

2024

IAS

# MA Research Symposium

Building Bridges  
Between  
Campus, Utah, and the World



**ASIA CENTER**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH



**International & Area Studies**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH



**CENTER FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH



# FRIDAY, November 15, 2024

## LNCO 2110

- 9:30am **Check-in & Pastries**  
**Welcome Remarks** Asia Center Director, Dr. Cindi Textor
- 9:40am **Keynote Speech** PhD Rodolfo Probst | *Learning from Ant-Plant Mutualisms: How Field Research Lays the Groundwork for Scientific Breakthroughs*
- 10:30am **Panel 1- Indigenous Connections**  
Arturo Cuellar | Latin American Studies MA  
Blanca Yagüe | Anthropology PhD  
Kyle Kittelberger | Ecology, Evolution, & Organismal Biology PhD
- 11:40am **Book Presentation- He pensado mucho en Sumalta**  
Published by: Akera, Mexico, 2023  
Alan Gutiérrez | World Languages & Cultures MA  
Faaizah Ghazi | World Languages & Cultures MA  
Prof. Timothy Cannon | World Languages & Cultures
- 12:15pm **LNCO 2120 - Catered Lunch for All Attendees**
- 1:00pm **Panel 2- Visual Art / Education in Mexico**  
Bailey Willes | Art History MA  
Amanda Platt-Allen | Art History MA  
Saydi Anderson | World Language & Cultures MA  
Alan Gutiérrez | World Language & Cultures MA
- 2:30pm **Panel 3- Asian Studies MA Works in Progress**  
T. Simpson | Focus: Japanese Fiction & Gender  
Kim Vo | Focus: A Temple Space as Social Welfare in Vietnam  
Lev Brunner | Focus: China & Revolutionary Propaganda
- 3:30pm **Panel 4- Latin American Studies MA Works in Progress**  
Isabella Tollefson | Focus: Decay of Venezuelan Democracy  
Suzy Bindrup | Focus: Diaspora & Nonprofit  
Abigail Swanson | Focus: Ranch Abandonment & Migration
- 4:30pm **Closing Address** Center for Latin American Studies  
Director, Dr. Alejandro Quin
- 5:30pm **Dinner- Invitation Only**  
*Kathmandu Grill - 212 S 700 E, Suit D, Salt Lake City, UT 84102*



# PRESENTER BIOS AND ABSTRACTS

## IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

### WELCOME ADDRESS

**Cindi Textor** | Asia Center, Center Director



Dr. Cindi Textor currently serves as Director of the Asia Center at the University of Utah. Their research takes a transnational approach to the study of Japan, particularly the Japanese empire and its legacies in the present. In addition to their primary focus on fiction by Koreans in Japan, they are interested in literature and culture from mainland Japan as well as Okinawa, the Korean peninsula, and Japanese and Korean American communities.

### KEYNOTE ADDRESS

**Learning from Ant-Plant Mutualisms: How Field Research Lays the Groundwork for Scientific Breakthroughs** / PhD. Rodolfo Probst

In the intricate web of ecological relationships, ant-plant mutualisms exemplify the profound connections that shape ecosystems. This talk, led by Rodolfo Probst, a postdoctoral researcher at the College of Science in the Science Research Initiative (SRI) program, explores how field research not only illuminates these interactions but also lays the groundwork for significant scientific breakthroughs. With a focus on the evolution of these mutualistic relationships, Probst integrates genomic tools, natural history, and undergraduate research to examine speciation in insects (with a focus on ants). Attendees will gain insights into how understanding these dynamic partnerships can enhance our knowledge of biodiversity and conservation. Drawing on his passion for tropical fieldwork and phylogenetics, Probst will demonstrate how empirical research - with support from CLAC! - fosters new hypotheses and informs conservation strategies. Join us as we explore the vital role of ant-plant interactions in ecological research and their implications for the future of insect evolution and environmental stewardship.



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Rodolfo Probst is a postdoc at the College of Science, where he mentors undergraduates and investigates speciation in insects, with a focus on the evolution of ant-plant mutualistic interactions. His research uses genomic tools, and natural history to understand how species are formed and how we can identify them using DNA sequences. He is led by his interest in insect evolution and his passion for tropical fieldwork and phylogenetics, teaching the public about bugs and conservation, and exploring the outdoors. When not at the lab or collecting ants, he likes to be biking and hiking around Utah, cooking, and writing poetry.



# PANEL 1: INDIGENOUS CONNECTIONS

**Chair: Kyle Kittelberger |  
Ecology, Evolution, and Organismal Biology PhD**

## Mexican Traditional Medicine

**Arturo Cuellar | Latin American Studies MA**

This research in Mexico uncovered historical records related to Mexican Traditional Medicine, focusing on its evolution, cultural significance, and indigenous practices. The study documented the rich history of Mexico's healing traditions using archival sources, interviews with practitioners, and visits to key repositories. The findings reveal the continuity of ancestral knowledge, its integration into modern practices, and its significant role in shaping community healthcare systems across generations, linking past and present.



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Bio: As an MA Student, I am deeply interested in researching the origins of Mexican families in Utah, a topic of significant historical and cultural importance. My research is focused on tracing their ancestral lines and detailing their daily lives during the XX Century. I'm investigating their cultural practices and the significant economic and social challenges they faced.

## Importance of Indigenous Foods for the Local Economy and Social Life of Mitú, Vaupés Colombia

**Blanca Yagüe | Anthropology PhD.**

Blanca's research aims to understand the adaptations to the urban environment by Indigenous peoples in the Amazon, studying the different ways Indigenous traditional foods are enhancing the local economy of Indigenous families and weaving to the social life of Mitú. Making Indigenous foodways visible in the city contributes to Food Sovereignty efforts and to Indigenous struggles for recognition as urban dwellers.



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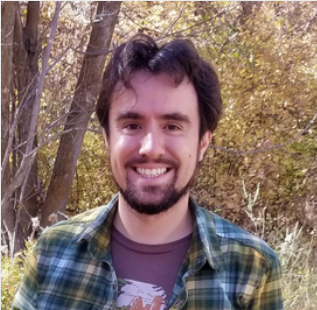
Bio: Blanca is in the last year of her post-doctoral program in Anthropology. She is currently applying to post-doctoral and teaching positions and hopes to continue her career in academia both through teaching and conducting research at the university level.

# PANEL 1: INDIGENOUS CONNECTIONS (continued)

## Bird Banding in the Poorly-Sampled Choco Rainforest of Southeastern Colombia: Researching Long-Term Population Trends in Resident Birds and Examining Local Variation in Avian Morphometrics

### **Kyle Kittelberger | Ecology, Evolution, and Organismal Biology PhD**

Through a long-term bird banding project in the Andean foothills of Colombia, Kyle aims to create an avian baseline to help assess future changes in bird populations in response to habitat and climatic changes. This project further aims to understand the community dynamics of forest understory bird species in the region, reveal differences in species turnover between forest sites of varying quality, and assess variation in life history and morphometric traits across and within species.

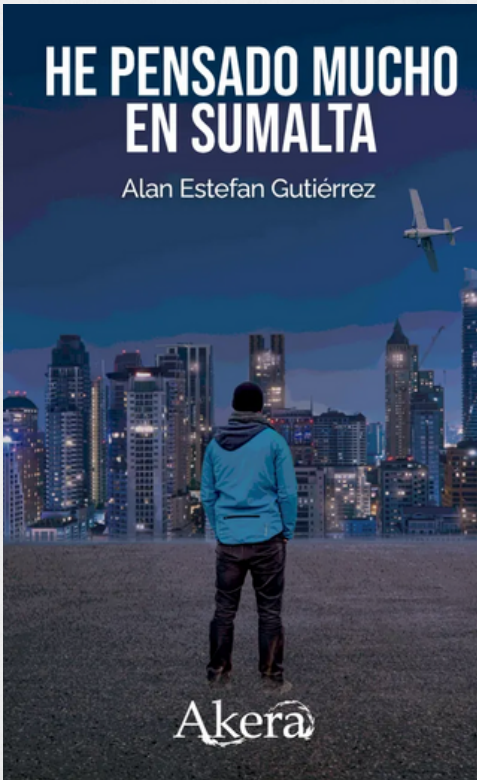


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Bio: Kyle Kittelberger is in the last year of his PhD program in Biology in the Ecology, Evolution, & Organismal Biology Program (EEOB). His research focuses on the study of birds, with a focus on their migration, movement ecology, and trying to better understand how factors such as climate change and habitat degradation are affecting these movements and bird populations.



# BOOK PRESENTATION



He Pensado Mucho En Sumalta

**Author: Alan Estefan Gutiérrez**

Publisher: Akerá, México, 2023.

This is a presentation on a novel written in Spanish by an MA student. It is based on Ciudad Juárez, a city in the border between México and the US. It explores themes of displacement, immigration, globalization, and the nostalgia of growing up.

Discussion By:

**Alan Gutiérrez | World Languages & Cultures MA**

**Faaizah Ghazi | World Languages & Cultures MA**

**Prof. Timothy Cannon | Instructor (Lecturer),  
World Languages & Cultures**

Tim Cannon is the Spanish Language Coordinator for the Department of World Languages and Cultures. He also directs the learning abroad program in collaboration with the University of Oviedo in Spain. An avid reader and traveler, Tim believes in the transformative power of books. He values their role as a sounding board for growth, learning, sorrow, and entertainment, that offers a gateway to new places, other perspectives, and different times with every turn of the page.



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Author Bio: Alan is a second-year Comparative Literature MA student. He specializes in the comparative relation between Latin American and literatures in English. He also specializes in rhetoric and literacy studies with a focus in Writing in the Disciplines (WID) in Spanish. Next year he'll publish two textbooks in México—one in business and professional writing and the other in writing about literature. He's also a fiction writer. Next year he'll publish a collection of magic realist/horror short stories. In 2023 he published his first novel in Spanish.



# PANEL 2: VISUAL ARTS / EDUCATION IN MEXICO

**Chair: Saydi Anderson / World Languages & Cultures MA**

Delcy Morelos' El Abrazo: Reconceptualizing Material as Embrace  
**Bailey Willes | Art History MA**

My research concerns Delcy Morelos' El abrazo, an exhibition that was recently on view at DIA Chelsea in NYC. I take a new materialist approach, considering the ways El abrazo resists a subject-object dichotomy that places humans at the top of a hierarchy. I simultaneously consider the multi-sensory nature of the installation. I aim to situate Morelos' work within a framework of indigenous knowledge, and account for her Colombian and Indigenous identities, which inform her view of land. The multi-sensory experience of El abrazo creates a non-extractive understanding of the earth.



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Bio: Bailey Willes is an art history graduate student in their second year of study. Their research focus is in contemporary installation art, centering interactivity in art and non-traditional media formats. They are currently interested in new materialism as a methodology through which to view art objects and assemblages.

Body, Land, and Identity in Laura Aguilar's Photography  
**Amanda Platt-Allen | World Languages & Cultures MA**

In her 1990 photograph, Three Eagles Flying, artist Laura Aguilar embodies Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of borderlands. In this photograph, Aguilar powerfully positions her body between the Mexican and American flags, literally making herself the border between the two cultures, identities, and lands. By visually becoming a borderland, Aguilar articulates what it means to be Chicana, including questions of identity, self-acceptance, and colonialism.



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Bio: Amanda Platt-Allen is a second-year art history graduate student working on artist and photographer Laura Aguilar. Her research is focused on Latinx and Latin American contemporary art with intersections of feminist, gender, and Chicanx theories. She is currently finishing her thesis on how Aguilar visually articulates her identities through a borderlands lens.

# PANEL 2: VISUAL ARTS / EDUCATION IN MEXICO (continued)

## The Pressing Role of Feminine Control in 20th Century Argentine Periodicals

### **Saydi Anderson | World Languages & Cultures MA**

The Pressing Role of Feminine Control in 20th Century Argentine Periodicals Through an analysis of the poetry and artwork displayed in Micaela, a monthly journal directed by the Asociación Latinoamericana de Mujeres, a female-run organization in Sweden during Rafael Videla' dictatorship (1976-1983), we will see the ways in which women resist dictatorial control, illustrating that exile, whether literal or metaphorical, is not a state of dormancy. Instead, Micaela represents the diaspora as a locus of power, underscoring the social and political strength women can find in shared memory.



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Bio: Saydi Anderson will complete a Masters in World Languages and Cultures with a Spanish Emphasis this spring. Her research focuses on Argentina during periods of dictatorship and analyzes the relationship between exile, memory, and gender during periods of military rule.

## The History of the Teaching of Writing in the Mexican Higher Education System (Late 19th Century, Early 1900)

### **Alan Gutiérrez | World Languages & Cultures MA**

This presentation focuses on the history of writing instruction in higher education in 19th century México. It presents four major trends: the teaching of grammar, Latin, and rhetoric and the writing of dissertations as the closest thing to writing instruction. The presentation considers the historical context of Mexico. The conclusion is that historically university students in México have been blamed for what are considered to be their poor writing skills.



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Bio: Alan is a second-year Comparative Literature MA student. He specializes in the comparative relation between Latin American and literatures in English. He also specializes in rhetoric and literacy studies with a focus in Writing in the Disciplines (WID) in Spanish. Next year he'll publish two textbooks in México-one in business and professional writing and the other in writing about literature. He's also a fiction writer. Next year he'll publish a collection of magic realist/horror short stories. In 2023 he published his first novel in Spanish.



# PANEL 3: ASIAN STUDIES MA WORKS IN PROGRESS

**Chair: Lev Brunner / Asian Studies MA**

Examining Trans Representation in Japanese Manga in the 21st Century

**T. Simpson | Asian Studies MA**

This project analyzes the representation of trans identities in two works of fiction in Japanese pop culture: the manga *Watashi no Oshi ha Akuyaku Reijou* and *Kanojo ni Naritai Kimi to Boku*. I also unpack what constitutes “good” representation, how the standards for it differ in the West and Japan, and how the context of Japanese society influenced the creation of these two series.

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Bio: T's academic interest is the transgender community in Japan, and the representation of trans identities through modern Japanese pop culture and media.

Focus: A Temple Space as Social Welfare in Vietnam

**Kim Vo | Asian Studies MA**

Built in 1926, Chùa Kỳ Quang Pagoda became a spiritual destination attracting Buddhists and tourists traveling to Vietnam. Through years of remodeling and expansion, the temple started to take in orphans, including those that are disabled. Through my project, I hope to explore how the temple acts as an orphanage and healthcare center for disabled youth in Vietnam, the stigma of leaving these individuals behind, and the Buddhist philosophies used to treat them.

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Bio: Kim is in the first semester of her Asian Studies Master's Program. Her focus areas include Southeast Asia and Health, with a primary interest in Vietnam. Through her research, she would like to explore the role of Buddhist temples in healthcare for disabled individuals in Vietnam.



# PANEL 3: ASIAN STUDIES MA WORKS IN PROGRESS (continued)

## Red Army, Feudal Landscape: Guohua and the Aesthetic Politicization of Environment

**Lev Brunner | Asian Studies MA**

Taking Ying Yeping (应野平, 1910-1990) and Wang Guanqing's (汪观清, 1931-) An Arduous Journey series (万水千山屏, 1961) as a case study. This project is interested in the appropriation of “feudal” aesthetics, and their subsequent revolutionary repurposing, in the socialist visual culture of the “seventeen-year” period (1949-1966) in the People’s Republic of China.



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Bio: Lev is a second-year student in the Asian Studies MA program. They are interested in the visual and material-environmental histories of twentieth-century China and Southeast Asia.

# PANEL 4: LATIN AMERICA STUDIES MA WORKS IN PROGRESS

**Chair: Abigail Swanson/ Latin American Studies MA**

## Change Over Chávez: Decay of Venezuelan Democracy

**Isabella Tollefson | Latin American Studies MA**

One of Latin America's most pressing issues today is the political, economic, and humanitarian crisis that is currently unfolding in Venezuela. Though the recent electoral upheaval certainly put Venezuela on the world stage, this problem began developing over three decades ago when Hugo Chávez was elected. This project aims to analyze the decay of Venezuelan democracy from Chávez's rise to power to his successor's cling to power in the face of domestic and international pressures.



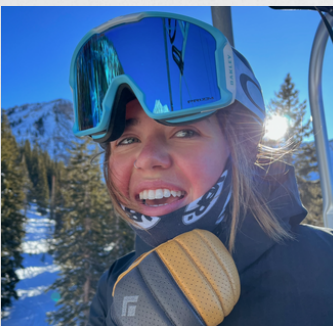
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Bio: Isabella is in her first year of the Latin American Studies MA program, having graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Her focus within LAS is Political Science, particularly democratic backsliding. Fluent in Spanish, she has recently begun studying Portuguese, too.

## Migration and Rural Depopulation across Baja California Sur, Mexico

**Abigail Swanson | Latin American Studies MA**

Over the last few decades rural populations have experienced decline as humans move to more urban areas. Here we seek to assess how ranch abandonment and migration have changed population dynamics across the Baja California peninsula from 2000-2020, and into the present, looking specifically at three major mountain ranges: Sierra de la Laguna, Sierra de la Giganta/Guadalupe, and Sierra de San Francisco. This research poses the question: What are the push and pull factors for ranch abandonment and/or migration from rural areas? Furthermore, does geographic proximity determine migration patterns?



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Bio: Abigail is a first-year Master's Student in the Latin American Studies program. She works in an Anthropology discipline with a geographic focus on Mexico. She is particularly interested in how local ecology impacts social mobility, mortality dynamics, and migration. Abigail works in both the humanities and social science frameworks to research these themes across the Baja California Peninsula.



# PANEL 4: LATIN AMERICA STUDIES MA WORKS IN PROGRESS (continued)

Focus: Diaspora & Nonprofit

**Suzy Bindrup | Latin American Studies MA**

Latinas/os, according to the most recent census, make up almost 20% of U.S. population. They are a powerful demographic that are projected to be the fastest growing minority in this country. Sadly, they also comprise the most underrepresented and underserved when it comes to housing. Centro Civico Mexicano [CCM], an Identity Based nonprofit organization that spans almost 100 years in the Salt Lake Valley, recently addressed housing issues for their elderly. Normally, Identity Based organization handle the preservation of culture, language, and traditions for their clients and members, as well as provide some support for assimilating into American society. In the case of CCM, they chose to go beyond this norm and in 2020, opened affordable housing for their 62+ constituents with low income on the property that also houses their community center. Studying how they accomplished this goal and how it benefits not just Salt Lake City's Latina/o community but the community at large, can and should influence creative solutions for housing, especially for the Latin community.



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Bio: Suzy Bindrup completed her undergraduate in Spanish at the University Utah. She is currently working on her MA in LAS on the FLAS Fellowship for studying Nahuatl, an endangered, but very much alive Indigenous language spoken by more than a million persons in Mexico. The Latin American people are an inspiration to Suzy, not just because of her own Mexican heritage, but also because they are an important demographic of people that the United States needs to understand and plan for in the coming decades. For this reason, her studies are focused on Public Administration, particularly nonprofits.



# PRESENTER BIOS AND ABSTRACTS

## CLOSING ADDRESS

Alejandro Quin | Center for Latin American Studies, Center Director



Alejandro Quin is Associate Professor of Spanish and Latin American studies. His research and teaching interests include modern and contemporary Latin American literature and culture, Spanish-American fiction and intellectual history, environmental studies, and the relations between politics, the state, and the field of cultural production from national and transnational perspectives, particularly in the South American context.



# 2024

# IAS

## MA Research Symposium

The International and Area Studies' Asia Center and Center for Latin American Studies join together for the first annual MA Research Symposium to offer a welcoming conference-like space for graduate students to publicly present their completed or ongoing research. We want to recognize all our amazing directors and affiliated faculty, for their continued support of the Asian Studies and Latin American Studies MA students as well as the Center for Latin American Studies specific funding support of field researchers across campus applying their disciplines to further the academic pursuits of research on Latin America.

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