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Humanities Center Annual Reports

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Summer 2024

## Humanities Center Annual Report 2023-24

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University of San Diego 2023-24

# Humanities Center Annual Report







# Letter From the Director



THE HUMANITIES CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO IS DEDICATED TO THE EXPLORATION OF THE HUMAN CONDITION AND THE LIMITLESS WAYS IN WHICH HUMAN BEINGS UNDERSTAND AND INTERACT WITH OUR WORLD.

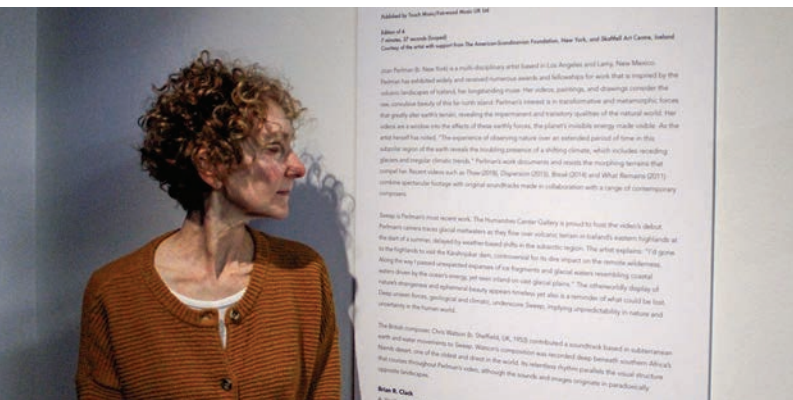
I am delighted to present the annual report on the 2023-24 activities and achievements of the University of San Diego's Humanities Center.

From its beginnings back in 2016, the Humanities Center has been built upon a multielement foundation, and the accomplishments of each of these elements — collaborative research, technology and humanities, interdisciplinary curriculum, public humanities and the Humanities Center Gallery — is outlined in the pages that follow.

It has been an especially vibrant year at the center, and this makes it hard to isolate highlights. The exhibitions in our gallery, however, continue to be of note, particularly as we staged an unprecedented number of shows this year. We hosted some extraordinary and well-known writers, such as Isabel Allende, Barbara Kingsolver and Amy Tan, and our three visiting Knapp chairs represented a wide range of disciplines. The work of this year's cohort of Keck Undergraduate Humanities Research Fellows has been an encouraging highlight also and attests both to the fruitfulness of the W. M. Keck Foundation grant we received in 2016 and to the center's success in attracting undergraduate students to the world of the humanities. Our popular series "Natural Landscapes and Human Meaning" entered its second year, with exhibitions, lectures, classes and multidisciplinary panel discussions exploring aspects of forests and ice.

As always in this context, very special words of thanks should be given to Carol Vassiliadis, whose endowment has embedded the Humanities Center at the very heart of the University of San Diego. It is Carol's generosity that has made possible our efforts to explore and celebrate the human condition in its endlessly varied forms.

Brian R. Clack, PhD  
A. Vassiliadis Director of the Humanities Center and Professor of Philosophy





# Collaborative Research

THE COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH ELEMENT INCLUDES THE KNAPP CHAIR OF LIBERAL ARTS, KECK UNDERGRADUATE HUMANITIES RESEARCH FELLOWS PROGRAM AND COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH GROUP GRANTS, WHICH STRIVE TO INITIATE, CONVENE AND PROMOTE EXCEPTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENT-FACULTY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS CENTERED ON THE MOST PRESSING HUMANITIES ISSUES.

## Knapp Program

The Knapp program enjoyed a dynamic year. The Humanities Center welcomed Alexander Nemerov, PhD (Carl and Marilyn Thoma Provostial professor in the arts and humanities at Stanford University) in September. During his time on campus, Nemerov discussed his most recent book, *The Forest: A Fable of America in the 1830s* (Princeton University Press, 2023) and delivered a public lecture where he reflected upon four decades of studying and teaching art history. In October, Jeffrey C. Drazen, PhD (professor of oceanography at the University of Hawai'i) shared his work on the environmental hazards of deep-sea mining. In February, Angharad N. Valdivia, PhD (professor of communications research at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign) arrived on campus to discuss her work on the girl culture of Latinas and Latinidad and its importance to issues of representation and profit in U.S. popular culture.

## Keck Program

The Keck program welcomed a cohort of six students who each conducted original interdisciplinary humanities research under the guidance of a faculty advisor. Ciara Colgan (art history major, philosophy and visual arts minors) examined the work of Lee Krasner within the context of the feminist art movement. Abigail Hinrichs (English major, Medieval and Renaissance studies minor) examined male entitlement in the Henrician Court. Jean Jeremie (architecture major, art history minor) studied housing solutions for Haitian migrants in San Diego County. Riley Lim (French and communication majors) explored the work of Ying Chen through Edouard Glissant's poetics of relation. Juliana Lo (history and international relations majors) analyzed the popularity of female gymnasts within Cold War politics and American culture in the 1970s and 1980s. Camille Torre (English major, psychology minor) studied abortion through the metaphorical imagination. In May, the fellows presented their projects with the Interdisciplinary Humanities graduating cohort.

# Technology and Humanities

THE TECHNOLOGY AND HUMANITIES ELEMENT CONTINUED ITS WORK EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES ON OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE HUMAN CONDITION. INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS OF THIS ELEMENT SHOW THE RANGE OF WHAT WAS UNDERTAKEN.

## Socially Responsible Technology Series

In the fall of 2023, the Humanities Center hosted three sessions of a speaker series addressing the intersection of ethics and responsibility with various technologies.

Forum on Technology for Social Responsibility at USD was aimed at discussing the issues with artificial intelligence (AI) and ChatGPT in education, and featured Dr. Nik Usher of the Communication Department, who had recently authored an article on Slate.com about discovering student usage of OpenAI in assignments. Dr. Usher is a regular contributor to Slate.com regarding technological developments.

"Digital Death: the Afterlives of Online Data" featured Dr. Jillian Tullis and Dr. Sophia Baik of the Department of Communication and focused on the survival after death of our online data, including voice, image and video data, and related privacy concerns. Their research project was funded in part by the Humanities Center's Technology and Humanities Grant.

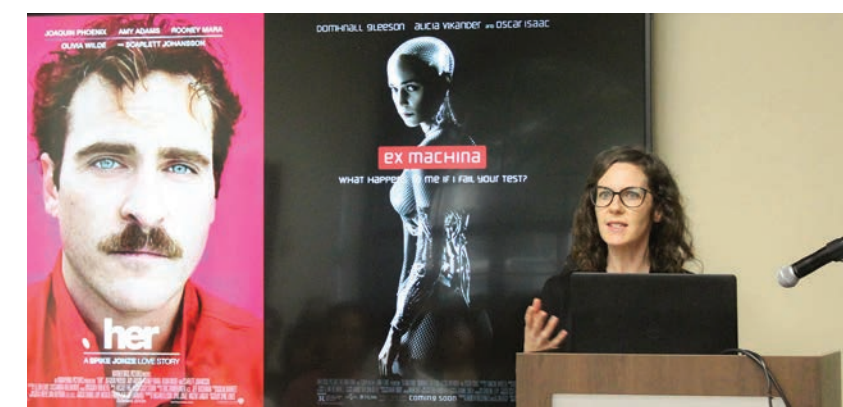
"AI and the Death of Cinema" featured Dr. Hannah Holtzman and focused on the use of AI in generating screenplays and even contributing to the construction of a film, such that actors and environments are replaced by generated images.

## Data and Society Minor

Dr. Hannah Holtzman, director of the Center for Digital Civil Society in the School of Engineering working in collaboration with faculty in the departments of Computer Science, Philosophy and Communication, developed an 18.5-unit interdisciplinary minor in data and society with multiple tracks to meet the needs and interests of students preparing for work and lives in an increasingly data-driven digital world and to build connections between relevant existing courses and in these and related departments. The minor was based on the minor on socially responsible technologies developed for the Mozilla Grant proposal submitted in March 2023. The proposal for the data and society minor was submitted to the University Curriculum Committee in March 2024.

## AI Dean's Advisory Committee

The Technology and Humanities element chair contributed to the meetings and report of the Dean's Advisory Committee on AI in Higher Education which was submitted to Dean Norton in January 2024. The report was accepted by the Academic Assembly on April 30, 2024.







### Technology and Humanities Project Grants

Continuing the two-year tradition of funding faculty research on AI and other technological impacts on the humanities, this year, the center funded three projects:

“Racing Against the Gene” examines the political, institutional and social history of Huntington’s Disease, as well as the study of the social and cultural impact of technology systems, consciousness and humanities approaches to data. Dr. Kenneth Serbin of the History Department received \$500 for his project.

“Exploring the Ethical Landscape of Artificial Intelligence in Public Relations” investigates the ethical implications of using generative AI tools in PR, focusing on issues of accuracy, transparency and the potential for misinformation dissemination in terms of algorithmic biases in the shaping of public perceptions. The project also intends to identify strategies and guidelines for ethical AI integration in PR practices, emphasizing the importance of transparency, accountability and human oversight in AI-driven communication. Dr. Gabriela Herrera Gugiu of the Department of Communication received a \$1,000 grant for her project.

Dr. Victoria Fu of the Department of Art, Art History + Architecture received a \$3,000 grant for a research and creative works project anticipated to be developed through the fall 2025. Titled, *The Crystal Sphere*, the final form is slated to be installed as a moving image art exhibition at DOCUMENT in Chicago, Illinois, in Fall 2025. This immersive creative work, in part generated with 3D modeling and AI-powered postproduction software, critically investigates how the use of these tools influences our spectatorial senses of narrative time and space. Dr. Fu will research AI software as a generative tool for text, image and moving image (e.g., the currently unreleased Sora software) and will be testing postproduction software that uses predictive algorithms and stock environments in its 3D rendering program, including Lumion, Blender, Cinema 4D and Revit to use in the moving image installation. *The Crystal Sphere* is a continuation of Dr. Fu’s previous creative works that render cinematic spaces in response to touchscreen interface technologies and digitally rendered and analog textures, together with virtual and actual spaces through architecture and projected images.

### Media Firestorms Lecture Sponsorship

Dr. Nikki Usher of the Department of Communication requested support to bring Dr. Boydston of UC Davis to campus for her lecture “Media Firestorms and Police Use of Deadly Force.” Dr. Boydston, author of *Making the News: Politics, the Media, and Agenda Setting* (The University Press, 2022), presented research regarding the question of why some news stories become media firestorms and the influence of technology in journalism.

### Critical AI Literacy Workshop

Dr. Hannah Holtzman of the Center for Digital Civil Society and Dr. Susie Babka of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies and the Technology and Humanities element chair, team-taught HUMC 394: Critical AI Literacy Workshop in a one-credit pass/fail course in Spring 2024. Fourteen students registered for the course and met on two Saturdays for lecture and discussion featuring topics such as the environmental impact of AI, data privacy, surveillance and privacy, bias in AI, the question of creative capabilities of AI and AI in higher education. The students submitted two projects for evaluation in the course.

### AI and Theology

While not taught through the Humanities Center, Dr. Babka developed THRS 394: AI and Theology based on her work in her role at the center. The course featured texts by David Chalmers, Martin Heidegger, Theodor Adorno, Safiya Noble, Kate Crawford, John Caputo, Norbert Wiener and others, and used film as a way to examine the artistic and emotional response of human beings to AI. Due to enthusiastic response, the course will be taught again in Spring 2025 and proposed to the curriculum of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

THE INTERDISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM ELEMENT CONTINUED TO THRIVE. INTERDISCIPLINARY MAJORS AND MINORS SHOWED ROBUST INTEREST FROM STUDENTS ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY. THE 1ST@USD SUMMER SEMINAR WAS A POPULAR SELECTION FOR INCOMING FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS, AND WE OFFERED A DIVERSE ARRAY OF POP-UP AND SEMINAR COURSES FOR CONTINUING STUDENTS.

### Interdisciplinary Majors and Minors

The Interdisciplinary Majors and Minors committee, consisting of the directors of the college’s 11 interdisciplinary minors and two majors that are not within departments, built upon past efforts to attract and retain students. Between Spring 2018 and Spring 2024, the number of students in these 13 programs nearly doubled from 131 to 233. The new minors in Africana studies and cognitive science continue to grow, and two new interdisciplinary minors were approved this year and will be launched in Fall 2024. The food studies minor connects faculty from a number of disciplines across the university with interest in ethical, just and sustainable food systems, and the minor in law, justice and society is designed to provide students with a broad understanding of the ways in which law interacts with society and how legal systems are shaped by social, cultural and political forces.

### 1st @USD Summer Seminar

Summer 2023 marked the fourth year of the 1st @USD Summer Seminar. Created to introduce incoming first-year students to the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge and the intellectual inquiry that a liberal arts education provides, this class was taught entirely in a remote, synchronous format by 19 faculty members from across the College of Arts and Sciences, Knauss School of Business and Shiley-Marcos School of Engineering. The class, titled The Changing Face of Humanity: AI and Identities of the Future, discussed the different ways that various disciplines embrace, reject and question artificial intelligence and its impact on humanness and identity into the future in the context of the nature of knowledge and learning. As in the previous two summers, the student response was very strong, with nearly 150 students enrolled in the class.

### Pop-up and Seminar Classes

A range of pop-up and seminar classes were taught through the Humanities Center in 2023-24.

Warriors, Athletes and Scholars: Sports and Thought in the Twenty-First Century, taught by Dr. Joshua Hall (Dept. of English)

Coming to Anytown USA: Movies, Lonely Men and Mass Shootings, 1826-2022, taught by Dr. Michael Gonzalez (Dept. of History)

“Iceolation”: The Greenland of Gretel Ehrlich, taught by Dr. Fred Robinson (Dept. of English)

Toxic Rage & Tragic Fate: The Iliad through the Female Gaze, taught by Dr. Darby Vickers (Dept. of Philosophy) and Dr. Tim McCarty (Dept. of Political Science and International Relations)

Stay or Stray: Into the Woods and Down the Path with Little Red Riding Hood, taught by Dr. Lisa Smith (Dept. of English)

Critical AI Literacy Workshop, taught by Dr. Hannah Holtzman (Humanities Center and Center for Digital Civil Society) and Dr. Susie Babka (Dept. of Theology and Religious Studies)

# Interdisciplinary Curriculum



# Public Humanities

BUILDING ON OUR PUBLIC'S DIVERSE ORIGIN STORIES, OUR CAMPUS'S DEEP CULTURAL RESOURCES AND OUR PARTNERS' ITINERARIES, THE HUMANITIES CENTER LOOKED AT WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT PERSON-TO-PERSON RELATIONSHIPS AND THE RELATIONSHIP OF PEOPLE TO LAND OTHER THAN WITH RESPECT TO BORDERS.

## Frontiers in Frontiers

This was the third and final year of the Humanities Center's Public Humanities' focus on Frontiers in Frontiers. The first sessions focused on indigenous perspectives, guided by USD's tribal liaison, Sahmie Wytewa. In conversation with USD's own Alberto López Pulido, PhD (department chair and professor, Ethnic Studies) and Jocelyne Olguin (associate director, Student Leadership and Learning at the Mulvaney Center for Community, Awareness, and Social Action) was Stanley Rodríguez EdD.: president of Kumeyaay Community College, council member of the Santa Ysabel Band of the Iipay Nation, commissioner on the California Native American Heritage Commission and veteran of the U.S. Navy. Panelists discussed the ways in which their lives and work have been shaped by multinational or extranational patterns specific to USD's region, which includes not only the U.S. and Mexico but 18 tribal reservations and four tribal nations.

The Humanities Center invited the Eva Li Memorial Chair in Architecture in the College of Environmental Design at UC Berkeley, Ronald Rael, to the Humanities Center. He discussed his award-winning breakthroughs in ecological and architectural thinking. He posed the question: What if the border wall is not infrastructure, but architecture? Rael also spoke about his innovative recipes for 3D printing with the oldest building material on the planet: earth. His imaginative thinking and inspiring earthen architecture projects implemented with a combination of robotic and human labor have won design awards from London to New York and been showcased at the Venice Biennale.

Through our programs, the humanities strengthened our relationship with the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego. The museum brought *Forecast Form: Art in the Caribbean Diaspora, 1990s–Today* to San Diego; the center brought exhibiting artists Cosmo Whyte (Jamaica) and Christopher Cozier (Trinidad and Tobago) in as live speakers: Whyte at USD's French Parlor and Cozier at MCASD, both with introductions by Humanities Center's Public Humanities Element Chair Farrah Karapetian. Marilyn and Larry Fields Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Carla Acevedo–Yates, led the Q&A with Cozier at MCASD. Taking the 1990s as its cultural backdrop, Acevedo–Yates' exhibition is the first major group presentation in the United States to envision a new approach to contemporary art in the Caribbean diaspora, foregrounding forms that reveal new modes of thinking about identity and place.

## University Galleries Art Walk

Another programmatic focus was ensuring that our communities know about our existing portfolio of exhibitions on campus. In that spirit, this year was the first USD Galleries Art Walk, showcasing the University Galleries' fall shows. In what hopefully can become a tradition for USD, the center highlighted the exceptional work on the university gallery walls, the dedicated curatorial work that goes into its exhibition and the potential links between our campus and its surroundings. The Humanities Center is proud to have engaged USD's public both on the hill and off of it: globally, regionally and locally.

# Humanities Center Gallery

SINCE ITS INAUGURATION IN 2016, THE SMALL GALLERY LOCATED IN THE HEART OF THE HUMANITIES CENTER HAS PRESENTED MORE THAN 30 TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS, INCLUDING SEVERAL VIRTUAL PROJECTS DURING THE PANDEMIC CLOSURE. THIS PAST YEAR, WE MOUNTED FIVE PROJECTS IN THE GALLERY. ALL WERE CONCEIVED IN SUPPORT OF “NATURAL LANDSCAPES AND HUMAN MEANING.”

## Exhibitions

The fall term began with a solo exhibition of works by the renowned American photographer Gregory Crewdson. Titled *Forest Fables*, the exhibition brought together, for the first time in San Diego, six large-scale color photographs from Crewdson's Cathedral of the Pines series. A small publication, with an original contribution from the fall Knapp Chair in the Liberal Arts Alexander Nemerov, was published to document the exhibition. Additionally, the artist was so pleased with the reception of his work at USD that he made a gift of one of the photographs in the exhibition, *The Mattress* (2014) to the Humanities Center.

*Screenings 11:* Ori Gersht ended the second half of fall semester programming in the galleries by showing *The Forest* (2005). Gersht's lush color video was shot in the woods near Kosov, Ukraine. That seemingly Edenic environment is disrupted periodically by the sound of trees thundering to the forest floor. In this way, the Israeli–British photographer called attention to hidden atrocities that historically took place in the region.

During the spring of 2024, the gallery increased its rhythm of programming to include three projects pertaining to frozen realms. A selection of works by Mark Dion and Farrah Karapetian titled *After Icebergs: Conceptual Photography and Climate Crisis* opened early in the new year. This included a pairing of Dion's ongoing series of black and white stills, *Ursus Maritimus*, with Karapetian's colorful photograms of melting ice cubes. A dialogue with both artists accompanied the project.

Next the center debuted Joan Perlman's newest video of Icelandic glaciers, *Sweep* (2024). As the artist herself explains, “The experience of observing nature over an extended period of time in this subpolar region of the earth reveals the troubling presence of climate change, which includes receding glaciers and warming temperature trends.” Screenings 12: Joan Perlman palpably brought that experience to USD.

Finally, the exceptional opportunity to screen a rarely seen documentary film, *Dutch Harbor: Where the Sea Breaks Its Back* (1998), was seized during the final weeks of the spring term. The A. Vassiliadis Director of the Humanities Center, Brian Clack, engaged the film's directors. Laura Moya and Braden King, as well as the composer of the film's score, Michael Krassner, in a public dialogue about the work.

Additionally, several public programs complemented these exhibitions throughout the academic year. These included memorable readings by Alexander Nemerov from his latest book, *The Forest: A Fable of America in the 1830s*, a lecture by Christopher P. Heuer titled *Treacherous Realms: The Underground Arctic*, as well as the above-mentioned dialogues with artists.





# Other Events and Programs

## Natural Landscapes and Human Meaning

2023–24 was the middle year of the Humanities Center’s three-year exploration of “Natural Landscapes and Human Meaning,” a series which from multiple perspectives investigates the striking and varied environments of our world. Our concern is with the way in which six chosen terrains — the ocean, the desert, the forest, the frozen realms, the mountain, the city — exercise influence on the human imagination, inspiring poetry, literature, art, philosophical reflection and scientific research. Having focused on the ocean and the desert in 2022–23, our attention this year turned to the forest and the frozen realms.

Our work on these themes consisted of a linked set of programming of exhibitions, panel discussions, special lectures, reading groups and classes.

The exhibitions, detailed in the Humanities Gallery section of this report, consisted of shows featuring the forest-based work of Gregory Crewdson and Ori Gersht and the ice-inflected art of Mark Dion, Farrah Karapetian and Joan Perlman. A fifth exhibition, also the focus of a special screening, featured a showing of the documentary *Dutch Harbor: Where the Sea Breaks Its Back*. The Humanities Center was honored to welcome Dion, Karapetian, Perlman and the makers of *Dutch Harbor* (Braden King, Michael Krassner and Laura Moya) to speak to audiences at the Humanities Center.

Our Tuesday panel series has been an increasingly popular and well-attended institution, with audiences representing faculty, students, university staff and community members attending each eight-part series. Specialists from across the range of disciplines in the college, including philosophy, literature, environmental sciences, physics, biology and art history, have considered aspects of each landscape, bringing the arts and sciences into vibrant and mutually illuminating conversation.

Additional programming took the form of faculty reading groups on Thoreau’s *Walden* and Gretel Ehrlich’s *This Cold Heaven* while seminar classes for students were offered on forest- and ice-related themes. Our work on “Natural Landscapes and Human Meaning” was publicized on the billboard outside of the USD campus, which featured the work of Gregory Crewdson and the photography of former Keck student, Bryson Patterson.

The series continues in the 2024–25 academic year, when the Humanities Center’s programming will center on the evocative themes of the mountain and the city.

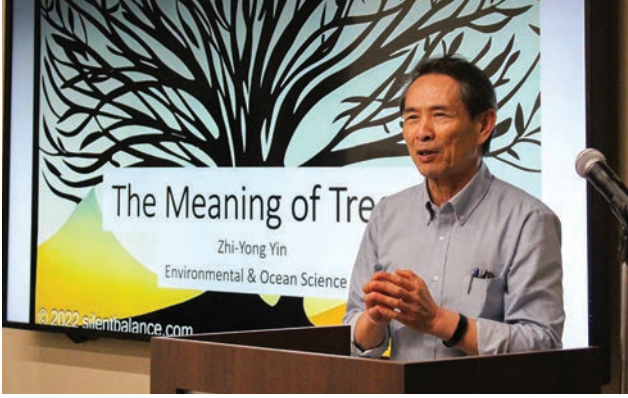
## Author Events and the Illume Series

The collaborative partnership between the Humanities Center, the College of Arts and Science and Warwick’s of La Jolla brought a number of high-profile authors to our campus in 2023–24. These included Isabel Allende, Valerie Bertinelli, Alice Hoffman, Barbara Kingsolver, Kevin Kwan, Colum McCann, Andrew McCarthy, Ann Patchett, Jen Psaki, Anna Quindlen, Amy Tan and Abraham Verghese. This year’s events, which were as always extraordinarily well attended by members of the broader San Diego community, demonstrate the Humanities Center’s commitment to the ideal of Public Humanities, sharing the delights of the arts and humanities to our city and region. This promotion of reading and literacy was also manifest in the San Diego Festival of Books, staged in partnership with the *San Diego Union-Tribune* and local independent booksellers. Once again a wildly successful event, the festival attracted more than 8,000 people to the USD campus.

The Illume Speaker Series consists of one-off and individual events, showcasing the work of USD faculty and of thinkers from outside our campus. This year’s College Lecture Series featured Alberto Pulido, who spoke on “A History of the Penitente Brotherhood of New Mexico: The Sacred as Resistencia”, while this year’s speaker in our Minerva Lecture Series, which brings back to campus retired and emeritus USD professors, was Del Dickson, who delivered a lecture on contemporary threats to the rule of law in the United States. Other Illume speakers this year included Ibrahim al-Marashi from CSU San Marcos, Emily Brady from Texas A&M, Christopher Heuer from the University of Rochester and Christopher McDonough from the University of the South, Sewanee.

## There’s More Student Podcast

*There’s More* hosted eight live events this past year with a total of 25 storytellers and collaborations with five campus partners, including the Environmental Integration Lab, the Homecoming Arts and Culture Festival, the Office of the Tribal Liaison, the Black Student Resource Center and Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Peer Educators. All stories from the past year have been uploaded to our *There’s More* podcast, which is available on Spotify and Apple. We have launched two new podcast playlists: Native@USD and Black & Blooming@USD, which are available at [theresmore.sandiego.edu](https://theresmore.sandiego.edu). Our student producers included Ethan Takaha, Stella Hess, Stella Schneider and Kate Buehrig. Ethan, Stella and Stella are graduating seniors — we wish them every success.







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