub of the film using the Nishnaabemwin script and Anishinaabe students and community members. This is in early stages, so stay tuned for an update!



Julia Tehauno, Kayla Gonyon, Alphonse Pitawanakwat & Gilbert Pitawanakwat

In March 2026, we attended the Anishinaabemowin-Teg conference in London, Ontario with undergraduate students Jackson Fenner, and Chloe Castile, as well as the three community members previously mentioned: Julia, Ariel Waagosh, and Aaron Miller. Aaron was a student in our first-year class in Fall 2023 and Winter 2024. He has been assisting us in various ways ever since. Ariel is an activist, lawyer and U of M alumna who lives in Lansing and founded the Wiingashk Negamajig Kwewag women's drum group that meets weekly at Nokomis Center (and that I attend when I am able!). Chloe is currently halfway through our four-course sequence of Ojibwe classes and we look forward to having her in class again in Fall 2026. Jackson will begin taking Elementary Ojibwe with us in Fall 2026. In the meantime he has been hard at work for U of M Library transcribing Basil Johnston's audio Ojibwe lessons so that they are ADA compliant.

In May 2026 I attended, as a student, the 2nd-annual Nishnaabemwin North language immersion camp, put on by Ninaatigoons Learning in North Bay, Ontario. I also attended last year, but this year I am happy to report that others from Michigan joined me, including Julia, Jackson, and Madison Kennedy-Kequom. Madison is an incoming graduate student in U of M's School for Environment and Sustainability. This 3-week-long camp is aimed at beginner and emergent speakers, and is part of Ninaatigoons Learning's Biidwedamowaad Nimkiig Biidaabang (BNB) program, a 10-month-long full-time training program for future Anishinaabemowin speakers and teachers. Nishnaabemwin North is the final project for students in BNB's teaching track. At camp each student teacher was assigned a class of campers, which acted as our "*home rooms*" for the 3 weeks of activities. The first week of camp was an intensive grammar review, and we were allowed to speak English. The second and third weeks were "*Nishnaabemwin eta*," and we were only allowed to speak Ojibwe. During the third week we were joined by several Netaanishnaabemjig, fluent first-speakers of Nishnaabemwin. (A couple of whom are relatives of Alphonse!)

I am also pleased to report that undergraduate student Madison Boes, who took the Elementary courses in Fall 2025 and Winter 2026, has been working with Alphonse and I on developing additional coursework for the 222 and 223 classes. Madison started as an assistant late in Winter 2026 semester, and is an excellent example of how taking our classes can lead to various opportunities for students to do research.

At the time I am writing this, Julia and I plan to join Alphonse in Wikwemikong for the annual powwow at the beginning of August. Julia and Alphonse volunteer at Nokomis, teaching a community language class. Visiting Wikwemikong will be helpful to the two of us, as we are both learning from Alphonse who is from Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island. Many of the fluent speakers who teach in Michigan are from Manitoulin Island in Canada.

AMAS Alumni Spotlight with Jude Yousif Sutton '2026'

Interview between Professor Karem Albrecht (CKA) and AMAS alumni Jude Yousif Sutton (JYS)

Jude Sutton, pictured here presenting on his research



CKA - During the course of your minor, you had the opportunity to conduct research. What was that project?

JYS - researched the history of the Organization of Arab Students and affiliated Arab student organizations at the University of Michigan and in the Southeast Michigan area to investigate its internal political life, its objectives, and its quiet dissolve and collapse. It was founded in the 1950s and dissolved by the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The American Culture 310 course [*"We Remember: Arab American History"*] offered the opportunity for students to get research experience and build research skills. I think more often than not, the average undergrad is thinking about research in a way that's quite competitive, and you have to work really hard to win the favor of a professor, for example, to get a coveted research position. So the course was quite democratizing in that it could give a wide array of students this opportunity. There was a group project component and I was able to pursue it further after the course via independent study with Professor Karem Albrecht. Fortunately, I was able to conduct interviews with former student activists who were attending the University in the '70s and '80s.

CKA - What did you learn from this research?

JYS - I think we have not properly understood the past Arab student movement's failures in such a way that we're not going to repeat those same errors. One, there was fixation on building power solely through the institution. So some of the interviewees stressed deeply to me that the political vision for the organization was in many ways to mirror other ethnic or religious minorities, the power and spaces that they had built at the university. They wanted to build that to be on equal footing. The second was that there was never a concrete long term vision beyond graduation, especially how these student activists could continue to work as professionals in ways that could contribute concretely to the Arab American movement at large. Thirdly, the isolation of

the student movement made it quite difficult to answer some of these questions. Compared to the makeup of the Arab student population at U of M now, for example, you would find a lot of international students, so their family's all the way back in the Middle East. In Ann Arbor in particular, it was difficult to be connected to the community.

CKA - Have you found ways to share your research with others?

JYS - I had the opportunity to present at **PEARS** [*Peer-led, End-of-year Asian/Pacific Islander American Research Symposium*] at U of M. It was a really positive experience to connect with other undergraduates who were asking similar questions like, What does it mean the way to us undergraduates who were pursuing these things, and it felt quite egalitarian. I was able to get a lot of helpful advice and connections to researchers in different fields who wanted to connect and follow up.

CKA - What's on the horizon now that you've graduated?

JYS - I'm using a lot of the experience and skills that I built through the AMAS minor at my current summer position at the Arab American National Museum. I'm working with a small cohort of other college-aged individuals to develop a temporary exhibit on the experiences of Arab American college students. Beyond that, I'm hoping to go to law school. In my research, I saw a strong tradition of advocacy for the Arab American community through law. Law was a field that a lot of these individuals ended up pursuing and always offering their services to the community as it's needed. So that's a source of inspiration for me, for my long-term career aspirations. It would be great to pursue a legal career around advocacy, but I think no matter what, as an Arab American professional, there's a degree of responsibility to be an advocate in any creative way that your position allows it.

CKA - Do you have anything else you'd like to share about your experience with the AMAS minor?

JYS - This is an incredibly valuable program that more students need to tap into. AMAS is one of the programs that I have seen not just restrict itself to the students who are under its minor, but also to be a resource and advocate for Arab and Muslim American students at large. That's quite unique that I don't often see at U of M. I remember for example, the Iraqi American Union really needed help with putting on an event, and it was AMAS that was willing to step up to the plate and nurture those spaces for Arab American students. That's something I've always been really grateful for, and it was an important experience for me as a student.

A/PIA Studies Research Awards

Honor Student Researchers Exploring History, Identity and Social Change



by Melissa Borja

This spring, U-M's A/PIA Studies program recognized four students whose scholarship explores race, migration, empire, identity, and community change. This year's Graduate Student Essay Award winners are Henry E. Chen, Gina Hsu and Wren Palmer, and the Undergraduate Research Fellowship was awarded to Paolo Gabriel Poquiz. These research awards, which are the first of their kind, were made possible through the generosity of the U-M Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander Alumni Association, which created an endowment last year to support student research.

The three graduate students recognized for their research and writing reflect the creativity, rigor, and interdisciplinary range of A/PIA Studies at U-M. Henry E. Chen, a PhD candidate in American Culture, received a Graduate Student Essay Award for "Go in an' See China Kids': Exhibiting Chinese Families in Gilded Age America." Chen's essay draws from his dissertation research, which examines the gender and sexual politics of Chinese Exclusion from 1875 to 1965. Gina Hsu, a PhD candidate in the Joint Program of Women's & Gender Studies and English, was honored for "Carp: Aquaforming, Nativism, and 'Invasion' in the Great Lakes."



Students who received awards celebrated with A/PIA Studies faculty at a gathering in May 2026. From left to right: Gina Hsu, Wren Palmer, Henry Chen, Paolo Poquiz, Melissa Borja, Retika Adhikari, and Roland Hwang.

Hsu is writing a dissertation on water and imperialism through anticolonial, feminist, and multispecies perspectives. Finally, Wren Palmer, a PhD candidate and Rackham Merit Fellow in American Culture, received a Graduate Student Essay Award for "Flesh and Skin(s)." Palmer investigates Polynesian warriorhood and the ways the body is represented through military culture, tattoos, performance, wrestling, video games and sports.

This year's Undergraduate Research Fellowship recipient, Paolo Gabriel Poquiz, brings the program's commitment to community-centered scholarship into focus. Poquiz is a third-year student majoring in Social Theory and Practice with minors in Creative Writing and Community Action and Social Change. Poquiz intends to use the fellowship to conduct archival research at the Bentley Historical Library for a capstone thesis on liberatory and progressive organizing in rural areas, especially mid-Michigan and the broader Rust Belt.

Together, Chen, Hsu, Palmer, and Poquiz demonstrate the breadth of A/PIA Studies at U-M. Their projects span Chinese exclusion, Great Lakes ecologies, Pacific representation and rural organizing, but all share a common purpose: recovering overlooked histories and imagining more equitable futures.

Class of 2026 Graduates

Minors

American Culture

Megan Degrand
Carlos Alberto Calzadilla Dominguez
Ligaya Lucia Galang
Mackenzie Nicole Kilano
Noelia Louisa Madrigal-Silver
Mackenzie Quinn Mielke
Isabelle Mara Schiff
Ethan Thomas Smith
Rylie Jazz Stam
Julie Elana Test
Cel Lin Torres
Amelie Vidrio
Maya Eden Volpi
Leilani Grace Wetterau

Native American Studies

Noah Nicholas Binson
Mani Vivian Carnes
Madison Michelle Reese
Mya Paige LaMay
Rae Zosel

Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies

Isabelle Leigh Lamug
Joenne Lau
Anika Nayegandhi
Tyler Nguyen

Arab and Muslim American Studies

Fatema Hazim Almoamen
Assmaa Eidy
Angy Galal El-Badry
Shatha Kassim
Moamen Shukeir
Jude Yousif Sutton

Latina/o Studies

Elena Aurora Fernandez
Victoria Hernandez
Christian Loredó-Duran
Noah Jude Morales
Amarilis Rachael Acosta Oliva
Kaytlin Marina Sanchez
Nazareth Sanchez
Alejandra Daniela Vasquez

Bachelor Degrees

American Culture

Paige Isabel Cook
Alexandra Mercurio
Emily Mara Ohl
Caleb Shoup

Latina/o Studies

Liliana Rachel Coker
Cassandra Corona
Melanie Cruz
Kasandra Negrete
Frida Salgado**

American Culture Ethnic Studies Sub Major

Kristina Alyssa Aguilar
Heeba Mohammad Altawil
Sage Niban Chupco
Katherine Elizabeth Cummings
Mari Angelique Longmire Davis
Dani Sanchez
Josie Nicole Sartin
Isabella Vong**
Helen Zheng**

Ph.D.'s

Spring 2025

Pau Nava

Fall 2025

Kate O'Connor

Winter 2026

Sena Duran

Summer 2025

Adrian King
Megan Rim

Summer 2026

Michael Brier
Alice Mishkin

** = Honors

Keep in Touch

U-M American Culture, Arab and Muslim American Studies, Native American and Indigenous 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.

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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.



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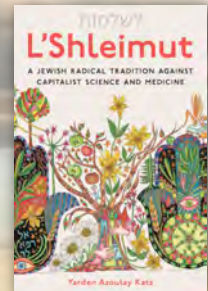
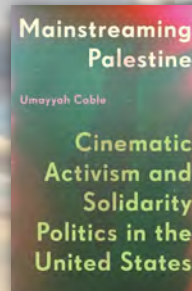
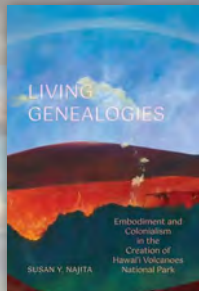
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2025-2026 Faculty Publications



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