

The USF School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies Presents

SIGS Newsletter

Spring 2024

Letter from the Director

It is a pleasure to share with you the Spring 2024 newsletter from the School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies (SIGS). Whether you're a graduate of one of our undergraduate or graduate degree programs, we hope you'll find something here to enjoy learning more about. The past academic year has been a busy one, for both current and former students!

As you will see from the newsletter, our alumni continue to do incredible things. This year's USF Outstanding Young Alumni award-winners showcased three former SIGS students! From service in the Space Force, to practicing law at a high level, to pitching for the Tampa Bay Rays, our former students continue to impress! We welcomed SIGS alum Nick Cox, the State Prosecutor for the State of Florida to one of our classes, and congratulated alumna Dr. Dragana Mrvos on winning a Fulbright Award to Croatia.



As you will see, our faculty continue to win awards, produce innovative research, and teach dynamic classes. Like every election year, Dr. Judithanne Scourfield-McLachlan's Road to the White House course was offered, this time taking students to the South Carolina primary. This newsletter also welcomes two faculty who joined SIGS this academic year, Dr. Alexander Ponomareff and Dr. Kirsten England, and in Fall 2024 we expect to welcome four new faculty members!

The end of the Spring 2024 semester saw our inaugural class of International Affairs MA students complete their first year of graduate study. We were happy to see several M.A. and Ph.D. students successfully defend their theses and dissertations.

We're excited about what SIGS faculty, staff, and students have accomplished this academic year, and look forward to taking you on the journey! We hope you'll connect with us through social media, pay us a visit on campus, or choose to support our students through giving. Your generosity fuels our success! To make a gift to support SIGS, please visit: [Giving to SIGS](#).

We hope you enjoy our newsletter. Have a wonderful summer!

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-Scott Solomon

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Road to the White House

This Spring, SIGS professor Judithanne Scourfield McLauchlan offered her Road to the White House course for both undergraduate and graduate students. The course gives students a chance to get up close and personal with the political process, including a trip to the South Carolina primary to experience campaign work firsthand. Political Science major and SIGS student Laura Shaw took part in the class, which she described as “a complete overhaul of what my idea of politics is.”



Laura, who has experience working with Progress Florida and Emily’s List, has taken a few classes with Dr. Scourfield McLauchlan before, and has always been very interested in political campaigns. When she heard about Road to the White House, she felt it was the perfect experience for her. “The class almost seems like it was made for me and my interests,” she said. “It got me one step closer to figuring out what I want to do with the rest of my life.” The class trip to South Carolina produced some once in a lifetime experiences, including a guest speaker series that gave students the chance to hear from a variety of voices in the political sphere, including state representative Jermaine Johnson. “It can be hard to see yourself in some candidates, but he was just a regular guy,” Laura said of Johnson’s talk. “It gave me a lot of hope.”



Laura worked with the South Carolina Democratic Party, where she got to see the ins and outs of campaign work. She and her classmates worked closely with members of the campaign team, like the executive director and technology director, and got to learn about these positions from presentations given by team members. Laura also had the chance to contribute directly to the campaign, as she and other volunteers participated in phone banking and data entry to help verify voters.



Laura’s advice to anyone considering taking Road to the Whitehouse is, put simply, “Do it!” She feels that the class is perfect for those considering a career in politics, but really, for anyone who wants to get involved and learn more about the political process. “The class was intense, but it was so worth it. The best learning experiences in your life aren’t going to be easy.”

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Alumni News

SIGS alumni were among those honored by the USF 2024 Outstanding Young Alumni awards, a university-wide program which recognizes alumni aged 35 or younger who have demonstrated innovation, creativity and success in their chosen career.

Awardees from SIGS are:



Kyle L. McIntyre, Political Science 2015

Kyle L. McIntyre is deputy director of congressional affairs at Headquarters U.S. Space Force, providing strategic planning and synchronization support for USSF activities with Congress. A Navy and Air Force Reserve veteran, McIntyre has served in numerous federal leadership roles and received multiple military and civilian commendations.



Shane McClanahan, Political Science 2015–2018

Shane McClanahan is a pitcher for the Tampa Bay Rays, a two-time Major League Baseball All-Star and the Rays' 2023 nominee for the Roberto Clemente Award, MLB's most prestigious individual honor. A former USF baseball team member, McClanahan is a longtime volunteer with Buddy Baseball, a league serving special-needs children.



Janae Thomas, PhD in Politics and International Affairs 2023

Janae Thomas is an associate at Quintairos, Prieto, Wood and Boyer, law firm, and a judge advocate for the U.S. Air Force Reserve. A former assistant state attorney for the 13th Judicial Circuit Court, she was voted Government Attorney of the Year by the Hillsborough County Bar Association in 2020.

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Fulbright Recipient Dragana Mrvos



SIGS Alum Dragana Mrvos (PhD in Politics and International Affairs, 2020) has received a Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program award in political science and government! This high honor, bestowed by the U.S. Department of State and the Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board, will take Mrvos to Croatia for research in the 2024-2025 academic year.

Mrvos, who is currently a lecturer at University of Tampa, will work on a research project entitled "Return Migration and Democracy in Croatia: The Potential of Social Remittances." This project will explore how return migrants, individuals voluntarily returning to the country of origin after living, studying, and working abroad, participate in numerous ways in economic life, educational systems, and cultural events in Croatia.

As a result of research conducted in collaboration with the Center for Advanced Studies Southeast Europe (CAS SEE) at the University of Rijeka, the findings will present how brain drain can be reversed to brain gain by concentrating on impacts of return migrants on the country's social and political progress.

USF is ranked among the top producers of Fulbright Scholars. SIGS congratulates Dr. Mrvos in continuing this impressive tradition of excellence in research!



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Student News

In Spring 2024 the department saw several successful dissertation and thesis defenses representing our graduate programs.



Veli Aydoner- MA in Political Science
Thesis entitled "Tangled Threads: The Emerging Ideology of Far-Right Islamic Conservatism in the Muslim Diaspora"



Arman Mahmoudian- PhD in Government
Dissertation entitled "The Cooperation of Russia and Iran-led Shia Axis: Its Nature and Implications for the U.S. Strategy in the Middle East"



Barbara Herrera- MA in Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies
Thesis entitled "Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Education, and Bilingualism: Ethnography of a STEM Program for Elementary Students in Southwestern Florida"

Sina Azodi- PhD in Government
Dissertation entitled "Iran's Nuclear Program: A Struggle for Security and Modernization"

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Student Profile Anabelle Folsom

This Spring, Political Science major Annabelle Folsom interned with the Tampa district office of Florida House Democratic Leader Rep. Fentrice Driskell. As a Legislative Intern, Annabelle worked on resolving cases on a variety of issues- from unemployment and education to veteran's affairs. Annabelle referred and connected constituents to state institutions and government offices that provide the necessary resources. Annabelle also had the opportunity to represent the district office at events and attend a panel at the WFLA station to observe how news is conducted behind the scenes.



Annabelle's interest in politics started at a young age, as she recalls following the 2012 presidential election results on television. However, it was during high school, through volunteer work at homeless shelters and youth group camps, that her motivation to study political science began to solidify. When asked about her interest in the field, Annabelle replied "I recognized the vital role government functions play in people's lives and saw pursuing this field of study as the best way to assist others."



Reflecting on her academic journey at USF, Ms. Folsom credits classes taken in SIGS for expanding her knowledge "on a wide scope of politics, including how our leaders make decisions, the history of politics, and the functions of our political system". In Summer 2023, Ms. Folsom also participated in the USF in London Program, led by USF SIGS Director Dr. Scott Solomon. During her time abroad, Annabelle had the opportunity to learn more about European Politics, which enriched her worldview beyond the U.S and gave her global context in studying political science.

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Mark Orr Fellows

Each year SIGS nominates up to three students to serve as Mark Orr Fellows with the Tampa Bay Committee on Foreign Relations (TBCFR). The fellowship involves attendance at monthly meetings, where prominent academics, policymakers, journalists, and other international affairs professionals speak on contemporary international issues. For the 2023–2024 academic year, SIGS nominated Jasmine Rehman and Taryn Bartley as its Mark Orr Fellows.

Jasmine Rehman



Jasmine Rehman, an international studies major who graduated this spring, found that the most interesting part of being a Mark Orr Fellow was hearing from such a wide array of knowledgeable speakers. “As a college student, the opportunity to hear such well renowned speakers in person and in a setting that allows one to ask questions is very rare and invaluable.” She says that the program helped solidify her interest in graduate school. Jasmine will pursue a Master of Science degree in Foreign Service at Georgetown University in the Fall. Her recommendation to future Mark Orr Fellows is to ask as many questions as you can. “It can be daunting to speak with someone who has so much intelligence and experience,” she said. “However, in my experience, no matter how high ranking the people I meet, they are always very friendly and open to genuine conversation, even if it is controversial.”

Taryn Bartley



Taryn Bartley is a SIGS student majoring in political science with a minor in legal studies. Though she also loved listening to visiting speakers, Taryn’s favorite part of the Mark Orr Fellows experience was meeting other fellows from nearby universities, which she said helped the students establish a sense of community. She appreciates how many new contacts she was able to make during this experience. “The members of the committee were incredibly receptive to the student fellows and it was very encouraging to meet individuals from different educational and career backgrounds.”

Taryn recommends that if you’re a student presented with this amazing opportunity, you take advantage of it! “As intimidating as it might be, try to take advantage of the cocktail hour and talk to committee members, they were all incredibly friendly and willing to talk to you about their path and advice they may have.”

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Faculty News

Dr. Ira E Harrison Legacy Award:

Dr. Cheryl Rodriguez

Congratulations to Dr. Cheryl Rodriguez, SIGS faculty member, who was awarded the Dr. Ira E. Harrison Legacy Award from the Association of Black Anthropologists in Fall 2023. This award honors anthropologists for “their significant contributions to research, scholarship, and service to communities of African descent in the United States and throughout the African Diaspora.”

Dr. Rodriguez has a long history of impactful research and service to the university and the community alike. Her current focus includes several projects related to African American neighborhoods in Tampa, as well as a National Science Foundation grant project entitled “How do histories of violence shape affect and experience?”.



Trail Blazer Series: Dr. Zacharias Pieri

In Fall 2023, SIGS Faculty Member Dr. Zacharias Pieri gave a talk entitled “Pushed to Extremes: The Power of Culture in Violent Extremist Groups” as part of the College of Arts and Sciences’ Trail Blazers speaker series. This longstanding speaker series works to highlight leading faculty in the college, creating a space for thought-provoking discussions and access to USF faculty’s latest research.



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Dr. David Ponton III- Book Launch



In Spring 2024, SIGS, in partnership with the Institute on Black Life, the Racial Justice Initiative, and the Women's and Gender Studies department, held a book launch for Dr. David Ponton's new book, "Houston and the Permanence of Segregation: An Afropessimist Approach to Urban History". The event, attended by faculty, students, and staff alike, celebrated Dr. Ponton with a rooftop reception and a book talk with Q&A in the brand new Research Innovation Building.



"Bringing the insights of Black studies and Afropessimism to the field of urban history, Dr. Ponton's book explores how gender roles constrained thought in black freedom movements, how the "rule of law" compelled black Houstonians to view injustice as a sign of progress, and how antiblack terror undermined Houston's narrative of itself as a 'heavenly' place."
-University of Texas Press



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Faculty Accolades

Community-Engaged Teaching Award

SIGS Faculty member Dr. Judithanne Scourfield McLachlan was honored with USF's Community-Engaged Teaching Award! This accolade recognizes faculty who engage in teaching that demonstrates community collaboration, deeply engaged, high-quality teaching, and meaningful interactions on campus. This much deserved award recognizes Dr. Scourfield McLachlan's commitment to community engagement, as evidenced by leading the Center for Global Engagement on the St. Petersburg campus and the Road to the White House course.



Certificate of HIP Excellence

Dr. Tatsiana Kulakevich, SIGS Associate Professor of Instruction, was honored for her excellence in high-impact practices by the Office of High-Impact Practices and Undergraduate Research.

This award recognizes Dr. Kulakevich's exceptional commitment to high-impact practices in mentoring and supporting undergraduate students while actively fostering a culture of intellectual curiosity and academic excellence. Dr. Kulakevich received this award for her consistent commitment to the success of her students, in the classroom and out.

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New Faculty

SIGS welcomed two new permanent faculty members in the 2023-2024 academic year!



Dr. Alexander Ponomareff (he/him) is a scholar of postwar African American popular culture, media, literature, and art. He joined SIGS as an assistant professor in Fall 2023. His teaching and research interests include graffiti, comic books, film, and popular music, with an emphasis on sample-based hip hop. Dr. Ponomareff received his B.A. in History and Philosophy from New York University. He also holds an interdisciplinary M.A. from NYU in Humanities and Social Thought. He has a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Prior to joining SIGS at the University of South Florida as an Assistant Professor, he was the inaugural Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Studying Structures of Race at Roanoke College.



Kirsten England, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Instruction in SIGS. She earned her PhD in Public Administration and Public Policy from the University of Tennessee Knoxville where she also graduated with a Masters degree in Public Policy and American Politics. Her undergraduate degree is from the Florida Southern College where she studied Pre-Law, Political Science, and Psychology. Dr. England's research focuses on education policy and the US courts. She looks at the rise of recent, though fleeting, education policies and their diffusion among states. She also studies and has presented on the US solicitor general and their influence on the US Supreme Court using principal-agent theory. Her current research focuses on the variables that surround school shooting incidents in order to help prevent them in the future.

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Department Event Bulls in Action with Nick Cox

In Spring 2024, State of Florida Prosecutor Nicholas B. Cox visited SIGS faculty member Dr. Rob Mellen's American National Government class. Cox visited as part of Bulls in Action, a speaking series that aims to foster interdisciplinary discussions spanning the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Cox spoke to students about his experience majoring in political science at USF, graduating in 1985, and applying to law school. Cox received a scholarship to Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas and interned with a prosecutor in a small county outside of Topeka.



Cox spoke to the class about his job duties, with a special focus on his most recent project, pursuing voter fraud cases. He also spoke on issues that students had been learning about all semester in American National Government, like grand juries and the differences in charging individuals across different states. Cox also opened the floor to allow students to ask questions about his life, the law, and law as a career, creating an invaluable experience for these students. “If you’re pursuing a career in law, all you have is your name and your integrity. Working in the government is all about networking and fostering relationships,” he explained.



Cox, who received the Distinguished Alumni award from USF in 2023, wrapped up the event by reflecting on his remarkable life and career. “If I could describe my career in one word it would be, ‘Honest.’ I worked very hard to be successful, but above all, I’m just really happy. You’ve all heard my resume, I’ve been able to accomplish some really cool things in my career, but I am happy with my job. I love my family and my wife of 34 years, but just make sure whatever you do makes you happy. Define what happiness means to you, pursue it relentlessly, and don’t let anything stop you from achieving it,” Cox said.

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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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