

PERFORMANCE

Fall 2019



LSA

AMERICAN CULTURE

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



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PHOTO BY: KIMBERLY MORALES (LA CASA MEMBER)

Farewell Letter from the Chair

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

I am happy to report on exciting developments in the department over the previous academic year.

First, this past year we welcomed two new faculty members, associate professor Leila Kavar, who joined us (and the Residential College) from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and associate professor Clare Croft, who shifted part of her line to hold a joint appointment with AC and the Department of Dance in School of Music, Theater, and Dance. These new colleagues are helping us to expand in the areas of legal and immigration studies and in performance and queer studies.

Second, our faculty continue to be recognized for our innovative and inclusive teaching. Greg Dowd won the Individual Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education in Race & Ethnicity Instruction from the College of LSA. He was praised for his revamping of American Culture's staple course, AMCULT 100, "What is an American?" Other AC faculty are equally creative and inventive in the classroom, offering new and popular courses such as "Gender and Transgender," "Food in American Culture," and "Race and Broadway Musicals." Magdalena Zaborowska received a NINI grant and is designing new courses on black digital studies, related to her pioneering museum and archival work on the life and legacy of James Baldwin. Big congratulations to Sandra Gunning who was awarded an Arthur F. Thurnau professorship, which recognizes excellence in undergraduate teaching. In addition, American Culture has been at the forefront of developing programs for transfer students with coursework in American Studies and related fields who will be transitioning to U-M from community colleges in the region.

Third, the high caliber of AC's research is reflected by the many awards received by our faculty and graduate students over the past year. Su'ad Abdul Khabeer was named a Soros Equality Fellow, Leila Kavar received a Mellon New Directions Fellowship, and I was awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant to build the digital archive "Eugenic Rubicon: Sterilization Stories in America" in collaboration with a colleague at Dartmouth University. Our faculty also have been awarded coveted fellowships and grants on campus. Charlotte Albrecht is a faculty fellow at the Institute for the Humanities and Sandra Gunning holds a Michigan Humanities Award. From the Latinx community on campus, Latina/o Studies director Larry La Fountain-Stokes received the Mildred Tirado Lucha Award "for uniting, empowering, and holistically supporting members of the Latinx community."

The same pattern holds true for our amazing graduate students. For example, newly minted Ph.D. Stephen Molldrem is a president's postdoctoral fellow at the University of California at Irvine, and Meryem Kamil holds the same prestigious fellowship at the University of California at San Diego. Kat Whiteley is a Visiting Fellow in the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Science in 2019-2020. Our graduate students are beginning tenure-track positions at institutions such as SUNY, Old Westbury, University of Mississippi, and the University of Texas, Dallas. One of our recent Ph.D.s is Assistant Director of Admissions at Interlochen Center for the Arts. Our graduate students also have won Rackham predoctoral fellowships, Ford fellowships, and many more prestigious awards. For instance, Jallicia Jolly is moving to Amherst University to begin a predoctoral residential fellowship there. By the time this newsletter goes to press, undoubtedly someone else in our community will have received a new award or honor.

Our department is one of spirited and critical engagement with the complexity of and significant challenges in the United States and beyond. We are on the leading edge of education in a state and country whose demographic and social landscape is transforming, and we strive to give students and the community tools to understand these changes, and to edify and empower themselves as change agents and global citizens.



Alexandra Minna Stern, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of American Culture, 2017-19
Professor, Departments of American Culture, History,
Women's Studies, and Obstetrics & Gynecology
Director, Sterilization and Social Justice Lab



NEW FACULTY

Leila Kavar

Leila Kavar joined the U-M faculty as associate professor of American Culture, affiliated with the Arab and Muslim American Studies Program, and in the Residential College. Her field of research expertise is the empirical study of law with an emphasis on interpretive and comparative methodologies. She is interested in how the work of lawyers, judges, and other legal experts shapes our understandings of social issues, particularly questions of migration and citizenship. Kavar was a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Law and Society at Indiana University's Maurer School of Law. She previously taught at Bowling Green State University, and moved to Ann Arbor from a faculty position at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her research has been funded by the Lurcy Trust, and the National Science Foundation, and the Council for European Studies.

Her first monograph, *Contesting Immigration Policy in Court: Legal Activism and Its Radiating Effects in the United States and France*, is published in the Law and Society Series of Cambridge University Press and is a co-winner of the Law and Society Association's Herbert Jacob book prize. The book compares the political impact of immigrant rights litigation in the United States and France, based on extended fieldwork and archival research in both countries. Her current research, for which she was awarded a 2019-20 Mellon New Directions Fellowship, explores international standard-setting initiatives in the domain of migrant labor governance during the early 20th Century. She comes to this work as a first-generation American who grew up in the Washington, DC area in a multiethnic family of mixed Lebanese-Palestinian and British background, in which both parents were stateless at different points in their lives.



Clare Croft

Clare Croft is a dance theorist and historian, a dramaturg and curator. She is the author of *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange* (Oxford 2015), which received the Congress on Research in Dance's Outstanding Publication Prize in 2016. More recently, she is the editor and curator of the anthology and website, *Queer Dance: Meanings and Makings* (Oxford 2017), which led Croft to create the EXPLODE! queer dance festival, which begins a national tour this summer.

Croft's writing has appeared in a number of academic journals (*Theater Journal*, *Dance Research Journal*), and she is also dedicated to public writing, having been a regular contributor to *The Washington Post* (2002-2005) and the *Austin American Statesman* (2005-2010). Croft is the founder and curator of Daring Dances, a program based in southeastern Michigan that considers how dance making and viewing can lead us into necessary, difficult conversations. Croft joins the Department of American Culture from the University of Michigan's Dance Department, and is excited to serve both departments moving forward.



“Soul Survivals”

The Inaugural Betty Ch’maj Distinguished American Studies Lecture

By: Manan Desai



ALEX STERN PRESENTS INAUGURAL BETTY CH'MAJ LECTURE. PHOTO BY: KATELYNN KLEMM

On April 1, 2019 the Department of American Culture inaugurated the Betty Ch’maj Distinguished American Studies Lecture. Our invited speaker, Professor Emily Lordi (UMass-Amherst) presented on her forthcoming book *Keeping On: Soul, Black Music, Resilience*. Analyzing stage performances by Gladys Knight and Otis Redding—including a blistering rendition of “Try a Little Tenderness”—Lordi examined the complex political dimensions of soul music in the 1960s, and its relevance for our fraught contemporary moment. “Soul,” Lordi explains, is “a mutable legacy of black resilience—one that at times reproduces and at other times resists the individualizing thrust of neoliberal ideology.” An accomplished public scholar who regularly writes for *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic*, Lordi spoke earlier that day with graduate students about writing for different audiences beyond the ivory tower.

In many ways, Professor Lordi’s lecture was a fitting tribute to the lecture series’ namesake Betty Ch’maj (1930-1997), who was awarded the first Ph.D. in American Culture in 1961 at Michigan. Ch’maj continued her illustrious career at California State University-Sacramento, where she taught and wrote on American literature, American cities, jazz and modern art, founding the Radical Caucus of ASA and working to challenge systematic gender discrimination in American Studies programs. She was also a committed and dynamic teacher. As her daughter Maria explained over email, “My mother was multi-media before multi-media was ever invented. Decades before the days of tablets, computers, or even videos, she would deliver lectures using two alternating carousel slide projectors and a stereo turntable in order to give her inter-disciplinary presentations on the arts. [...] I remember helping her for hours to arrange the slides in order... and learning where to ‘drop the needle’ to play the right musical sequences.” The A/V was a little easier to work with for our inaugural lecture series, but the spirit remained the same.

The lecture was generously co-sponsored by DAAS, English, and the Institute for the Humanities, and we plan to continue the series in the future. •



EMILY LORDI, INAUGURAL BETTY CH'MAJ DISTINGUISHED AMERICAN STUDIES LECTURE GUEST SPEAKER, POSES FOLLOWING THE EVENT.
PHOTO BY: KATELYNN KLEMM

Celebrating César Chávez’s Activism and Transforming Space through Art and Poetry

By: Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, Interim Director of Latina/o Studies Program



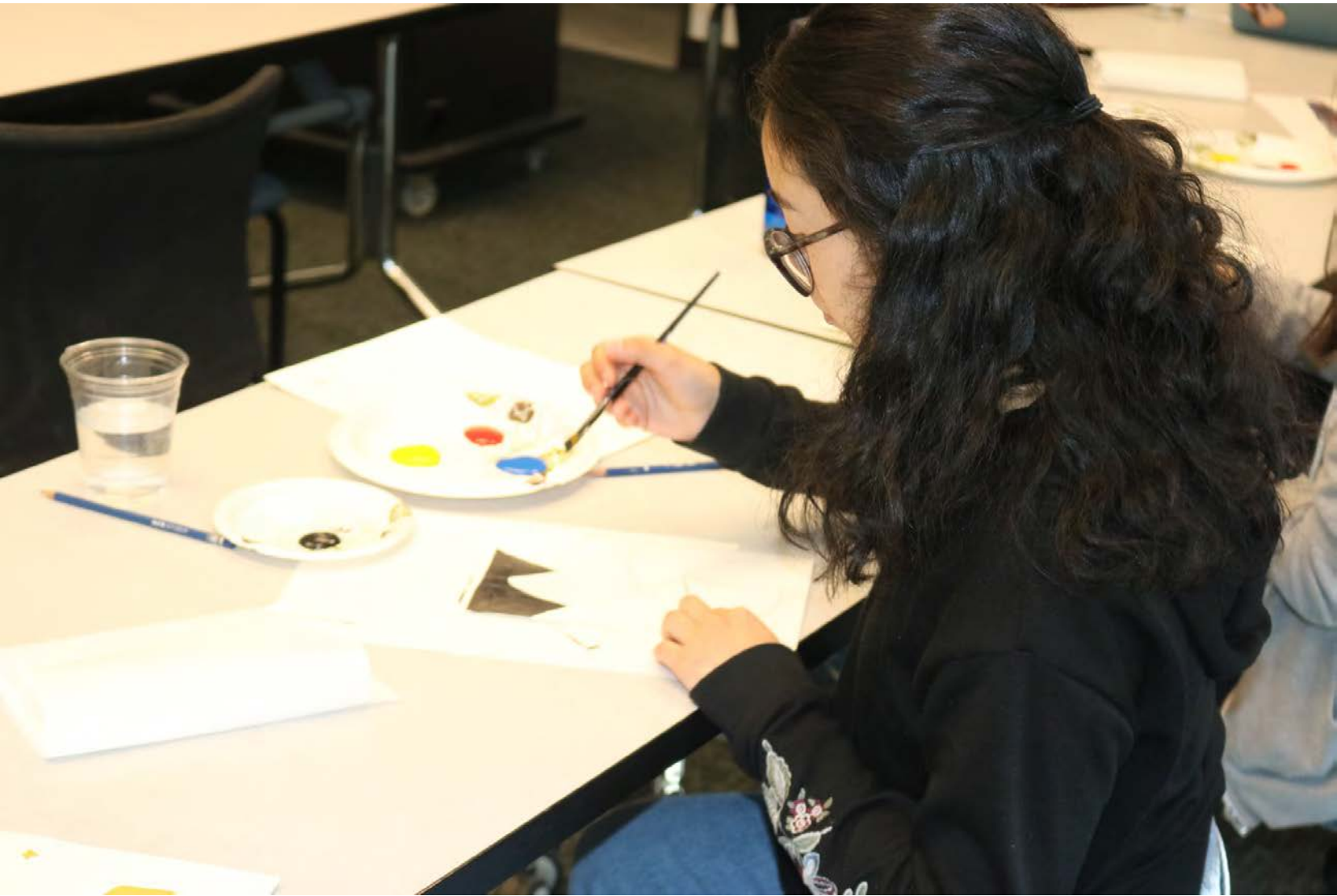
JEFF ABBEY MALDONADO (BACK ROW, SECOND FROM RIGHT) POSES WITH GUESTS FROM HIS ARTIST WORKSHOP IN FRONT OF THE CHÁVEZ MURAL IN HAVEN HALL.

ALL PHOTOS IN THIS SECTION ARE BY: KIMBERLY MORALES (LA CASA MEMBER)

Almost twenty-five years ago, undergraduate students at the University of Michigan such as Milton Rodríguez (currently a board member of the University of Michigan Latino Alumni group) successfully petitioned for a student lounge honoring the legacy of Chicano civil rights leader César Chavez, who founded and led the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), the first long-term farm workers union in the country, later known as United Farm Workers of America (UFW). The UFW held boycotts and fasts to protest the treatment of farm workers worldwide. Thanks to student activism, the César Chávez Lounge at the Mosher-Jordan “Mo-Jo” Student Residence Hall in the Hill neighborhood on Observatory Street was inaugurated in 1995. In 1998, the university commissioned

Chicago-based artist Jeff Abbey Maldonado to paint a seven-panel portable mural honoring Chávez’s legacy. After recent renovations, the mural no longer fit in the original multicultural lounge due to its size and was in storage. In the summer of 2018, La Casa, the largest Latinx student organization on campus, successfully petitioned University Housing—a unit of Student Life—to have the three central panels, which measure 12 x 24 feet in total, donated to American Culture and Latina/o Studies, and they are now exhibited in our main conference room located at 3512 Haven Hall.

In order to celebrate this donation, we welcomed muralist Jeff Abbey Maldonado to Ann Arbor on Tuesday, March 26, 2019, for an arts workshop, an artist’s talk, and a



A STUDENT FROM THE LA CASA ORGANIZATION AT THE ARTIST WORKSHOP.

poetry performance. He came with Dulce Santoyo, an emerging artist who collaborates in Maldonado’s non-profit J-Def Peace Project, which provides youth arts instruction as a means to combat violence in Chicago. Participants in the workshop had the opportunity to learn about Maldonado’s integrative artistic vision and participated in drawing and painting exercises, similar to the ones the youth in J-Def engage in. The artist’s talk was a remarkable event, in which Maldonado greeted the audience in the Alabama language of the Alabama-Coushatta tribe of south-east Texas and talked to us extensively about his early life, his family, his education, his experiences as an artist, and the anguish he experienced when his son was murdered in 2009, which led to the establishment of J-Def Peace Project.

Maldonado also showed numerous slides and several videos. Born and raised in Bridgeport, a neighborhood on the south side of Chicago, Jeff Abbey Maldonado described how his father Jesús Maldonado Calvillo migrated without documents from San Luis Potosí, Mexico, and worked for over thirty years making cars for General Motors. The artist’s father met his mother, Ina Abbey, a Native American woman of the Alabama-Coushatta tribe who worked with pregnant teenage girls from Chicago’s infamous Cabrini-Green housing projects, at a restaurant where she also worked on 18th Street (La Dieciocho) in Pilsen, a Mexican-majority neighborhood. Jeff Maldonado is a registered member of the Alabama-Coushatta tribe and self-identifies as part of the Daddy Long Legs clan. At

Columbia College, Maldonado studied under artist Mario Castillo, who is credited with painting the first Latino mural in Chicago. Maldonado has worked in many schools as an artist-in-residence, teaching mural making.

During the 1998 dedication of the mural, students led an In Xochitl, In Cuicatl Flor y Canto or flower and song poetry reading that featured Brenda Cárdenas, who is now a professor at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Maldonado requested that his current visit also integrate a participative component. With the help of La Casa member Rebeca Yanes, we recruited three student poets who read in English and Spanish: Jose Jarquin, a fourth-year student majoring in Mechanical Engineering; Monica Rico, who is an MFA poetry student in the Helen Zell Writers' Program; and Constanza (Coni) Contreras, a Ph.D. candidate in English. After the poetry reading we held a reception on the third floor of Haven Hall and guests were able to ask

Maldonado about the mural, which features iconography linked to the UFW's labor struggles, a reference to the grape boycotts, exhortations to strike or participate in a huelga, as well as images of Chavez and of labor leader Dolores Huerta, of the Chicano painter Carlos Cortez—the first artist Maldonado met, easily identifiable because of his handlebar mustache—and even a small rendering of a young Maldonado as part of a crowd. The right-hand panel also prominently displays an Aztec pyramid as a form of homage to indigenous culture, while the lower part of the left-hand panel includes a bloody scene of police brutality. The mural has become an integral part of American Culture and Latina/o Studies, and current and prospective students routinely come to 3512 Haven Hall to see it and to learn about the history of our institution and of Latinxs in the Americas. •



STUDENTS ADMIRE THE MURAL HONORING CHÁVEZ'S LEGACY.



PROFESSOR LAWRENCE LA FOUNTAIN-STOKES AND LA CASA STUDENT PRESENT THE IN XOCHITL, IN CUICATL FLOR Y CANTO OR FLOWER AND SONG POETRY READING.

2019 ROBERT F. BERKHOFFER JR. LECTURE

AN EVENING WITH MARY KATHRYN NAGLE

BY: MICHAEL WITGEN, DIRECTOR OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM,
BETHANY HUGHES, AND KATELYNN KLEMM

The Berkhofer Lecture series, named for a former U-M professor and founder of the field of Native American studies, was established in 2014 by an alumni gift from the Dan and Carmen Brenner family of Seattle, Washington. In close consultation with the Brenner's, Native American Studies decided to create a public lecture series featuring prominent, marquee speakers who would draw audiences from different communities including faculty and students, Ann Arbor, Detroit, and Michigan tribal communities, as well as writers and readers of all persuasions. Native American students at U-M have consistently expressed their desire to make Native Americans more visible both on campus and off, and we believe that this lecture has made a meaningful step in that direction. Additionally, because of the statewide publicity it generates, we think the lecture serves as a recruitment incentive for Native American students. It goes without saying that the speakers we have invited provide tremendous value to the mission and work of Native American Studies at the University of Michigan.

In asking Mary Kathryn Nagel, a prominent attorney specializing in federal Indian law, and a successful playwright we shift the focus of the Berkhofer lecture to highlight emerging indigenous literary talent. Mary Kathryn Nagle is a partner at Pipestem Law, P.C. where she specializes in federal Indian law and appellate litigation. Nagle co-authored (with Sarah Deer) and filed an amicus brief in *Dollar General v. Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians* on behalf of the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC) and more than one hundred organizations working to end domestic violence and sexual assault. As counsel to the NIWRC, Nagle has drafted and filed numerous briefs in the United States Supreme Court articulating the connection between preserving tribal sovereignty and ensuring safety for Native women and children. Nagle also has extensive experience with numerous laws that protect the rights of American Indians, including the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and the Indian Child Welfare Act. Nagle works out of Pipestem Law's Washington, D.C. office.



THE 2019 BERKHOFFER LECTURE WAS HELD AT THE PALMER COMMONS GREAT LAKES ROOM ON CENTRAL CAMPUS.

ALL PHOTOS IN THIS SECTION BY:
AUSTIN THOMASON (MICHIGAN PHOTOGRAPHY)



MARY KATHRYN NAGLE
AT THE FOURTH ANNUAL
BERKHOFFER LECTURE.



THE 2019 BERKHOFFER LECTURE HAD THE HIGHEST UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ATTENDANCE OF ANY IN THE SERIES THUS FAR.

Nagle is a 2013 alumna of the Public Theater's Emerging Writers Group. During her tenure in the Emerging Writers Group, she wrote *Manahatta*. *Manahatta* was performed as a staged reading as a side-event in the 2013 United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous People, and received a reading as a part of the Public's NEW WORK NOW series. Most recently, the Public Theater workshopped *Manahatta* in its first iteration of PUBLIC STUDIO (May 2014). In December 2014, *Manahatta* was named a top-three Finalist for the 2014 William Saroyan Prize for Playwriting, and was named the Runner Up for the 2015 Jane Chambers Playwriting Award. *Manahatta* is also on the 2015 Kilroy's List.

At this year's Berkhofer Lecture, Nagle spoke on the state of Native American authored plays in the

twenty-first century, Native playwrights' response to the persistent practice of redface in mainstream American theatre, and the growing recognition and support for Native American plays in regional U.S. theatre. She explained the continued use of redface, the reductive and stereotypical depiction of Native American characters by non-Native actors, within popular and award winning plays produced across the country. And in response to these harmful depictions she highlighted a wave of young, female Native American playwrights who are writing against these stereotypes and being successfully produced in prestigious regional theaters across the country. Sharing about her work as a lawyer and as a playwright Nagle advocated for telling stories of Native life as an act that restores their humanity and resists the persistent attempts to make Natives invisible within U.S. culture.

She was able to interact with faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates during formal and informal events, her public lecture was attended by the largest undergraduate audience of any Berkhofer lecture, and she was featured on the campus radio program "Living Writers." Faculty from LSA, SMTD, and the School of Social Work attended events where they could converse and network with Nagle. Undergraduates and graduate students studying Indigenous performance, Native American literature and history, law, environment & sustainability, and Native American representation were able to meet with her in small events. And her public lecture was very well attended. After her lecture one of the American Culture faculty characterized the event by saying "In three years we'll be saying 'We saw her at Michigan'." This anticipation of significant contribution to the field of Native American literary arts was what drew us to Nagle

for this lecture in the first place. It was gratifying to see that her audience also recognized the same potential. With growing attention and resources being given to Native American theatre artists, we anticipate Nagle will have a significant and national impact on American theatre. Nagle was pleased with her visit and particularly appreciated the care that was taken to accommodate her food allergies. She said that most places just made sure that nothing served would kill her, but that we went beyond that to insure she could enjoy everything, not just live through it. We mention this perhaps minor part of her visit because we want to express appreciation to the Brenner family for supporting the kind of thoughtful engagement and interaction that the Berkhofer Lecture provides and to demonstrate that we take our part in the creation of a thoughtful environment seriously. •



ALPHONSE PITAWANAKWAT, LECTURER FOR THE ANISHINAABE (OJIBWE) LANGUAGE, IN A DISCUSSION FOLLOWING THE LECTURE.

A Year of Transition for Arab and Muslim American Studies

By: Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, Director of Arab and Muslim American Studies Program

This academic year has been one of great transition for AMAS. In the fall we welcomed new AMAS affiliated faculty, Nancy Khalil, an LSA Collegiate Fellow and Leila Kavar, a critical legal studies scholar in the Department of American Culture and new members Jason Young (History) and Osman Khan (Stamps) to the AMAS advisory board. We also said a bittersweet farewell to our inaugural director and AMAS founder Evelyn Alsultany. In addition to her pioneering work on Hollywood's representations of Arabs and Muslims and Islamophobia, Dr. Alsultany will be missed for her dedication to teaching and mentoring students and efforts to make the University of Michigan an inclusive campus.

The winter term began with an open house lead by the new AMAS director, Su'ad Abdul Khabeer aka Dr. Su'ad. The event was open to faculty, students and staff and featured, alongside very important conversations, different kinds of sweet and savory pies, specifically pizza (pie), spinach pie and bean pie. This open house menu was a playful way, on the part of Dr. Su'ad, to be reflective of the ethnic, racial and culture diversity of the many communities that fall under the categories Arab American and American Muslim. A good portion of the open house was dedicated to getting feedback from faculty and students about program strengths and weaknesses. Strengths included the internship program and the strong sense of community AMAS continues to provide, particularly for Arab American and Muslim students on campus. Some of the weakness identified included limited course offerings



GUEST SPEAKER OMAR OFFENDUM SPEAKING AT SYRIANAMERICANA.

ALL PHOTOS IN THIS SECTION BY: SILAN FADLALLAH
(AMAS UNDERGRADUATE ASSISTANT)

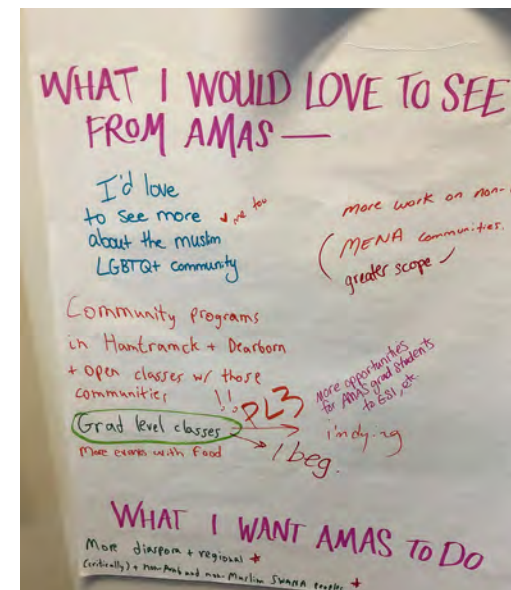
and programming on non-ME/NA communities. This was constructive feedback that is being addressed in our teaching and programs.

Our first program of the 2018-2019 academic school year was a lively lecture, "As Black Muslim As Bean Pie" by oral historian Zaheer Ali. Ali narrated the story of the historic and delicious bean pie (yes AMAS loves bean pie!) as means spiritual purification and economic development for members of the Nation of Islam to the more recent appearance of bean pie recipes by people like Martha Stewart, which brings up questions of cultural appropriation. Additionally, this winter, Dr. Khalil revamped the Muslims in America course, last taught in 2014, which AMAS will now offer more regularly and as an option to fulfill the required 200-level AMAS survey course. And Dr. Su'ad taught two new courses, "Emcees and Jihad-ism: Race Muslims and Pop Culture" and "Race, Muslims, and US Empire," which culminated in

the launch online resource created by students of the class, "Race and Muslims in the US: A Primer." Visit the primer at: tinyurl.com/usmuslimsprimer.

We also continued to support our strength around Arab American studies by hosting a poetry reading by UM alum Bayan Founas and cohosting the visit of Omar Offendum, a Syrian American hip hop artist with University Musical Society. Offendum, who was on a UMS artist residency, gave a moving presentation, "Syrianamericana: A Nation State of Mind," to ARABAM 215: "Intro to Arab American Studies," which was opened up to guests.

Change can be challenging, but it also comes with opportunity. In that spirit, we invite you to join us as we look forward to what comes next! •



PROJECT FROM AMAS OPEN HOUSE EXPLORING WHAT STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF WOULD LIKE TO SEE FROM THE PROGRAM.



ORAL HISTORIAN ZAEHEER ALI SPEAKING ON "AS BLACK MUSLIM AS BEAN PIE."



The “Slants” at the University of Michigan

By: John Kuwada,
Director of Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies Program

The 2018/2019 academic year started for A/PIA Studies with a combined concert and talk by the activist Asian American indie rock group, the “Slants”, in the first weekend of the Fall Semester. The Slants write and perform songs depicting the Asian American experience and received significant media coverage for their Supreme Court case in which they won the right to trademark their name in summer of 2017. The “Slants” sang their catchy and meaningful songs and Simon Tam, their leader, spoke about the genesis and history of their legal case and the social and political issues associated with the case. This concert/talk was followed a couple of weeks later by a panel discussion for students to explore the complex and contentious issues related to the commercial use of derogatory terms, the impact of such commercial terms on targeted groups and how targeted groups are reclaiming such terms to have positive value. The panel consisted of UM faculty with expertise in the 1st Amendment of the Constitution, Native American Studies, Latina/o Studies, A/PIA Studies, Arab and Muslim American Studies and African American Studies. These events were organized in partnership with WeListen, the grass-roots student group that runs events that promote civil discussion of controversial issues at the UM. Also, in September A/PIA Studies participated in bringing the Pulitzer Prize winning



ABOVE: “SLANTS” LEAD SINGER
LEFT: TABLE OF THE “SLANTS” MERCHANDISE

ALL PHOTOS IN THIS SECTION BY: KATELYNN KLEMM



UCLA Professor, Viet Thanh Nguyen, to give a public lecture “Race, War, and Refugees” in which he spoke about how to promote tolerance and empathy especially during times of contentious debate about immigration and national boundaries. We also initiated the A/PIA Studies seminars this year with an engaging talk “Refusal to Eat” by Professor Nayan Shah of the University of Southern California. The lecture discussed hunger strikes in the Japanese American incarceration camps during World War II. Thanks to Professor Susan Najita and graduate student Mika Kennedy for organizing the seminar.

Last year we welcomed the newest member of A/PIA Studies, Ian Shin, who is an Assistant Professor in the Departments of American Culture and History. Ian studies Asian American history with an emphasis on cultural issues related to collection of Chinese Art in the U.S. and the Boys Scout movement in Chinatown, New York City. Ian taught “History of Asian Americans” last year and looks forward to teaching “Introduction to A/PIA Studies” in 2019-20. We also welcomed Melissa

Phruksachart, who is an LSA Collegiate Fellow in the Department of Film, Television and Media, as the newest Faculty Associate of A/PIA Studies. Melissa is teaching “Asian American Cinema” in Fall, 2019. On the topic of courses, last year we offered “Introduction to A/PIA Studies” in both semesters as opposed to the past practice of just in the Fall Semester. The course was taught by Professor Manan Desai in the Fall and Professor Amy Stillman in the Winter. This was a rousing success that enrolled nearly 95 students as opposed to the usual 35. We are hopeful that exposure to our introductory course results in increased interest in our more specialized A/PIA Studies courses.

Finally, as we started off the academic year with thoughtful music, we ended the year by cosponsoring the Asian/Pacific Islander American Heritage Month Gala that featured the solo musical project, “Japanese Breakfast”. The gala was organized by the student group, United Asian American Organizations, which is a coalition group representing many of the A/PIA student groups at the UM in conjunction with A/PIA Studies. •



SIMON TAM, FOUNDER OF THE “SLANTS” GIVES TALK ABOUT SUPREME COURT CASE REGARDING THE BAND NAME.



Interview with Kyle Frisina, Ph.D. candidate and dramaturg

Interviewer: Julie Ellison

What experience with this year’s theme of “performance” do you bring to Michigan?

Between college and graduate school I spent most of a decade as a dramaturg and artistic producer. Immediately prior to grad school I was director of play development at NYC’s Second Stage Theatre and before that associate producer at the new work incubator New York Stage and Film. My first job out of college was in the literary office at McCarter Theatre in Princeton, NJ.

Since coming to Ann Arbor I’ve continued to work each summer as dramaturg-in-residence back at New York Stage and Film. The company’s annual retreat to the Vassar College campus involves a couple hundred artists exploding the American theater by day and eating at the same restaurant night after night.

What exactly is a dramaturg?

Good *question*. Another good question is how to pronounce it (with a hard g). “Dramaturg” comes from the word “dramaturgy” (soft g!), which refers to the rhythms and forms of a script or performance. “Dramaturgy” also refers to the work of the dramaturg: to draw everyone’s attention to those rhythms and forms.

How do you go about doing that?

Katherine Profeta has a great list of the dramaturg’s possible roles: “researcher, editor, questioner, catalyst, historian, archivist, literary manager, outside eye, inside eye, advocate for the audience, advocate for anything *but* the audience, [and] witness.” During most projects we wear a bunch of these hats simultaneously, like the man in the children’s book *Caps for Sale*.

My own work has included research for artists on topics ranging from the history of Ireland under British rule to the causes of the Arab Spring; and, in a different vein, passionate arguments about which terrific young writer gets a slot in the upcoming season. One of my favorite kinds of dramaturgy involves huddling in the last row



"CAUGHT IN THE ACT: POST-REHEARSAL DRAMATURGY AT NEW YORK STAGE AND FILM."
PHOTO BY: MARIA MILEAF



"WHEN W. H. AUDEN, CARSON MCCULLERS, AND GYPSY ROSE LEE ALL SHARED A BROOKLYN BROWNSTONE DURING WORLD WAR II, THEY CALLED IT "FEBRUARY HOUSE." THIS IMAGE CAPTURES A FAVORITE NEW YORK STAGE AND FILM WORKSHOP OF THE SAME NAME BY GABRIEL KAHANE AND SETH BOCKLEY.
PHOTO BY: BUCK LEWIS/VASSAR & NEW YORK STAGE AND FILM'S POWERHOUSE THEATER.

with a playwright and director, angsting over how to amplify the general feeling of “heartbreak.” Sometimes conversation with a writer about the climactic moment of her musical lasts for years, from the piece’s very first workshop to its Broadway premiere. Other times I’ve only got one shot to learn something new from an artist over coffee, or to raise a helpful question with the creative team at the bar.

And/but just as often, being a dramaturg means creating opportunities for *other* folks to be in conversation. Second Stage’s full-day staging of the “Elliot Trilogy” during our work with playwright Quiara Alegria Hudes is a good example. Audiences viewing our matinee production of the second play in Quiara’s trilogy between readings of plays #1 and #3 told us they loved the extended intimacy with her multigenerational characters and the actors who brought them to life. And watching the whole thing alongside an audience allowed Quiara to approach revisions of the third play, which we produced the following season, with a fuller understanding of the trilogy’s arc.

How has your ongoing work in theater shaped your time at Michigan?

Most of my time at Michigan has been a process of realizing that I couldn’t *not* write about theater. My dissertation is called “Thinking Theatrically: Contemporary Aesthetics for Ethical Citizenship,” and it begins from the observation that in an era when many Americans have lost faith in government to act as a guarantor of democracy, an acclaimed subset of women writers of color and queer women writers has turned to the subject of relational ethics: that is, to the local, moral question of how to perform in relation to others. I interrogate their interest in *relational* performance by identifying and taking seriously an often coincident investment in *theatrical* performance. Examining how literary works including Rankine’s *Citizen*, Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*, and Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* take up themes of theatrical performance, how they perform on the page, and how their evocations of specific marginalized bodies are



INTERIORS OF THE ONE OF THE THEATERS WHERE KYLE HAS DONE VARIOUS WORKS. PHOTO BY: KYLE FRISINA

performed by and for the books' wide audiences, I argue that encoded in these texts is a "theatrical" reorientation toward democratic life that's both more modest and more radical than we might expect. It's more modest in that subjects—and audiences—are figured as perpetually unable to understand one another. It's more radical in that they are urged to attend to one another anyway. Each chapter elaborates different relational elements of thinking theatrically, advancing collaboratively-developed, collectively-sustained forms of attention.

Collaborating for so many years on new work with living playwrights, directors, and other artists has certainly influenced my questions as a scholar of contemporary arts. It's (more than) possible that I came to graduate school in order to grapple with issues I faced constantly as a dramaturg: how do audiences interface with art? How do critics interface with artists? How do people writing and talking about the arts account for their lived relationship to the works they discuss, particularly when (as with live theater) their own presence is in part what gives the work the shape it takes? I've always been drawn to performances, not all of them plays, that offer some

pedagogy of ethical encounter. How can writers and audiences better partner with artists around this mutually meaningful theme in our own devastating times?

Is being a dramaturg good preparation for teaching?

I've been really lucky to feel that it is. Good dramaturgs work to make spaces inclusive, by facilitating post-play talkbacks, drafting contextualizing notes for theater programs, or conferring with a writer about what information could be seeded in Act One to bring audiences to the writer's desired revelation in Act Two. Good teachers employ a slew of corresponding strategies with essentially the same aim.

One of the most important questions dramaturgs ask playwrights is "What are your most important questions?" It's a similar scene in the classroom. There it's teachers' job to build students' confidence in their own curiosity—and to facilitate their joyful discovery that answers are cooperative efforts.

Is there a relationship between dramaturgy and the public humanities?

In the sense that dramaturgs are often responsible for translating what's going on with a script, in the rehearsal room, or onstage to many different kinds of audiences, dramaturgy feels to me very much like a public humanities practice. More broadly, theater itself is underutilized, I think, as an analogue for lots of activities falling under the umbrella of "the public humanities"—from podcasts to lectures to programs like "One City, One Book." In theater, the production, transmission, reception, and reformulation of ideas all take place at the same time. Learning from theater's intuition about the indivisibility of these events might inspire public humanists to further nuance their own performances engaging various publics.

What play should members of the American Culture department read/see/teach next?

On all three counts, that's easy: *The Brothers Size* by Tarell Alvin McCraney. It was written ten years before he won an Oscar for the screenplay of *Moonlight* but tackles some similar themes. As assistant dramaturg to a workshop production in 2007, I fell in love with that play like you fall in love with a person—can't eat, can't sleep, *oh there she is*—and I will be forever in its wake. •

THE INCREDIBLE NELSON GONZÁLEZ (FAR RIGHT) ON THE TRES WITH HIS BANDMATES IN THE THIRD PLAY OF QUIARA ALEGRÍA HUDES'S ELLIOT TRILOGY, *THE HAPPIEST SONG PLAYS LAST*. PHOTO BY: JOAN MARCUS





HONORING QUEEN LILI'UOKALANI WITH DR. AMY KU'ULEIALOHA STILLMAN AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN SMITHSONIAN, WASHINGTON D.C.. MARCH 9, & 10, 2019. PHOTOS CREDITED TO: HALAU HO'OMAU I KA WAI OLA O HAWAII FACEBOOK.

Honoring Queen Lili'uokalani at the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC

By: Amy Stillman

As a historian of Native Hawaiian music and dance, I have been privileged to experience many thrilling moments of discovery, of uncovering treasures during hours of silent labor sifting through archival documents and spinning reel after reel of microfilm. My quarry? Mele—the poetic compositions that are rendered vocally in song and visually through choreographed dance. My motivation? To repudiate the history I was taught from childhood, that our traditions had died as my grandparents and their grandparents accepted Christianity and Americanization. Through research, it was evident that much had been preserved.

Finding poetic compositions was a historian's dream come true. But I also knew that these mute texts

would truly live only if they were reunited with hula masters who possessed the skills to take new compositions and turn those stories into graceful yet powerful visions onstage. In their hands, the stories set in mele from the past could connect us with that testimony. And so it is that my greatest privilege has been seeing the fruits of my scholarship materialize onstage once again, across decades and even centuries of disconnection.

The program “Honoring Queen Lili'uokalani” at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian was part of the celebration of Women's History Month, as well as two other Smithsonian initiatives, “Because of Her Story” and “Year of Music.” I was invited to collaborate with Kumu Hula (master hula

instructor) Manu Ikaika, director of Hālau Ho'omau i Ka Wai Ola o Hawai'i, based in Fairfax, Virginia. We put together a program that highlighted the Queen's renown as an accomplished songwriter and composer. (And in an OMG moment, I thought the program would feature the hula troupe and I would be the academic accessory. On checking the event publicity days before traveling to Washington, it turned out that I was billed as the featured speaker!!)

Our program opened with traditional protocols. Over the plaintive tones of the pū kani conch shell, I chanted lines from the epic creation chant “Kumulipo.” The translation of its 2000-plus lines into English was one of Lili'uokalani's tasks during her sojourn in Washington in 1897, as she was lobbying against the United States annexing Hawai'i.

Two songs by Queen Lili'uokalani were the centerpiece of our program. The first is a sublime love song titled “Sanoe” detailing a love affair of paramours in the Queen's court who remain anonymous to us.

The second song, “Mai Wakinekona a Iolani Hale” was presented with a tale of its recovery. The anonymous text appeared on the front page of the Hawaiian-language newspaper Ka Makaaainana, mere days after Lili'uokalani was imprisoned within her own 'Iolani Palace, following a failed rebellion by her supporters to restore her to the throne in 1895. We had been taught that Lili'uokalani was not allowed to communicate with her supporters. This poetic text told us otherwise. She described her arrest, and poignantly stated that her crime was, in reality, her deep and abiding love for her people. The following week, that same space on the front page of Ka Makaaainana had another poetic text from an anonymous supporter, affirming continued loyalty. The following week, the Queen herself replied—in poetry. The exchange stretched over at least another 10 weeks! Although I first encountered this poetic text in anthology in 1982, and the newspaper publication came to light in 1993, it took several more years for me to recognize that this poetic text also appeared in an 1897 manuscript of songs that the



PROFESSOR AMY STILLMAN SINGS ON STAGE FOR DANCE PERFORMANCE AT EVENT. PHOTOS CREDITED TO: HALAU HO'OMAU I KA WAI OLA O HAWAII FACEBOOK.

Queen had hoped to publish, and it included a tune for this text. So three dancers presented Manu's choreography as I sang the song. Together, we brought the song full circle from its 1895 composition, through its 20th-century disappearance, and its return to light through the slow process of piecing its story together again from the fragments of history.

We then turned toward the future, by bringing a group of children on. First they engaged in a conversation in the Hawaiian language, then they delivered a spirited chant of pride. They were followed by the adult ladies performing a beloved song “Anapau” that honors Lili'uokalani equestrian skills. My heart overflowed with happiness, because as the ladies danced, the young girls sat on the side and began imitating their movements. By the end of the weekend, after we had presented our show 8 times, the girls had virtually learned the entire dance!

We closed our show with Lili'uokalani's most famous composition, “Aloha `Oe.” Another love song, again involving unnamed paramours, the song has become synonymous with vows of affection exchanged upon departures, “until we meet again.” Most often sung in Hawaiian, Lili'uokalani published the lyrics in Hawaiian, English and German in 1884. While we may some day sing the German lyrics, we did sing both the Hawaiian and English lyrics at NMAI.

It is truly a blessing that a venue such as the National Museum of the American Indian provides a space for indigenous people—including Native Hawaiians--to share our stories. That blessing is incomparable when, in the presence of a dedicated practitioner like Manu Ikaika, the stories embedded in poetic treasures from the past are rediscovered, then brought alive once again in song and dance onstage. •

You can watch the full event here:
<https://youtu.be/aoSdg9qNgLo>



PROFESSOR AMY STILLMAN PRESENTS MATERIALS TO ATTENDEES AT THE EVENT. PHOTOS CREDITED TO: HALAU HO'OMAU I KA WAI OLA O HAWAII FACEBOOK.

GROUP PHOTO FEATURING PERFORMERS OF EVENT. PHOTOS CREDITED TO: HALAU HO'OMAU I KA WAI OLA O HAWAII FACEBOOK.



Siegel Scholarship

The Joel Siegel Scholarship, made possible through the generosity of the estate of Mr. Siegel, helps to provide support for students who demonstrate the potential for excellence in any program within the Department of American Culture and who have financial need. The 2019 Joel Siegel Scholars are Telana Kabish and Emmanuel Solis.

Telana Kabish

Telana Kabish (2020) is completing her major in American Culture and a Minor in Intergroup Relations (IGR), with a focus on issues of Native American Studies, law, and immigration. As part of her American Culture studies, she researched country conditions for asylum applicants while working at the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center. With support from the Siegel scholarship, she had the opportunity to study abroad in Argentina for Winter 2019, and plans to graduate in Fall 2020. She is passionate about social justice issues and hopes to pursue this work in her career after graduation.



Emmanuel Solis

Emmanuel Solis (2020) is completing his double Major in Latino/a Studies and Communication and Media, and is also minoring in LGBTQ & Sexuality Studies and Urban Studies. As part of his studies in the Residential College, he worked as a tutor through Proyecto Avance: Latino Mentoring Association. He is Co-President of The Quito Project at UM, a program that supports educational achievement in low-opportunity areas both locally and globally. He has interned with WDET Detroit Public Radio, and is Editor-in Chief of *Latinidad Magazine*, which aims to showcase the voices of Latinx writers and artists. After graduation, he plans to continue his work with Latinx communities through media industry work or doctoral studies.



The Meisler Writing Award

Each year our department also presents two awards to undergraduates in any of our degree programs for excellence in writing. This prize is named the Richard Meisler Award, in memory of our dear colleague Richard Meisler, who served as undergraduate advisor in our department for more than a decade and who was both playful and deeply respectful of the ideas and commitments of our undergraduate students. The 2019 Meisler Writing awardees are Caitlyn Zawideh and Holly Reynolds.

Caitlyn Zawideh

Caitlyn Zawideh, whose essay "Deepfakes, Truth, and the Individual," explored the ways in which machine-learning algorithms can create increasingly realistic images & videos, and the implications for the circulation of this synthetic media on the internet. Caitlyn's essay showed how "deepfakes" pose critical questions about truth, power and control. This work is particularly timely given political and ethical concerns about "fake news" and social media networks. Caitlyn's essay argued that new technologies demand new ways of interacting with those technologies, astutely closing with the point that "Deepfakes signal a need for social transformation -- not the end of truth, but the beginning of a new way to engage with it."



Holly Reynolds

Holly Reynolds, whose essay "Summary of the 1868 Crow Land Session," explored the history and effects of a treaty which ceded over 30 million acres of land to the United States, including areas now part of Montana and Wyoming. She writes that "instead of ... mapping out what land would be ceded, the treaty with the Crow instead defined which lands would be reserved for the Indians and then marked the Crow as 'relinquishing all claim' to the rest." The committee was particularly impressed with the depth of her historical research, the compelling way she synthesized complex historical negotiations, and her attention to the long-term effects that these treaties and their repeated violations have had on Native lands, economies, and communities.



Congratulations, American Culture Graduates 2019!

American Culture Major

Brown, Rebecca
Colburn, Lauren
Croman, Jake
Gregg, Gabrielle (*Honors*)
Isabell, Alexandra
McCurry, Melissa
Minnebo, Anna
Noori, Shannon
Pinson, Max
Triezenberg, Julia
Trudeau, Margaret
Wandmacher, Lydia

American Culture Minor

Akkoor, Hiranmayi
Davis, Margaret
Joss, Madeline
Kennedy, Reilly
Lakin, Ryan
Malecki, Robert
Mitchell, Amber
Moore, Taylor
Mota, Nadia
Poggensee, Maeve
Rosenberg, Spencer
Rullman, Cailey
Shabbir, Maya
Somers, Alexandra
Taginya, Roxana
Timmer, Arrie
Withrow, Lauren

Arab and Muslim American Studies

Abduljaber, Rasha
Afifi, Yasmeen
Al-Bonijim, Alyiah
Ali, Iman
Alogaili, Sarah
Askar, Brandon
Demashkieh, Mohamad
Ebrahim, Rami
Issa, Ayah
Jawad, Rasha
Kafelghazal, Sally
Mohamed, Sadeeqe
Najjar, Mary



ABOVE: JOHN KUWADA, DIRECTOR OF A/PIA STUDIES, PLACES CHORD ON A/PIA MINOR GRADUATE.

BELOW: JESSE HOFFNUNG-GARSKOF, ASSOCIATE CHAIR, WITH AC MINOR GRADUATE.



Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies

Chang, Monicka
Thach, Victoria

Digital Studies

Bautista, Willa
Beaver, Emily
Berger, Carly
Bluestein, Emily
Borre, Matthew
Brown, Rebecca
Buck, Hannah
Caplan, Matthew
Chandrakanthan, Aisvarya
Cohen, Ariana
Cohen, Caroline
Cupelis, Paige
Davis, Elizabeth
Eisenshtadt, Kaitlyn
Gitelman, Leo
Glick, Jessica
Goriparthi, Amandha
Hunt, Cameron
Jautakis, Hayley
Kahan, Carly Palmer
Kennedy, Christian
Levin, Jodi
Liebergall, Rachel
Lieberman, Leon
Martinez, Ben
Mazanka, Katarina
McKee, Gwenevere
Meyerson, Danielle
Milek, Henry
Mirman, Drew
Mittman, Zoe Rose
Mooney, Jacqueline
Noori, Shannon
Ramos, Emma
Ross, Julia
Roush, Katherine
Samson, Kelsey
Schuman, Joseph
Shen, Mingyu
Somers, Jackie
Trudeau, Margaret

Digital Studies (cont.)

Vu, Jessica
Young, Jacob
Zheng, Taylor

Latina/o Studies

Bueno, Alma
Cano, Heidi
Diaz, Melissa
Hernandez-Solis, Alan
Lopez, Daniel
Valle, Cristal

Native American Studies

Franke, Charlene

Ph.D.s

Aune, Stefan
Chaar-Lopez, Ivan
Gaudet, Joseph
Garzonio, Dominic
Lee, Joo Young
Morales, Orquidea
Miller, Rachel



FAMILY POSES WITH AMAS GRADUATE.

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