Dear Alumni, Students, Faculty, and Friends of the Department of American Culture,

The past academic year, 2015-16, was the 80th year since courses in the Development of American Culture were first offered to LSA undergraduates. It was the 64th year since the Program in American Culture granted its first Ph.D., and the fourth year since we became a Department. From my point of view as Chair, it was both an ordinary year—in which we taught, did our research, participated in the business of running the unit and the University—and an extraordinary year.

The 80th anniversary conference we held in March was definitely extraordinary. For me, during those two days, a very familiar place—the Art Deco palace that is the Rackham Building, built around the time the Program was founded, and the location of my office for years while I was an Associate Dean in the Graduate School—turned into a somewhat overwhelming whirlpool of memories and new ideas. I had the privilege of talking with scholars who earned Ph.D.s in the program before I arrived in Ann Arbor, who told me much that I had not known about our history. I heard excellent papers by young scholars who were not connected to the University of Michigan except by the fact that our selection chose them to present. That was true until they arrived, at least—many of them came by to thank me at the final dinner, and not only had a vivid sense of who we are but said they felt a sense of affiliation. I had wonderful conversations with scholars I first met when they were graduate students, and felt so much happiness and pride seeing what a powerhouse group has fanned out into the field. Everyone was delighted that Linda Eggert, the quite extraordinary administrator of the program from 1970 to 2003, was able to attend. It probably won't surprise anyone to hear that she hasn't changed a bit since she retired—but it did contribute to the “time warp” sensation that I was experiencing!
There were events marking our anniversary all during the year, which you'll read about in these pages. And there were lots of other talks and activities as well, of course. One of the privileges that goes with the hard work of being in the office of the Chair is having a good view of how very much we do! I'll mention just a few examples that were especially personally rewarding for me.

One was a visit from four professors from Jilin University, in Changchun in Northeast China. Some years ago, Mingli Sun, who is now Chair of the English Department at Jilin and led the group, came to Ann Arbor to study and work with me for a year while she was writing her dissertation. The group (pictured on the opposite page) was in Ann Arbor for five weeks, talking about interdisciplinary scholarship and curriculum with members of our community, visiting classes, and using the wonderful Michigan library.

Another highlight was working with Women's Studies, for the second year in a row, on a successful search (you'll meet Ava Purkiss in the pages that follow). And some of the best moments of the year were ones when I learned that an American Culture faculty member or student had won an award or a grant.

Readers of past Chair's letters will be happy to hear that a nomination made jointly with the Department of History succeeded: Gregory Dowd has been honored with a Collegiate Professorship. His title will be the Helen Hornbeck Tanner Collegiate Professor of American Culture and History.

Matthew Countryman won the John D'Arms Faculty Award for Distinguished Graduate Mentoring in the Humanities—that makes two years in a row for the American Culture faculty, because Kristin Hass won it last year.

Stephen Berrey won the 2016 Matthews Underclass Teaching Award, which recognizes instructors who inspire wonder and excitement for first and second year students. Colin Gunckel likewise won the Class of 1912 Memorial Teaching Award for 2016. Both Colin and Stephen show how serious and dynamic our colleagues are when they enter the classroom.

Congratulations also should go to Alexandra Stern, who was awarded a grant from NEH for her research, and Lisa Nakamura, who will be establishing the “Precarity Lab” with a grant from the new Humanities Collaboratory. Other AC faculty and students will be involved in those research projects as well, and you can expect to hear more about them in future newsletters.

Finally, Tammy Zill, our Undergraduate Program Coordinator, was recognized by the LSA Staff Spotlight Committee for her excellent work with students and faculty.

If you follow the news from Ann Arbor, you know already that all across campus there is a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. The phrase is fairly new, but the issue of social justice it points to are central for us in American Culture every year. Our faculty and students have been involved in this effort in many ways, at every level. The energy going into DEI (yes, it's already an acronym) was the most extraordinary thing about 2015-16. It will be just as important next year. Stay tuned.

And please, stay connected! We always love to hear from you.

June Howard
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor and Chair of the Department of American Culture

On opposite page (L-R): Dr. Ping Wang, Instructor in English literature, Jilin University; Jie Zhao, doctoral candidate in applied linguistics and culture study, Jilin University; Dr. June Howard, Chair and Arthur F. Thurnau Professor in American culture, English literature, and women's studies, University of Michigan; Dr. Mingli Sun, Chair and Instructor in English literature, American literature, and American culture, Jilin University, and former visiting graduate student scholar to the University of Michigan; and Jinglan Xu, doctoral candidate in linguistics and applied linguistics, Jilin University. Photo courtesy of Mingli Sun.
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Cover photo of Dept. of American Culture graduate students Michael Pascual and Meryem Kamil and photo above of (L-R) American Culture Ph.D. alumna Dolores Inés Casillas and Dept. of History graduate student ToniAnn Treviño by Michigan Photography
All illustrations by Hannah Yung

EDITING
Executive Editors: Anthony Mora
Managing Editors: Shannon Davis and Judy Gray
Creative Director: Hannah Yung
2015-16 was an exciting year for Digital Studies at UM. In March, we invited Digital Studies minors to complete a simple task: Take a “selfie” with a handwritten sign featuring a short message about their experience studying digital culture at the University of Michigan. Each photo was prompted by one of the following questions:

- How would you describe digital studies at UM?
- What’s an example of a question that your digital studies classes have made you think about?
- What’s your favorite thing about digital studies classes?
- Why should other students do the Digital Studies minor?
- Why is digital studies important today?

Almost 70 submissions came in, capturing a range of perspectives:

“Digital Studies is not only relevant to every career… it is relevant to everyday LIFE.” Digital Studies also “teaches you to think critically about cultural issues that surround the technological age.” And “Digital Studies courses have made me think critically about things that I used to accept as normal.” Or even more honestly:

“My favorite thing about [Digital Studies] is that we study problems and things that I see every day, not just memorize random formulas.”

The Digital Studies minor was created in 2014 to provide students critical tools for analyzing the technologies and practices that are vital to our day-to-day, digital lives. The challenge is how to study phenomena that seem so “normal” that we barely take notice of their larger social and cultural implications.

Through Digital Studies’ growing course catalog, expanding faculty, and wide variety of talks, presentations, exhibits, and even parties over the past semesters, we have sought to promote a diversity of views, topics, and ideas about how the digital world changes us—and how we can change the digital world. We invited Richard Grusin to campus to speak about Wikileaks and the documentary Citizenfour. Simone Browne presented on her groundbreaking book, Dark Matters, on surveillance of black populations throughout U.S. history. Patrick Keilty delivered a paper exploring the idea of “flow” around user web design of pornography sites.

For our “What Is Digital Studies at UM?” conference in April, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun gave a keynote from her new book Updating to Remain the Same, a critique of how we use new media (and how new media use us). The conference, which was livestreamed, brought together panelists working on digital studies across campus from a range of critical methods.

We also offered courses on video games, race, gender, privacy, radical (cont)
Jennifer Hill

Erika Bell

Daphne Jong

Hafsa Ghias

Alex Krivan

Arielle Lawlor
media, digital news, history, algorithms, and much more. The course catalogue available to students is both growing, and also being updated. Next year, Digital Studies faculty will also teach on computer code, digital visual culture, queer digital culture and gaming, and digital identity.

We even instituted an internship program where students are invited to learn, and work, in the digital field—for course credit. As a minor, Digital Studies is dedicated to helping students engage with the critical questions of digital culture, power, and politics, as well as provide the necessary critical thinking tools around digital technology that digital focused job prospects require.

(Below): Digital Studies Professor Lisa Nakamura, and Chair June Howard at the “What is Digital Studies at UM” conference.
Photos courtesy of Michigan Photography.
Photos on previous page courtesy of each student.
adventures
- in the -
ARCHIVE
Revising the History of the Department of American Culture
by alex olson
In 2012, the Department of American Culture started to plan for its 60th anniversary. In the midst of the planning, however, historian and department chair Gregory Dowd had a hunch that something was amiss.

For decades, internal documents had identified 1952 as its founding date and English professor Joe Lee Davis as its founding director. But there did not appear to be any archival foundation for this story. Instead, memos with historical sketches cited other memos with historical sketches, which in turn cited other memos with historical sketches. But where did these sketches come from?
The following spring, Greg asked me to check it out in the Bentley Library. It took less than an hour to discover that the conventional narrative was completely wrong. In fact, the undergraduate concentration was first offered in 1935 as part of an interdepartmental degree program, “The Program in the Development of American Culture,” with coursework as varied as American literature and forestry. Among its founding directors were Howard Mumford Jones (a literary historian who soon left for Harvard to help launch its American Civilization doctoral program), Max Handman (a heterodox member of the institutional economics movement), and Roderick McKenzie (a Chicago-school sociologist who had arrived at Michigan from the University of Washington in 1930). The degree went on hiatus during World War II, but was revived in 1948. The following year’s LS&A Announcement identified one of the program’s goals as preparing students “for admission to recently established graduate programs in American civilization.” In 1957, Rackham Graduate School approved the American Culture program’s proposal for establishing a doctoral program of its own. The establishment of the original American Culture program was part of a flurry of similar interdepartmental initiatives around the country. In 1930, for example, Sweet Briar College in Virginia launched a degree program in “American Problems” that brought together history, economics, and sociology to address practical social issues by avoiding the tunnel vision of a single discipline. As Sweet Briar’s Bulletin explained: “Many problems facing America today result from the reciprocal play of forces which can be understood only by the study of their interrelations.” The “American Problems” approach became the basis of Amherst College’s American Studies Program as well, with a required sophomore course that was organized around a specific set of contemporary social issues selected each year by the faculty as a whole. Students were expected to practice dissent, writing essays explicitly disagreeing with the perspectives presented by (cont)
faculty members. Amherst’s program director George Rogers Taylor, an economist, argued that students should “actually practice the difficult art of analyzing problems, considering alternatives, and choosing a course of action.” This became the orientation of Michigan’s program as well, particularly in the 1960s, when its faculty and students were integral to the formation of the American Studies Association’s Radical Caucus.


Despite these findings, it is still unclear why the program’s internal documents got its early history so wrong. At the Library of Congress, the American Studies Association Records include a questionnaire submitted by Joe Lee Davis that placed the founding date as 1950, which was also inaccurate. The narrative identifying 1952 as the founding date first surfaces in a document appended to the Executive Committee Minutes from November 2, 1971, but does not include any citations. This hastily-prepared document with no named author had a snowball effect through memo after memo—a pre-internet portent of the hazards of simply trusting what you read on the internet!

**it is still unclear why the program’s internal documents got its early history so wrong.**

celebrating 80 years of AMERICAN CULTURE
To celebrate our department’s 80th anniversary, we organized a series of events throughout the year, culminating in a dynamic one-day conference called Envisioning American Studies.

The goal of this major conference, held on March 18, 2016 on the University of Michigan’s campus, was to bring together newly minted Ph.D.s in American studies and allied fields such as African American studies, Arab and Muslim American studies, Asian and Pacific Islander American studies, Latina/o studies, Native American studies, digital studies, and science studies. Our call for papers by emerging scholars resulted in a formidable pool of 149 submissions, from which we chose 14 presenters who are poised to advance American studies scholarship in the coming years. A stellar selection committee comprised of eight American Culture Ph.D. graduates guided us in the challenging
process of selecting our final roster of presenters. The papers represented the cutting-edge of scholarship in American studies, intersecting with history, literature, disability studies, media studies, and queer studies. The presenters shared a range of critical approaches to examining race, sexuality, gender, U.S. empire, biopolitics, and media through interdisciplinary scholarship. The program is available here.

The conference was enriched further by the participation of 16 additional American Culture Ph.D. graduates, from across the decades of the 1970s to the 2010s, who served as chairs and commentators, and took time to reflect on American Culture over the years. An innovative feature of the conference was a publishing panel that featured leading American studies editors from the following presses: Duke University, University of California, University of Illinois, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, and University of North Carolina. The editors shared insights about publishing in the digital age and about emerging areas of American studies scholarship.

We also celebrated the 80th anniversary with a series of signature events of speakers and performances organized by our ethnic studies programs and digital studies program throughout the year. These events included talks by Latino/a studies scholar Frances Aparicio, Asian American history scholar Erika Lee, legal scholar Khaled Beydoun, novelist and Native American studies scholar N. Scott Momaday, and a digital studies conference with a keynote by Wendy Hui Kyong Chun.
AN EVENING with Scott Momaday
Native American Studies inaugurated the Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. Lecture in Native American Studies series on Friday, March 11, 2016 with a presentation by writer N. Scott Momaday.

A Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, Native American scholar, and poet, Momaday has been hailed as “the dean of American Indian writers” by the New York Times. He crafts — in language and imagery — majestic landscapes of a sacred culture.

Named a UNESCO Artist for Peace and Oklahoma’s poet laureate, Momaday is also a recipient of the 2007 National Medal of Arts, presented by President George W. Bush. Momaday is the first Native American to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his novel, House Made of Dawn, widely considered to be the start of the Native American Literary Renaissance. His most recent volume, Again the Far Morning: New and Selected Poems, was released in 2011.

The event drew about 250 people, a combination of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and people from Ann Arbor, Detroit, and Michigan Indian communities. NAS provided bus transportation to people from Detroit with the assistance of American Indian Health and Family Services. The evening began with a welcome given by LSA Associate Dean of Humanities Anne Curzan followed by remarks by NAS Director Scott Lyons and presentation of gifts to Robert Berkhofer III and members of the Carmen and Dan Brenner family (whose gift established the lecture). Literati Bookstore sold books, and Momaday signed many during the reception that followed. Momaday attended another, smaller gathering on the following evening, socializing with some fifty guests including (cont)

Left: N. Scott Momaday at the inaugural reading. Above: Native American Studies Faculty (clockwise from left): Amy Stillman, Michael Witgen, Robin Beck, Scott Lyons, Gregory Dowd, Susan Najita, and N. Scott Momaday.
NAS graduate students, faculty, and guests. As well, Momaday conducted an interview with T Hetzel for her WCBN radio program and podcast, Living Writers.

The Berkhofer Lecture was established to address stated concerns in the U-M Native American student community: visibility, inclusion, and relevance. Native American students do not wish to simply study at Michigan; they want to see their histories, accomplishments, and current issues reflected in public intellectual culture. Additionally, the NAS faculty felt that a signature event such as this would go a long way to putting our program on the radars of both Michigan tribes and the national NAS scene. Feedback from students, faculty, community people, and the Brenner Family indicates that this inaugural Berkhofer Lecture very successfully exceeded all expectations.

Momaday has been hailed as “the dean of American Indian writers” by the New York Times.
the future of ETHNIC STUDIES
In April 2016, graduate and undergraduate students affiliated with the ethnic studies programs organized The Future of Ethnic Studies. The coalition included students and faculty from Arab and Muslim American Studies, African and Afro American Studies, Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies, Latina/o Studies, and Native American Studies. The goals of the event were to develop interest and investment in ethnic studies across the University and to build structures of collaboration and coalition among graduate students, undergraduates and faculty of color. Organizers also aimed to encourage the growth of ethnic studies programs and demonstrate to the University administration that there is a need for these units to secure more resources, especially in light of the University’s diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

On the day of the event, the room was packed. With over a hundred students, faculty, staff, and community members in attendance, the investment in the future of ethnic studies was clear. The event opened with a statement from graduate students in Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies that framed the teach-in and highlighted the potential for ethnic studies to grow and transform the institutional frameworks we have operated within. The powerful opening statement was followed by a brief history of the development of ethnic studies and an overview of the field’s institutionalization at the University of Michigan provided by faculty members in the Department of American Culture. Attendees then broke out into small groups to discuss their experiences with ethnic studies and their vision for the field’s future. There were four breakout groups whose discussions were each facilitated by an undergraduate and graduate student. The event closed with readings of selections from women and queer of color poets. (cont)
The event organizers aim for this event to be the beginning of a broad coalition concerned with institutionalizing ethnic studies in order to create a more inclusive campus. At the same time, the event centered the need for ethnic studies to continue to be political in its demands, to aim for a reshifting or dismantling of the university in line with Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s “undercommons of the enlightenment,” defined by Jack Halberstam as “where subversive intellectuals engage both the university and fugitivity: ‘where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong.’”

In order for American studies and ethnic studies to be relevant in the age of #BlackLivesMatter, we need to reformulate the fields of study away from a food-group model that aims to be included within the academy. Rather, as scholars of social justice, our praxis should never be satiated by institutionalization. We need to aim for relevance, for change. Ethnic studies is not the end-game, but the spring-board for our activism.
Since its establishment in 1984, the Latina/o Studies Program at the University of Michigan has offered students, faculty, and staff a space for learning and community building, for “making familia from scratch,” to quote a well-known phrase from Chicana playwright Cherríe Moraga’s play *Giving Up the Ghost*. Here, *familia* (family) is reenvisioned as a set of connections and frameworks that serve to create bonds, whether they are the friendships and solidarities required to survive and thrive as minority subjects in a historically white university or the social networks that are used to advance knowledge production and professional development. These practices occur within and outside the classroom, during special events, meals, gatherings, conferences, and parties. Social interaction is a crucial element of this *intercambio* (exchange) that leads to *comunidad* (community).

The 2015-16 academic year was especially rich in these opportunities, particularly in the context of the 80th anniversary of the Department of American Culture. Latina/o Studies participated in this celebration in diverse ways, including organizing a keynote address by Prof. Frances R. Aparicio (Northwestern University) titled “Passing for Mexican: Relational Identities in Latina/o Chicago” held on October 2 as part of Latinx Heritage Month, and cosponsoring the 80th Anniversary Symposium in the winter. (cont)
We were excited to invite Professor Aparicio, as she is one of the leading scholars in the field, taught in our department for ten years (from 1990 to 2000), and served as Director of the Latina/o Studies Program. In her talk, she explored the tensions that intra-Latina/o subjects face between competing Latina/o ethnic identifications, specifically in a Midwestern city where Mexican culture is often perceived to stand in for all Latin American and Caribbean culture and where national differences can be subsumed or erased. Prof. Aparicio used the neologism “intra-Latina/o” to identify Latina/o individuals who are of two or more Latin American national origins, for example Mexican-Ricans or Cuban-Salvadorans or Dominican-Argentineans. She offered three distinct strategies for negotiating these challenges, which form part of a book-length study she is completing.

After a full day that included a lunchtime talk at Hatcher Library and a more informal coffee and cookies hour with graduate and undergraduate students in the afternoon, several faculty gathered at my home for dinner. The informal photo on the previous page served to capture this moment.

A second photo below features Latina/o Studies alumni and faculty at the eightieth anniversary dinner for American Culture, held on Friday, March 18, 2016, at Rackham Assembly Hall. Starting from left to right, we see Prof. Anthony Maclás (Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies, UC Riverside), who received his PhD from our department in 2001; Prof. Neil Foley (History, Southern Methodist University), who received his PhD from our department in 1990; Prof. Yelidy Rivero, who recently became the new director of the Latina/o Studies Program; Prof. Dolores Inés Casillas (Chicana/o Studies, UC Santa Barbara), who received her PhD from our department in 2006, Prof. Mora;
Prof. Wilson Valentín-Escobar (Sociology and American Studies, Hampshire College), who received his PhD from our department in 2011; Prof. Cotera; me; current PhD student Kris Klein Hernández; Prof. William Calvo-Quirós; and Prof. John R. Chávez (History, Southern Methodist University), who received his PhD from our department in 1980 and served as the first director of Latina/o Studies while he was a visiting assistant professor from 1984 to 1986.

Both of these images capture complex connections (far too complex to explain at length in this short essay!), which pertain to the nature of being colleagues in a department or of having studied with each other, or under the supervision of one another. The images capture genealogies of Latina/o studies knowledge and solidarity that have been marked by the Michigan experience. These photos speak in perhaps often-unacknowledged ways about knowledge production and the most basic experiences of everyday shared lives. They crystalize these special events, memorialize and help us remember. For me, these Latina/o studies photos are a way to make sense of history in the making, of unsuspected connections, of details that frequently get lost in the day-to-day shuffle of our busy lives.
A GLASS CEILING

FOR ASIAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN FACULTY IN LSA? YES.

BY AMY STILLMAN
The faculty roundtable discussion convened by A/PIA Studies on “Asian and Asian American Faculty in LSA: A Glass Ceiling?” was one of the highlights for the 2015-2016 academic year. The event, held on March 28, 2016, drew a standing-room only audience to a long overdue dialogue. The event was videotaped, and can be viewed here: http://youtube.com/watch?v=cEDupBcQAOQ

The underrepresentation of Asian Americans at the highest levels of leadership and administration in higher education was the focus of a national report issued in 2013 by the American Council on Education. Titled Raising Voices, Lifting Leaders: Empowering Asian Pacific Islander Leadership in Higher Education, the report contained sobering statistics: whereas Asian and Pacific Islander Americans made up 7% of full-time tenured faculty, they make up only 2.8% of deans, 2.4% of chief academic officers (variously titled provost or chancellor at different campuses) and 1.5% of presidents. In an era when institutions are scrambling to diversify faculties as well as student bodies, the virtual invisibility of Asian/Pacific Islander Americans in academic leadership positions is problematic, especially given widespread perceptions of Asian/Pacific Islander American over-representation on faculties and student bodies.

After welcome remarks by LSA Dean Andrew Martin, Prof. Amy Stillman (A/PIA Studies Director and organizer of the roundtable) provided a brief overview of Asian and Asian American demographic diversity in the U.S., calling attention to the masking of disparities by the aggregation of diverse cultural communities under the “Asian American” rubric. Then the following question was posed: How can an appreciation for Asian and Asian American diversity be productively linked to equitable opportunity to ensure meaningful inclusion of Asians and Asian Americans in all facets of U-M institutional life and practices?

We were fortunate to be joined by Dr. Kim Bobby, Director of the Inclusive Excellence Initiative of the American Council on Education. Her remarks provided a national framework to contextualize the U-M data, and she briefed us on leadership development programs offered by ACE.

Five LSA faculty then presented research evidence of the situation at Michigan.

• Prof. Fiona Lee and doctoral candidate Amy Westmoreland Ko (Psychology) reported on their analysis of U-M data from the NSF-funded ADVANCE, and concluded that Asian and Asian American faculty were underrepresented as department chairs. (cont)
• Prof. John Kuwada (Dept. of Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology), shared his findings that since 2012, there have been no Asian faculty members elected to the LSA Executive Committee, or appointed as Associate Deans, or directors of Programs, Institutes, or Museum. He pointed out that there was “little appreciation by LSA faculty, Dean’s office and U-M Executive Officers” and “no priority to remedy this at UM.”

• Prof. San Duanmu (Linguistics) briefed us on the Association of Chinese Professors at UM, a group that fosters a sense of community among international Chinese faculty at UM.

• Evans Young, Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Education in LSA, spoke on campus-wide academic leadership programs, raising questions about the extent to which these opportunities are accessible to Asian and Pacific Islander American faculty.

• Prof. Leela Fernandes (Women’s Studies and Political Science), a member of the LSA Task Force on Faculty Diversity, reported on key findings—including that the open meeting with Asian and Asian American faculty had the highest attendance and most active participation. We were treated to a preliminary version of some of the recommendations that will be submitted in the Task Force’s report.

Following a half hour of spirited discussion, Vice Provost Rob Sellers provided a closing commentary. He began by acknowledging that the underrepresentation of Asian and Asian American faculty in academic leadership at U-M “is not right.” Vice Provost Sellers offered suggestions for concrete action, emphasizing especially the development of a formal network with whom the administration can work, and to whom the administration can be responsive.

The event was extremely successful in bringing together ideas and thoughts for further conversation and action!

We are grateful to Marie Ting, Associate Director of the National Center for Institutional Diversity, for invaluable logistical support on this event.
The Rise in Islamophobia

Evelyn Alsultané
EVERY TIME

a Muslim commits an act of violence in the U.S. or Europe, there is a rise in anti-Muslim hate in the United States. The terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, the San Bernadino shootings in December 2015, and the mass killing of (mostly Latino) LGBT people in Orlando in June 2016 have all led to greater suspicion and hate towards Muslims. The operating assumption is that these acts of violence can be easily explained through “Islam” and therefore that Islamophobia is not a form of racism or discrimination, but a rational response to these instances of violence. The increase in Islamophobia has been accentuated by anti-Muslim rhetoric, especially by presidential candidates. Republican Presidential Candidate, Ben Carson, stated that a Muslim should not be president because Islam is not compatible with American values and the Constitution. Republican Presidential Candidate Donald Trump stated that all Muslim refugees and immigrants should be banned from entering the U.S. Mosque burnings, hate crimes, workplace and airline discrimination have become commonplace. And murdering Muslims or those who appear to be Muslim is not unusual.

American Culture’s Arab and Muslim American Studies Program has been active in addressing the impact of Islamophobia on our campus community. We collaborated with LSA Undergraduate Education on a student-centered event, created an Islamophobia Working Group, offered an undergraduate course on Islamophobia, among other initiatives.

Sharing Stories, Building Allyhood:
Student Voices Against Islamophobia

In the wake of the tragedies in Paris and San Bernadino, the LSA Associate Dean’s office partnered with Arab and Muslim American Studies to organize an event: “Sharing Stories, Building Allyhood: Student Voices Against Islamophobia” that took place in January 2016. Among those who collaborated on this event were staff members from the English Language Institute, the Program on Inter-Group Relations, the Center for Engaged Academic Learning and about a dozen undergraduate students. The event was also supported by CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services) and MESA (Multiethnic Student Affairs).

The objective of the event was to focus on the impact of Islamophobia within our own community at UM. The event was organized in two parts. First, students who have experienced Islamophobia shared first hand accounts. Undergraduate student bravely shared personal experiences that ranged from microaggressions in everyday life to explicit threats and harassment. One example can be read at https://www.michigandaily.com/section/viewpoints/viewpoint-my-heart-hurts-too. The second part of the event focused on how to be an ally. Given that racism and discrimination is not unique to Muslims, we hoped that the ally portion of the event would be relevant in thinking about how to challenge Islamophobia, yet be applicable to other forms of racism and discrimination.

The event drew hundreds of people. It was emotional event and successful in building community and solidarity. It was written about in the Michigan Daily as an article and as a review. Furthermore, the students involved in organizing the event were recognized with a Michigan Difference Student Leadership Award, specifically the Cross-Cultural Programming Award.
The Islamophobia Working Group

In January 2016, Arab and Muslim American Studies initiated the Islamophobia Working Group. The purpose of this group of faculty, staff, and students is to study the increase in Islamophobia nationally and its impact on Arab, Muslim, and MENA-identified students, faculty, staff and the campus community at large; strategize on how to create a safe and inclusive campus environment for Arab, Muslim, and MENA students and those who are impacted by anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments (i.e. Sikh, etc.); and create a set of resources for community members, students and faculty included. The group consists of over 60 members that includes undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, and staff. In the winter term, we drafted and submitted a report to the administration suggesting ways to include Arab, Muslim, and MENA students in the University of Michigan’s strategic plan for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. We also created a resource list for Arab, Muslim, and MENA-identified students who are impacted by Islamophobia. Both can be accessed at http://lsa.umich.edu/amas/islamophobia-working-group

Islamophobia Course

In Winter 2016, Arab and Muslim American Studies offered its first course on Islamophobia. The course focused on understanding Islamophobia beyond as a response to violence committed by Muslims. It examined how the media, government policies, and nativist movements shape Islamophobia; the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim American communities; and whether or not Islamophobia is an adequate term to use to capture the phenomenon of seeking to target or exclude Muslims from multicultural nations. The course also examined several case studies of Islamophobia in the U.S. and Europe, including the “Ground Zero mosque” controversy in the U.S. and the Prophet Muhammad cartoons controversy in Denmark to identify the specific forms that Islamophobia takes. The course ended by briefly considering how Muslims have responded to Islamophobia through community organizing and various artistic forms.

The Campus Responds

The broader campus community has also been active in taking a stance against Islamophobia. Central Student Government issued a resolution opposing “anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and xenophobic harassment, intimidation, and all acts of bigotry against Muslim students” and affirming “the right of all students to participate fully and equally in the academic, social, political and all other aspects of life on campus.” The Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs (SACUA) issued a resolution in support of UM’s Muslim community. Over 500 faculty members signed a letter to President Schlissel after anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant chalking was found on the Diag, denouncing the chalking and expressing solidarity with Muslim students. President Schlissel responded to the letter affirming the University’s commitment to an inclusive campus environment.
My general research interests lie at the intersection of race, gender, and health. My current project examines African American women’s exercise and fitness culture in the early twentieth century. Preliminarily titled “Mind, Soul, Body, and Race: Black Women’s Purposeful Exercise in the Age of Physical Culture,” my work explores how black women used exercise to shape themselves into healthy, “fit” citizens at a time when physical fitness garnered new socio-political significance. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, physically fit individuals constituted a “right-thinking” citizenry and African American women adapted to this trend by integrating exercise into larger campaigns of racial uplift and assertions of citizenship.

The oft-cited statistic that 50% of black women are obese as well as assumptions about black women’s idleness generated my initial research questions about the historical role that exercise played in black women’s lives. In examining the barriers to exercise that black women encountered, this project grounds current statistics concerning black women’s health in a long tradition of recreational segregation and exclusion from fitness institutions (e.g. gyms, pools, parks, etc.). It adds a vital historical dimension to a host of studies that attempt to understand why African American women and girls are disproportionately overweight, at risk for numerous deadly diseases, and have low rates of physical activity. In addition to health implications, this project has revealed a surprising history of black women’s intraracial fat shaming as well as underexamined narratives of black women’s “active” leisure pursuits. These revelations have allowed me to think more broadly and counterintuitively about African American aesthetic and recreational values.

I look forward to putting this thinking to practice in two American Culture courses I will teach in the Winter 2017 term: “Skin Deep: Race and Beauty in American Culture” and “Race, Gender, Recreation, and Sport in Twentieth Century America.” The former will explore how “beauty” has served as a proxy for race throughout American history and the latter will examine how certain pastimes became gendered and racialized during the “long” twentieth century. A hallmark of both classes will be to show the interconnectedness of the present and the past by framing contemporary debates (e.g. cultural appropriation and doping) as deep-seated historical problems. I am excited about the interdisciplinary freedom I will exercise in these classes and my work as an American Culture faculty member.
The Undergraduate Writing Awards

Each year, the American Culture’s faculty recognize the outstanding talents of our students through our Undergraduate Writing Awards. This year’s contest had an unusually high number of excellent entries, making the final selection almost impossible. Ultimately, two students garnered this high honor.

These two recipient represent the amazing talents of all of our undergraduate students. They also highlight American Culture’s ongoing mission to encourage critically engaged scholarship among our undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty.

The Joel S. Siegel Awards

For the past decade, thanks to the ongoing generosity of the Siegel family, the Department of American Culture has been able to award two of our undergraduate students the Joel S. Siegel Scholarship based on outstanding merit and financial need. Although the final decision always proves a difficult one, we were delighted to name Iliria Camaj and Sarah Khan, two truly fantastic students from within American Culture’s Arab and Muslim American Studies Program (AMAS), as our 2015-2016 honorees.

Iliria Camaj represents the idealism and intellectual rigor that we think are the hallmarks of our department. Now in the middle of her junior year, Iliria has distinguished herself academically as an honors student. She also has assembled an impressive dossier of experiences beyond our campus, including an internship with the U.S. Department of State. Despite that busy schedule, Iliria has taken on major leadership roles, like being the President of the Albanian American Student Organization. She has a set of interlinking interests in law, international security, and Arab and Muslim populations in the United States.

Sarah Kahn matches Iliria’s drive and achievements. Sarah came to our department because she yearned for a deeper understanding about the ways that race and religion intersected with Muslim identities in the United States. Since that time, she has thrived in our AMAS program. Currently she is composing an honors thesis that questions U.S. policy, human rights, and the post 9/11 world. Moreover, she received a fellowship to study Urdu through a global health lens. This past year, she worked with the Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning to develop tools that will help student organizations evaluate and compile resources centered on K-12 literacy. Sarah plans on pursuing law school so that she might become a legal expert and advocate for those imprisoned in the U.S. and beyond.
Mena Hermiz, currently an International Studies student and a minor in our Arab and Muslim American Studies program, wrote a memorable essay entitled “Criticism of the ‘Clashing Civilizations’ Theory.” Within her paper, Mena explored how a 1993 essay from Samuel Huntington became a touchstone for media and policy leaders following the events of 9/11. Pundits and politicians sought easy explanations that named 9/11 as an inevitable conflict resulting from two allegedly irreconcilable world views. By so doing, Mena suggests, deeper understandings of globalization and imperialism became lost or obscured. The committee commended Mena on her approach. We imagine that she will continue to build persuasive interventions around erroneous assumptions that have too often guided international affairs.

Taking us further into the past, History major, honors student, and Native American Studies minor Dylan Nelson delivered a notable paper entitled “Relational Resistance: Misunderstanding, Race, and Sacred Power in Mid-Eighteenth Century Delaware Nativist Revival.” Dylan explored how eighteenth-century nativist religious revivals emerged out of the changing economic and political situations in the Ohio River Valley. He made visible the way those movements redefined how Delawares imagined their relationships to each other and to Europeans. We applauded Dylan’s strong writing, solid research, and engaging analysis. Dylan, we think, has tremendous potential to become a remarkable historian.

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CONGRATS, GRADUATES!

**Bachelor Degrees**
*American Culture*
- Tyler Babbitt
- Michael Bae Gieske
- Stefany Barba
- Andrew Fedurek
- Olivia Garcia
- Mollie Gordier
- Kathleen Harrington
- Gordon Howey
- Lauren Hurst
- Renato Jamett
- Nancy Lucero-Altamirano
- Jacqueline Matyszczyk
- Meghan Monaghan
- Mia Orlow
- Eliana Ungar
- Thomas Vanslooten
- Jingyi Yang

*Latina/o Studies*
- Lauren Ash
- Janay Brandon
- Rogelio Castro
- Sydney Demo
- Marie Dillivan
- Desiree Salazar

**Minors**
*American Culture*
- Daniel Bakst
- Casey Baltimore
- Joshua Belt
- Ilana Beroff
- Daisy Bishop
- Erin Bozek-Jarvis
- Hanna Cervarich
- Abigail Choi
- Courtney Collins
- Ryan Eaton
- Cameron Giniel

*American Culture*
- Logan Hansen
- Caitlin Janquart
- Matthew Jenuwine
- Ian Johnston
- Paula Moldovan
- David Monticelli
- Ashley Ogwo
- Michael Peabody
- Cara Richard
- Lania Robinson
- Nicki Sanii
- Melissa Singer
- Mami Sow

*Arab and Muslim American Studies*
- Noran Alsabahi
- Iliria Camaj
- Fatima Chowdhury
- Catherine Cypert
- Emma Gies
- Hannah Henkin
- Mena Hermiz
- Areeba Jibril
- Sarah Khan
- Fadel Nabilsi
- Sarah Raoof
- Layla Zarkesh

*Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies*
- Michael Bae Gieske
- Tosca Le
- Kaylee Schonsheck

*Digital Studies*
- Anna Bahorski
- Katherine Baral
- Erika Bell
- Casey Cameron
- Olivia Cottrell
- Jackson Deloria

*Ph.Ds.*
*American Culture*
- Rabia Belt
- Jesse Carr
- Sarah Gothie
- David Green
- Frank Kelderman
- Erik Morales
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:

- Offer a new internship in Digital Studies
- Send students to the Migrant Farmworker Outreach Program in partnership with the English Language Institute
- Bring world renowned artists, scholars, and performers to visit undergraduates in their classes
- Inaugurate a new speaker series in Native American studies
- Develop classes that sent students to Detroit where they met and learned from community leaders
- Award American Culture students scholarships based on merit and need to pursue a humanities education
- Sponsor career events for our students that connected them to some of our successful alumni
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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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