

# SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH CONFERENCE



**MAY 1, 2020**

**1:00 PM - 3:00 PM**

**WATCH VIRTUAL PRESENTATIONS  
VIA WEBEX LINKS**

**SHOWCASING INTERDISCIPLINARY  
HONORS THESES & THE  
INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH TEAMS**

**RUTGERS**

School of Arts and Sciences  
Honors Program

For more information, contact  
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**School of Arts and Sciences**  
**Interdisciplinary Research Conference**

Friday, May 1, 2020

**INTERDISCIPLINARY HONORS THESES (IHT)**

1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

WebEx Meeting(s) password: IHT2020

[Panel A WebEx Meeting](#)

[Panel B WebEx Meeting](#)

[Panel C WebEx Meeting](#)

**INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH TEAMS (IRT)**

1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

[WebEx Meeting](#): 196 372 223

WebEx password: 6YrmeMuvi26

**IHT Presentations**  
**(PANELS A, B, & C)**  
1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

**Panel A: Creative Expression** | Chair: Paul Blaney, Writer in Residence, SAS Honors Program

Sophia Angelica Nitkin, *Music as Creative Activism: A Theoretical Framework*  
Advisors: Damaris Otero-Torres and Todd Wolfson

Salma Emara, *Think with Your Heart: The Heart's Ability to Store Memory, Emotion, and Personality*  
Advisors: Atif Akin and Julie Langsam

Andrew Rears, *SnowTunes Island: An Exploration of Music's Influence in Video Game Design*  
Advisors: Steven Kemper and George Berger

**Panel B: Science & Medicine** | Chair: Jennifer Kim-Lee, Assistant Dean, SAS Honors Program

Nishita Patel, *An Analysis of Preventative Medicine in Rural and Metropolitan Gujarat*  
Advisors: Pilar Rau and Omar Dewachi

Saleh Houshmand, *The Genetic and Biochemical Predisposing Factors of Hepatomegaly*  
Advisors: Ines Rauschenbach and Doreen Glodowski

Usman Toor, *Evaluating the Genetic Interplay Between Alcohol Exposure and Social Stimulation within the Entorhinal Cortex of CD-1 Mice*  
Advisors: Lei Yu and Arthur Tomie



**Panel C: Historical and Global Perspectives** | Chair: Kathy Sadowsky, Assistant Dean, SAS Honors Program

Rebecca Chanin, *At The Hands of Others: Stories of Holocaust Survival*  
Advisors: Gary Rendsburg and Atiya Aftab

Matthew Jaffe, *The history of ISIS and the narratives they exploit*  
Advisors: Julie Rajan and Ethel Brooks

Jordan Levy, *The Intangible: Making Sense of Essence*  
Advisors: Chenjerai Kumanyika and Louis Prisoc

### **IRT Presentations**

1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

**Session 1:** | Chair: Jenevieve DeLosSantos, Director of Special Pedagogic Projects, SAS Office of Undergraduate Education

*Indigenous Languages IN/OF New Jersey*

Advisors: Becky Schulthies, Kathleen C. Riley & Pilar Rau, Anthropology

Team members: Jusleen Basra, Bing'en Lin, Devin Natishyn

*The Missing Bones*

Advisor: Dan Cabanes, Anthropology

Team members: Chelsea Carriere, Natalie Lau, Sandra Paredes

*Cryptozoology Project*

Advisor: Angus Gillespie, American Studies

Team members: Nadine Blank, Kristen Thomas, Lailitha Vallabhaneji, Samantha Waldman

**Break: 10 minutes**

**Session 2:** | Chair: Jenevieve DeLosSantos, Director of Special Pedagogic Projects, SAS Office of Undergraduate Education

*How Do We Know What They Know?*

Advisors: David Vicario and Mimi Phan, Psychology

Team members: Leah Cherukara, Giorgia Merolli, Saikiran Venkata Nakka,  
David Natanov, Karl Waldron

*Modeling Crowd Diversity to Design Inclusive Environments*

Advisor: Mubbasir Kapadia, Computer Science

Team members: Rhyan Moghe, Duc Ngo, David Xue

## Conference Participants

**Jusleen Basra (IRT)** is a sophomore in the School of Arts & Sciences studying Cultural Anthropology with a minor in English. Along with her passion for language, Jusleen is also interested in studying agricultural sustainability and food security and will be interning at Why Hunger NY this summer to begin her journey in this field. She looks forward to applying the skills she has gained from her research experience to this position.

**Nadine Blank (IRT)** is a School of Arts and Sciences senior graduating with a degree in American Studies and a minor in political science. In her last four years at Rutgers she has had a pleasure participating in Rutgers Battle of the Bald and the New Jersey Folk Festival, and now the IRT program! After graduation, Nadine hopes to take a few years to save up and travel the US before pursuing a long-term career.

**Chelsea Carrière (IRT)** is a senior graduating this year with a Bachelors of Science in Evolutionary Anthropology. My primary interests are in forensics and bioarchaeology and will be attending Boston University's Masters of Forensic Anthropology program this coming Fall semester. Some of her hobbies include refurbishing antique books, raising exotic plants, and baking.

**Rebecca Chanin (IHT)** is a double major in political science and Middle Eastern studies on a pre-medical track. At Rutgers, she is a varsity athlete in the women's rowing team. She was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa during her junior year and is a member of Alpha Epsilon Delta (the pre-medical honors society), Chi Sigma Alpha (the national athlete honor society), and Pi Sigma Alpha (the national political science honor society). After four wonderful years at Rutgers as a part of the SAS Honors program, Rebecca will start medical school at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson in July 2020!

**Leah Cherukara (IRT)** is a sophomore majoring in Cell Biology and Neuroscience, and pursuing minors in Religion and Public Health. She has been serving on the Honors College Student Advisory Board for two years, and is a member of the Rutgers Global Health Institute Student Council. Some of her hobbies include reading and biking.

**Salma Emara (IHT)** is a pre-medical student majoring in visual art and minoring in biological sciences. While on a path towards medical school, Salma is equally as invested in the arts. Her career at Rutgers has been all about interdisciplinary concepts and trying to combine topics that are typically not combined, such as art and medicine. As a part of the SAS Honors Program, she received the Harriet and Robert Druskin Endowed Scholarship for four years. She is also part of the Rutgers Club, NADI, which provides free health screenings in efforts to bring more awareness on hypertension and general health

in local places. Salma has volunteered at Robert Wood Johnson hospital for over three years, mostly in the NICU department while teaching Arabic and Quranic studies on Saturdays at her local mosque for almost seven years. Salma plans to apply to medical school this June; after graduation, she will be taking a gap year to get some medical experience.

**Saleh Houshmand (IHT)** is a biological sciences major and has participated in several health-oriented undergraduate clubs/organizations. As a result, he wants to assist individuals during times of difficulty by using the knowledge he has learned over the years and what he hopes to enhance in the future. Crises, such as pandemics, make apparent the need for inclusive, well-organized, and collaborative healthcare facilities. Now more than ever, individuals are able to make important contributions to others and to society on a fundamental basis. Saleh hopes to be of use to society, as well, upon graduating from Rutgers.

**Matt Jaffe (IHT)** is a political science major with a minor in critical intelligence studies. He interned at the US Army War College during summer of 2019, where he studied hypothetical natural disasters, and the gap between civilian and federal preparedness in responding to unprecedented catastrophe. Matt's interest in history and modern terrorism culminated in his thesis. Though some of his plans are currently on hold, Matt is a graduating senior that intends to apply to a State Department recent graduates program. In the meantime, he aims to seek federal employment and optimistically envisions a move into the private sector.

**Natalie Lau (IRT)** is a third year undergraduate in the School of Arts and Sciences majoring in evolutionary anthropology. Natalie hopes to attend graduate school for a masters in library science or museum studies, hoping to work at a museum as a conservator or archivist. In her free time, Natalie enjoys watching the tv show Bones, reading, and learning new things

**Jordan A. Levy (IHT)** is a journalism and music double major who is also pursuing a certificate in the recording arts. Over the years, he has served as the hip-hop director at WRSU 88.7 (2018-2019) and the features editor for the Daily Targum in 2019. Outside of these positions in student media, he is concluding an internship with Document Journal, an arts magazine in New York City, where he has interviewed Grammy-winning artists, entrepreneurs, and fashion designers. Jordan has also played drums in various student-run basement shows in and around New Brunswick, which he tremendously values as it has complemented his educational experience outside of the classroom. Jordan plans to continue his work in media, hopefully writing creative nonfiction about culture and politics.

**Bing'en Lin (IRT)** is a senior at Rutgers University majoring in Chinese and minoring in Anthropology. She is passionate about Chinese dialect diversity, Chinese phonetics and sociolinguistics, language revitalization, and systematic decolonization.

**Giorgia Merolli (IRT)** is a second year student interested in studying molecular biology and biochemistry. She was born and raised in Italy and loves learning, music and reading. Her future goal is to become a researcher.

**Ryhan Moghe (IRT)** is a second year student majoring in Math and Computer Science. His goal after graduation is to obtain a degree in artificial intelligence or computer science theory.

**Saikiran Venkata Nakka (IRT)** is a third year student in the School of Engineering majoring in Electrical and Computer Engineering and double minoring in Cognitive Science and Computer Science.

**David Natanov (IRT)** is a third year Cell Biology and Neuroscience major with a minor in History.

**Devin Natisyn (IRT)** is a third year Linguistics and Cultural Anthropology Double major. After graduation he plans to continue studying Anthropology.

**Sophia A. Nitkin (IHT)** is a singer-songwriter and creative activist who is currently majoring in journalism and media studies and double minoring in creative writing and Spanish. She is president of the SASHP's Artists Collective, writes for the SASHP blog, is part of the Kappa Tau Alpha journalism honors society, and is a regular on dean's list. Sophia also writes for Impacto Latino, the oldest Spanish newspaper in New York; she has contributed to other outside publications. As a performing artist, she most recently completed a university music tour across Taiwan and received the presidential volunteer service award for her work with human rights. Sophia is a seasoned performer for United Nations events, award shows, and music festivals. She is currently working on an original contemporary album. After graduation, she hopes to pursue her musical aspirations and work as a freelance journalist. For more information/music, visit: [www.sophiaangelica.com](http://www.sophiaangelica.com).

**Sandra Paredes (IRT)** has always had an interest in forensics. To her it was always like solving a mystery. Being able to research what happened to bones missing from an archaeological site was very interesting to her because of this reason! She hopes that this experience will help her with her plans concerning osteology and forensics in the future!



**Nishita Patel (IHT)** is a biological sciences major and a cultural anthropology minor. She received the Bigel Endowment Award for Undergraduate Research in Anthropology to conduct her IRB-approved research in India. The organizations she has joined and the people she shared valuable experiences with have defined her experience at Rutgers. Nishita served as the vice-president of Brett Hall and as the education and recruitment chair for FeelGood, an organization dedicated to ending world hunger. She was also an Access 2 education tutor for the Youth Empowerment Club and a volunteer general chemistry tutor. She volunteers as an EMT for the Highland Park First Aid Squad, and is currently training to become a counselor for the Crisis Text Line. In her free time, she likes to dance and paint. This upcoming fall, Nishita will be attending the SUNY College of Optometry and she hopes to use her background in medical anthropology to enhance patient care.

**Andrew Rears (IHT)** is excited to be finishing his capstone project and newest game, SnowTunes Island! As a computer science major who also earned a certificate in recording arts, he hopes that people will see the culmination of his coursework as they play through the game. Over his four years at Rutgers, he has played trombone with the RU Marching Scarlet Knights and Pep Band, danced as treasurer of the Swing Dance Club, made games as the tech chair of the Creation of Games Society, and run the Composer's Colloquium as their president. When he is not making games (like Space Crab 2 and Neo Honeycomb Hop), he is writing music, making videos for his YouTube Channel (Commander Jersey), and sitting down with friends to play board games. After graduation, he will continue to make new games and write new music as he works in the wild world of computer science!

**Kristen Thomas (IRT)** is a senior majoring in Economics and minoring in American Studies and Statistics. At Rutgers, she is involved with The New Jersey Folk Festival, New Student Orientation and Family Programs, Greek Life, the National Residence Hall Honorary, and the Douglass Residential College. Post graduation, Kristen hopes to work in market research or consulting.

**Usman Toor (IHT)** will be graduating with a BA in biological sciences. Over the years at Rutgers, Usman has held several positions that he takes pride in. He has worked as a peer career advisor at the Office of Career Exploration and Success, where he has helped his peers with resume writing. Usman has also had the pleasure of working under Dr. Lei Yu as a research assistant, focusing on the social interplay between genetics and substance use. Research has become an important part of his life and has led him to present at several conferences, including his most recent participation at the Harvard National Collegiate Research Conference. For the past year and a half, Usman has also practiced

his passion of teaching through his position as a course assistant for anatomy lab. Outside of these activities, Usman enjoys spending time with his family, experimenting with new cooking recipes and forcing his family to eat them! After graduation, Usman hopes to apply to medical school to become a primary care physician.

**Lalitha Vallabhaneni (IRT)** is a third year Business Analytics Information Technology major at the Rutgers Business School. In addition to my participation in the IRT Fellowship as part of The Cryptozoology Team, I serve as an ambassador for the Douglass Women's College, and I am a student-athlete on the Women's Rowing team here at Rutgers. In my spare time, I am currently taking a Masterclass in Creative Writing taught by Margaret Atwood.

**Samantha Waldman (IRT)** is a Rutgers Presidential Scholar and Honors College Student majoring in American Studies. She recently submitted and defended her Undergraduate Thesis for the department, studying the progression of gay representation in American family sitcoms. She is excited to be a member of the Cryptozoology Research Team, exploring how folk narratives surrounding cryptids reflect larger societal conflicts and anxieties.

**Karl Waldron (IRT)** is a senior majoring in Cognitive Science and minoring in Psychology. He is from Neptune, New Jersey and developed an interest in neuroscience after learning about “face blindness.” It highlighted to him how complex the brain could be. This led him to his major and ultimately to the Vicario lab as an undergraduate research assistance. After he graduates he plans to take a gap year and then apply to medical school.

**David Xue (IRT)** is a second year student studying Mathematics and Computer Science. His work is on developing virtual environments and creating simulations to model the movements of people. In the future he plans on going on to do further work in computer science.



## Thank You

With thanks for the generous support of the IHT and IRT faculty advisors, Paul Blaney for his work with IHT students through the year in Research Workshop, Alan Grossman for his generous support of the Interdisciplinary Research Teams, the SAS Honors Program staff, and the School of Arts and Science's Office of Undergraduate Education.

### WEBSITES

[SAS Interdisciplinary Honors Thesis Program](#)  
[Interdisciplinary Research Teams](#)

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