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INTERDISCIPLINARY HUMANITIES GRADUATE GROUP NEWSLETTER

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On the front and back cover:

Post-TA discussion section in a pre-pandemic world | Fall 2019 | UC Merced



FROM THE **Editor**

In this fourth issue of the Interdisciplinary Humanities Graduate Group (IHGG) Newsletter, we explore humanist inquiry into the act of listening, reciprocity through flexible methodologies, and graduate school guidance from peers who've weathered storms in cross-disciplinary scholarship. In "Voice as an Interdisciplinary Approach," Lorraine Ramos reflects on the meaning behind language and finding one's voice—both inside and outside the classroom. Through "Giving Back in a Meaningful Way During Research," we join Adam Fleenor at the intersections of the pandemic, Mono Lake, and community work—a methodological approach which speaks volumes against a "dining and dashing" approach to the dissertation. This fourth issue also includes written pieces on graduate school advice, which I hope become a recurring theme of the IHGG Newsletter. Under "Advice for Prospective and Current students," Lyndsay Teegarden shares first-hand experiences with an honesty that I believe you'll relate to and find helpful. Lyndsay's advice is timely and appreciated during the current era of remote work/learning. Along the same lines, Kevin Easley's "Grad School Tips for New Students," highlights three particular themes that can help ground new graduate students in their research while building positive relationships with advisors and dissertation committees.

While I haven't seen any of my peers in over a year (aside from occasional gallery views on Zoom), I was able to reconnect with this issue's contributors through the stories they shared.

I hope this fourth issue of the IHGG newsletter fosters connection during these precarious times.

Thank you.

The IHGG Newsletter is made by graduate students for graduate students, and the editor reserves the right to suggest changes or make edits to submitted written pieces in a manner that adheres to each issue's format, theme, word count, and page limit. The Newsletter is intended to feature the professional lives of IHGG graduate students and faculty beyond their critical work. Our contributing authors' views are their own and they do not necessarily represent the views of the IHGG or the University of California. If you would like to feature your work or publicize an event on a future issue, please contact IH graduate student, Ivan Gonzalez-Soto, at isoto5@ucmerced.edu.

VOICE AS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

By Lorraine Marie Ramos, Ph.D. Candidate



"I didn't know what to say. So, instead of producing language, I started listening."

I started as a heritage language speaker, I trained as a linguist, and now I'm becoming an interdisciplinary listener.

My academic formation was about producing, specifically the target language. First, it was English when my kindergarten ignored my cultural heritage. At the university level, my target became Spanish, to regain what I had lost, through linguistics and literature. In graduate school, I was still expected to produce but while finding my own voice.

I didn't know what to say. So, instead of producing language, I started listening.

As most TAs, I read and graded students' work, noting academic language use and the requirements of the assignment. Yet, paper after paper, I found common themes where they were not only writing in the target language but also exploring their formative social and educational experiences. It seems they were trying to tell me something deeper. While learning through writing, they were writing about learning. So very Meta.

My dissertation project developed and I began searching through their written texts for embedded meaning, not through the academic, but rather their figurative language.

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VOICE AS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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Here, the students were metaphorically relating their language knowledge as something that could be lost or even die. They showed concern that the language they were speaking at home and learning in school, could somehow perish. Additionally, when relaying their educational experiences, students spoke about education as violent. They fight and battle to speak and learn language. One wrote quite creatively, "They get the bad end of the broom," which left me to ponder, which end is that? These students have a lot to say and have found creative avenues as well as fascinating ways to say it.

I found my own voice, through the voices of others. Talk about community learning!

I wanted to see what others were saying. This humanist found themselves in the biology department looking at student's journal entries. Similar metaphors surfaced where knowledge was perceived as a perishable or living substance and learning, a battle that needed to be fought. Other metaphoric frames emerged like IDEAS ARE FOOD, where they digested information or sometimes absorbed it. This abstract concept of knowledge was associated with a tangible object so students could grasp the information. I craved more.

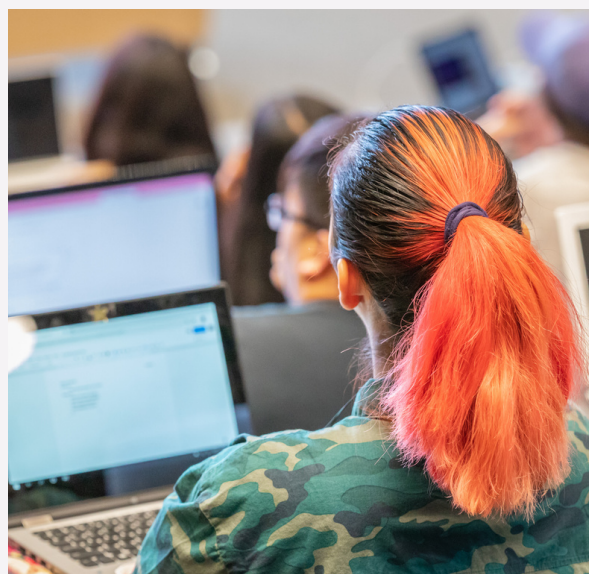
Somehow, I wandered into the healthcare field, as for a year and a half, our collective lives were held captive in our homes, six feet apart. In this virtual space, I started watching the news and hearing the same words: we are in a fight, battle, and war against Covid-19 and people are on the frontlines engaging in combat against this threat. Suddenly, all while staying firmly planted at home, we were taking a journey. We were trying to go in the right direction, taking steps on a road or path. This unexpected side project helped formulate a new question. Whose voices are we listening to? or maybe more specifically, Whose voices do we privilege?

The science sector wasn't done with me yet. My future side project, or rather an adventure, focuses on Spanish-speaking patient narratives about Breast Cancer. On the pedagogical side, I will be interviewing stop out students to better understand their academic needs, directly from their voice.

After years of listening, maybe the question was not, "who's voice do I privilege?", but instead, "who's voice do I amplify?"



**"AFTER YEARS OF LISTENING
MAYBE THE QUESTION WAS NOT,
'WHO'S VOICE DO I PRIVILEGE?',
BUT INSTEAD,
'WHO'S VOICE DO I AMPLIFY?'"**



GIVING BACK IN A MEANINGFUL WAY DURING RESEARCH

By Adam Fleenor, Ph.D. Candidate



**THE LESSON HERE IS NOT TO
WAIT TO START BUILDING
RELATIONSHIPS.**

I came from a positivist background using western triangulation methods to “prove” if something was true. When my chair asked me how I describe myself, I responded, “I am a geographer.” She retorted, “this is a humanities program, so you have to prioritize humanities in your research.” In my head I was thinking, “okay, as soon as I figure out what humanities is.” After taking classes and learning from my fellow grad students, I finally wrapped my head around the discipline and fell in love with theory, methodology, and community-based research.

I have spent three years building relationships and recruiting participants in my study. It sounded so linear and straightforward when I wrote it in my proposal. “I am going to interview 50 people,” I said to my smiling committee members. I can imagine them thinking, “this guy fell off the turnip truck and landed on his head.” Needless to say, I have revised my ambitious interview goals. The summer I planned to travel to Tribal Nations, Covid-19 hit, and no contact with participants was allowed. Fortunately, I had made enough friends that vouched for me and interviewed many Native cartographers via Zoom. The lesson here is not to wait to start building relationships.

Yes, the point. One of the things that helped me grow as a humanities-focused person is the idea of reciprocity as methodology. Through my studies and substantial interaction with Elders, I started reflecting

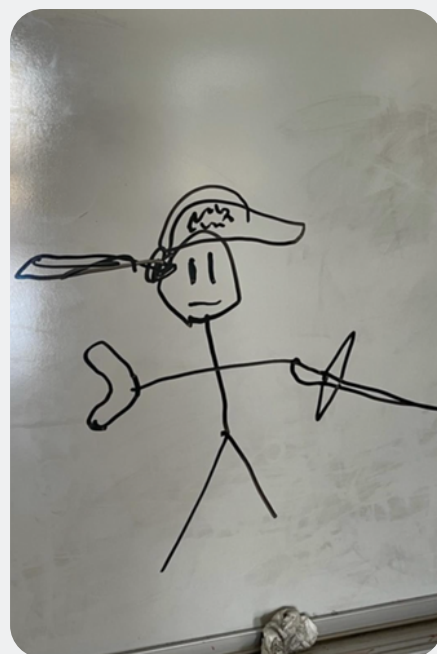
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GIVING BACK IN A MEANINGFUL WAY DURING RESEARCH

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on my positionality and questioning my research. I was taught that I am standing on the shoulders of my predecessors to continue to build knowledge. However, I learned that receiving my Ph.D. is far more valuable than what I would do for the people who made it possible. I wanted to challenge the routine of extraction and then to move on, leaving participates and communities with a “report.” I recognized that what I need to do to obtain my credentials was not necessarily what the Tribal community required or even wanted.

Reciprocity, if done correctly, is non-transactional and does not depend on quid pro quo. It is a form of methodological flexibility that seeks to improve the circumstance of people that have taken time to assist you in your research. Most importantly, you will likely not know the full extent of reciprocity until you are finished with your study. Also, what you end up doing to help the community may not have anything to do with your dissertation. For example, last week, I got a call from one of the participates in my study. I had interviewed this person over a year ago and no longer need anything from him. He needed help with a Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) conference where they hosted over 100 people for a field trip around Mono Lake. I canceled my meetings and drove to the Community Center in Lee Vining. I spent the evening cooking with the Tribal Chairwomen and her sisters to prepare lunch and snacks for the next day. I slept out on the beach on Mono lake under the stars and woke up at 5 am. I helped set up canopies, dished out food, and played with her grandson so she could work more. We finished at 6 pm and I traveled 3.5 hours back home sunburnt, tired... and happy. This work does not directly benefit my study other than being part of my methodology.



I STARTED REFLECTING ON MY POSITIONALITY AND QUESTIONING MY RESEARCH.

My attitude with integrating reciprocity into research is similar to going out to eat; if you cannot afford your bill or tip, you cannot afford to eat out. If you do not have time to give back to the community helping you complete your dissertation, you are essentially dining and dashing. I waited tables as an undergraduate.

One more semester – wish me luck!

ADVICE FOR PROSPECTIVE AND CURRENT GRAD STUDENTS

STUDYING, READING, AND GRAD SCHOOL IN GENERAL

BY LYNDAY TEEGARDEN, PH.D. STUDENT

To Whomever Reads This,

If you find anything in the next bit helpful at all to you then I will consider this first dip into contributing to the IH Newsletter a success. Over the last few years I have resisted doing anything like this simply because the very idea of people reading what I might have to say or whatever is frankly terrifying. Yes, this sort of thing fills me with anxiety just as much as getting an email from a professor does. But also I chose this path so I gotta live with it and by Surak's wisdom and Khaless's strength I will.

Anyways, so, advice. Well, first of all don't do what I did my first year which was procrastinate on every reading for every seminar, with maybe a couple of exceptions. I'll be honest and say not every syllabus was of interest to me and my areas, but that's no excuse. So, please, **READ AHEAD OF TIME AND TAKE NOTES!** It'll be a lifesaver and allow you to participate much more in seminars. Please don't ask me how best to participate as

**BUT ALSO I CHOSE THIS PATH
SO I GOTTA LIVE WITH IT
AND BY SURAK'S WISDOM
AND KHALESS'S STRENGTH I WILL.**

I still have a hard time with that. I'll just say it wasn't my strongest area.

Make up a reading schedule too! I got really into that around my second year I think it was. Of course, it wasn't so much a schedule of what to read when but rather a schedule wherein the morning was dedicated to reading. Split up the reading too. By that I mean if you have a goal of getting a book read by the next time your seminar meets, then break that book down over the course of your next seven days. This may seem obvious and yet I can't recommend it enough. Reading 20-25 pages a day is way easier than reading 200 in a day. Trust me, your brain will not like 200 straight pages of

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ADVICE FOR PROSPECTIVE AND CURRENT GRAD STUDENTS

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**SOMETIMES
I READ SOMETHING FUN IN
BETWEEN ALL THE THEORY.**

**THAT'S NOT TO SAY THAT
THEORY CAN'T BE FUN,
BUT SOMETIMES YOU JUST
GOTTA READ ABOUT YOUR
FAVORITE CHARACTERS
GETTING A HAPPY ENDING.**

theory in a day. I swear I am more tired after a reading day than I am a day of teaching sections, and I go absolutely all out when I teach. So spread out the readings. Or don't, I'm not your boss. Do what you want. The point is to figure out what works best for you; the above happens to work for me.

Snack breaks in between readings is also a must. **Give your brain a breather.** While you snack for 10-15 minutes watch a video, part of an episode, or something. Sometimes I read something fun in between all the theory. That's not to say that theory can't be fun, but sometimes you just gotta read about your favorite characters getting a happy ending. Also **music is helpful** if you happen to be in an area that is not exactly quiet. My go-to reading albums are predominantly soundtrack types. A few good examples are Mick Gordon's *Doom* (2016) video game soundtrack, Inon Zur's *Fallout 3*, *Fallout: New Vegas*, *Fallout 4*, and Music from *Far Harbor* and *Nuka World* soundtracks, and the original *Spyro* video game soundtracks by Steve Copeland. Film soundtracks

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are also very good. I'm partial to Hans Zimmer there. And, although it might seem a bit much, a sign attached to the back of your chair communicating that you are not to be disturbed is something I found helpful too.

Let's see, what else is good to know? Hmm...Oh! Okay, **if you need help or guidance with anything, ASK!** Ask your advisor, ask the grad specialist, ask your seminar instructors, just ASK! Don't worry about appearing silly or something. It's best to ask for help before it's too late and if you're like me in that you have no idea what is going on at times, then ask. I recently asked a faculty member on my committee how to go about preparing for Qualifying Exams because I have no idea what or how I am supposed to do that. The faculty member got back to me and advised me too! Now I feel loads better. Am I still feeling a little clueless? Absolutely. Is it as bad as it was before? No. Heck, I had to ask how to go about doing the language exam requirement (in fact I am sure I had it explained to me multiple times), and I got it figured out!

I AM ALLOWED TO RELAX, AND SO ARE YOU! IT'S EASIER SAID THAN DONE, I KNOW, BUT PLEASE, BE KIND TO YOURSELF.

Finally, let yourself have fun. You are allowed to have a day where you just do whatever you want to do. For me, that's watching films with my housemates, going to Yosemite with my housemates, playing 6-8 hours of Xbox, coloring (took that up recently) or straight binging shows (sometimes that means re-binging shows). If you can, make it two days of fun! Y'know, like the weekend! I try to do that for myself. I say "try" because even when I give myself a day of rest I still end up doing some form of work (it's usually reading). I suffer from that feeling of "I'm not doing something and I'm relaxed, which means I should be doing something productive." You have no idea how many times I'm just like "You're allowed to relax, LT." I am allowed to relax, and so are you! It's easier said than done, I know, but please, be kind to yourself.

Now, if you found any of the above remotely helpful, or if you read all the way to the end, then to you I say, "Cool beans!" I don't know if I will contribute again in the future, but I might be persuaded. Who knows? Okay, before I get onto a tangent completely unrelated to grad school advice, **I want to wish you well** in any and all of your endeavors and hope to possibly see you during the upcoming semester! If you don't wanna see me that's fine too! You do you!

Take Care,
Lyndsay Teegarden



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GRAD SCHOOL TIPS

FOR NEW STUDENTS

By Kevin Easley, Ph.D. Student



A PhD is a different ballgame from undergraduate and more intense than a masters; more is expected in regards to reading, analysis in papers as well as class, and time dedicated to studies.

The next page provides some advice/tips to help you in your PhD journey:

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GRAD SCHOOL TIPS FOR NEW STUDENTS

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BOOK REVIEWS

Reading a densely written 300-page text filled with esoteric, jargon-filled theory can be very difficult. There are book reviews of many canonical readings of well-known academics by other well-known academics. Read a book review as a guide to help you read through the text.

Reading a book review prior and/or after can help you pinpoint various arguments buried in some of the more frustrating readings (i.e. Foucault).

TIME MANAGEMENT

Juggling preparations for class, being a TA, and having a life can be difficult. Some students need a routine while others do not. It is important to know or learn who you are academically in regards to study habits. Do you like to stay on campus to read and write or do you have an office set up at home? Do you study a set amount of hours as if it's a job, or do you study according to work load?

If you are not sure about your style in regards to study habits, you will have to figure it out by trial and error. Watch more senior graduate student and ask for advise. Work at different times and locations to see what works best for you.

ADVISOR

While you are doing required courses and other duties as a graduate student, you must not forget about your dissertation. You should be formulating your research and how to best go about doing research. Your advisor is the one who you need to plan everything with; your committee, a timeline to advance, research methods, publications, etc... Although many of those mentioned will be pretty far away for a first or even second year student, staying in contact with your advisor will help you put a plan together. Your advisor has gone through the process as well as possibly helped others get to a PhD. Try to schedule regular meetings with faculty to check in and go over ideas.

READ A BOOK REVIEW AS A GUIDE TO HELP YOU READ THROUGH THE TEXT



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IHGG NEWSLETTER

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