2020 has been a challenging and extraordinary year for everyone in the world and this holds true for everyone here at the Institute of Mesoamerican Studies. Board members and IMS-associated students have had to postpone field research and travels, while teaching and learning remotely, using an ever-growing list of online tools and platforms. Many of us have also had to maintain some level of work productivity, while caring for family members, full-time, at home. Whether it is our children, parents, grandparents or others, many of us have had to come to terms with what are our priorities, as we redefine what it means to have a semblance of work and life balance. Several IMS board members have long-time friendships and familial relationships with people in the places where we have worked throughout our careers. This pandemic has made us recognize the importance of these people, as we face the challenges of communicating with them and even trying to help out, from afar, and without the possibility of travel in the foreseeable future.

Among academic circles online talks and seminars have proliferated, especially from institutions based out of Latin America and some have commented that this modality has made talks by top scholars more accessible to students who are not able to afford international travel to conferences. So, there is always some good to come with the bad. There is also a renewed interest on the subject of epidemics and their impact on indigenous peoples and their societies, past and present. Now that we have lived moments of pandemic-related anguish and isolation, we are perhaps better suited to empathize and think about what it was like to be faced with wave after wave of disease following European Conquest. And yet, what we have lived pales in comparison to what indigenous people faced across the Americas in the centuries following the fateful year of 1492.

In our home state of New York, the state’s response to COVID and its financial cost is now being presented as the reason why there are deep budgetary cuts to public education, and in the cross hairs are liberal arts programs and area studies. Despite of our Institute’s excellent record of research and productivity, no one is safe from the dire consequences of these cuts and the institutional attitudes they engender. In the years ahead we must work to champion the importance of science and liberal arts education, the arts, and area studies. We must continue to do our part to educate and foster an informed and politically active citizenship that values cultural diversity, and understands what constitutes evidence-based knowledge and science and what does not.

During the Spring 2020 semester the Institute hosted two invited speakers as part of the IMS speaker series, but the third and last talk was cancelled as our University shut down and classes went to a remote format. We hope to bring this last speaker, David Carballo, to our campus in the Spring 2021 to talk about his most recent research at Teotihuacan. The DeCormier Scholarship, the David Scotchmer Essay, and the IMS Undergraduate Essay Award competitions went ahead as planned in Spring 2020. The committees met remotely to determine award winners and the awards were made remotely. While the awards celebration was cancelled, we hope to hold a double celebration in late Spring 2021 when we will recognize the winners of both 2020 and 2021. We have yet to know if this double celebration will be done remotely or in person, however. The Day of Triqui Culture celebration, normally held in the month of April, and sponsored by the Institute, was also canceled, but we look forward to renewing our involvement with this celebration in the years to come.

In the spirit of ancient Mesoamerican peoples’ resiliency after Conquest and the epidemics that followed, I hope we honor their example as we work collectively to help end this epidemic and the social inequities it has revealed and exacerbated. May the coming year be a more positive one for everyone and may field research in Mesoamerica resume once again.

Sincerely,

Verónica Pérez Rodríguez
IMS Director
The IMS hosted two talks this year. One on Maya Linguistics by Carol Little-Rose, and another on Cultural Anthropology by Dr. Casper Jacobsen.

In 2020, IMS hosted two speakers, in February, Carol Rose Little, from Cornell University discussed her research entitled *Absolutive objects in Mayan and beyond*. In this talk, she applied insights from the Mapping Hypothesis to object case assignment in ergative languages. In the first part of the talk, she presented data from fieldwork with Ch’ol (Mayan) on the interpretation nouns without determiners, i.e. bare nouns. She accounted for the available interpretations of bare nouns in Ch’ol, a language where the object is licensed absolutive case in situ. In the second part of the talk, she presented analyses of other Mayan languages as well as Tagalog and Eskimo-Aleut languages, where objects have been argued to move. In these languages, an existential indefinite interpretation is not available for the object, unlike in Ch’ol. She ended with implications for (i) the interpretation of absolutive objects; (ii) available covert operations in natural language; and (iii) languages with and without overt definite articles.

In March, Dr. Casper Jacobsen who was at the time a visiting scholar at UAlbany, presented his research entitled *An Immaterial World? Culture, Religion, and Five Centuries of Indigenous Dispossession*. When, beginning in the 1970s, UNESCO expanded its conception of cultural heritage to include not only tangible but also intangible manifestations of heritage, this move was largely viewed through the lens of cultural recognition. In his talk, Dr. Jacobsen suggested that there is a deeper political history behind the inclination to equate indigenous peoples with intangible living and, conversely, to connect non-indigenous peoples with tangible living. Assigning indigenous peoples to cultural and religious spaces spring from a global pattern shaped through Euro-colonial rule. To support this idea, he traced connections between how Spanish colonial sources, Mesoamerican research, and present-day recognition practices of heritage tourism in Latin America converge in assigning indigenous life to immaterial spaces. By immaterializing indigenous peoples, the identified sets of practices and their underlying assumptions, although found in widely different historical contexts, underpin an ongoing material dispossession of indigenous peoples.

IMS News

Speaker Series
Community outreach opportunities in a pandemic year

Despite of the unique challenges that 2020 presented, IMS associate and current director Verónica Pérez Rodríguez had a chance to collaborate with the American Museum of Natural History as an invited speaker for their “Scientist Is In” video series. This online series of interviews and discussions are live casted through the Museum’s Facebook page. The videos can also be viewed after the live cast through their Facebook page. In this event Dr. Pérez Rodríguez joined Dr. Ana Porzecanski, Director of the Museum’s Center for Biodiversity and Conservation, to discuss the celebration of Day of the Dead and its origins as well as the Museum’s outreach and education efforts surrounding the topics of animal extinction and human-induced climate change and habitat loss. This family-friendly event was also the first in the “Scientist Is In” series to be broadcasted in both English and Spanish. This online public outreach event has been quite impactful, as of early December the Spanish-language event had over 6,700 views and the English language video had over 8,200 views. In previous years the American Museum had hosted very well-attended Day of the Dead celebrations featuring altars and ofrendas in honor of extinct species, as well as science talks and cultural events intended to showcase dances, music, and traditions from Mexico and Oaxaca, specially. The Museum hopes to renew the tradition of having in-person celebrations and altars in the years to come.

Christopher De Cormier Memorial Scholarship

2020 Award Recipients: Jamilläh Rodriguez & Antonio Martínez Tuñón

Jamilläh would like to sincerely thank the IMS again for all of their hard work and support during this time. Due to the pandemic, she has not been able to make another trip to Oaxaca but continues to work on Copala Triqui using data she previously collected. In January, she will present with Dr. Lee Bickmore at the annual meeting for the Society for the Study of Indigenous Languages of the Americas on their paper titled “Cophonologies and upper-lower tone register mapping in Copala Triqui”. This paper was recently submitted for journal publication (her first)! She has also worked with Dr. Lauren Clemens and the Psychology department on a grant conducting an experiment to analyze how speakers of tonal languages like Copala Triqui process music. Outside of her recent work on Copala Triqui, she has also submitted a publication that expands on her M.A. thesis with Brazilian Portuguese. This paper is a collaboration with Gean Damulakis of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, in which she conducts an experimental study with native speakers to understand the phonological factors that contribute to the range of acceptability in reduplicated verbs. Jamilläh also hopes to attend the Bantu 8 conference to present on her work with Lee Bickmore and Winfred Mkochi analyzing phonological and phonetic effects of depressor consonants on pitch in Malawian Citonga, which was postponed to this upcoming summer.
Antonio was awarded the De-Cormier Memorial Scholarship for a project entitled Western Chiapas Territories Archaeological Project. This project proposed the archaeological reconnaissance of six archaeological sites in Chiapas to investigate their role in the expansion of social complexity during the Middle Formative Period (ca.1000–400 BC). This project was planned as a pilot study for his dissertation. However, due to the ongoing pandemic, Antonio was not able to travel and conduct the fieldwork which had to be postponed hopefully for the next year. In the meanwhile, Antonio has continued with his classes and started his doctoral exams. He also continued analyzing data and writing results from previous projects. Among these, he co-authored with Dr. Rosenswig an article in the Journal of Archaeological Science a paper entitled “Changing Olmec trade routes understood through Least Cost Path analysis”, in which they compare different methodologies to estimate interactions routes as well as their changes through time. He also co-authored a paper entitled “Viviendo al borde: Territorio y patrones de asentamiento prehispánico en Santo Domingo Tonaltepec dentro del contexto regional de la Mixteca Alta, Oaxaca” which has just been accepted with minor revisions in the journal Latin American Antiquity. The paper is the result of a project directed by Dr. Pérez Rodríguez during summer 2018 and with contributions from Dr. Jennifer Saumur, Dante García Ríos, and Aphizetl Lemus Medina. He is working in the revisions right now and hopes the paper will be published early next year.

Undergraduate Essay Award in Mesoamerican Studies

2020 Recipient: Angelika Wenzel

Angelika was awarded for her poster entitled “Use of Deer at the Pre-Columbian Maya Urban Capital of Mayapan, Yucatan Mexico”. In it, she presents a zooarchaeological analysis in which she explores to what extent was deer meat provisioned to monumental center custodians and to those who hosted ceremonies at administrative buildings found at the Pre-Columbian archaeological city of Mayapan. She compares the White-tailed deer remains found at houses Q-56 and Q-92 (occupied by custodians and artisans), and colonnaded hall Q-99 (an administrative and ritual building).
Becky is a doctoral candidate in linguistics. Her dissertation entitled *The Materiality of Metaphor in Mayan Hieroglyphic Texts* examines how political metaphors in pre-Columbian Mayan texts materialize differently in the modalities of writing and art. The project uses a mixed-methodology 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 and depicts 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 body parts and plant parts. The metaphor also expresses distinct semantic structure when expressed in the different modalities. The project also examines how the metaphor varies across space and time, and what this can tell us about the history of pre-Columbian Mayan society. Her dissertation work has implications for a reinterpretation of writing on Mayan vases, and for metaphor theory broadly, situating metaphor use in its social context.

Becky won two dissertation fellowships for this work — the Chancellor’s Doctoral Incentive Program at the California State University and Dissertation Research Fellowship Award awarded by the University at Albany, SUNY. She also presented some of her results on how metaphor materializes in images in Mayan hieroglyphic texts at the 2020 *Society for the Study of Indigenous Languages of the Americas Conference* in New Orleans, Louisiana. Additionally, she participated in the *American Anthropological Association’s* fall event, in their inaugural Three Minute Thesis competition. She was also awarded David Scotchmer Essay Award for her paper *Shifting Meanings of Mayan Hieroglyphic Vases: Metaphor across Modalities and Media in Changing Political Climates*. This paper is part of her dissertation and was presented at the *American Anthropological Association Conference 2019*.

Becky is also continuing 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. She also started collecting data on a new metaphor project outside the area of Mesoamerica and submitted this research to the *American Anthropological Association Conference 2021*. Using a mixed methodology that integrates discourse analysis with corpus linguistics like in her dissertation, the project examines multimodal political metaphors surrounding COVID-19 and their use in the construction of truth. Particularly, she is building a corpus of New York Governor Andrew Cuomo’s daily briefings and examines how he uses metaphor verbally and in visuals to assert facts about COVID-19 and urge New Yorkers to adhere to the state’s social distancing protocols. In 2019 Returning home and giving back to new and young students what she learned at UAlbany has been one of the most fulfilling and rewarding experiences for her.

Becky won two dissertation fellowships — the Chancellor’s Doctoral Incentive Program at the California State University and Dissertation Research Fellowship Award awarded by the University at Albany, SUNY.
This academic year I am in Washington, DC, having been appointed to the Jay I. Kislak Chair for the Study of the History and Cultures of the Early Americas at the John W. Kluge Center, Library of Congress. Moving here in August, during the pandemic, was an odd family adventure, and the ongoing circumstances mean that the Library is mostly closed and I am missing out on the community of scholars that would normally occupy the Kluge Center. However, I am able, with some waiting time, to have any book in the collections delivered to my office, and so have been doing the library research for my book project Staging Christ’s Passion in Eighteenth-Century Nahua Mexico. I have prepared a composite play drawn from the six extant manuscripts, an introductory study, and chapters on staging techniques, options for women’s parts that support gender complementary, and the (male-gendered) violence and anger that culminate in the staged crucifixion of a Nahua man. These chapters, which I drafted earlier this year while on sabbatical, continue to be edited to incorporate the ongoing library research, and I have started writing the last major chapter, on the controversial staging of the Last Supper. This restricted and quiet life is, at least, good for writing.

The other good news for the Passion play research is that the National Endowment for the Humanities Scholarly Editions and Scholarly Translations program has awarded a two-year grant for the collaborative digital project “Passion Plays of Eighteenth-Century Mexico” (passionplaysofeighteenntcenturymexico.moeka.net). This grant will support course release time for me and for my co-PI Daniel Mosquera, of Union College, and consultant work by UAlbany PhD Nadia Marín-Guadarrama, UAlbany doctoral student Abelardo de la Cruz de la Cruz, and Rebecca Dufendach, of the Getty Research Center. So far on the website we have translations of only one (of six) Nahuatl plays and two (of four) Spanish-language plays. The remaining plays and additional documents—mainly from the 1768–1770 Mexican Inquisition case investigating the plays—and supporting material will begin to be posted over the coming months, starting very soon with the Nahuatl Passion play from Princeton University Libraries.

The accompanying photograph is from a sixteenth-century Nahuatl Christian copybook in the Latin American Library at Tulane University. One of two Passion accounts in this manuscript contains the only early text I have so far identified that provided source material for the Nahuatl Passion play tradition. This is just one scene in the plays, the farewell between Jesus Christ and his mother, which may have been added to the performance tradition separately from the rest of the play. This fall I transcribed and translated the remaining Passion material here, which, although not a direct source, offers interesting comparative material. Copybooks like this can have Indigenous-authored interpretations a little at odds with official teachings. In this text, for example, Christ at the Last Supper blesses five tortillas, turning them into...
his body, because that is how many are left after he and the apostles finish eating their roast lamb.

Apart from the different elements of the Passion project, I have written a chapter for the Sermones en Mexicano (sermonesenmexicano.unam.mx) project. This essay is one of the introductory studies that will be published along with the translations of the 82 sixteenth-century Nahuatl sermons contained in Manuscript 1482 from the Biblioteca Nacional de México’s collections, prepared by Dr. Berenice Alcántara Rojas’s research team. My essay, “La cultura nahua reducida: la visión del otro en el manuscrito 1482,” discusses the very restricted and negative view of Indigenous culture and society represented in the sermons—even in those attributed to fray Bernardo de Sahagún. I argue that the sermons do more to promote a fictional impression that evangelization is both possible and well in hand, thus supporting colonialist ideology and assuaging the preachers’ anxieties, than they do to persuade Indigenous people to adopt Christianity.

Like all my colleagues, I look forward to when we can all resume having public talks and going to conferences. I expect my public talk and/or other event for the Kluge Center to be postponed until fall 2021.

Nahuatl Passion text, sixteenth century. Courtesy of the Latin American Library, Tulane University.

Lauren Clemens

In June of this year, University at Albany linguists and IMS faculty associate Dr. Lauren Clemens and University at Albany psychologist Dr. Ronald Friedman were awarded a grant from the Grammy Museum Grant Program, which provides support for archiving and preservation programs and research efforts that examine the impact of music on human development. Their project Exploring the Links Between Tone Language Use, Pitch Discrimination, and Musical Emotion Perception investigates whether speakers of Copala Triqui, an indigenous language of Mexico with a complex tone system, show advantages in music perception.

Recent studies suggest that speakers of tone languages, in which pitch variations convey differences in word meaning, show advantages in musical pitch discrimination. However, prior studies have been limited due to inadequate control for second language experience and by overreliance on Asian tone languages such as Mandarin. This raises the possibility that existing effects have been partially due to cultural and/or linguistic differences not directly related to speaking a tone language. Dr. Clemens and Dr. Friedman address this issue by testing for advantages in pitch discrimination in speakers of Copala Triqui by assessing whether Triqui/Spanish bilinguals, relative to a non-TL-speaking control group of English/Spanish bilinguals, demonstrate a heightened sensitivity to differences between melodic intervals.
This year Dr. Clemens, together with IMS student associate Jamilläh Rodriguez, published a paper on tone lowering in Copala Triqui nominal compounds in the Proceedings of the Annual Meeting on Phonology. The paper examines compound nouns that differ on two dimensions: i) the degree of phonological merger, i.e. whether the compound behaves as a single prosodic -ó or a complex prosodic -ó and ii) whether or not the lexical tone of the second sub-constituent of the compound is lowering. The paper argues that tone lowering represents a tonal overlay required when a root is modified by a phrasal constituent.

Walter Little

For 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic has kept Walter Little from his research field sites in Oaxaca, Mexico and Antigua, Guatemala. Instead, he has maintained his connections via social media, email, and telephone to continue his research and writing on Maya clothing fashion for Mayas and the expansion of Guatemalan textiles for Mexican consumers in Mexico. Both of these kinds of textiles are challenging us to rethink the links between Maya clothing and community, as well as pushing the boundaries of property rights and creativity.

Dr. Little continues to work on his now 20-year exploration of the spatial political-economy of Antigua Guatemala. Here, he studies the ways the everyday livelihoods of the people who live, work, and visit there, interplay with architectural and street regulations of this UNESCO World Heritage site. As part of this research he has published two articles, “Antigua Street Food Vendors” in Revista del CESLA: International Latin American Studies Review (2020, 25:209-232) and “Street Food to Restaurant: Politics of Eating and Cultural Heritage in Antigua Guatemala” in Food, Taste, and the Politics of Identity in the Global Stage: Cases from Asia, Europe and the Americas, edited by Steffan Igor Ayor Díaz (Bloomsbury Books, 2021). The first article explores why selling street food persists despite laws that prohibit such sales and, generally, negative public health attitudes about the food and the vendors. The other article explores why Guatemalan food is out-of-sync with tourists’ expectations and how Guatemalans are striving to re-brand their cuisine to attract international tourists interested in new culinary experiences.

One of Dr. Little’s projects with Oaxacanist ethnographer Martha Rees questions ethnographic practice, ethics, and collaborations in Mesoamerica. Originally, they organized a roundtable, “Participatory Research and Ethics in Mesoamerican Fieldwork” for the American Anthropological Association’s 117th Annual Meeting in San Jose, CA in 2018. Of the participants that attended, 10 wrote short ethnographic essays in which they reflected on how they did their research and the kinds of ethical dilemmas and challenges they faced, in order to draw conclusions as to what is participatory research. The contributing anthropologists range from recent PhD graduates to recently retired from Canada, England, Mexico, Paris, and the United States, representing projects in Guatemala, Oaxaca, Central Mexico, and Yucatan. Their essays, including an introduction by Little and Rees and a chapter by Little, “Language Use and Participatory Research”, will be published as special issue, “Participatory Research and Ethics in Mesoamerican Fieldwork,” in the forthcoming Annals of Anthropological Practice in 2021.
Marilyn Masson

Marilyn Masson has spent the past year on publication projects. Her edited book, a four-year project, came out in the Fall of 2020, “The Real Business of Ancient Maya Exchange: From Farmers’ Fields to Rulers’ Realms.” It is co-edited with David Freidel and Arthur Demarest, published by the University of Florida Press. Dr. Masson wrote two of the 27 chapters of this book, including the conclusion, “The Ties that Bind.”

In early 2021, a second book edited by Marilyn Masson (with co-editors Timothy Hare, Carlos Peraza, and Bradley Russell will be published, “Settlement, Economy, and Society at Mayapan, Yucatan, Mexico.” This book, which is bilingual (English and Spanish), is with the Center for Comparative Archaeology at the University of Pittsburgh, which offers free pdf downloads to the public as well as printed hard copies. She is author or co-author of seven of this book’s 18 chapters.

A number of other publications also came out in the Fall of 2020, for which Dr. Masson serves as sole author or senior author. These chapters include:

- “Effigy Censer Smashing and Termination Rituals at a Mayapan Ceremonial Group.” In A Forest of History: The Maya after the Emergence of Divine Kingship, edited by T. Stanton and M. K. Brown, pp. 204-235 (Univ. Press of Colorado, with W. Cruz, C. Peraza, and S. Milbrath)
- “Faunal Foods as Indices of Commoner Wealth (or Poverty) in Rural versus Urban Households of the Terminal Classic and Postclassic in Northwest Yucatan”. In Her Cup for Sweet Cacao: The Social Uses of Food in Ancient Maya, edited by T. Ardren, pp.297-333 (Univ. of Texas Press, with T. Hare, B. Russell, and C. Peraza).
- Hybridity and Mortuary Patterns at the Colonial Maya Visita Settlement at Yacman, Yucatan, Mexico. International Journal of Historical Archaeology (by M. Masson, B. Russell, S. Serafin, and C. Peraza), and
- The Gradual Change of Early Colonial Maya Ceramics northern Yucatan. Historical Archaeology (by C. Peraza, W. Cruz, M. Masson, and T. Hare)

These works reflect the culmination of several years of intensive research, including field seasons in Mexico on the urban archaeology of Mayapan (funded by NSF), changing rural economies through time at households in the greater Mayapan region (funded by NSF), and a new (2018) project on early Colonial life at two visita settlements in northwest Yucatan, funded by National Geographic. The forthcoming year will be one of grant-writing to further her teams’ research on rural settlement, resilience, and demography, and early Colonial household archaeology.
Verónica Pérez Rodríguez

Even though this year has been largely spent in the confines of my home during lock down, my research and publication work has continued. In collaboration with Ricardo Higelín Ponce de León, Geoffrey Blomster, and Antonio Martínez Tuñón we published an article in UNAM’s Anales de Antropología. The article is titled “Tratamiento funerario en la Mixteca Alta durante el Formativo Mesoamericano.” In this article we discuss funerary patterns from the sites of Etlatongo and Cerro Jazmín, both in the Nochixtlán Valley, to explore broader cultural patterns and their change from the Middle to Terminal Formative periods. This article makes a contribution because the time periods in question coincide with the establishment of stratified and urban societies in this region of Mesoamerica. In terms of burial patterns, we see a decline in seated burials in bell-shaped pits and the beginning of tomb burials in residential, as well as public settings.

I published a second article, with Corina Kellner and Ricardo Higelín, titled “Urban to the Bone: Isotopic and faunal dietary data from Formative-period Cerro Jazmín, Mixteca Alta, Oaxaca, México” in Journal of Archaeological Science. This article is the first to report isotopic results, along with faunal evidence to reconstruct the ancient diet among the urban population of Cerro Jazmín. Among our main findings was the fact that individuals 3 years of age or younger reported Oxygen and Nitrogen isotopic signatures that place them a trophic level above adults, signaling the dietary importance of breastfeeding and the practice of weaning around age 3. Isotopic data from the adult population pointed to a nearly vegetarian, C4-plant heavy diet, and the consumption of C-4 plant fed animals, chief among them domestic dogs, rabbits, hares, white-tailed deer, and turkey. The faunal and isotopic data emphasize the experiential and dietary importance of meat consumption in feasting events that have been identified in public spaces elsewhere in Cerro Jazmín.

Also, our book, co-written with Verenice Hereedia, finally came out. The book titled “La Epopeya de la Mixteca” was published with the Colegio de Michoacán. It is a Spanish-language book, written for both specialized and general audiences, that synthesizes the most up-to-date archaeological and ethnohistoric information on the long history of social development and political cycling in the Mixteca Alta. We hope, once the pandemic situation ends or allows, to promote this book in Oaxaca.

On the publication front, with co-editors Shanti Morell-Hart and Stacie King we secured a book deal with the University of Texas Press for the edited volume titled “Mesquite Pods to Mezcal: 4,000 Years of Oaxacan Cuisines.” The edited volume brings together some of the most established scholars, as well as promising emerging Oaxacanist scholars to talk about the development of Oaxacan cuisines from the Archaic period to the present. We expect this book to come out sometime in 2021.

I feel strange as I write this, but this has also been a very positive year in terms of research funding. I received two National Science Foundation grants. With the first grant (#2015994), I will collaborate with UNAM’s Luis Barba and his archaeological prospection team to expand work at Cerro Jazmín by surveying and excavating public spaces adjacent to the Tres Cerritos monumental sector. The objective is to survey plazas adjacent to the Tres Cerritos mounds, followed by systematic pit testing and sample collecting to map underlying features and the chemical signatures of the plaza floor to investigate ancient activities in these public spaces. This work was to begin in the summer 2020, but had to be postponed. We hope to undertake this work in late summer and fall 2021.

The second NSF award (#2001654) titled “CNH2-L: The Dynamics of Socio-Environmental Systems, Urban Depopulation, and Social Stability” will fund a collaborative project between
Arthur Joyce, Michelle Goman, Arion Mayes, Steven Lund and myself as we collect paleoclimatic data and investigate highland and coastal household responses to climate change and their sociopolitical consequences at the end of the Classic period. This will be a multi-year project (2021-2024) that will have multidisciplinary teams working in the Mixteca Alta highlands, at the site of Cerro Jazmín and other points in the Nochixtlán Valley, as well as excavations at Río Viejo, a Classic period site on the Coastal Río Verde Valley. Between the two upcoming field projects there should be plenty of field research and learning opportunities for UAlbany students and IMS associates. It is my sincere hope that the next year research can resume, but more importantly that the coming year is better and happier for everyone.

Robert M. Rosenswig

Dr. Rosenswig was on sabbatical during the spring 2020 semester so the professional impacts of the COVID shutdown were muted for him. He “adjusted” from writing journal articles in both his campus and home offices to the new normal of only using the latter. This time was productive and he generated new papers, one dealing with the history of money and another defining the political sovereignty of the Izapa kingdom. The global pandemic resulted in the cancelation of Dr. Rosenswig’s summer fieldwork as Belize closed its borders and the Institute of Archaeology was not accepting permit requests. Fortunately, the NSF grants he has to explore the origins of food production and climate change (outlined in last year’s Newsletter) are both extended so as to simply push the research further into the future.

A number of Dr. Rosenswig’s publications have recently come out and others are on the way. This summer, the article “Burying the Dead during the Maya Postclassic: Saxe, Binford and Goldstein’s continued relevance to mortuary analysis” coauthored with Dr. Marilyn Masson, appeared in the Journal of Anthropological Archaeology 58 (June). The article reports the mortuary patterns from a series of Postclassic period cemeteries in northern Belize. These data were collected by the co-authors almost 20 years ago. The paper allows them to infer increased territoriality in the centuries after the Classic-period Maya kingdoms collapsed. Another paper “Least Cost Path Analysis of Changing Olmec Trade Routes” was released this summer in the Journal of Archaeological Science 118 (June), co-authored with UAlbany doctoral student Antonio Martinez. In this paper, they infer likely travel routes through the mountainous terrain of central Chiapas to explore interregional exchange network between Mexico’s Gulf Coast Olmec and kingdoms such as Izapa in the Soconusco region.

While writing this update in late October, Dr. Rosenswig is working on the...
final page proofs of an article that will appear in the February issue of Antiquity. This paper, “Chacmools in Costa Rica: long-distance interaction between lower Central America and Mesoamerica c. AD 1000”, is co-authored with Ricardo Vázquez, former IMS student affiliate and current archaeologist at the National Museum of Costa Rica. The publication emerges from their collaborative research defining the Las Mercedes chiefdom on Costa Rica’s Caribbean coast. In the paper, they report the chacmool they excavated at Las Mercedes in 2012. Comparing this new sculpture with a similar example also from Las Mercedes and long-displayed at the American Museum of Natural History (as well as six other examples held by the National Museum of Costa Rica), they demonstrate that this sculptural form was common in lower Central America by AD 1000. Chacmools are a distinctive sculptural form displayed at prominent locations within Mesoamerican cities such as Chichen Itza and Tula during the Terminal Classic period (AD 800-1000). The Costa Rican chacmools document connections between Costa Rica and Mesoamerica dating back to AD 1000. We interpret the Costa Rican chacmools as ritual furniture employed by local chiefs to enhance their power and prestige through the enactment of Mesoamerican-inspired rituals.

Dr. Rosenswig published this year papers from his different research projects in Chiapas, Belize, and Costa Rica.

John Schwaller

The year 2020 was as hard for me as for most other faculty members. The switch to online teaching was extremely difficult. Nonetheless, in the midst of the other chaos, I continued to work on my project of “The Stations of the Cross; A Nahuatl devotional by Fr. Agustin de Ventacurt.” The book manuscript was completed this spring and sent to the University of Oklahoma Press. The readers’ reports should arrive in early December. I am hoping for a positive response, which would result in publication, most likely, in early 2022.

The Annual Northeastern Group of Nahuatl
Dr. Burrell is happy to report that her In Focus Issue (24:4) on Politics and Generation in Central America, put together for the 25th anniversary of the Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology, is hot off the press (or, on-line, anyway.) Co-edited with long-time collaborator Ellen Moodie, the special issue pairs scholars at different career stages, trained in North or Central America and from activist or academic backgrounds to offer new perspectives and voices from the lens of generation. Dr. Burrell, Mounia El Kotni (PhD 2016) and Ramiro Calmo contributed the article “The Anti/Corruption Continuum: Generation, Politics and Grassroots Anti-Corruption Mobilization in Guatemala,” based on fieldwork and collaboration in Todos Santos Cuchumatán, in northwest Guatemala. Dr. Burrell also co-authored “From sparks and embers: Concluding reflections on anthropology, generation, and Central America,” as well as the introduction, “Generations and Change in Central America.”

Dr. Burrell’s multi-sited research on new technologies and evidence in human rights investigations, Evidentiary Dilemmas and Emergent Publics: How Contestations over New Geospatial Technologies are Shaping International Justice,” with Drs. Kamari Clarke (UCLA/UToronto) and Sarah Kendall (Kent Law School, UK) received generous funding in 2020. An NSF Collaborative grant (https://www.albany.edu/news/93327.php), and a SSHRC (Canada) is supporting research in Mexico, Nigeria and the Hague through 2023. Dr. Burrell and team commenced with the research in Mexico in April, shifting planned geospatial...
Dr. Burrell’s "Geospatial Technologies, Justice and Evidentiary Procedure" project is one of the first empirical studies on how geospatial technologies are being used around the world in criminal and human rights judicial investigations.

Following presentations and workshops by leading experts in forensic architecture, including Brad Samuels (SITU, NY) and Eyal Weitzman (Forensic Architecture, Goldsmiths UK) they teamed with Nathan Su of the Art History and Architecture department at UCLA for a UCLA Transdisciplinary Research Grant, “Visualizing Justice.” With $35,000 in start-up funds, the team has worked with international lawyer Nawi Ukabila, Canadian lawyer Andrea Sobko, UAlbany Anthropology PhD student and Center for the Elimination of Minority Health Disparities (CEMHD) Hearst Fellow Jazmin High and Carleton U grad student Sara Ai to produce open access video content that maps histories of state supported structures of racial inequality. The main focus of the research project is how U.S. legal forms have perpetuated violence and injustice against Black people.

The project is animated by a sense of urgency around redressing racial injustices that are perpetuated through legal forms, and it draws upon contemporary modes of representing and visualizing discriminatory state practices. It is based upon the premise that calls to reform and redress need to be clearly communicated and visually compelling. At the same time, these claims should be grounded in thorough research and should draw upon discipline-specific knowledge practices. In this way, the work of academic knowledge production can be turned toward broader publics, with the aim of engaging citizens in practices of political engagement around redressing structural injustice.

The Visualizing Justice team will be releasing its first video in December 2020. The 15-minute video draws upon archival material to illustrate the continuities of racial injustice that have continued throughout the history of the U.S. legal system, and which persist to this day, manifesting in the mass protests that have coalesced as Black Lives Matter. The first film advocates resorting to the legal framework in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (the “CERD”) to address systemic racism in U.S. legal forms. The CERD contains a far more robust legal framework for the eradication of racial discrimination than domestic alternatives. Moreover, it provides a mechanism for other countries to initiate conciliation proceedings before a United Nations human rights treaty body to challenge systemic failures in U.S. anti-discrimination practices on a much broader scale than is possible in domestic legal practice.

A series of four additional films will follow. Burrell and High are currently working on the health disparities film, which also serves as High’s mentored experiential learning experience for her CEMHD Hearst fellowship.
Joanna Dreby

This year, Associate Joanna Dreby has been working on an RSF-funded project focused on immigration enforcement and its long-term impacts on the children of immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, including children of immigrants from Mesoamerica. For this, she is interviewing young adults (ages 18-30) raised anywhere in New York State or the greater metropolitan region of NYC about how immigration policies—or even fear of these policies—have affected their lives. The project considers ways enforcement actions—such as deportations, detentions or arrests—come to shape how second generation young adults navigate relationships, education, family dynamics, or mental health, just to name a few areas of interest. So far, she has collected 58 interviews, and will continue interviews during spring semester. At this point, all data collection has migrated to electronic formats. The hope is to diversify the sample during the spring, specifically looking for stories from young men and from more young people with parents who emigrated from the Caribbean or from Central America.

One notable aspect of this research project is the heavy involvement of students, supported by a FRAP A award from the University at Albany. So far, we have had three graduate and nine undergraduate students involved in recruitment, transcribing, and preliminary data analysis—and we have five more undergraduate students who will be joining the project next semester through an independent study research option. During weekly meetings, we discuss patterns in interviews that students have read and transcribed, connecting them to themes in the literature. In this way, students are gaining invaluable experience in the practicing of research methods. Students have the option to continue involvement for a second semester; when they do, roles become more targeted and research tasks they engage in more advanced. Additionally, students—the majority of whom are from immigrant families themselves—often experience a process of self-discovery through participation, as interview narratives often resonate with their own experiences.

If anyone in the IMS community is interested in participating in this project, either through an interview or participation in the independent study, please reach out to Joanna Dreby at jdreby@albany.edu.

John Justeson

John Justeson’s research focuses on Mesoamerican hieroglyphic writing, Mesoamerican historical linguistics, and Mesoamerican calendrics and astronomy. His primary focus during his 30 years at the University of Albany has been on epi-Olmeic writing, language, and text interpretation. This year, in collaboration with four eminent co-authors, he published a study in Latin American Antiquity establishing Tres Zapotes, the dominant Proto-classic political center of epi-Olmeic culture in southern Veracruz, Mexico, as the source of the Tuxtla Statuette (dating to 162 CE). Julia Hendon, editor of the journal, writes that “This is a fascinating example of historical research combining archival [research], oral histories, [and] personal knowledge. It really adds to our understanding of this particular object and the Gulf Coast Olmec.”

Justeson initiated this work during his 2010-11 sabbatical year as a Pre-Columbian Fellow at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington D.C. It began in collaboration with Jane Walsh of the Smithsonian Institution, with a review of the correspondence surrounding the Smithsonian’s acquisition of the statuette. In the fall of 2010, drawing on Dumbarton Oaks’s Pre-Columbian Library and through genealogical research, Justeson identified the original owners of the statuette in Veracruz, its likely association with Tres Zapotes, and the dominant role of Tres Zapotes as the source of the Tuxtla Statuette. This year, in collaboration with four eminent co-authors, he published a study in Latin American Antiquity establishing Tres Zapotes, the dominant Proto-classic political center of epi-Olmeic culture in southern Veracruz, Mexico, as the source of the Tuxtla Statuette (dating to 162 CE). Julia Hendon, editor of the journal, writes that “This is a fascinating example of historical research combining archival [research], oral histories, [and] personal knowledge. It really adds to our understanding of this particular object and the Gulf Coast Olmec.”

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In the spring of 2011, Justeson shared these results with Prof. Christopher Pool of the University of Kentucky, the leading specialist on the archaeology of epi-Olmec Veracruz and on Tres Zapotes in particular; by the summer, the collaboration expanded to include Ponciano Ortiz Ceballo and María del Carmen Rodríguez, long-time collaborators of Pool’s and heads at the time of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Veracruz. The four were able to meet in the city of Veracruz with descendants and other relatives of the Statuette’s former owners to work out more of the owners’ history; Justeson and Pool researched relevant facets of the history and boundaries of the hacienda with them, and in the state archives of Veracruz and those of Mexico’s National Museum of Archaeology and History.

One of the most satisfying and most poignant facets of this work was the opportunity to provide the family of the statuette’s original owners with a sense of their family’s personal contributions to the growing understanding of the ancient history of their homeland. The last owner of the Statuette, Félix Cházar Guzmán, lived in the town of Tlacotalpan, Veracruz, which was the place of debarkation for the National Geographic / Smithsonian archaeological expeditions to Tres Zapotes. He had hoped that people at the Smithsonian would be able to tell him what message the Statuette’s text expressed. Cházar died in 1964 with this hope unfulfilled; but the Statuette he parted with toward this end has played an important part in the decipherment not only of the message on the statuette but of the epi-Olmec script as a whole.

Dr. Justeson and co-authors, published a study establishing Tres Zapotes, as the source of the Tuxtla Statuette.

IMS Student Associates

Abelardo de la Cruz

This academic year Abelardo de la Cruz began his 4th year as a PhD. candidate in Anthropology. He has recently completed his field research in two Nahua indigenous communities in Chiantepec, Veracruz, Mexico. He spent 4 months in the community of Tepoxteco and conducted several interviews in Nahuatl with the motiochihuaniih (catechists and prayer specialists) related to their religious work within el costumbre (the Nahua religion). This research was possible thanks to the financial support received from the Programa de Estímulos a la Creación y al Desarrollo Artístico de Zacatecas (PECDAZ) and from the Stresser-Péan Fun-
Abelardo completed his field research conducting interviews in NahuaTl with the motiochihuanih (catechists and prayer specialists) related to their religious work within el costumbre (the Nahua religion).

dation. He has finished transcribing the collected voice audios and has also spent time analyzing the data collection carried out in his recent fieldwork.

Last summer, de la Cruz lived in Zacatecas, Mexico where he taught Nahuatl as part of a distance-learning course for 6 weeks to several students at the University of Utah. Then, in September he travelled to Salt Lake City where he is now living on campus at the University of Utah with his wife Bety Martínez and his newborn Nubia Quetzaly. For this academic year Abelardo de la Cruz is working part-time as a visiting professor, in the Department of World Languages and Cultures at the University of Utah. At the same time, he is working on the first chapter of his thesis intitiled “Motiochihuanih: catechists and prayer specialists as religious leaders brokering ‘el costumbre’ Nahua in Chicontepec Veracruz.” He is also doing documental research to continue writing the next chapter of his dissertation, using all the resources provided by the Marriot Library at the University of Utah.

With respect to conferences, last May Abelardo de la Cruz participated in a symposium on Nahua language and culture organized by the University of California (UCLA). On November 19, he also participated as a guest speaker in a presentation titled “Project 1521 and the Florentine Codex,” organized by the Fowler Musem at UCLA. Both presentations were online, and de la Cruz talked about his the most recent findings of his current doctoral research related to current Nahua beliefs. Finally, Abelardo de la Cruz is advancing in the writing of his dissertation, working at home at the University of Utah. He also misses his professors and friends from the department of Anthropology at UAlbany.

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Fátima Rodríguez Pacas

Fátima is the first IMS Student associate from the Sociology department. She studied sociology at the University of El Salvador and continues her academic formation, pursuing professional expertise in political sociology at UAlbany. Her academic goal has also been shaped by her professional experience as a human rights advocate for...
Yajaira Núñez-Cortés graduated with her PhD in August 2020. Her dissertation, *Economy, Exchange, and Political Power at Lomas Entierros, Central Pacific Costa Rica*, explores the relationship between power and economic practices throughout the Lomas Entierros community. This project also implemented innovative methods such as LiDAR, micro-archaeology and chemical residue analysis. Yajaira continues her commitment to research in the area and she is very excited to start a post-doctoral fellowship at the Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) this upcoming March, 2021. Yajaira will further her current investigations by focusing on the consumption and preparation of food through chemical residue analysis and starch grain analysis in artifacts recovered at Lomas Entierros.

In the fall of 2020, Yajaira thought the course Archaeology of Warfare and Violence for the Anthropology Department at the University of Costa Rica, and she has been collaborating with the updating of the management plan for Carara National Park, where Lomas Entierros is located. Recently, she presented the results of her dissertation as part of the Jornadas de Investigación y Acción Social from Centro de Investigaciones Antropológicas at the University of Costa Rica. Furthermore, she recently published an article for the journal *Vínculos*, which taps on the role of Lomas Entierros as an important center for inter-regional exchange.

Yajaira is very grateful with the University at Albany and the Institute for Mesoamerican Studies for all the support provided throughout the years and specially for supporting her dissertation research.
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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The Institute of Mesoamerican Studies

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.