2026

IAS

Grad Research Symposium

Building Bridges Between Campus, Utah, and the World

THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
ASIA CENTER

THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
INTERNATIONAL & AREA STUDIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
CENTER FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

FRIDAY, November 20, 2026

GC 2018 - THE HINCKLEY CAUCUS ROOM

9:00am ***Check-in & Pastries***

9:15am ***Welcoming Address*** Asia Center Director, Dr. Cindi Textor

9:30am ***Panel 1- Transpacific Perspectives on Migration, Energy Markets, and Digital Colonialism***

Chair: Dr. Danielle Endres | Dept. of Communication
Jamie Nakano | History MA
Gabriele Mello | Environmental Humanities MA
Chelsea Patterson | Sociolology PhD

11:00am ***Panel 2- International War and Peace: Military Alignment and Demographics***

Chair: Dr. Steven Lobell | Dept. of Political Science
Taemin Kim | Political Science PhD
Shaarif Sameer | Political Science PhD

11:50pm **Lunch for all participants and attendees**

12:30pm ***Panel 3- Methodological Frameworks: Archives and Solidarity Journalism in Transnational Contexts***

Chair: Dr. Danielle Olden | Dept of History
Mari Linares | Communication MA
Anthony Ray | History MA

2:45pm ***Panel 4- Haunted Images, Musical Landscapes, and Video Games***

Chair: Dr. Jacqueline Sheean | Dept of World Languages & Cultures
Eduvey Ramírez | World Languages & Cultures MA
Dingqi Chen | World Languages & Cultures PhD
Riccieri Luís Paludo | Music Composition PhD

3:30pm ***Closing Address*** International & Area Studies Administrative Program Coordinator, Roxanna Lee

PRESENTER BIOS AND ABSTRACTS

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

9:15am, November 20, 2026
WELCOMING ADDRESS

Dr. Cindi Textor | Asia Center, Center Director



Dr. Cindi Textor currently serves as Director of the Asia Center at the University of Utah and is an associate professor in the Department of World Languages and Cultures. 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.

9:30am, November 20, 2026

PANEL 1: Transpacific Perspectives on Migration, Energy Markets, and Digital Colonialism

Chair: Dr. Danielle Endres | Associate Professor
Department of Communication



Bio: Danielle Endres is a Professor of Communication and the Director of the Environmental Humanities Program. Her research expertise includes environmental communication, Indigenous communication, and rhetorical studies. Her research projects focus on the rhetoric of environmental and science controversies including nuclear waste siting decisions, climate change, and energy transitions. Her work is guided by principles of democratic participation and focuses on how underrepresented and marginalized groups, particularly Native peoples and nations, engage in environmental advocacy.

The Disappearance of Elena Jurado: Race, Gender, and American Empire in Early Hollywood

Jamie Nakano | History, MA

In the 1920s, newspapers across the U.S. called Elena Jurado—originally an extra in a Hollywood film—the “first Filipino movie star.” Jurado then disappeared from the public eye, only to be rediscovered in 2008 by a Filipino essayist. I situate Jurado’s life and career in the context of US colonization and early Filipino migration to the US and consider what her obscurity from historical narratives reveals about race and gender in US empire.



Bio: Jamie Nakano is a second-year MA student in U.S. History with research interests in Asian American history, media representation, and U.S.-Asia relations from the late 19th to early 20th centuries. She also works at the Natural History Museum as a collections assistant in Anthropology, researching Native American artists.

9:30am, November 20, 2026

PANEL 1: Transpacific Perspectives on Migration, Energy Markets, and Digital Colonialism (Continued)

Carrying Energy: China in Brazil

Gabriele Mello | Environmental Humanities, MA

Since 2005, Brazil has become the main recipient of Chinese-FDI in Latin America, with as much as 75% being destined to the energy sector. This research seeks to examine the dynamics of Chinese funded energy transmission lines under construction in Brazil , and how they transform energy markets, landscapes and human-nature relations.

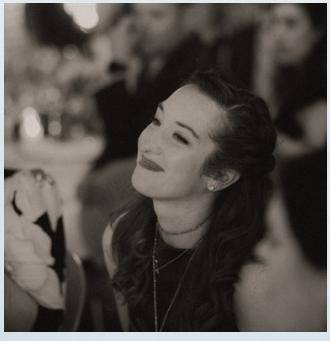


Bio: Gabriele is a first-year Environmental Humanities master's student. She received her B.A. in Environmental Studies from Mount Holyoke College, where her interest in Chinese-funded Energy infrastructure in Brazil began. Currently, her work explores how energy infrastructure reflects geopolitical dynamics and connects to local lived experiences against the backdrop of the energy transition.

Colonizing Nicaragua – A Digital Perspective

Chelsea Patterson | Sociology, PhD

In 2021, Nicaragua launched the 'National Plan for the Fight against Poverty and for Human Development' to "modernize" the nation with robust 5G networks, datacenters, crime prevention via surveillance, and telecommunication. China is at the forefront of providing these modernizations. This research explores the China-Nicaragua relationship through the concept of digital colonialism. Historical and discourse analyses, followed by field observations, revealed Nicaragua's cultural resilience alongside growing foreign influence and identified sites for continuing research.



Bio: Chelsea Patterson is an aspiring sociologist transitioning from a career in corporate finance and business analytics. Her research interests focus on the intersections of globalization, technology, political power, and social inequality. Her current research examines digital colonialism, foreign investment, and economic development in Nicaragua, with particular attention to national autonomy and cultural identity.

11:00am, November 20, 2026

PANEL 2: International War and Peace: Military Alignment and Demographics

Chair: Dr. Steven Lobell | Professor
Department of Political Science

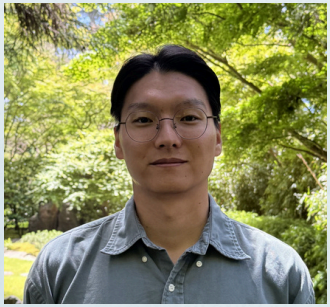


Bio: Steven E. Lobell is Professor in the Political Science Department at the University of Utah. His research interests include neoclassical realism, the political economy of security, near crisis and escalation, and great power competition and weak states. He is the author or co-author of ten books and twenty-five articles. Lobell served as the PI of Department of Defense Minerva Research Initiative and Office of Naval Research award on “Power Projection, Deterrence Strategies, and Escalation Dynamics in an Era of Challenging Near Peers, Rogue States, and Terrorist and Insurgent Organizations.” He was awarded a Visiting Fellowship at the Nobel Institute and a Fulbright Scholar award in Israel.

Back to the Future: Population Aging, Welfare Politics, and Geriatric Peace

Taemin Kim | Political Science, PhD

Does population aging necessarily promote international peace? Existing literature argues that increased social spending crowds out other expenditures, including military spending, leading to geriatric (or demographic) peace. However, this preliminary research challenges this automatic mechanism. It argues that developmental legacies shape individual perceptions of welfare-warfare trade-offs, thereby mediating the effects of population aging on security outcomes. This suggests that states under similar demographic pressures may experience different political pressures regarding military spending.



Bio: Taemin Kim is a PhD student at the Department of Political Science, University of Utah. Born and raised in South Korea, he is interested in the impact of population aging on state behavior, especially in terms of international security. He is also a recipient of the Fulbright Grant (2024-26).

11:00am, November 20, 2026

PANEL 2: International War and Peace: Military Alignment and Demographics (Continued)

Great Power Alignment and Military Autonomy in Authoritarian Regimes

Shaarif Sameer | Political Science, PhD

How does alignment with great powers shape civil–military relations in authoritarian regimes? I argue that great-power alignment increases the military's political autonomy through two mechanisms: strengthening the military's organizational capacity and forcing civilian leaders to delegate greater authority to the armed forces. To test this relationship, I construct a multidimensional index of military autonomy that captures the military's bureaucratic and structural influence in the state. Focusing on alignment with the United States, I examine how military training programs, security assistance, and arms transfers affect these two dimensions of military autonomy.



Bio: Shaarif Sameer is a PhD candidate in Political Science at the University of Utah. His research examines authoritarian politics, international security, and civil-military relations, with a particular focus on how partnerships with great powers shape military political autonomy in authoritarian regimes.

12:30pm, November 20, 2026

PANEL 3: Methodological Frameworks: Archives and Solidarity Journalism in Transnational Contexts

Chair: Dr. Danielle Olden | Associate Professor Department of History



Bio: Danielle Olden is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Utah. Her research and teaching focus on modern U.S. history, with specializations in race, racial formation, and Mexican Americans in the post-WWII period.

Perspectivas Transparentes

Marí Linares | Communication, MA

Venezuelan migrants in Colombia are often portrayed in media as threats linked to crime, scarcity, and social disorder, while their own voices are missing. This project pairs qualitative content and discourse analysis of Colombian news coverage with interviews and discourse analysis. Guided by solidarity journalism, the project co-creates a 10-episode podcast with migrant collaborators, contrasting dominant narratives with lived experience, and models journalism that supports dignity, self-representation, and belonging.



Bio: Marí Linares is a Peruvian-born scholar and journalist based in the United States whose work examines media violence, migration narratives, and xenophobia affecting Latino communities. Treating storytelling as a shared, culturally responsive practice, she is currently producing a documentary podcast on Venezuelan migration in Colombia (Summer 2026) that centers who gets to tell migrants' stories.

12:30pm, November 20, 2026

PANEL 3: Methodological Frameworks: Archives and Solidarity Journalism in Transnational Contexts (Continued)

Archivos de Sonora: Navigating Archival Research in Sonora, Mexico

Anthony Ray | History, MA

The borderlands region of Mexico and the United States is rich with history that has yet to be unearthed. However, many American scholars have yet to tap into the resources available in Mexican archives. Not knowing what the archives hold and not having contacts can often be a deterrent. In this brief presentation, I will discuss my travels to Sonora, Mexico, the types of archives that exist, and some of the material that I found.



Bio: Anthony Ray is a local musician, theologian, and historian. His research focuses on the American Southwest and northern Mexico during the nineteenth century. He teaches theology and government at Judge Memorial Catholic High School. He holds a master's degree in theology from St. John's School of Theology and a master's degree in history from the University of Utah.

1:40pm, November 20, 2026

PANEL 4: Haunted Images, Musical Landscapes, and Video Games

Chair: Dr. Jacqueline Sheean | Assistant Professor Department of World Languages and Cultures



Bio: Jacqueline Sheean is an Assistant Professor of Spanish in the Department of World Languages and Cultures. Her research and teaching focus on the intersection of media theory and Spanish cultural studies, engaging issues of memory, authoritarianism, and national identity in 20th and 21st century Spain. Her writing on Iberian cinema and media has appeared in venues such as Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies, Revista de Estudios Hispánicos, Discourse: Journal of Media Theory, and her book, Capital Cinema: Projecting Madrid from Dictatorship to Democracy will be published with University of Toronto Press in March 2027.

A Slurring of Images: Haunting and Framed Narratives in Susan Meiselas's "Nicaragua", "Pictures from a Revolution", and Julio Cortázar's "Apocalypse at Solentiname"

Eduvey Ramírez | World Languages & Cultures, MA

The thesis focuses on three photography-based works from the Sandinista revolutionary period in Nicaragua: Susan Meiselas's photographic collection "Nicaragua, June 1978–July 1979", her documentary "Pictures from a Revolution", and Julio Cortázar's short story "Apocalypse at Solentiname." These three works demonstrate how framed narratives can, and will be, conceptualized by the viewer or reader. The effectiveness of haunting images lies in prompting the viewer to examine their own possibilities and associations with the images before them.



Bio: Eduvey Ramirez is a second-year master's student focusing on Spanish-language literary and cultural studies in the Department of World Languages and Cultures, where he also teaches second-year Spanish courses on the cultures of the Spanish-speaking world. He previously earned bachelor's degrees in English and Spanish from the University of Utah.

1:40pm, November 20, 2026

PANEL 4: Haunted Images, Musical Landscapes, and Video Games (Continued)

Post-Fordist Commodities and Digital Fetishism: Intimacy, Narrative Consumption, and Gacha Monetization in Genshin Impact

Dingqi Chen | World Languages and Cultures, PhD

This paper examines how Genshin Impact's gacha monetization transforms fictional characters into post-Fordist commodities shaped by narrative, affect, and intimacy. Building on Joleen Blom, Marc Steinberg, Ōtsuka Eiji, and Christine Yano, it analyzes how continuous world-building and player–character relationships generate consumption desire. Drawing on player experience and online community ethnography, the paper argues that this process produces a form of digital fetishism central to contemporary digital capitalism.



Bio: Dingqi Chen is a Ph.D. student in Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Utah. His research focuses on Japanese popular culture, digital media, anime, manga, and video games, with particular interests in media theory and contemporary digital cultures in East Asia.

Creative Processes and Innovation in Gaucho Traditional Music in Southern Brazil

Riccieri Luís Paludo | Music Composition, PhD

This qualitative research examines creative processes and contemporary innovation within southern Brazil's gaucha traditional music. Grounded in fieldwork conducted in Lages, SC during the Sapecada da Serra Catarinense festival, the research combines participant observation, archival analysis, and semi-structured interviews with leading tradition-bearers. By investigating how contemporary musicians negotiate tradition and innovation, this study bridges lived cultural practice with academic inquiry, contributing original field-based scholarship that informs both compositional practice and creative process research.



Bio: Riccieri Paludo is a Brazilian composer, cellist, and Fulbright Fellow pursuing a PhD in Music Composition and Music Technology at the University of Utah. His work explores the intersection of tradition and technology, reimagining Brazilian and South American musical traditions through contemporary acoustic and electroacoustic composition.

3:30pm, November 20, 2026

CLOSING ADDRESS

Roxanna Lee | Administratice Program Coordinator
International & Area Studies Office



Roxanna Lee serves as administrative staff for the College of Humanities, supporting the Asia Center, Center for Latin American Studies, Middle East Center, International & Area Studies, World Languages & Cultures, and the Second Language Teaching & Research Center. She holds a master's degree in Korean Studies from Yonsei University, with a focus on orthography and code variation, and a bachelor's degree in Applied Linguistics with a minor in Spanish from Portland State University.

2026

IAS

Grad Research Symposium

The University of Utah's Asia Center and Center for Latin American Studies join together for the second annual International and Area Studies 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' Ed Epstein endowed funding support of field researchers across campus applying their disciplines to further the academic pursuits of research on Latin America.

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