

SIGS Newsletter

Fall 2024

Letter from the Director

It is my great pleasure to share with you the Fall 2024 newsletter from the School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies (SIGS). Whether you graduated from one of our undergraduate or graduate degree programs, we hope you'll find something here to enjoy learning more about. The first semester of this academic year has been a busy one for SIGS!

We were very excited to welcome four new faculty to SIGS in August 2024. Dr. Adam Hernandez joins us as an Assistant Professor of Instruction, while Dr. Laura Mendez Carvajal, Dr. Vanessa Perez, and Dr. Eric Stephen join us as tenure-track Assistant Professors. I hope you'll take the time to read a bit about each of them in our newsletter and join me in celebrating the incredible talent and potential of SIGS' newest faculty members. This newsletter also features one of our outstanding Academic Advisors, Ms. D'Amour Edwards. D'Amour represents the general excellence of SIGS staff, including our other advisors, Department Operations Manager, and Academic Program Specialists.



I am also delighted to share the news that our MA in International Affairs program continues to expand. We had an impressive cohort start the program in the fall, and next fall looks to be our largest class yet. As you will see in the newsletter, our students, faculty, and alumni continue to do incredible things, and we hope you'll take a moment to learn more about some of those activities!

As you know, we experienced two strong hurricanes in Florida during the Fall 2024 semester, Milton and Helene, and many of our faculty, staff, and students were impacted. Dr. Judithanne Scourfield McLauchlan's home was devastated by Helene. While the family continues to rebuild, the aftermath of the hurricane saw a group of USF faculty and staff come to the aid of Dr. Scourfield McLauchlan's family. I hope you'll read the heartwarming story about the kindness and solidarity that followed this tragedy.

Finally, at the end of the semester we were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Dr. Earl Conteh-Morgan, a SIGS faculty member for nearly forty years. Earl made numerous scholarly contributions to his field of peace and conflict studies and was very active in his local church. For most of us, he will be remembered for his decades of excellent teaching to thousands of SIGS students, his wry sense of humor, and his cheerful disposition.

One other item to note before closing, Dr. Steve Tauber and his wife Meghan Tauber have made a major gift to SIGS and the university. Dr. Tauber served as chair of SIGS for seven years before taking on his current role as Vice Provost. We are very grateful for Steve and Megan's gift, and for Steve's many years of service to SIGS and the university! We hope you'll consider making a small contribution to SIGS in the future and/or connect with us through social media. Your generosity fuels our success! To make a gift to supports SIGS visit: [Giving to SIGS](#).

We hope you enjoy our newsletter. Have a wonderful holiday season!

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-Scott Solomon

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Alumni News

Fulbright Recipient Taylor Herman

In Fall of 2024, SIGS alumna Taylor Herman was awarded the prestigious Fulbright English Teaching Assistant scholarship in Moldova. This honor awards her the ability to teach English in Moldova under an experienced English teacher, serving as a resource for conversation, vocabulary, and reading and writing courses. The experience lasts nine months and allows participants the opportunity to immerse themselves in Moldovan culture and form connections with locals.

Taylor has been no stranger to accomplishment in her time at USF—she served as lieutenant governor for the USF St. Petersburg Student Government, completed an internship for Florida Congresswoman Kathy Castor, and served as a member of the Collegiate Leadership Tampa Bay Chamber. She was even awarded a Golden Bull, an award given for exceptional leadership and service to the community, in Spring 2024.

Herman plans to use this Fulbright opportunity to expand her skills in Russian and Romanian while applying for graduate programs in Foreign Policy. Congratulations, Taylor!



Taylor Herman (middle) at her graduation ceremony with her family.



Taylor Herman (right) with SIGS faculty member Dr. Judithanne Scourfield McLauchlan.

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Student Spotlight

Anabela Villach Vaquer



In Summer of 2024, SIGS Graduate Student Anabela Villach Vaquer completed the Organization of American States Internship Program. The internship focuses on enhancing networking opportunities and allowing students to acquire experience in multiple different areas of expertise over just ten weeks. Anabela was assigned to the Department of Social Inclusion, where she was able to work with vulnerable migration groups.

This internship opportunity allowed students involved to contribute to research on migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, including facilitating translation for these vulnerable groups. Her favorite moment of the experience was assisting in a special meeting with the Permanent Council that addressed the electoral process in Venezuela.

Anabela, who is a student in SIGS' MA in Latin American and Caribbean Studies program, has focused her studies on contemporary affairs in Latin America, so she can bring her knowledge with her back to Argentina. "MALACS allows me to be in contact and take courses with professors specializing in migration experiences, its complexities and the legal and institutional mechanisms that shape them," she explained. As a graduate assistant for the department, Anabela also works with the Institute for the Study of Latin America and The Caribbean.

When she graduates in the spring of 2025, Anabela plans to return to Argentina and resume her academic positions there.

She also plans to work on finishing a PhD dissertation and apply to governmental positions that will allow her to contribute to the Province of Mendoza's development, institutional improvement, and the preservation of justice and legality.



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SIGS Scholarship Awards

SIGS awarded three scholarships to deserving students in Fall 2024.

Mark Orr International Studies Award

The Mark Orr International Studies Award, named for late SIGS faculty member Dr. Mark Orr, is awarded each year to two students majoring in International Studies. These students have shown a commitment to academics, a passion for giving back to their community, and a commitment to global engagement. This year's recipients are Sierra Boodhoo and Ege Karademir.

Sierra Boodhoo

Sierra is an International Studies major in her senior year at USF. She aspires to be an international lawyer after graduating from USF, and served as President of Phi Theta Kappa honor society for two years. She also studied abroad as part of the USF in London program in Summer 2024.

Ege Karademir

Ege is a junior majoring in International Studies. He is involved with the Turkish Student Association at USF and has a passion for serving his community. In Fall 2024 he participated in the USF Legislative Internship program, which places students with local legislators to create experiential learning.

Helman Scholarship for International Studies and National Service

The Helman Scholarship recognizes students of International Studies who wish to pursue a career involving national service, broadly defined.



Christopher Oueis

Christopher is a SIGS student in his senior year, double majoring in international studies and econometrics and quantitative economics. Christopher's time at USF has included many spectacular accomplishments, including co-founding the Lebanese Student Association on campus and completing several internships in the areas of foreign policy and international development. In Fall 2024, Christopher participated in the MICEFA Semester in Paris program, an exchange program that allows students to take classes at a Parisian university with French students.

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Political Science in Action

Dr. Kirsten England, SIGS Assistant Professor of Instruction, used hands-on learning this semester to teach students in her Congress and American National Government classes.



Students in Dr. England's classes created balloons to represent an interest group or cause they care about. These balloons, pictured here, required students to think about symbols, color choices, and shapes that could help convey the message they were seeking to get across.



After creating their balloons, students shared and discussed their designs, revealing the reasoning behind their design choices. This activity, meant to engage both creativity and critical thinking, helped students consider the function of real life interest groups and how they aim to sway their audiences.



In her Congress class, Dr. England's students practiced lobbying by doing an interactive simulation where they had to lobby each other on various issues.



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Department Event

Class Visit to 13th Judicial Circuit Court



In summer of 2024, Dr. Rob Mellen, SIGS Assistant Professor of Instruction, took his American National Government ACE class on a visit to Tampa's 13th Judicial Circuit Court Headquarters in Tampa. The ACE program, also known as the Academic and Cultural Engagement Program, offers courses for incoming first-year students to ease the transition from high school to college. The visit allowed the students a hands-on opportunity to learn more about the role of the state judicial system in comparison to the federal judicial system.

During the visit, students had an opportunity to talk with Ms. Susie Lopez, the State's Attorney, Mr. Nick Cox, Statewide Prosecutor, and Chief Judge Christopher Sabella. Mr. Cox, a USF alumnus, is the longest serving statewide prosecutor in Florida history and has previously come to talk to SIGS classes about his time at USF and his career journey- including his current role, which he has served in for 13 years. While at the circuit court, the class also enjoyed a visit to the courtroom where they witnessed the proceedings in an active manslaughter case.

Prior to the visit, the class was preparing to review Article 3 of the Constitution, which establishes the Judicial Branch. One student who attended thought it was a fitting trip to precede the lecture. "It was a great opportunity to see how the American legal system actually works in action.", the student remarked. When asked about aspects of the trip that stood out, the student noted a change in their perception of the relationships between prosecutors and defense attorneys, "I assumed that each side disliked each other because they're at odds with each other most of the time in the court room. In reality, they couldn't have been closer friends."

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Staff Profile D'Amour Edwards SIGS Academic Advisor

SIGS is lucky enough to have three wonderful advisors serving our undergraduate students. One of those advisors is D'Amour Edwards, a lifelong Floridian with a BA in Anthropology from the University of Florida and a Master of Education in Educational Leadership with a concentration in Higher Education from Florida Atlantic University.

Before coming to USF, D'Amour worked as a Career Consultant at Florida Atlantic University, helping students explore major and career options. She also has previous experience as a College and Career Advisor, assisting high school students in preparing for life after high school.



D'Amour came to USF in the summer of 2023, after graduating with her Master of Education, looking to pursue her interest in assisting college students in some capacity. She has always been interested in USF, and was delighted when offered this position.

Though she has only been advising SIGS students for a little over a year, D'Amour has grown a great appreciation for them. "I appreciate how dedicated our students are; they have big goals, and I love being able to help guide them toward their intended paths," she explained. D'Amour, along with our other two advisors, helps students with more than choosing classes—advisors serve as a liaison between students and the department, offer advice, and even help students access a variety of resources when they are in need.

More than anything, D'Amour loves helping students figure out their path through school: "My favorite thing about being an advisor connects back to my passion for assisting college students. From my own undergraduate experience, I know that navigating these years can be challenging, even if you have a clear idea of what you want to do after graduating. So being able to help students through support and resources offered at USF has been the most rewarding."

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Faculty News



Steven and Meghan Tauber Create Estate Gift for Students

Dr. Steve Tauber, SIGS faculty member, and his wife Meghan Tauber, announced in Summer 2024 that they will leave a bequest of \$1 million to establish the Steven and Meghan Tauber Endowed Scholarship. This award will support SIGS students, with a preference for students majoring in political science or international studies. This generous gift will no doubt benefit students for generations to come.

SIGS Adjunct Honored at Lightning Game

In November, SIGS adjunct faculty member and retired US Marine Corps brigadier general Tom Draude was honored at a Tampa Bay Lightning hockey game for his service. General Draude has taught for SIGS since 2017, and continues to offer classes like “Why and How We Fight US Wars” and “The Vietnam War”.



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Faculty News

“At the Boundary” Podcast Appearance

In Fall 2024, SIGS faculty member Dr. Jongseok Woo was a guest on the Global National Security Institute’s podcast, “At the Boundary”. The podcast focuses on global and national security insights, exploring the intersection of policy and technology. Dr. Woo and GNSI’s Dr. Tad Schnauer analyzed the newly formed NATO-style provision by Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. The podcast recording can be found [here](#).



St. Pete Colleagues Step Up in Hurricane Aftermath

In Fall of 2024, SIGS professor Judithanne Scourfield McLauchlan suffered a devastating loss during Hurricane Helene- her house flooded with four feet of water, destroying all of her family’s possessions. However, from unspeakable tragedy comes great kindness- when Dr. McLauchlan’s family returned to clean up their home, they were accompanied by many volunteers, including colleagues and students from USF. Even Dr. Susan Toler, associate dean of USF CAS St. Petersburg, joined in, helping the family pick up the pieces. Dr. McLauchlan described how helpful this assistance was- “I had friends who came in who just took charge to help get organized and helped coordinate the other volunteers,” she said. “The support, just the shoulders to cry on, was so overwhelming.”



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New Faculty

SIGS welcomed four new permanent faculty members in the 2024-2025 academic year!

Dr. Laura Mendez Carvajal

I am a scholar of the political economy of development with a focus on Latin America. I investigate how the rhetoric of development (such as self-help) shapes systems of beliefs and behavior in recipient communities. In particular, my work aims to understand how such rhetoric influences individual decision-making. My book project studies the relationship between foreign aid and structural violence by examining the consequences of foreign aid policy discourses on the reproduction of inequality in marginalized rural communities in Colombia.



Dr. Vanessa Perez

Dr. Perez is an Assistant Professor in the School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies (SIGS) specializing in American politics. She holds a Ph.D., M.A., and B.A., in Political Science from Columbia University. She also previously worked in electoral politics in the Washington, D.C. nonprofit sector. Before coming to USF, she was Assistant Professor of Political Science in the City University of New York. Dr. Perez teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in American politics, including courses in voting and elections, the presidency, data-driven campaigns, political parties, Latino politics, and American political culture through the lens of comic books and the superhero genre. She is also an active participant in implementing intercultural interdisciplinary global exchanges connecting classrooms in the U.S. and abroad.



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Dr. Eric Stephen

I am an interdisciplinary scholar of religion and American law in the United States. My work draws from critical religious studies, political science, and legal theory to examine how the very concept of "religious liberty" has been defined, contested, and enacted over the course of US history. In particular, I am interested in the ways that Americans' faith commitments have influenced the US Supreme Court's religious liberty jurisprudence, how those legal precedents have in turn informed religious belief, and how this relationship has shifted throughout American history in response to significant social changes and political events. In my current book project, I explore the ways the rhetoric of "secularism" and the "secular" was invoked in American legal and political discourse in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and the role that changing understandings of these categories played in influencing both what Americans popularly understood the term "religion" to mean, and the different visions of religious liberty that emerged as a result.



Dr. Adam Hernandez

Dr. Hernandez earned his Ph.D. in Political Science at Florida International University in 2023. He has taught a wide variety of classes such as American National Government, American Foreign Policy, Introduction to Political Science, and Introduction to Middle East Politics. His interests include American Foreign Policy, Climate Politics, and Political Propaganda. He is currently interested in online disinformation proliferated by corporate actors and has written "Bell Pottinger: Pre-Digital Fake News During the Rise of Neoliberalism" and "Cambridge Analytica: Military Psy-Ops Privatized," both being articles delving into the topic.



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In Memoriam- Dr. Earl Conteh-Morgan



SIGS suffered a great loss this semester with the passing of longtime professor Dr. Earl Conteh-Morgan. Dr. Conteh-Morgan was a man of remarkable intellect, unwavering faith, and profound dedication to his family, students, and community. Born on January 3, 1950, in Masauda, Sierra Leone, he was the youngest of six children to the late Earl Conteh-Morgan Sr. and Daimoh Bangura.

Earl began his primary education in Waterloo before continuing in Freetown, excelling academically and qualifying for the prestigious Bo School. However, he was ultimately selected for the Sierra Leone Military School. Earl's academic journey continued at Fourah Bay College, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1968 and a Diploma in Education in 1972. He began his teaching career at Rokel Secondary School, where he impacted many young minds. He completed his Ph.D. at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, in June 1984, solidifying his expertise in political science and international studies.

Earl's career flourished after moving to Florida in 1987, where he joined the University of South Florida as an Associate Professor. He later earned tenure, becoming a respected voice in international studies for almost forty years. In 1994, Earl's life took a beautiful turn when, with the help of Ms. Margaret Pratt, he met and married Patricia Taylor, the love of his life. Together, they built a home filled with faith, love, and joy, raising three wonderful daughters. By God's grace, they celebrated 30 years of marriage in November 2024.

In 1995, Earl was honored with the Senior Research Fellowship at the Norwegian Nobel Institute in Oslo. He spent a year in Norway with his young family, engaging in research that enriched his academic legacy. Dr. Conteh-Morgan was a prolific scholar whose contributions shaped the understanding of global conflict, peacebuilding, and geopolitics. He authored and co-authored several seminal works, including *Democratization in Africa: The Theory and Dynamics of Political Transitions* (Praeger, 1997), *Collective Political Violence: An Introduction to the Theories and Cases of Violent Conflicts* (Routledge, 2004), and *Sierra Leone at the End of the Twentieth Century: History, Politics, and Society* (Peter Lang, 1999).

Earl cherished his family and found joy in life's simple pleasures, like working with his wife in her garden, from lively discussions with his daughters to the companionship of his beloved cats, Rosie, Mingo, and Sapphire. He leaves behind a legacy of love, scholarship, and faith, cherished by his wife, Patricia Conteh-Morgan; his daughters, Janjay (Jamaul Majors), Tinzie, and Dekontee; his grandsons, Roman and Azlan Majors; his surviving older brother Kabba; and a host of extended family and friends in Sierra Leone, England, and the United States.

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Contact Us

Are you a SIGS student, alumnus, or faculty member with exciting news to share?

We'd love to hear from you!

Send your news to jamielane@usf.edu for the chance to be featured in our next newsletter!

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