01. Table of Contents
01. Acknowledgments
02. Letter from the Chair
03. The Personal Meets the Academic
Two A/PIA Minors on what it means to be a heritage student in the program
07. The Rewards of Teaching
Silvia Pedraza shares some of the unexpected joys that have come from her time as a professor
10. Broadening the Network
Richard Meisler talks about his experience teaching an online course in Winter 2015
14. New Faces
Meet our newest professors in Arab and Muslim American, Latina/o, and Digital Studies
18. 80 Years of American Culture
Learn about where we’ve been and what we’ve been doing since our founding!
20. Creating a Latina/o Literary Tradition in Michigan
With LSA undergraduate poet Cándida Curtis-Carazo
24. Talking College Across Boundaries
28. Announcing the Berkhofer Lecture and Tanner Awards
29. Ask a Grad!
American Culture Graduate Students talk to undergraduates about why they chose American Studies at Michigan
32. Awards
36. Congratulations, Graduates!
37. Publications
See what our faculty have published in the last year

Acknowledgments

PHOTOS
Cover photo of AMCU T 355 students [L-R] Jamie Chiu and Darius Cram by Ting Su

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ARTWORK
All photographs, artwork, and articles by Hannah Yang unless otherwise noted.
Accent font (cover) by Nelson Balaban
Dear Alumni, Students, Faculty and Friends of the Department of American Culture,

It’s “connection”—the theme of this edition of our magazine—that draws us all to the field of American studies. Certainly that’s what I was looking for when (having arrived in Ann Arbor because I was hired by the English Department) I began teaching courses for American Culture and Women’s Studies. My colleagues and I are very much engaged with literary studies, with history, and with other disciplines; we now have joint appointments not only with English and History but also with six other LSA units. I had the privilege last fall of teaching the theory-and-methods course required of our beginning Ph.D. students, and it’s all about how disciplines both connect and diverge.

We also connect the histories and cultures of the many peoples of America. The project of American Culture is nothing less than understanding our world in all its diversity. In the winter I taught a seminar for first-year undergraduates, on the topic “Understanding Everyday Life”—as you can imagine, it’s wide-ranging and a lot of fun. It’s been known to lead to students majoring in American Culture.

And we want to connect with different publics as well—as you read through this newsletter you’ll see our contributions to many different kinds of knowledge-making and action projects.

This year we are celebrating the 80th anniversary of our founding. Please take a look at the time line in the center of the issue to get an overview of our history. We’ll be having a lot of events this year, culminating in a conference in which we focus on looking forward to the future of American studies, with young scholars presenting papers on panels chaired by American Culture alumni. We are trying to connect the past not only with the present, but with the future.

I’m writing these words in mid-August. Many of us are returning to Ann Arbor from distant places—I’ve just come back from Québec, a place I am connected to both by its link to the Great Lakes that shape our landscape in Michigan and by my own family background. New colleagues are arriving; you’ll find articles about them in the following pages. The atmosphere and tempo of the town are about to change as students arrive. It’s a great moment!

I hope you enjoy these stories about our activities and that they connect with your own interests and activities. We are always eager to hear from our graduates and friends, so please take any occasion to write to us.

June Howard
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor and Chair of the Department of American Culture
EESHIN: I took my first Asian/Pacific Islander American (A/PIA) studies course, AMCULT 314: History of Asian Americans in the U.S., in the Fall semester of 2013. I originally took this course because I needed Social Science credit. The topic seemed interesting because it related to my organization, United Asian American Organizations. Throughout the course, I learned about the history of people I could relate to, A/PIA. This was an area of history that is not commonly taught in other colleges, much less other high schools. Having the opportunity to learn about influential A/PIA such as Vincent Chin, Grace Lee Boggs, and Yuri Kochiyama led me to develop an interest in this minor. Halfway through the semester, I declared A/PIA Studies as my minor.

Unlike my other courses, A/PIA Studies courses seem more relatable to me. Because I identify as an Asian American, I am better able to understand the topics we discuss in these classes such as model minority, identity, and culture. In these classes, we are able to talk on a deeper level and learn about the tougher issues that are not normally given a space in other classes. These issues are, in my opinion, fundamental to a students’ development in college. Unfortunately, outside of ethnic studies courses and Intergroup Relations courses, they are not typically a focus of or even mentioned in the class. Of course, there are student organizations that address these areas but it is not the same as learning about them in a classroom setting with a professor.

For my minor, I have taken a history course, a cultural performances course, a Women's Studies course, and an independent study. Despite the diverse range of topics, I have been able to connect my personal life with my academic topics. I do not intentionally try to separate the personal and academic in A/PIA courses because I feel like they complement each other. Because of my personal experiences, I am able to better contribute to the conversations that I have in these courses. Additionally, I was able to use assignments in several of my A/PIA courses to learn more about my family and their immigration to the United States. On the other hand, because of what I learn in the classroom, I am more intentional with what I say and do outside of the classroom. For example, I try to speak up more in order to combat the model minority myth. I also tried to attend several campus events such as vigils and speak out events with people of color to stand in solidarity with them after incidents affecting their community created a need for those events. Additionally, I have developed an interest in keeping up with current events that affect A/PIA through sources such as Angry Asian Man because of what I have learned in these classes. It is one thing to take classes for the requirements (Race & Ethnicity, Language, etc.) and another thing entirely to pursue something because it is an issue that needs addressing or a passion you can relate to. I took A/PIA Studies courses because I understood the importance of A/PIA issues as well as how these classes related to me on a more personal level. Without my minor, I would not have had as full of a college experience as I have in these past three years.

KEVIN: Growing up in the Northern Mariana Islands, a US territory in the western Pacific, I never really saw race as an issue because I came from such a diverse place. It was not until I came to Ann Arbor for my college education that I learned that being different was a social stigma that needed to be discussed. A/PIA studies gave me that space to share my experiences with like-minded individuals. Studying Asian American and Pacific Islander American issues allowed me to have critical engagement with issues of race and ethnicity, which I firmly believe is essential to a holistic understanding of the world in the 21st century. It prepared students like me to live in a multicultural society by understanding how a social construct like race affects an individual’s identity and opportunities. It was these issues, ideas, and lessons that provided me with the tools and knowledge necessary to address issues of race, ethnicity, and inequality tangibly and intelligently.

My eventual passion for Asian American and Pacific Islander American issues was something I developed relatively late into my undergraduate career—my junior year to be exact. Two friends were minoring in A/PIA studies and encouraged me to take classes just to get a feel for the subject and—like many other LSA students—get my Race & Ethnicity and Interdisciplinary requirements out of the way. Those classes exposed me to some significant issues that changed the way I looked at our society.

I learned about racial harassment through the Vincent Chin case, in which an innocent Chinese American was killed as a result of being a scapegoat for his murderers who lost their jobs in the auto industry in Detroit. I learned about our country’s broken immigration system through exclusionary policies like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that restricted Chinese immigrants from entering the United States and the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 that put a limit on the number of immigrants from Asia. I learned about racial injustice through Executive Order 9066, which called for the internment of roughly 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans from the West Coast—the largest detaining of a single group of people on the basis of race in our country’s history, which also led to national attitudes of fear and prejudice against any American of Asian descent. It was in those intellectual spaces that I had an opportunity to explore the social, historical, and cultural consequences of looking different despite being American. (cont.)
"In most of my other classes, there is a stigma of having my opinion be perceived as one that represents the ideas of the minority."

As a student in Ethnic Studies, it is quite difficult to separate the personal from the academic when engaging with material that has significant meaning for one's life. However, that is the beauty of this academic field. It allows students, like myself, to bridge the two by sharing common experiences and differences in thought within the context of race and ethnicity. It is through programs like this one that provide an understanding of true diversity from multiple perspectives. Moreover, the lessons I learned from studying A/PIA material reinforced my passion in promoting the interests of my personal community locally and the greater Asian American and Pacific Islander American community nationally. Interestingly enough, it was through those discussions and academic experiences that I developed a passion for Asian American and Pacific Islander American activism on the national level and eventually had the opportunity to intern for the OCA—Asian Pacific American Advocates, one of the largest Asian American civil rights organizations in the country.

The main differences between my A/PIA courses and my other courses all stem from the fact that I have the opportunity to collaborate with other students who share the same interests as I have, while having an academic space that is small, comfortable, and respectful. In my A/PIA courses, there is absolutely no fear of sharing opinions or ideas, which allow for active and meaningful discussion about the various issues that affect our global community. In most of my other classes, there is a stigma of having my opinion be perceived as one that represents the ideas of the minority, which is far from the truth of real academic discussions. My A/PIA courses created an environment where everyone is given an opportunity to say something and not be judged for it. Moreover, these courses expanded my worldliness and enhanced my social development significantly more than any of my other courses at the University of Michigan.

KEVIN (CONT.):

(Above): Kevin at graduation with Director of A/PIA Studies, Professor Amy Stillman

REWARDS

by Silvia Pedraza

06.

07.
The Rewards of Teaching

Silvia Pedraza is a Professor of Sociology, American Culture, and Latina/o Studies. She was the first tenure track appointment in the Department of American Culture (see page 18 for more important dates in our Department’s history).

Usually we talk about the rewards of teaching in terms of our contribution to the next generation and to the nation. But this Winter semester my teaching also directly rewarded my own life—on two occasions. In my Sociology/American Culture 304 class—American Immigration—I survey the history of immigration, race, and ethnicity in America from the 19th to the 21st centuries, focusing on many immigrant histories: that of the Germans, Irish, Italians, Jews, Blacks, Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese. While teaching about the history of the group, I make a point of including a short autobiographical vignette on each, as I go back and forth from biography to history—the central insight that C. Wright Mills (1961) called “the sociological imagination.”

The first reward came when I was teaching about the history of Mexicans, for which I included the short biography of Mary Lou Hernandez-Olivares Mason that appeared in Michigan History—“Living the Migrant Life” (2014). This told the story of her family when, in her childhood, they came up from Texas to work for the Michigan Sugar Company picking fruit and vegetables in the fields (blueberries, sugar beets, cherries, cucumbers, strawberries) in the heat of the summer months. They lived in the back of a trailer camp without electricity or running water, earning little, drinking water that was hot as soup from the sun. My students gasped at the living conditions! Despite an early marriage and several children, by dint of hard work, Mary Lou went on to earn a nursing degree and to make a mark in Michigan’s history as she became Director of the Michigan Commission on Spanish-Speaking Affairs, a capacity in which she helped migrant workers.

The very weekend after I introduced this material to the class, I served as a Faculty Marshall at the Honors Symposium, wearing my University of Chicago cap and gown. Was I surprised to find that Mary Lou’s granddaughter, Jennessa L. Rooker, was the undergraduate who spoke representing the Honors students. The address she delivered focused on her grandmother, who was in the audience, and her courageous life. When everyone clapped, the real Mary Lou stood up! Thanks to her tenacity, her granddaughter was now at Michigan and an Honors student. Amazing mobility in this wonderful family! I shared Jennessa’s address with my students later as well.

The second reward came when I was teaching the history of Cuban-Americans, for which I relied on my own research. This American Immigration class for upper class students has a research paper assignment for which students interview their family members as an immigrant family and focus on how they became incorporated in America over the course of time. They also do library research on the history of the particular immigrant/ethnic group, and then link the two together. This assignment most often results in a beautiful paper. One day, one of my Cuban-American students in the class, Eduardo Consuegra, came to me during office hours regarding his paper. Was I surprised to learn that his mother’s first cousin, Rosa María Alejo, had been my classmate and best friend when we were both little girls in the same school in Cuba! All the more so because I had never seen Rosie again. After our families left Cuba, the Alejos went to live in Tampa, Florida, rather than Miami, and my own family did not arrive in Miami until 15 years after they left Cuba, as they first lived in Bogota, Colombia for most of those years, and then Akron, Ohio. It was only when email finally arrived that the old classmates began to find their lost friends. In this case, unfortunately, that was impossible because Rosie had already died—rather young. So having Eddy in my class became a spiritual experience for me—like the return of a dearest friend I had lost.

Teaching does have many rewards, as we contribute to creating a better generation and a better nation. Unbeknown to us, at times we also reward ourselves.
broadening the network

a course about AIDS in the cloud
by Richard Meisler
I started teaching at the college level 50 (!) years ago, I became committed to two ideas: experimenting with educational technology and teaching in a non-authoritarian mode, eliminating grades. Computers were not available for educational use. The most advanced teaching technologies were tape recorders, 35mm slides, and overhead projectors. Our lives and classrooms are now saturated with digital technologies.

The idea for non-authoritarian teaching and learning came from both the progressive education and the student power movements. I wrote a book on the subject, *Trying Freedom*. Although a lot has changed in education, our schools and universities are still dominated by the grading power that professors exercise over students.

This year I created a MOOC (a massively open online course), a free, non-credit version of my on-campus course, AIDS and America. I called the new version AIDS: Fear and Hope. It is part of the Coursera system, a consortium of which UM is a member. About 2000 people from more than 100 countries signed up for it. About 700 finished it. Here is the way a few of the students introduced themselves in the online discussion forums:

- I live in Tanzania. I have experience working in international public health but have taken a few years off to care for my young children. I have HIV and will answer any questions you have.
- I work at a charity in London providing services to HIV-positive people. I spent the weekend with two friends who are both HIV-positive and in reasonably good health; they came close to death at times.

The best part of my on-campus course on AIDS is the guest speakers: HIV-positive people, doctors, social workers, lawyers, activists. They all agreed to come into a TV studio to record conversations with me. I edited the conversations to serve as video sessions for AIDS: Fear and Hope. These included one conversation with my wonderful American Culture colleague, Professor Lawrence La Fountain Stokes. Larry shared his memories of the early years of the epidemic in San Juan and Cambridge, Mass. He also read, in both Spanish and English, a powerful poem about AIDS.

The technology also allowed me to link to a wide array of resources: a TED talk by the virus hunter, Dr. Nathan Wolfe; a video talk by the great hero, Dr. Anthony Fauci, of the NIH; segments of the State of the Union Address in which President Bush announced PEPFAR.

I had no direct contact with the students, but I followed the online discussion forums. As they developed, I was impressed by the high quality of the information that was being exchanged. I also found the online conversations to be compassionate and humane. I came to believe that these distant strangers were real students, sincerely trying to learn without the usual trappings of credits and grades. As the course progressed, I increasingly felt that real education was going on, and that it was non-authoritarian, free of coercion. It was achieving my old goal of trying freedom.

"Universities are still dominated by the grading power that professors exercise over students."

Richard Meisler is a lecturer in the Department for American Culture. He started teaching with the Department of American Culture 12 years ago and serves as the Undergraduate Advisor for the American Culture major and minor. His teaching focuses on social and political issues.
new faces

meet our newest faculty members, assistant professors

charlotte karem albrecht
william calvo-quirós
& anna watkins fisher

My research is broadly focused on the history of Arabs in the United States and on the effects of class, gender, sexuality, and religion on the racial-ization of Arab Americans before the Cold War. My current research project looks at Arab immigrant peddlers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to ask how this transient labor that came to define the early community affected their racial positioning. While later community narratives of this history would recast peddling work as key to their acceptance in U.S. society, the number of Arab women involved in peddling work and the stigma surrounding it as deceitful actually made it a precarious endeavor for the community’s reputation. I take an interdisciplinary approach to this topic, looking at how Arab peddlers were understood through popular culture (such as the musical Oklahoma!), social welfare archives, and through the Arab American community itself.

This project also asks how we can better understand the uses of historical narratives by tracing the work that the existing narrative about Arab peddlers has done. For instance, what does it say about labor and race that the most commonly-understood narrative about Arab American peddling is one of entrepreneurship and building capital? Following this interdisciplinary thread, I also examine my own position as an Arab American who descends from this very history. What should I do with the desire to find certain kinds of stories and to validate those stories over others?

How do I account for the exclusionary nature of many archiving practices, which often determine what counts and what does not as historical evidence?

In addition to my academic work, I am the board chair for Mizna, an Arab American arts organization based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Through programs like our Arab Film Festival and producing the only Arab American literary journal, Mizna’s mission centers the creativity and self-representation of Arabs in the face of a culture of demonization. I am excited to bring some of my work with Mizna into the classroom this fall, when I teach a class called “Arab America: Arts, Culture, and Activism.”
My work is all about connections and intersections, as it is located between the multidisciplinary fields of Industrial Design and Ethnic Studies because of my Ph.D.s in both areas. My early work focused on car subcultures and race, and how cars manifest American values and anxieties. In particular, I studied lowrider car customizations and their use of color and design methodologies. This project explored lowrider aesthetics as part of a visual language linked to Chicana/o Latina/o oral traditions and the struggles against discourses of aesthetic regulation and normalization in the American Southwest. By studying the connections between aesthetics, race, and class within the social consumption of cars and the governing of taste, this work showed how color and aesthetics are used to construct notions of visual sovereignty, nationhood, and to inscribe visual mobile histories in America.

My research interests also include Chicana/o Latina/o feminist and queer decolonial methodologies and spiritualities, as well as interviews and ethnographic visits to popular shrines in order to study border monsters and folk saints. I approach these tales and fantastic entities as sophisticated community epistemic archives that unveil the sociopolitical and economic struggles experienced along the border in the last hundred years especially in the context of the post-Cold War years, the signing of NAFTA, and the events following September 11, 2001.

In the book I’m working on at the moment, I theorize parasitism as an ambivalent mode of resistance in contemporary digital and performance art. Taken up as a performative maneuver, I argue that the parasite figures a symptomatic response to the perceived impasses of political action. It mobilizes the constraints of our political present, not by fighting them frontally or by seeking a means of escape, but by accepting (or rather, performing one’s acceptance of) the conditions of domination in order to challenge them from the inside.

In recent years, my research has become increasingly preoccupied by whether radical politics is still possible in the era of networks and if so, what avenues for action remain open in a system from which there appears to be no way out. From high-speed financial networks that erode national and institutional borders to social networking sites that dissolve the distinction between work and play, networks are pervasive (or so we’re told). But, as the connective tissue that links transnational issues of credit and debt to issues of invisible and outsourced labor to big data and mass surveillance, they also constitute the ground of the political today.

I’m looking forward to pursuing these questions in dialogue with students in American Culture in courses such as “Digital Bodies: Performance After the Internet” (Fall 2015) and “Radical Digital Media” (Winter 2016). In my teaching, I encourage students to think about how digital technologies, like facial-recognition technology or scannable barcodes, facilitate new relationships to identity and social engagement that are both banal and pernicious: making previously tedious tasks simple even as they represent sites of vulnerability to exposure and regulation. I’m not only interested in how digital culture poses questions about participation and consent in contemporary life, but also in how these very technologies have been taken up and repurposed by experimental artists, tricksters, and media interventionists for forging creative responses to the limits of resistance in network culture—from lifecasting and surveillance art to glitch art and aesthetics to tactical media and hacktivism.

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This timeline is a work in progress of historical research and collective memory. We welcome your feedback and comments!
THE MIDWEST poetry may not be the first pairing that comes to mind, but to senior Cándida Curtis-Cavazos, they are inextricably linked. Both have played a major role in her past and, she is certain, both will continue to shape her future.

Curtis-Cavazos is used to a careful balancing act; she is at once a student, a poet, a Wolverine, a Latina, and a Detroit native. This last title in particular has been difficult to carry at times. She was born in Detroit. Not the Detroit, as she pointed out when she read at the Latina/o Studies Program’s January 20 literary reading, the part of Detroit that has “recently become cool to visit again.”

Instead, Curtis-Cavazos said in the spring, she remembers growing up and being “always ready to get out. I didn’t really want to be there. I grew up in kind of a rough neighborhood. There were a lot of good things (cont.)
about my neighborhood, but I just started to lose appreciation for it.” She lived briefly in Houston as well, in a rough neighborhood that she says was “the same in a lot of ways... very negative.”

For Curtis-Cavazos, poetry has always been an outlet. She began writing at age seven, when she kept up a correspondence with her father, who was incarcerated at the time. She says, “my father’s not educated formally or anything, just a good poet.”

It wasn’t long into college before she realized that she needed poetry and the connection it provided to her community more than ever. Before her first year at college was over, she began to appreciate the community she came from in a new way. She began to feel like she was different than her new classmates, that “there weren’t too many people from the kind of areas” she grew up in.

“I was fed up of being the oddball,” she admits. “I started to see all the beauty of my neighborhood that I’d never seen before. ” She began to view the art that had surrounded her during her upbringing in a new light.

She “fell in love with [her neighborhood] again, and that’s when [her] writing took off.” She learned to integrate her new life with her old through a new type of poetry. She says that, “[the University] opened my mind to the politics and the systems that you’re up against. College introduced me to the rest of the world, broadened and deepened my poetry.” It was a combination of understanding the systems at play and a newfound appreciation of and perspective on her hometown that allowed her poetry to mature. She is happy to say that her poetry is “not about escape anymore.”

It was through her desire to be involved with the Latina/o community on campus that she met the Director of Latina/o Studies, Professor Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes. La Fountain-Stokes, she says, “was always so supportive and loving towards the [Latina/o] community any time we reached out to him.”

As director, La Fountain-Stokes was excited to meet young Latina/o poets like Curtis-Cavazos and invested in fostering a Latina/o literary scene at Michigan. The Latina/o Studies Advisory Board, led by La Fountain-Stokes put together a slate of Winter 2015 literary events. First, the Islands Meets Borderlands literary reading at which Curtis-Cavazos, graduate students, and faculty read. The readers (who included Aliyah Khan, Amy Sara Carroll, Francis Santana, Larry La Fountain-Stokes, and Marcelo Hernández Castillo) shared with a packed and captive audience a wide range of literary styles and topics, touching on sites of encounter and transformation. A month later, the legendary founder of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, Miguel Algarín, performed for the Latina/o Studies Program. He was accompanied by Detroit musician Randall Wilson and featured Detroit poet Deonte Osayande as an opener. Later in the semester, Latina/o Studies hosted a lunch with poet Martín Espada in collaboration with the Helen Zell Writers’ Program.

Reflecting on her reading at the January literary event, Curtis-Cavazos declares it “really cool; it was great to be at an event that appreciated different kinds of writing. Usually, I’m in front of an audience that wants to hear something specific, like rap or spoken word.” Even though there were over 50 people in the audience, Curtis-Cavazos felt comfortable reading personal work she hadn’t shared before. She says, “I felt like I was a part of a community.”

And while the other readers’ backgrounds were not identical to her own, she felt a connection. She says, “I’ve lived in more than one place and I’m mixed; I’m not just Latina I’m also Arab... it was cool to meet other people [at the reading] who were talking about those things... people who have been different places and struggled with it. That mixed-up identity.”

Curtis-Cavazos will graduate in December 2015. She has no intention of taking a break from poetry. On the contrary, she looks forward to continuing to write poetry that integrates her experiences in Detroit and in Ann Arbor and wherever else she ends up. She realizes now that “writing confirms that I exist. My life happened and is here, for a reason.”

“My poetry is not about escape anymore.”
JULIE ELLISON’S AMCULT 498 COURSE, GETTING IN/GETTING OUT, ASKS UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS TO TALK ABOUT COLLEGE ACROSS BOUNDARIES AND DIFFERENCES.
On a spring evening in April, 11 students in my Winter 2015 American Culture capstone seminar and a dozen members of the larger Ann Arbor community sat down together for a deliberative dialogue on “The Changing World of Work: What Should We Ask of Higher Education?” The event marked the culmination of our semester-long study of “Getting In and Graduating: What College Means in America.”

It might seem strange to ask college students to reflect on college. But the diversity of the class and the input of the community resulted in one of the most thought-provoking events I’ve had the privilege of being involved with.

The class included several students who were the first in their family to attend college; an international student who had attended American Schools in three countries; recruited athletes; and a new transfer student. Some students were familiar with community colleges; others weren’t.

They drew on scholarship in education, history, critical race studies, anthropology, literacy studies, and sociology. Activities in and out the classroom challenged students to work together (a lot) on core questions: Who—and what—is college for? How have people labored and fought for educational opportunity, now and in the past? How does college have people labor and fight for educational opportunity, now and in the past? How does college—actually work?

Each week, a classmate and I facilitated a small group planning. Our starting point to college—actually work?

The stories that came from the event revealed a powerful range of reasons people come to college and what they need from it. Some of those observations included:

**Spring:** [After graduation] I had to learn so much about working with people and time management and making appointments. College didn’t prepare me for having to develop and build those skills as you’re going along. [At a job you see] different levels of jaundice, bitterness. College doesn’t prepare you for this: people wiping the cobwebs off their faces... How do you keep yourself valuable and relevant? Work doesn’t stop.

**Jordan** [in school the biggest goal was ‘get that BA.’ Now it’s not enough. Higher ed [is] faced with returning students to reinforce [skills] so they can keep their jobs and get a wage increase. I’ll get bumped off by somebody coming out of grad school with that MSW. I’m a first generation college grad—still trying to make my mark. How are colleges accommodating people like me?

**Katie, U-M student:** I realized that I won’t be learning anything in the classroom. It will all be about the internship. All I needed was the internship but I have to pay to get the degree.

**Paul, entrepreneur:** Higher ed will be forced to change dramatically in next 50 years. We’re using the same system developed in England 200 years ago. [It’s] ineffective. It worked because it was limited to the wealthy... There’s... no force against tuition rise. Obama’s community college proposal, free education while still working and getting aid—I was a huge proponent.

**Danny, student in the class:** My mom got an associate degree. I said “Mom you could go further.” It’s a trend with my mom and my sister—community college courses. Obama’s idea has a lot of potential.

**Kurum, comedian, actor, retired cop:** It’s a trend with my mom and my sister—community college courses. Obama’s idea has a lot of potential.

**Carol, student:** [My aims are] a bit broader, more towards getting past stigma of mental health... I came to U-M not knowing anybody, not having anybody nearby. It’s hard for students to reach out to others... Teachers don’t care as much as they should. Success is based on mental health as well.

**Wendy, a student in the class:** College should focus on raising awareness—not narrow minded individuals. I like that [U-M] offers the R[ace] and E[nrichment] requirement. People are... more self-aware. [That’s good] for our nation as a whole.

We need to prepare students for college. We need to do better. Students are not getting what they need in high school.

So what is the point of talking about college in college? Does deliberating change people’s minds? Yes and no. One person wrote on their evaluation form, “I always thought that colleges and universities don’t have the guts to foster real change and create the change needed. I still think that.” For others, the value of the experience lay in hearing fresh viewpoints: “Most of the issues discussed were relatively new to me. It was cool to... explore ideas with diverse people.” The opportunity to compare experiences expanded horizons: “Degree inflation never really crossed my mind until now and it really makes me worry what we as a society will do to remedy the situation.” Finally, many responses took the form of fresh resolutions going forward: “HE [higher education] is always changing so it’s important to see all aspects of people’s need and value in HE.” “Be more involved in community service; provide more mentorship to college students.”

While improving the higher education system may be a slow process, it is my hope that this class and events like this deliberation can inspire the reflection necessary for that change in the students, in the community, and in myself.
The Native American Studies (NAS) program was gifted with a generous donation this past year and will use it to create two new, annual initiatives: the Robert F. Berkhofer Lecture on Native American Studies, and the Helen Hornbeck Tanner Awards for Best Student Writing on Native American Issues. The first Berkhofer Lecture will be delivered on Friday, March 11, 2016, by legendary Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday, with the Tanner Awards to be given in a ceremony prior to the talk.

“The idea behind the Berkhofer Lecture is to showcase a premiere speaker in our field,” said NAS Director Scott Lyons. “The Tanner Awards are designed to put the best written work by students literally on the same stage as our noted speakers.” There will be four Tanner Awards given out for writing by graduate, undergraduate, tribal college, and high school students.

Funding for these initiatives is coming from around campus, but it all started with a generous three-year gift by UM alumni Carmen and Daniel Brenner (both ’97, LSA and Residential College) of Seattle, Washington. Carmen is a descendant of Michigan Indians and sees these initiatives as a way of honoring her maternal grandmother, Vita Clark, who was part of the Ottawa Tribe and raised at Bad River on the Upper Peninsula. As Carmen explains, Vita was “a gifted child and she was able to skip two grades in school. She received funding to go to college but she was not able to attend because her family did not have enough money to pay for books and living expenses. She never made it to college.” The Brenners hope that their gift will support Native American recruitment and retention at U-M in addition to contributing to Native American Studies as a vibrant academic field.

Both the lecture and the essay awards are named for former U-M faculty members who shared Carmen’s vision and were notable in establishing Native American Studies as a field. Robert Berkhofer Jr. (1931-2012), an historian and the author of The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present (1978), taught at Michigan from 1973-1991 and for a time directed the Program in American Culture. Helen Hornbeck Tanner (1916-2011) was a founder of the fields of New Indian History and ethnohistory and the author of the Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History (1987); she received a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in 1961 and taught here for many years.

The first Berkhofer Lecturer, N. Scott Momaday, is the author of over fifteen books of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama. His first novel, House Made of Dawn, won the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and inaugurated what has come to be called the Native American Renaissance in literature. In 2007 he was awarded the National Medal of Arts by U.S. President George W. Bush.

For more information, contact Scott Lyons, Director of NAS, at lyonssr@umich.edu
I’m sticking it out to try and prove that I can do it when what I’m actually enjoying is my gender study classes that I’m taking as electives. So I switched majors!

**ON THE MICHIGAN DIFFERENCE:**

**EM:** I came to the University of Michigan because Tiya Miles was here and I wanted to work with her. Her work focuses on the connection between black and native peoples; I read her work and thought, ‘oh my god, this person is amazing.’

**MA:** I chose Michigan because of its outstanding African Americanist historians; we have an unparalleled number of people who specialize in 20th century African American history. I also wanted to go to the school that I knew would let me finish in the time that I needed to finish. The program here says you can finish in 5 years. When I made my decision, I considered whether I believed Michigan when they said that and realized that I did, mainly because of how much research I had done so far and the monetary support. I had the funding to focus on research for the next 5 years and if I decide not to apply for tenure track positions at that point I can do that. You should definitely have that conversation with yourself.

**Kf:** You can do a lot of the same kinds of work in different places but the most integral question you can ask yourself is, “how do you like thinking about things?” That goes for a graduate school program, a course you pick in graduate school, or any other job. Michigan has a really wide range of scholars whose interests and approaches intersected with mine. I felt like this would be a good fit to explore a lot of my different options and interests.

**IC:** I actually was not considering Michigan initially, until I was invited to come with a group of graduate students from the University of Puerto Rico. We went to a conference and after coming here and meeting a lot of people in American Culture, history, anthropology, and elsewhere, I realized that this was a strong intellectual community that would be a good place for my work.

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**ON THE MANY WAYS TO GET TO A PH.D.:**

**Iván Chaar-López (IC):** The path that led me to a Ph.D. in American Culture at the University of Michigan is filled with twists and turns; it’s a very crooked line. I initially entered into university to do a B.A. in music and music composition and I never took an American studies class. But I was always really into history; as a kid I always engaged history through video games. I played a lot of Age of Empires as a kid! So I started taking history classes and getting frustrated with my music teachers. And I said, “you know what? I really love my history classes and I should follow this.”

**MA:** My road to a Ph.D. started when I was about 9 or so. In college it suddenly dawned on me that what I was really interested in talking about were the things that my father and I had talked about when I was a child. African American history, for example, and how you can win a fight with household items. I sought out the African American Studies Department at Columbia University. And I started thinking about how my history with my father was so foundational. And I thought, ‘maybe there’s a history here that I want to research and I want to follow.’

**EM:** I started as a psychology major as an undergraduate. At the end of my third year I hit a crossroad because I realized I wasn’t enjoying it whatsoever. The program was science-grounded rather than social science-grounded. I thought, ‘I don’t even like these classes.’

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**Kyle Frisina (KF):** I think it’s pretty extraordinary to have the time and space to investigate the things that really feel important not just to us individually, but also to a community whose interests touch on and inform our own. It’s a huge luxury, and also a big responsibility.

**Maryam Aziz (MA):** Graduate students are really cool people who study really cool things. You can be that person! And I think an American studies Ph.D. is worth it if it’s useful to what you want to do for a career, especially if you can do it in an environment like the University of Michigan where you are supported mentally and monetarily.

**Emily Macgillivray (EM):** It needs to be talked about more, but the skills you learn with an American studies Ph.D. can be marketed and applied to other positions both inside and outside academia.

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**Maryam Aziz is from Lawnside, NJ and has a B.A. in African American Studies from Columbia University. Her research includes work on martial arts as used by 20th Century Social Movements.**

**Iván Chaar-López is from San Juan, Puerto Rico and has a B.A. in History from University of Puerto Rico – Río Piedras. His research is in New Media Studies and Latina/o Studies.**

**Kyle Frisina is from New York City, NY and has a B.A. in Art from Harvard University. Her research is on martial arts as used by 20th Century Social Movements.**

**Emily Macgillivray is from Thunder Bay, Ontario and has a B.A. in Gender Studies from Queens University. Her research is on transnational and comparative Native Studies.**
Enrique Méndez is a junior who is pursuing a double major in Latino/a Studies and Spanish. Upon graduating, he intends to obtain a degree in Public Health and create programs in Latino communities within urban areas. He is particularly interested in increasing education and awareness on HIV and AIDS in order to decrease the health risks posed by sexually transmitted diseases. Enrique plans to utilize his degree in Latino/a Studies to understand the multifaceted dimensions of the Latino/a community. His coursework will prepare him with the interdisciplinary frameworks needed to increase access to education and health.

Paula Moldovan is a junior who is pursuing a major in Biomolecular Science and a minor in American Culture. When she enrolled at the University of Michigan, she decided that she wanted to become a dentist and thus declared a Pre-Dental path. While taking “Introduction to Arab American Studies,” she became aware of the diversity of the Arab American community and decided that in order to be a great dentist who offers excellent and compassionate care, that she would need to learn about the peoples and cultures that make up the United States. Paula therefore decided to minor in American Culture, to distinguish herself as a culturally sensitive and culturally competent future dentist. In winter 2014, she received University Honors in recognition of her scholastic achievement.

Lania Robinson is a junior who is pursuing a major in Psychology and a minor in American Culture. In her first semester at the University of Michigan, she received University Honors and was inducted into Psi Chi, the International Honor Society in Psychology. She serves on the executive board of the National Council of Negro Women and volunteers as a mentor for first year students. In addition, she is a Resident Advisor for University Housing and an Academic Success Partner for the Leaders and Best Program in OAMI (the Office of Academic Multi-cultural Initiatives). Through American Culture courses, Lania has explored the history and contributions of African Americans to American culture. Passionate about social justice, she is pursuing a career in human resources and will use her minor in American Culture to create diverse and inclusive organizational structures.

The Joel S. Siegel Award

Every year, the Department of American Culture awards the Joel S. Siegel prize to undergraduate students with demonstrated financial need and who best represent the potential for excellence in our program. Each winner has proven academic accomplishment and professional goals in line with the Department of American Culture. The Siegel Award has been given out for more than five years and has helped students achieve the goals they set for themselves. The recipients’ work spans health, immigration, social justice, and more.

This award was named for Joel S. Siegel, a University of Michigan alumnus. A lawyer and veteran, he enjoyed traveling and classical and folk music. He and his wife, Evelyn (née Marks), believed in supporting undergraduates however they could. Mr. Siegel passed in 2013, but his memory lives on through this award.
The Department of American Culture selects undergraduate essays each year for their contribution to understanding an aspect of American culture, including issues emerging from race and ethnic studies, history, literature, media studies, performance studies, women’s studies, LGBTQ studies, the social sciences, and other related fields. Essays were also judged on their originality and the clarity of presentation.

**Ariel Kaplowitz**

Ariel Kaplowitz is a graduating senior with Honors and the Residential College, a double-major in American Culture and Creative Writing and Literature, and a minor in Inter-Group Relations. Her paper, "Mujeres por La Causa: Chicana Feminists in the International Women’s Year" is an original research paper based on the Chicana por Mi Raza archive. It uses archival materials to construct a historical narrative documenting Chicana feminist involvement in the International Women’s Year conference in 1975 and activism that followed from 1975-1977. The committee appreciated her perceptive readings of Chicanas’ struggles for inclusion and effort to write Chicanas into the history of feminism.

**Nour Soubani**

Nour Soubani is a graduating senior with Honors and a triple-major in American Culture, International Studies, and Arabic, Armenian, Persian, Turkish, and Islamic Studies. Her paper, "Complicating the Arab-American Identity: The Role of War and Violence in Arab-American Creative Writing from 2001-2014," examines poetry written by Arab Americans after 9/11. It highlights recurring themes in the poetry: physical displacement, war, diaspora, and military aggression. The committee admired the perceptive readings of post-9/11 Arab American poetic production and the interconnections made between U.S. demonization of Arab Americans and multiple struggles around identity.

**Patrick Mullen-Coyoy**

Patrick Mullen-Coyoy is a sophomore with Honors and a double-major in Spanish and Latino/a Studies. His paper, "A Not-So-New Colossus: United States Response to Central American Immigration in the Mid-1980s and the Mid-2010s," compares two historical moments of U.S. immigration policy towards Central American refugees. It shows how the situation of refugees from Central America needs to be understood in relation to U.S. policies in the region. The committee was impressed with his insightful grasp of issues of immigration, refugees, and civil conflict between the US and Central America.
CONGRATULATIONS, GRADUATES!

American Culture Bachelor Degrees
Kalli L. Bates
Olivia Rose Birchmeier
Destiny M. Carter
Kevin Cheng
Alexander Robert Chessin
Paige Marie Compagner
David Alan Cooper
Wendy Cortes
Justin Dawes
Aaron Folbe
Jordan Thomas Fricks
Fabia Haque
Gordon Harrison Howey
Kavitha Iyengar *
Nicole S. Joseph
Ariel Rose Kaplowitz *
Chelsie Kastl
Aashay Kumar
Jacqueline Kathe Matyszczyn
Rachel Beatrice Talon Mazer
Nikki Blue Page
Keon Anthony Ray
Rachel Esther Salle
Dounique R. Sims
Nour Soubani *
Stevie Danyel Vance
Thomas Joseph Vansooten
Steven Harris Wilf
Latina/o Studies Bachelor Degrees
Cesar Vargas
American Culture MInors
Sarah Michele Ballew
Allison Marie Bell
Emma Caslyn Bunin
Gabrielle Elizabeth Christ
Ryan Alexander Eaton
Natasha Janardan
Mark Alexander Madion
Emily Moore
Alia Maya Raheem
Zach Paul Reilly
Alison L. Sagin
Arden Julia Shore
Brian Thomas Snyder
Michael Dale Vandenburg
Alicia Marie Venable
Rachel Eae Weisberg
Ben Paul Ziffren
Arab and Muslim American Studies MInors
Tala Dabbour
Zaina Gennaoui
Safer Rathur
Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies Minors
Kevin Bautista
Eeshin Chang
Suzanne Hiraisa
Megan Ashley Yee
Digital Studies Minors
Andre’ Miller Barbour
Sean Patrick Byrne
Julie Michelle Cohen
Amie Sarah Diamond
Emily Anne Parsons
Aryeh S. Perlman
Lindsey Alice Poppeck
Jessica Lea Roach
Layne Austin Simescu
Katie Lyn Szymanski
Latina/o Studies Minors
Alejandra Roel
Native American Studies Minors
Natasha Dabrowski
Tashina Lee Emery-Kauppi
American Culture Ph.D.s
Matthew Blanton
Joseph Cialdella
Sarah Gothie
Natalie Lira
Wendy Michael
Hannah Noel
Krisitina Salllata
Mejdulene Shomali

* graduated with honors

Photo (L-R): Graduating students Nour Soubani, Reem Kashlan, Professor Evelyn Alsultany, and graduating students Tala Dabbour, Safer Rathur

The Jim Crow Routine: Everyday Performances of Race, Civil Rights, and Segregation in Mississippi
University of North Carolina Press
Stephen A. Berrey

[({ })] The Transborder Immigrant Tool
The University of Michigan Digital Environments Cluster Publishing Series
Poetry and statement by Amy Sara Carroll, computer code by Brett Stalbaum and Jason Najarro

Mexico on Main Street: Transnational Film Culture in Los Angeles before World War II
Rutgers University Press
Colin Gunckel

The Cherokee Rose: A Novel of Gardens and Ghosts
John F. Blair Publisher

Broadcasting Modernity: Cuban Commercial Television, 1950-1960 (Console-ing Passions)
Duke University Press
Yeidy M. Rivero

Kaulana Na Pua (Famous Are the Flowers)
Lowell Edgar Productions
Amy K. Stillman
Thank you.

Our alumni and friends’ generosity allows us to provide our students and faculty with extraordinary opportunities.

Because of your support, this year we were able to:

- create a new undergraduate student award,
- give over $5000 in scholarships,
- launch a lecture series in our Native American Studies Program,
- enhanced our undergraduate classes by funding trips to the Detroit Institute of Arts and the National Arab American Museum,
- offer our graduate students full funding for five years,
- and much more!

Want to make a difference?

Your support is always greatly appreciated.

If you would like to speak to someone directly about your giving options, please feel free to contact the Chair of the Department or the staff of LSA Development. The liaison officer for American Culture in LSA Development is John Ramsburgh. John’s contact information is as follows:

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