Letter from the Director

Dear IMS friends and associates,

Over the summer of 2019 Robert Rosenswig stepped down after serving 4 years (2015-2019) as director of our Institute. With the support of the Board of Directors I assumed my new role as Director in late August 2019. In this, my first “Letter from the Director” I wish to express how deeply thankful and honored I am for this opportunity. I am honored not only because IMS serves an important role at our University and its Anthropology Program, but also because this Institute has fostered, for over four decades now, important research and publications on the world region that is my family’s place of origin and heritage, Mesoamerica.

Under Rob’s leadership the Institute continued to host a speaker series that has brought a wide range of Mesoamericanist scholars to our campus. Through the DeCormier and First Encounters Scholarships and the Undergraduate Essay and David Scotcher Essay awards the Institute has supported students and their research to help usher the next generation of Mesoamericanist scholars. Thanks to the hard work of the director and the sage guidance of Walter Little, IMS has expanded its publication series through the University Press of Colorado. Finally, our collaboration and bonds of friendship with the Triquis Sin Fronteras group have continued to grow. The Institute co-sponsored the sixth annual Day of Triqui Culture on the UAlbany Campus and this trajectory of collaboration received the University’s Exemplary Public Engagement Award.

This year has been very prolific for the Institute in other fronts as well. While serving as IMS director, Rob Rosenswig maintained an active program of NSF-funded field research in Belize and won another grant, this time a $1.6 million dollar grant from the NSF’s Dynamics of Integrated Socio-Environmental Systems program to investigate human responses to climate change in prehistoric Belize. IMS affiliated faculty, have published this year four books, three peer-reviewed articles, four book chapters, one documentary, one open-access website on eighteen century Nahuatl texts, and have organized a conference about the Nahuatl language and a symposium on linguistic research among diaspora communities. The coverage of our IMS scholars goes from the study of trauma among US citizens whose parents have gotten deported from the US, to documenting Maya textile producers and sellers’ choices as reflected on textile production and fashion. All IMS faculty have presented on their research at international conferences and actively engage with their communities of study and with international institutions to work on their behalf. For example, Jennifer Burrell serves as the AAA liaison to the Human Rights coalition of the American Academy for the Advancement of Sciences.

IMS affiliated students are also very productive. Yahaira Núñez Cortéz, former DeCormier scholar-ship recipient, published two articles in Cuadernos de Antropología, while moving forward on her dissertation analysis in collaboration with Luis Barba at the Laboratorio de Prospección Arqueológica at UNAM. She also earned two grants from the National Geography Society to fund her research. Jamillah Rodríguez and Abelardo de la Cruz won the DeCormier Memorial Scholarships in support of their respective dissertation research projects. With the DeCormier support Jamillah travelled to Oaxaca with Lauren Clemens and collect-ed data on Copala Triqui language. Abelardo, also with DeCormier support, travelled to Veracruz to conduct ethnographic research on modern Nahua religious practices in the Huastec region. Thanks to the First Encounters award Lore-tta Tucker travelled with Marilyn Masson and other UAlbany students to Yucatán and participated in an INAH project assisting in laboratory analysis.

Finally, on a personal note, I wish you a healthy, happy, safe, and productive year 2020. May your travels be safe, may your prose flow, and may the reviews you get be helpful and, mostly, positive.

Sincerely,

Verónica Pérez Rodríguez
IMS Director
In 2019, IMS hosted two speakers, both members of the IMS Board of Directors. In the Spring Dr. Verónica Pérez Rodríguez premiered her documentary titled “Alfarería Yucunchana: Traditional pottery making in the Mixteca Alta, Oaxaca,” which focused on the ceramic tradition of Santo Domingo Tonaltepec, one of the few communities in the Mixteca Alta that continues to produce pottery. This film is the result of an National Geographic Society funded research study titled Tonaltepec Ethnoarchaeological Project. The documentary is the first film that visually documents Mixtec language terms, traditional knowledge, and practices associated with traditional pottery making in this corner of Oaxaca.

In the Fall Dr. Rob Rosenswig gave a talk focused on his work in the site of Izapa. Long known as an important Late Formative political center, Izapa was the capital of one of a string of early Mesoamerican kingdoms that are widely known from hundreds of carved stone sculptures. Despite early research efforts, the political organization and territorial extent of Izapa’s associated polity were completely unknown until now. New LiDAR (light detection and ranging) and pedestrian survey data document the internal structure of the Izapa kingdom from its emergence at 700 BCE through its collapse after 100 BCE.

In May 2019, IMS co-sponsored The Northeastern Group of Nahuatl Scholars annual conference held at the University at Albany on May 10 to 12, 2019. The conference took place in the Alumni House on the uptown UAlbany campus with sessions running Friday afternoon through Sunday afternoon. Sessions included academic talks, document translation workshops, and a workshop on Nahuatl writing.

This international and inter-disciplinary conference drew scholars and students from the fields of anthropology, history, linguistics, art history, literature, and archaeology who are connected by an interest in the language and civilization of the Nahua from pre-Columbian times to the present. Nahuatl was the language of the Aztecs and related ethnic groups, the predominant civilization in the Valley of Mexico when the Spanish arrived in the area in the sixteenth century.

Under Spanish rule the Nahuatl language spread even further as a lingua franca in Mesoamerica and became the medium for the largest corpus of Indigenous-language colonial documents from anywhere in the Americas. Today, it is the mother tongue of over two million contemporary Indigenous people, including immigrants to the United States. Hence, the conference took a long view, looking at the unrolling of Nahuatl language and culture over several centuries.

Participants shared scholarly research, supporting language documentation and revitalization efforts, and works aimed to advance the availability of the Nahua’s historical archives by translating and publishing texts. This inter-disciplinary and temporal breadth, combined with a focus on one linguistic group, makes this conference unique.
This past year was marked by a number of highlights for Triqui and IMS collaborations, notably, by winning a University at Albany President’s Public Engagement Award and participating in Albany’s 48th annual Festival of Nations. The Engagement Award is for the Triqui Project, a community-building collaboration between the Department of Anthropology, the IMS, and the Linguistics Program, and Triquis Sin Fronteras, a community organization whose mission is to support Triquis living outside of traditional communities, maintain traditional cultural and linguistic knowledge, and contribute to multiculturalism in the capital district.

This year also marked the first time Triquis Sin Fronteras participated in the Festival of Nations; the event, held in the Empire State Convention Center, featured the rich ethnic food, customs, arts and crafts, and dances of the Albany region’s immigrant community. The dance performance of the Triquis Sin Fronteras children received a standing ovation, and in our unbiased opinion, stole the show.

This particularly busy year of promoting Triqui culture through food and dance performances at community centers included a performance at the New York State United Teachers’ headquarters in October for Hispanic Heritage Month. In August, Triquis Sin Fronteras performed at Albany’s 2019 Latin Fest and in July at several regional Guelaguetza celebrations.

For Day of the Dead, IMS faculty and Triqui community members participated for the second year in a row in a bilingual education fundraiser by building an ofrenda for the event. One of the local Triqui restaurants, Viva Cinco de Mayo, won for the second year running a food competition. Last year, they were declared to make the best enchiladas in the region and, this year, they won the best taco contest.

April 28 marked the sixth annual Day of Triqui Culture, held at the University at Albany campus. In addition to a selection of traditional music and dance performances, highlights included the staging of a traditional wedding ceremony. For the first time, children’s theatre was included and together, children whose parents were born in Mexico, El Salvador, Ecuador, and the United States performed the Triqui “Legend of the Rabbit” in Spanish. Adding to the multiculturalism and the promotion of Indigenous identities, the event also featured a poetry recital in the Nahautl language by graduate student and IMS member, Abelardo de la Cruz, and his spouse, Alberta Martinez Cruz. The IMS and the Triqui community anticipate the next dynamic Day of Triqui Culture this April 2020, so stay tuned for more information.
Christopher De Cormier Memorial Scholarship

2019 Award Recipients: Abelardo de la Cruz & Jamilläh Rodríguez

Abelardo de la Cruz

On April 18th, 2019, Abelardo de la Cruz received an email from Dr. Robert Rosenswig formally notifying him that he had been awarded the 41st Christopher De Cormier Memorial Scholarship. On May 13th, he participated in a lunch with the De Cormier family and that afternoon presented his project at the Alumni House at the University at Albany titled “Moteochihuanih (Catechists and Prayer Specialists) as Indigenous Leaders in Nahua Indigenous Communities in Chicontepec, Veracruz) at the De Cormier Scholarship Award Ceremony.

This year, he advanced to ABD status and at the same time returned to Mexico to do ethnographic work as part of his dissertation research. Currently, he is working on the analysis of data that he has collected in two Nahua communities. He has interviewed new motiochihuanih “prayer specialists and Nahua catechists” who spread Catholic doctrine in the 1980s in the northern regions of Veracruz, México. Nahua evangelists strategically negotiated the best way to teach Catholicism in order to protect their own religion, one that remains a contemporary practice.

Now, de la Cruz will present part of his new discoveries based on his current fieldwork. Firstly, Mr. Adrian is a Nahua catechist from a small Nahua town (Image 1). He shared his notebooks where he translated Catholic prayers into the local language. For example, Totatah tlen tiitztoc elhuicac is the “Our father,” Na nicneltoca totitotzin totatah the “Creed” and Xiyolpaqui tonantzin Maria the “Hail Mary” among many others. De la Cruz wants to highlight these translations on behalf of the work from the tlacatl macehualli or “male Nahua speaker” as a translator of Catholic prayers which he used for evangelization in his youth. However, even now, he still believes in the local Nahua religion known as “el costumbre”, and he respects the Nahua beliefs.

De la Cruz wants to highlight the work that was carried out by the chihuat macehualli “female Nahua speaker” Mrs. Gregoria, from a small Nahua town (Image 2). She is a Nahua catechist and preaches the Nahua doctrine at the Catholic chapel to Nahua people. At the same time, she recites Catholics prayers and sings when one person passes away. She works as a prayer specialist and is an expert in beseeching the tonalli “soul” from a person who has passed away with both Nahua and Catholic prayers.

Both Nahua people, like Mr. Adrian and Mrs. Gregoria, teach Catholic doctrine but at the same time they believe in the local religion; they depict with their work and attitudes how to believe in two religions. Until now, catechists and prayer specialists are seen by Nahua people as taneltocanih “exemplary models of belief” because Nahua people have learned how to negotiate the best way to believe in Catholic doctrine and take care of the taneltoquilli or local beliefs. Through his present fieldwork, Abelardo de la Cruz has been able to elaborate his plans for this dissertation research thanks to the talks and opinions shared by the Nahua evangelists in their own communities.
Jamilläh Rodríguez

Jamilläh Rodríguez would like to express her gratitude towards the IMS and the DeCormier family for their support of her research, which funded travel to Oaxaca City during the summer of 2019. During the summer, she conducted fieldwork with speakers of Copala Triqui alongside Dr. Lauren Clemens, where she recorded phrases and analyzed tone changes through linguistic software. The data she collected is key for her initial dissertation work and has been used for several presentations since she has returned. Jamilläh presented “Tone overlay in Copala Triqui: Nominal compounds and other syntactic domains” with Dr. Clemens at the Annual Meeting on Phonology hosted by her alma mater Stony Brook University. She continues to study tone with speakers of Copala Triqui living in the Capital Region and plans to return to Oaxaca City next summer for additional fieldwork.

In addition to tone in Copala Triqui, Jamilläh has also been working on tone in Malawian CiTonga with Dr. Lee Bickmore and visiting Fulbright scholar Dr. Winfred Mkochi. Together, they presented their findings “Depressor Consonants Effects in Malawian CiTonga: Phonetic or Phonological?” at AMP as well.

In 2019 Yahaira was awarded with the David Scotchmer Essay Award with her paper “The walled city and the dogs: Utilization of Canis familiaris at Maya-pan, Yucatan”. Yahaira is currently revising this paper to prepare it for submission. Additionally, Yahaira has published two articles this year for Cuadernos de Antropología, at Universidad de Costa Rica. Her paper entitled “Las voces de la Arqueología de Protesta”: Arqueología Social Latinoamericana. Un análisis bibliométrico del Boletín de Antropología Americana. On the other hand “Fronteras cambiantes en el Golfo de Panamá: Aportes desde Análisis Instrumentales de Cerámica del Sitio Punta Zancadilla (PGL-100), Archipiélago de las Perlas”, presents the results of x-ray diffraction and petrographic analysis of ceramics sherds from Pedro Gonzáles, and their implications for inter-regional exchange.

On the other hand, Yahaira has been concluding her dissertation analysis and she is currently writing. This past summer she spent time at Laboratorio de Prospección Arqueológica at Universidad Nacional Autónoma-
Institute for Mesoamerican Studies

This past summer, Loretta Tucker traveled to Mexico for the first time with the help of the First Encounter Award. Loretta is a student of Dr. Marilyn Masson, and has been working with data from Mayapán to write her master’s paper on the distribution of speleothem artifacts at Postclassic Mayapán households.

For three weeks from May through June, she traveled with Dr. Masson and Dr. Bradley Russell, as well as undergraduate student Rachel Freeman and recent grad Dan Madigan. The group spent most of their time in Mérida and Telchaquillo, with daytrips to other areas. Loretta worked organizing and recording artifacts from previous years’ excavations at the INAH lab, gaining valuable lab experience and familiarizing herself with the local artifact typologies. She especially worked with ground stone and shell artifacts, and was able to personally examine some of the speleothem artifacts she has been researching. The students also got some firsthand dig experience, spending two days working with an INAH dig team excavating several Maya housemounds.

When they weren’t busy in the lab, the group went on sightseeing daytrips in the region. Loretta got to tour the archaeological sites of Chichen Itza, Uxmal, and Mayapán. She was also able to visit the Gran Museo del Mundo Maya in Mérida and the Choco-Story chocolate museum/ecopark near Uxmal. The group spent several afternoons swimming in local cenotes, and even went spelunking through a cave system.

The trip also helped Loretta practice her Spanish, chatting with locals and generally being immersed in the language for the first time. One memorable exchange was when she met some vendors making chainmaille jewelry in Mérida. Having experience making the same type of jewelry herself, at the vendors’ request she was able to provide English translations for the names of the patterns they were selling.

Loretta would like to thank the Institute for Mesoamerican Studies for making this trip possible. She would also like to thank Dr. Masson for her guidance and support.

The First Encounter Award

2019 Recipient: Loretta Tucker

The First Encounter Award allowed Loretta to travel to Mexico for the first time to familiarize herself with the material culture of the region’s ancient inhabitants.
IMS Faculty Associates

Louise Burkhart

I have continued chipping away at the project on eighteenth-century Nahuatl Passion plays that I reported on in last year’s newsletter. This project involves an open-access website, “Passion Plays of Eighteenth-Century Mexico” (passionplaysofeighteenthcenturymexico.omeka.net/), which will host transcriptions and translations of six Nahuatl plays as well as four plays in Spanish and documents from a 1768 Inquisition investigation into the performance practice, and a book on the Nahuatl plays. As I am on sabbatical for the 2019–2020 academic year, supported by a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, I am making much faster progress. I am completing the draft translation of the play from Amacuitlapilco, Morelos, housed in the Archivo General de la Nación. I will then have complete working drafts of all the Nahuatl plays and will move on to comparing them more systematically, planning out my book, and doing some writing for it during the spring semester. The electronic publishing project also includes Professor Daniel Mosquera of Union College, Dr. Rebecca Dufendach of the Getty Research Center, and UAlbany’s Dr. Nadia Marin-Guadarrama and doctoral candidate Abelardo de la Cruz de la Cruz, both current or former De Cormier Scholarship winners. We are re-submitting a proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities Scholarly Editions and Translations grant program in December, 2019. Further development of our preliminary website awaits the outcome of that request for funding.

This past May 10–12, IMS Board Member John Frederick Schwaller and I co-hosted the Northeastern Group of Nahuatl Scholars conference at UAlbany’s Alumni House. The conference attracted almost fifty participants, including scholars coming from Mexico, and Germany. The meeting was funded by the Institute for Mesoamerican Studies; the Office of the Vice President; the College of Arts and Sciences; the Departments of Anthropology, History, and Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino Studies; the Center for International Education and Global Strategy; and the Center for Research and Practice in Cultural Continuity at the University of Warsaw. In August I participated in a colloquium at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México entitled “In teoamoxtli in teotlahtolli In teoamoxtli in teotlahtolli: Nuevas miradas sobre los textos cristianos en lenguas indígenas del periodo novohispano,” connected with the “Sermones en Mexicano” research project head-
Jennifer Burrell's co-authored publication “Beyond the Migrant Caravan” was part of Cultural Anthropology's HotSports forum and was nominated for a AAA award for exemplary anthropology.

Dr. Burrell began the year with the publication of “Beyond the Migrant Caravan: Ethnographic Updates from Central America,” a collection of short articles she co-edited with her long-time collaborator, Ellen Moodie, and published in Cultural Anthropology’s HotSpots—a forum that goes beyond the headlines to consider current events and pressing global issues from anthropologists and others on the scene: https://culanth.org/fieldsights/series/behind-the-migrant-caravan-ethnographic-updates-from-central-america. Authors included seasoned anthropologists as well as emerging scholars, activists and a photographer from the region. By the end of May, the collection had garnered more than 4000 hits from around the world, was incorporated into classrooms and global studies curricula and was nominated for a AAA award for exemplary anthropology. In this public-oriented vein, Dr. Burrell spoke with many journalist and advocates, was occasionally quoted in the news, and has ramped up her expert contributions to asylum cases, mostly on behalf of people from Todos Santos (and more widely for Mam speakers and people from Huehuetenango) where she’s conducted fieldwork for many years.

Dr. Burrell continued research in Todos Santos Cuchumán, Guatemala in June with Dr. Mounia El Kotni. Burrell and El Kotni continue to work on the issue of corruption and anti-corruption as well as development, gender and reproduction. This work was presented at the Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology conferences in Santo Domingo in April, and at the American Anthropological Association in Vancouver in November. Burrell and El Kotni contributed “Corruption, Waiting, Exhaustion” to the Cultural Anthropology collection, a piece about the hope imbued in the work of the now-defunct International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) by individuals employed and/or educated in a few different employment sectors. Several articles are under review and/or to be published in the coming year.

Dr. Burrell’s multi-sited research on new technologies and evidence in human rights investigations, in conjunction with Drs. Kamari Clarke (Carleton U, Canada and UCLA) and Sarah Kendall (Kent Law School, UK) continues in a number of locations. In March, the team convened a two-day event at UCLA, Human Rights and Technology.
Over the past year, Joanna Dreby has started a new research project titled “The Aftermath: Enforcement Policies of the Life Course.” The project aims to document how the lives of young U.S. citizens, who are otherwise protected due to their citizen status, have been impacted by immigration enforcement over time. Today, enforcement is a key feature of U.S. immigration policy and we know from research that there are serious, negative, effects on children, families and communities. Yet because these tactics are relatively new, peaking just during the past decade, know little about the long-term, transnational consequences of these policies. Joanna hopes to help document how these policies impact U.S. citizens whose parents may have had interactions with immigration, what Joanna is terming “enforcement episodes” but also as families of the missing in Mexico, academics and legal staff from offices of prosecutors.

As the AAA liaison to the Human Rights coalition of the American Academy for the Advancement of Sciences, Dr. Burrell attended a conference at the AAAS in Washington, DC at the end of October. The coalition brings together representatives from the scientific academies and disciplinary organizations in the US who are interested in human rights and social justice work.
Justeson’s research continues to focus on Mesoamerican hieroglyphic writing, Mesoamerican historical linguistics, and Mesoamerican calendrics and astronomy, primarily in epi-Olmec, Zapotec, and Mayan hieroglyphic texts. Much of his recent epigraphic research has been done in collaboration with Terrence Kaufman, the leading scholar in Mesoamerican comparative linguistics. This year, the European Association of Mayanists (wayeb.org) released a memorial volume in honor of Alfonso Lacadena, in which Justeson and Kaufman published an 80-page analysis of the second longest epi-Olmec hieroglyphic text currently known, which is inscribed on the inner surface of a stone mask in Teotihuacan style. This paper focuses on an analysis of the mask’s text, primarily internally and also by comparison with the other longest epi-Olmec texts, on the La Mojarra Stela and on the Tuxtla Statuette. It focuses on the structure of ritual presents the following results:

(1) It provides the first detailed exposition of a uniquely epi-Olmec chronological cycle, the Circumnodal Venus Cycle (CNVC), which commensurates the Venus cycle, at a point near its maximum distance from the sun as evening star, with the appearance of solar or lunar eclipses. Long term, the CNVC cycle consists of 15 stations every 65 Venus cycles (about 104 solar years), at intervals of 3, 5, or 8 Venus cycles (≈ 10, 17, or 27 eclipse cycles). On the mask text and on the La Mojarra stela, the Venus components of these cycles are implemented at multiples of a canonical Venus cycle of 584 days.

(2) The mask text narrates a ritual sequence that begins in the first Venus cycle in a CNVC with a detailed account of preparations for rituals whose focus is a captive. This ritual is followed on the first Venus anniversary of the base with a more elaborate discussion of the drawing of blood from a (or the) captive, and later, on the next Venus anniversary, with the sacrifice of a/the captive. The text addresses a prominent person who is a principal participant, plausibly a speaker, and plausibly not the sacrificial victim.

(3) The three texts agree in elements of ritual acts involving blood sacrifice, and their sequencing, and in differences between acts involved in autosacrifice and those involved in the sacrifice of others’ blood. For example, the blood of “prisoners” and “captives” was collected for later use in rituals, something not known for autosacrifice; conversely, drums are said to have been beaten before bloodletting in autosacrifice, but not when others’ blood is sacrificed. The main protagonist in sacrificial events spoke, at least sometimes narrating the spilling of his blood “on behalf of others.”

Walter Little

Over the last year, Walter Little has pursued two primary research directions. One is the expansion of his research on Guatemalan Maya weavers and textile vendors. What began as an exploration of the transnational textile commerce of Guatemalan vendors selling handwoven items in Mexican tourism markets has evolved into a more holistic exploration of the manufacture and consumption of textiles by Mayas themselves and by tourists and other consumers, where Maya vendors in tourism marketplaces are making hard decisions about what to wear and sell to represent Maya identities while offering critiques of newer machine-manufactured Maya
clothing. It documents, the expansion of Maya clothing as expressions of ethnic and town-specific identity to its emergence of Maya fashion for Mayas.

As he wraps of the field research in Guatemala and Mexico on this project this coming year, Dr. Little anticipates completing a monograph on this topic. So far this last year, he has presented three presentations that map out potential directions this work could go: “Weaving a Livelihood and Building Social Capital” at the Society for Economic Anthropology Annual Meeting in Orlando, FL on March 1, 2019, “Maya Textile Identity Politics and Tourism Practice in Guatemala” at Hartwick College in Oneonta, NY on April 1, 2019, and “Fashion Wars: Textile Politics and Economy in Guatemala” at the Latin American Research Centre, University of Calgary on November 18, 2019.

Dr. Little’s other project relates to his now 19-year exploration of the spatial political-economy of Antigua Guatemala. Here, he explores the ways architectural and street regulations of a UNESCO World Heritage sites interplay with the everyday livelihoods of the people who live, work, and visit Antigua. He published an article on this topic, “The Practices and Policies of Heritage in Antigua Guatemala” in Anthropological Quarterly 91(4) and gave two presentation, “Spatial Economies and Extralegalities of Street Vendor Permissibility in Antigua Guatemala” at the 118th American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting in Vancouver, CA, on November 22 and “Extralegalities of Street Vendor Permissibility in Antigua Guatemala” at the Informality and Development Workshop at The School of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape at University of Calgary on November 19, 2019. Where the article in Anthropological Quarterly focused on watercolor artists who work on the street and two forthcoming articles on street vendors of food are anticipated to be published this year and the next, these two presentations in Canada focused on defining the space between informality and informality through the comparison of the work of Maya handicraft vendors, street food sellers, and watercolor artists, in order to develop a theory of urban spatial permissibility.

Marilyn Masson

Marilyn Masson has spent the past year on analysis and publications. For three weeks in May/June (2019), she undertook a lab season on a faculty research grant from the College of Arts and Sciences, accompanied by a team that included co-director Bradley Russell, graduate student Loretta Tucker, and undergraduate students Dan Madigan and Rachel Freeman (shown in the photo in one of the local cenotes). M. Masson and project co-director Carlos Peraza are shown in the photo below from 2019. The team finished analysis and photography from the 2018 “Maya Life in Early Colonial Yucatan” project, funded by National Geographic, focusing on the sixteenth century rural mission sites of Yacman and Hunacti. A report will be prepared for Mexico’s Consejo de Arqueología in the Spring of 2020, and at the same time, the team will finish submitting scholarly articles stemming from this work. All of these efforts pave the way for grant preparation and submission in the Summer and Fall of 2020. The photo of teeth represent those of horse, found in the Colonial church of Hunacti; a pig ulna in the other photo was also from this early Colonial Maya site (thanks to Jessica Vavrasek for assisting us with the
id)! A Colonial Maya composite flake tool from Yacman is also among the photos.

With the help of undergraduate intern Meghan Eigen, Dr. Masson has also ushered forward the final analyses of UAlbany’s “Underground Railroad Archaeology Project” in historical downtown Albany, which involved archaeological field school excavations in the summers of 2017 and 2018. She will prepare a report on this research, also, in the Spring of 2020 for the Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region (Stephen and Harriet Myers site) and the Albany County Historical Society (Ten Broeck Mansion).

Dr. Masson spent much of the past year bringing two edited books into press and several articles and chapters submitted. The first book is titled The Real Business of Ancient Maya Exchange: From Farmers’ Fields to Rulers’ Realms, a 27 chapter volume on the current frontiers of research into Prehispanic Maya political economies edited by M. Masson, David Freidel, and Arthur Demarest (University of Florida Press, expected in 2020). The second book is titled Settlement, Economy, and Society at Mayapan, Yucatan, Mexico, with 18 chapters authored by international team members of the “Economic Foundations of Mayapan Project,” edited by M. Masson, Timothy Hare, Carlos Peraza, and Bradley Russell. This book will be published in English and Spanish by the Center for Comparative Archaeology at the University of Pittsburgh and is expected in 2020. M. Masson and colleagues also submitted book chapters on Mayapan’s urban life, foodways and its role as a resilient Maya state (and its aftermath) to three forthcoming books, Maya Worlds (S. Hutson & T. Ardren, eds., with T. Hare, C. Peraza), Her Cup for Sweet Cacao (T. Ardren, ed., with T. Hare, B. Russell), and Mesoamerican Archaeology (L. Overholtzer, R. Joyce, J. Hendon, eds.). Two new journal articles were submitted by Masson and colleagues in the Fall of 2019, including “Appropriation of Space and Mortuary Hybridity at a Remote Rural Chapel at the Early Colonial Maya Mission Site of Yacman, Yucatan, Mexico” (World Archaeology, with B. Russell, S. Serafin, C. Peraza) and “Social Identity and Dental Modification at the Postclassic Maya Urban Center of Mayapan” (Cambridge Archaeological Journal, with S. Serafin, C. Peraza), and “Burying the Dead during the Maya Postclassic…” (Journal of Anthropological Archaeology, with R. Rosenswig, M. Briggs). A fourth article will be submitted before January I “Gradual Change of Colonial Era Maya Pottery in the Context of Social Transformation (Latin American Antiquity, with C. Peraza, W. Alvarado).
Verónica Pérez Ródíguez

In August of this year I assumed my current role as director of the Institute of Mesoamerican Studies. Throughout the year I have continued to work with research collaborators on finalizing different analyses and publications from our Cerro Jazmín and Santo Domingo Tonaltepec projects. We have finalized the isotopic analyses of human remains recovered from burials excavated at Cerro Jazmín between 2013-15. The results of this work, done in collaboration with Corina Kellner (NAU’s Anthropology Paleodiet Stable Isotope Laboratory) and physical anthropologist Ricardo Higelín have been written and submitted for publication. Meanwhile, with Seth Brooks, a UAldany anthropology major, I have been working on understanding the spatial distribution and context of figurine use and discard in public and residential areas at Cerro Jazmín.

Work on the National Geographic funded project on the ethnoarchaeology of pottery-making in Santo Domingo Tonaltepec also continues. In collaboration with Leah Minc from Oregon State University’s archaeometry laboratory, we got INAA results that characterize the clays currently used by Tonaltepec potters. We have compared these chemical results with previously analyzed archaeological samples. Preliminary results indicate that Tonaltepec was not the site where Postclassic fine cream pottery was made, as previously suggested by researchers like Ron Spores, but instead the clays more closely align with archaeological samples of Yucuita Tan wares and Orange wares. We are currently writing up these results as additional sand temper samples are being analyzed at OSU, also using Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis.

In April I attended the annual meetings of the Society for American Archaeology and stemming from a session I organized for this conference I am working with Shanti Morell-Hart (McMaster University) and Stacie King (Indiana University) on an edited volume on the history and archaeology of Oaxacan cuisine. Also, I am (still) working on bringing to fruition the publication of our book titled “La Epopeya de la Mixteca: cómo se hicieron y rehecieron las sociedades complejas en la Mixteca Alta.” This book was written in collaboration with my friend and colleague Verenice Heredia from the Colegio de Michoacán and is intended for a Spanish-speaking audience who wishes to learn about the latest archaeological and ethnohistoric studies on this highland region of Oaxaca. My coauthor and I are currently in negotiations between the Colegio de Michoacán and the Oaxaca-based publisher Ediciones 1450 to bring about the publication of this book, hopefully with some color illustrations, in the coming year.

During the fall of this year and from October 31 to November 2 I travelled to New York City to collaborate, again this year, with the American Museum of Natural History in their Day of the Dead celebrations. In the company of Charles Spencer, Curator of Mexican and Central American Archaeology, we ran an archaeology station that engaged the greater public, kids and adults, to teach about how ancient Mesoamerican societies buried their dead and engaged with the idea of death. They also got to learn about atlatls. During my stay at the American Museum I also got to preview and yet the content of the altares and ofrendas that the Museum created, with the help of some very talented Mexican artists for some extinct animals being honored by the Museum. Among the extinct animals being honored this year was my kids’ favorite dinosaur, the T. Rex.

On personal note, I loved engaging with kids and the greater public to share information about how Mesoamerican societies engaged with their dead in ways that are very different from ours. Many people were surprised about the idea of burying your dead relatives at home, but once I explained a bit more the benefits of this practice and its cultural context may expressed surprise about not thinking about the issue differently before.
Robert Rosenswig had another busy year that included beginning fieldwork for the National Science Foundations (NSF) Archaeology Division grant that he announced getting in last year’s IMS Newsletter. This 3-year project is documenting mobile foragers in Mesoamerica before permanent villages were established, ceramic containers were used or people based their diet on agriculture in the Maya region. The Belize Archaic Project (BAP) was undertaken from June to August of 2019. Dr. Rosenswig was accompanied by current UAlbany graduate students Yahaira Nuñez, Antonio Martinez and Morgan Marx, former graduate student Sean Higgins and former undergrad Ana Cerquera as well as University of Michigan graduate student Laura Bossio. During this 7-week field season ~4500 augur holes were dug, documenting distinctive orange soils associated with Archaic-period occupation in 91 of them. Then, we excavated at four of the newly documented sites, collecting stone tools and botanical remains to reconstruct forager adaptation. The field season was a resounding success!

Then, while still in the field in early August, Dr. Rosenswig received word that he had been awarded a second NSF grant for this project. This is a five-year, $1.6M interdisciplinary award from NSF’s Dynamics of Integrated Socio-Environmental Systems (CNH2) program. The grant, titled “Climate Change and the Coupled Dynamics of Tropical Forest Ecology and Human Food Production,” builds on the Archaeology Division project to examine how drying environmental conditions affect human subsistence practices and how intensified food production, in turn, affect local vegetation patterns. Food production is long-acknowledged as setting the stage for virtually all subsequent cultural developments by increasing the carrying capacity of land, the degree of sedentism that is possible as well as greater population density. Climate modeling, environmental reconstruction and archaeological inference of human adaptation will be used to evaluate the long-term relationships among these factors and changing socio-environmental dynamics. This study will provide insights to the experience of thousands of generations of human responses to environmental change and potential guidance so that future generations can be more resilient to major environmental changes.

This research advances basic understanding of interactions between how human populations feed themselves and tropical forest ecology in response to profound environmental change.

Upon returning to Albany, the CNH2 grant garnered local media attention, making the front page of the Albany Times Union newspaper on September 4th and being announced by Congressman Paul Tonko in the context of local research studying climate change. Dr. Rosenswig is already busy organizing collaborations with UAlbany co-investigators Mathias Vuille in the Department of Atmospheric Sciences and Karin Reinhold in the Department of Mathematics as well as colleagues at Arizona State University, University of California, Santa Barbara and Central Washington University for the years of research that lie ahead.

As work on the Belize project gears up, Rosenswig is publishing on the Izapa project. A paper came out in Latin American Antiquity early in 2019 and he delivered a lecture to the DC Prehispanic Society in September. Further, with a sabbatical during Spring 2020 semester, he plans to write three more journal articles and film an episode for the Discovery Chanel on the Izapa lidar project. Then back to Belize in June for the BAP 2020…
The highlight of 2019 for John F. Schwaller was the publication of *The Fifteenth Month: Aztec History in the Rituals of Panquetzaliztli* by the University of Oklahoma Press. This work reevaluates material that has been used by countless other authors, namely works by Diego Durán and Bernardino de Sahagún regarding the rituals of the Mexica (Aztec) solar calendar. Yet in focusing on one of the eighteenth months of the Mexica year, Schwaller has begun to expand the content to look not just at the details of the celebrations of the month, but what those celebrations can tell modern scholars about other aspects of Mexico history. Just as Christmas or Passover ritually recreate moments in Christian and Jewish history, so the ceremonies of Panquetzaliztli recreate milestones in Mexica history. In particular, Schwaller sees the celebrations of the month as firmly proclaiming Mexica dominance in the culture of central Mexico.

For the eleventh consecutive year, Schwaller, along with Prof. Louise Burkhart, organized the Northeastern Group of Nahuatl Scholars conference. This annual conference was once again held on the University at Albany campus. It attracted some fifty scholars from all over the world, including specialists from Mexico, Poland, and Germany. The meeting was clearly one of the best attended thus far. Papers covered the whole range of topics of interest to specialists in Nahuatl and Aztec studies. Over the summer, Schwaller conducted research in Mexico City thanks to support from the University at Albany. In a successful proposal to the faculty research awards program, Schwaller received a FRAP-A seed grant to spend just over a month in research. In particular he is planning a book that will present the most recent developments in Mexica History. While hardly a year goes by without a new monograph or other professional study of the Mexica, most of these works are ahistorical: that is, they take a snapshot of the Mexica at a point in time and analyze some particular aspect of the civilization, such as the merchants, funerary objects, or lithic traditions. Very few books have presented the historical development of the Mexica from the time they were nomadic hunters and gatherers, up to the foundation of the Aztec Empire, and then the Spanish conquest and its aftermath. Indeed, only one book takes a full historic approach, by Nigel Davies. Unfortunately, it was published in the 1970s and based on earlier research. In the last five decades, hundreds of titles have appeared using new and innovative methodologies to reevaluate Mexica history. In a work of synthesis of this long research tradition, Schwaller plans a comprehensive history of the Mexica. The research conducted included work at the library of the National Museum of Anthropology and in the Archivo General de la Nación. Additional work included private visits to the two main archeological sites in Mexico City: the Templo Mayor, under the direction of Leonardo López Luján, and Tlatelolco, under the direction of Salvador Guillen Arroyo.

Schwaller’s on-going research project is a major study of the Catholic devotion of the Stations of the Cross. The book has been tentatively accepted by the University of Oklahoma Press. It will trace the development of the Stations of the Cross from Medieval Europe to its importation to Mexico. The devotion is a relatively recent addition to the Catholic Church, having received papal approval as late as 1731. The devotion fell on fertile soil in Mexico where it was strongly embraced by both colonists and natives alike. In the late seventeenth-century a Franciscan friar, Agustín de Vetancurt, published a Nahuatl version of the prayers and meditations for the devotion. In his book, Schwaller looks at the cultural environment of the seventeenth century in Mexico and how the Stations of the Cross played an important role. He also presents a translation and analysis of the Nahuatl text. The work under study is unique because it is a manuscript copy of a printed book. Unlike the original, the copy had small drawings to illustrate the work. Schwaller also studies the content and implications of the drawings.
In June, 2019, Dr. Clemens, together with former faculty associate, Dr. George Aaron Broadwell, and current IMS-affiliated PhD Student Jamilah Rodriguez, organized a symposium on the topic of linguistic work with diaspora communities at the Linguistics Society of America’s Summer Institute at the University of California, Davis. The symposium was sponsored in part by an NSF grant awarded to Dr. Clemens to advance multidisciplinary perspectives on minority languages in diaspora. A team from Albany presented on multilingual language documentation in the Copala Triqui diaspora.

Linguistic work with diaspora communities represents a new area of research for Dr. Clemens, who is comparing traditional field experiences (Tahitian in Tahiti, Kaqchikel and Q’anjob’al in Guatemala, and Ch’ol in Mexico) to experiences working with diaspora and internally displaced communities (Niuean in New Zealand, and Copala Triqui in Oaxaca City and New York) in order to re-examine concepts such as ‘fieldwork’, ‘the field’, and ‘the field worker’ in the context of linguistic work with diaspora communities. Due to an increase in involuntarily displacement worldwide, linguists are increasingly working with speakers of at-risk languages in diaspora communities, but many best practices in linguistic field work start with the image of a homogenous and central- ized speech community, which is unlikely to reflect languages spoken in diaspora contexts. In September, Dr. Clemens presented this work as a guest speaker at the Humanities Corridor Workshop: Celebrating Indigenous and Refugee Language Communities in New York State at Cornell University.

Dr. Clemens has also been collaborating extensively with PhD student Jamilah Rodriguez on documenting and analyzing grammatical tone in Copala Triqui (Otomanguean). Together they travelled to Oaxaca City, Mexico to collect additional data and strengthen ties with the Triqui community there. In October, Rodriguez and Clemens presented “Tone overlay in Copala Triqui: Nominal compounds and other syntactic domains” at the Annual Meeting on Phonology at Stony Brook University in October, as well as with diaspora communities in the Albany area.
as “Descenso tonal y la formación de compuestos nominales en el triqui bajo” at the Conference on Indigenous Languages of Latin America (CILLA IX), University of Texas at Austin.

Turning to her work on Mayan languages, Dr. Clemens chapter on Mayan languages in the Routledge Handbook of North American Languages was published this year. She also presented work on the derivation of verb-initial word order in Ch’ol (Mayan) as an invited speaker at the at Tokyo’s International Christian University in May.

Finally, this Fall, Copala Triqui was the language of instruction for Dr. Clemens’ field methods class. The main objective of the course is to provide students with the opportunity to collect primary language data through direct work with a native speaker of a language that they do not speak and probably have never even encountered. Students are engaged in original linguistic research in this class, but they are also encouraged to think critically about ethical engagement with minority speech communities. At the end of the course we invite members of the Copala Triqui speaking community to campus to present our work, thank them for sharing their language and their invaluable contribution to our curriculum and to celebrate the end of a productive semester.

IMS affiliates Dr. Clemens and Jamillah Rodriguez in Oaxaca City, Mexico.

Undergraduate linguistics major Jenna Terrelle giving a Copala Triqui language-maintenance game to children of the Copala Triqui community.

IMS Student Associates

Rebecca Dinkel

Becky is a doctoral candidate in linguistics. Her dissertation entitled The Materiality of Metaphor in Mayan Hieroglyphic Texts examines how metaphors in pre-Columbian Mayan texts materialize differently in the modalities of writing and art. The project uses a mixed-methodology corpus approach that integrates discourse analysis with corpus linguistics. The project is divergent from other interpretative approaches of pre-Columbian Mayan texts because it actively engages such linguistic methodologies. Specifically, the project examines how a metaphor that describes Mayan rulers as trees materializes differently in the different modalities of writing and art. In writing, she has found the metaphor correlates with distinct grammatical forms whereas in art, the metaphor materializes with the superimposition or fusion of human
Becky is a doctoral candidate working on how pre-Columbian Mayan texts materialize differently in the modalities of writing and art.

This year Antonio finished his first year as doctoral student. He worked as a Teacher Assistant for an Introduction to Archaeology course teaching independent sections. This was Antonio’s first experience teaching at a US institution and it was really rewarding.

In April, Antonio attended the 84th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in Albuquerque, NM. There, Antonio presented results of an archaeological survey performed in the summer of 2018 as part of the Tonaltepec Ethnoarchaeological Project, which relates the settlement history of this peripheral area in the Mixteca Alta with craft production and the politics of the broader region.

During the summer, Antonio traveled to Belize along with other students to work with Dr. Rob Rosenswig in the Belize Archaic Project. He conducted pedestrian surveys and excavated test pits in search of Archaic sites.

In the Fall, Antonio was appointed as the Graduate Assistant for the Institute for Mesoamerican Studies. He has learned a lot of the great work this Institute does to further the knowledge of his home region.

Antonio also continues to analyze data. His love for maps has led him to learn different spatial analyses that he is applying for different research purposes. One of these analyses compares different methodologies to calculate Least Cost Paths to identify communication routes between the Gulf of Mexico and the Soconusco region during the Formative period. This work explores the cultural implications of not following the “optimal route.” Another analysis Antonio is undertaking is focused on exploring the spatial correlation between archaeological sites and severe erosion in the Mixteca Alta of Oaxaca. This analysis is still in progress, but preliminary results are very promising in support the idea that today’s erosion is, at least in part, result of the collapse of the extensive terrace systems built by the preHispanic Mixtecs due to the lack of maintenance that resulted from the population decrease in the region after the Spanish conquest.

As part of the Albany Copala Triqui Working Group, Becky has received the President’s Award for Exemplary Public Engagement awarded by the University at Albany, SUNY for the group’s work with the Triqui community in the Capital Region. She has also received a grant to continue to examine clause linkage types in Copala Triqui. Currently, she has expanded her research on Copala Triqui’s syntactic causative to examine other clause linkage types that also do not show all of the normal properties of subordination or coordination.
The DeCormier Scholarship Fund continues to make important contributions to the study of Mesoamerican societies and the training of the next generation of Mesoamerican scholars.

IMS is grateful for the numerous small donations that we regularly receive from current and former IMS faculty and students, and from friends of Mesoamerican studies generally. This kindness and generosity are what supports IMS-sponsored activities.

The Christopher DeCormier Fellowship Fund was created in 1978 to honor the memory of Chris DeCormier—a dedicated anthropology student—by providing field research assistance to other young scholars. For almost 40 years now, this fund has supported dissertation field work by graduate students in Mesoamerican studies, often a basis for pilot studies that have led to successful applications for larger external grants (and sometimes enough to complete dissertation work). By enabling outstanding graduate students to complete their research, the fund compliments the Institute’s mission to promote the development of new generations of Mesoamerican scholars.

For those who are able, your tax-deductible contributions can help to support this important part of the infrastructure for Mesoamerican research at UAlbany. Donations to the Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, the Christopher DeCormier Fellowship Fund, or to the Mesoamerica Endowment Fund can be sent by check to the Institute for Mesoamerican Studies at the address on the left.

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Recent publications

**ON BEING MAYA AND GETTING BY: HERITAGE POLITICS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN YUCATAN** by Sarah Taylor, to be published in July 2018, Institute for Mesoamerican Studies and the University of Colorado Press.


The Institute for Mesoamerican Studies (IMS) is a nonprofit scholarly research center dedicated to the study and dissemination of knowledge about the ancient and modern peoples and cultures of Mesoamerica (Mexico and Central America).

Since 1975, IMS helps coordinate the work of the Mesoamerican faculty at the University at Albany – SUNY. We have the largest number of full-time Mesoamericanists of any institution north of Mexico, and our members are among the most active and prominent scholars in the field of Mesoamerican anthropology. The primary activities of IMS are research and publication.