



Department for the  
Study of Religion

2022-2023 NEWSLETTER



## *A Note from the Chair*

Greetings from the newly-renamed Department for the Study of Religion at UCR! For many more reasons than our name change – about which more in the pages of this newsletter – the 2022-23 academic year proved to be a year of transitions. For quite a few graduate students and faculty members in our department, the summer of 2022 was the first time they could travel for study or research since the lockdown in March of 2020, and this was the year when UCR rolled back the last of its pandemic restrictions and accommodations. We also saw an enormous set of staff transitions that are still ongoing, and we welcomed four new teachers to our ranks – two new ladder-rank faculty members and two alumni of our program who are now regularly teaching as lecturers in the department. The very successful lecturers' strike in 2021-22 was followed this year by an epic UC-wide strike by graduate student workers and postdoctoral scholars that won them important improvements to their contract even as it failed to go far enough for many.

As we re-emerge from the various places, both literal and figurative, to which the pandemic drove us, many of us are finding that the world has fundamentally changed, as have we. Some of these changes are obvious, such as the political shifts in the US and elsewhere around the world as well as the complicated emotions that attend those shifts, particularly on the part of all those whose bodies and lives are targeted.

Some are more mundane – for instance, the changes in workplace culture, such as the continuing support at UCR for staff maintaining hybrid schedules, or changes in academic culture that have led some conferences to become permanently hybrid in the interest of maintaining broader access. Some are in us; for instance, many people have found their stamina for travel, meetings, and interpersonal interactions reduced by the years of isolation, and many excitedly re-emerged into the broader world only to get very, very sick – often with COVID but also with a myriad of viruses our immune systems had temporarily forgotten how to fight. I have colleagues at other schools who spent the year excitedly pursuing ambitious travel schedules for research, conferences, talks, and family visits, only to develop long-term or chronic illnesses as a result. Many people report increased anxiety and depression in their own experiences or in their families, and I think all of us who teach have experienced a startlingly sharp and ongoing rise in student anxiety, in disappearing students, and in intense verbal attacks by students against each other and against their teachers. No small number of people at UCR, from grad students to senior scholars to staff members, have reassessed their goals and priorities in the afterlife of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their relationship to the unrelenting demands of neoliberal capitalism. We are living, indeed, in times of profound change.

Another major change that has been brewing for several years but that took form this year is the division of the Multidisciplinary Unit, or MDU – the staff department that has supported our department for well over a decade.

## *A Note from the Chair (cont.)*

By the time the question of dividing the department was considered seriously by CHASS, the unit had seven staff members with various specialties supporting close to twenty departments, programs, and research centers – not counting the graduate and undergraduate academic advisors. The workload was completely untenable, and many of us recall regularly receiving emails from our staff colleagues at all hours of the night as they struggled mightily to keep up. Unfortunately, the process of determining the best solution was also untenable, and as a result we lost FAO Diane Monroe, who had been with the department for far longer than any of our current faculty members, to early retirement. When the dust settled the MDU had been split three ways, with one new staff unit working with programs and centers, one working with the two former MDU departments without graduate programs (Gender & Sexuality Studies and Media & Cultural Studies), and one working with our department and Ethnic Studies. All of our staff members who took positions in a single staff unit ended up with GSST and MCS, and our much-loved Financial Analyst Diana Marroquin became the FAO of that unit (congratulations, Diana!). Our department is now working with FAO Cindy Redfield, Financial Analyst Kasondra Lopez, and Event Coordinator Geneva Amador. If you're on campus, stop by and welcome our wonderful new staff colleagues in INTN 4033!

Lastly, after more than a year with no Graduate Student Affairs Officer, and a couple of years before that when our GSAO was too overburdened to be very responsive, we are at last as of this writing entering the final stages of a search for a new GSAO. After several

years of tumult for our staff members, in particular, but also for our faculty and students, we fervently hope that the fall quarter of 2023 will find us back on stable ground and with more sustainable and better supported workloads and jobs for our staff colleagues.

Also joining our department this year were four teachers! Dr. Sahin Acikgoz, a former Holstein Fellow and Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellow in our department, successfully made the leap from postdoc to the tenure track as Assistant Professor of Islam, Gender, and Sexuality. Dr. Elyse Ambrose came to UCR from a visiting position at Meadville Lombard Theological School and a Louisville Institute Postdoctoral Fellowship to take up a joint position as Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Black Study. And UCR graduates Dr. Jessica Rehman (PhD 2022) and Dr. Nathan Womack (PhD 2019) joined us as lecturers, teaching a range of undergraduate courses that aren't covered by our ladder-rank faculty.

Last but far from least, four amazing new PhD students joined our department this year, coming together with our first post-COVID cohort to lend fresh vitality and engagement to our newly in-person courses. You'll find introductions, welcome messages, and updates from most of these new and returning folks, and tributes to Diane and Diana, in the coming pages. I encourage you to read all the way through, because we are very fortunate in this department to be surrounded by absolutely amazing people.

Wishing you a wonderful coming year and as gentle and rewarding a time as possible in the afterlife of COVID-19,

Melissa

# Striking for Labor Justice

Around March to April of 2022, the contracts of UC student researcher, teaching assistant, and postdoctoral workers were open for negotiations around the same time. The United Auto Workers unions (UAW) utilized this opportunity to organize and mobilize the largest strike in U.S. higher education. By late October to early November of 2022, 76% of workers voted on the strike with 97% of them authorizing the strike. By mid November, 48,000 workers across the UC went on strike.



By mid December, as the UC system offered contracts that bore very little resemblance to the unions' original demands, leading union bargaining team members agreed to a voluntary mediation by a third party. During mediation, the UC offered a contract that included TA wage increases by 55-80% and SR wage increases by 25-80%. A majority of bargaining team members agreed to the tentative contract with the minority opposing the tentative contract on various grounds including the proposed wage increases still denying liveable wages. During the third week of December, amidst winter break, the tentative contract became open for workers to vote on. By the end of the week the contract passed.

# Roundtable on the UC Strike at the AAR Western Region Annual Meeting

In March 2023, three members from our department participated at the roundtable “Reflections on the University of California (UC) Strike” at the University of California, Davis. We provided an analysis of what has been considered the biggest strike in history of higher education in the United States. We paid particular attention to issues that had not been discussed in detail and which we considered very relevant, such as the place of some marginalized groups whose demands were not adhered to during the strike. First, we summarized our own involvement and positionality, which went from engaging in activities that took place ‘on the ground’, such as non-violent marches on campus, to online outreach and support. Second, we described how the UCR Religious Studies department and the greater UCR campus community engaged with the strike, giving examples of the prevailing misinformation, and poor union leadership. Third, we discussed the narrative of the “historic moment” as portrayed in the media. We argued that this narrative lacked historical perspective and replicated already established power structures. Fourth, we elaborated on how normative constructs of professional development were perpetuated during the strike and the implications of these perpetuations. Finally, we turned to the ways in which the UC strike relates to the current socio-political climate of academia and its trajectory. Our contributions revolved around a basic frame of human rights that prioritizes a high quality education in public settings.

Kim, Jess, and Alba





# Faculty and Student Updates

# OUR FACULTY



Sahin Acikgoz  
*Assistant Professor*



Michael Scott Alexander  
*Professor & Maimonides Endowed Chairholder*

As the Maimonides Chair in Jewish Studies, Prof. Michael Alexander initiated a new annual talk, the Robert & Cheryl Fey Lecture in Jewry and Innovation; our inaugural lecture by Dr. Brian Harris Kopell of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York was entitled “The Cutting Edge of Psychiatric Neurosurgery: What’s old is what’s new again.” The Mark & Pamela Rubin Lecture in Hate, Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing this year featured Prof. Tudor Parfitt of Florida International University speaking about his recent book *Hybrid Hate: Conflations of Antisemitism & Anti-Black Racism from the Renaissance to the Third Reich*. Working cooperatively with Prof. Muhamad Ali, director of UCR’s Middle East and Islamic Studies program, Prof. Alexander interviewed Prof. Noam Chomsky, emeritus faculty at MIT, on the subject of “Israel & Palestine, Possible Futures.” Alexander is continuing research on his next project, a medical history of depression care over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, culminating in recent advances in psychiatric surgery.



Muhammad Ali  
*Associate Professor*

# OUR FACULTY



**El/yse Ambrose**

*Assistant Professor of the Study of Religion and Black Studies*

Dr. El/yse Ambrose is elated to have completed their first year in a joint appointment as an Assistant Professor in the Department for the Study of Religion and the new Department of Black Study. They are a recipient of the Mellon Humanities Quarterly Fellowship through the CIS at UCR and the Underrepresented Scholars Fellowship through the UCHRI. They were pleased to be inducted into the Martin Luther King Jr. Collegium of Scholars at Morehouse College and to be selected as a participant in the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion Workshop for Early Career Religion Faculty Teaching Undergraduates. Dr. Ambrose continued their work on “What’s Magnificent about It and What’s Miserable about It: Blackqueer Ethics, Community and the Abject-Sublime” for *The Message Is?*, an edited volume to which they were invited to contribute on the religious in the work of renowned video artist, Arthur Jafa. Dr. Ambrose was invited and co-wrote with interdisciplinary artist, storäe michele, “Queer and Trans Performance and Ritual” for the *Handbook on Queer and Trans Studies in Religion*, edited by Melissa M. Wilcox (New York: Palgrave Macmillan). They are putting final edits on their first book, *Blackqueer Sexual Ethics: Embodiment, Possibility, and Living Archive* (London: T&T Clark), an invited first contribution to the *Enquiries in Embodiment, Sexuality, and Social Ethics* series. In addition to teaching, Dr. Ambrose continues their photo-sonic art and was honored to contribute to the creation of an oracular card deck, alongside significant scholars and artists such as Saïdiya Hartman, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and Omi Osun Jones, in celebration of the 100-year anniversary of Jean Toomer’s novel, *Cane*.



**Ana Bajželj**

*Associate Professor & Shrimad Rajchandra Endowed Chair in Jain Studies*



# OUR FACULTY



Paul Chang  
*Assistant Professor*



Matthew King  
*Associate Professor*



Amanda Lucia  
*Professor*

Dr. Lucia spent 2022-2023 in London as a Visiting Fellow at King's College London (KCL) in partnership with Inform, one of the organizational partners in the Religion & Sexual Abuse Project that Dr. Lucia coordinates. Most days last year, Dr. Lucia was at the British Library in London, reading India Office Records and colonial newspapers, researching the trials of Hindu gurus who have become ensnared in the legal system since the late 18th century. Her new book questions the epistemological foundations of criminality, and shows how guru trials tellingly reveal the contestations of Hindu modernity. Dr. Lucia presented her new work at the University of Vienna and at the annual Spalding Symposium at KCL. She also presented research related to her book *White Utopias* (2020) at the University of Ghent (Belgium), SOAS in London, and at a yoga teacher training at Satya Yoga in Paris. Building on her work in yoga studies, she collaborated with the Yoga in Latin America (YoLA) project as a respondent to their September 2022 conference at El Colegio de México in Mexico City. This past year placed heavy emphasis on research and publications, but she's also excited to be back in the classroom at UCR!

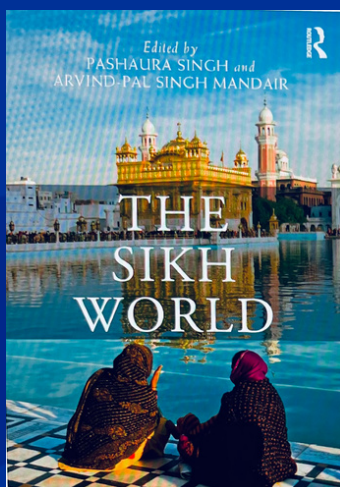
# FROM OUR FACULTY



## Pashaura Singh

*Professor & Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair*

Dr. Pashaura Singh remained creatively busy along with his team of graduate students throughout the academic year in organizing the 8th Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh Studies Conference on the theme of “Sikhs in North America: Remembering Key Historical Events, Challenges and Responses” at UCR on May 5-6, 2023, drawing 35 academics and Sikh activists from the UK, Canada and the US. Second, Dr. Singh attended the American Academy of Religion Meeting at Denver on November 19-21, 2022. Third, Dr. Singh had a Zoom Meeting on July 31, 2023, in which Professor Howard Gontovnick of the Department of Religious Studies at the State University of New York (SUNY), Plattsburg, asked questions about the origins of the Sikh tradition and different issues related to the Sikhs in the diaspora. Fourth, on August 1, 2023, Allana Akhtar, a reporter of ‘The Juggernaut’ – a publication that covers South Asians – interviewed Dr. Singh on phone on the significance of the yellow color in the Sikh tradition. Finally, Dr. Singh attended the week-long activities of the Parliament of the World's Religions (13 August 2023 to 19 August 2023) at Chicago and participated in the Interfaith panel discussion on Human Rights from the Sikh perspective on Friday, August 18, 2023.



Dr. Singh's co-edited volume *The Sikh World* was published under the prestigious Routledge Worlds series on June 10, 2023. The second major article on “Growing pains in the field of Sikh Studies in the Western Academy” was published online on 18 July 2023 in academic journal *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*. The third article on “Sacred Music of the Darbar Sahib” is under the review process for Open Access Academic Journal *Religions*. Finally, Dr. Singh's monograph on *The Life and Legacy of Guru Hargobind: Sovereignty, Militancy and Empowerment of the Sikh Panth* was accepted for publication on July 13, 2023, in Routledge Sikh Literature, Culture and Society series.

# FROM OUR FACULTY



**Melissa Wilcox**

*Professor and Holstein Chair; Department Chair*

Melissa M. Wilcox was thrilled to finally begin emerging from COVID isolation in 2022-23, getting fully back out in the world as of the end of spring quarter. This meant finally re-starting but also significantly re-envisioning an emergent book project on religion and spirituality in queer and trans leather, BDSM, and kink spaces, practices, and communities – a project that is increasingly hindered by the shifting political ground facing LGBTIQ+ people in the US today. In addition to being hard at work on a forthcoming article and on the first-ever research handbook in trans and queer studies in religion, Professor Wilcox is delighted to share that the new journal QTR: A Journal of Trans and Queer Studies in Religion has been signed by Duke University Press, and the first issue is expected out in the first part of 2024. The journal, whose editorial team includes Professor Wilcox, Joseph A. Marchal, Max Strassfeld, Thelathia Nikki Young, Evren Savcı, and Ashon T. Crawley, will be published on a fee-free, open-access model, removing paywalls for readers and authors alike. This model was made possible by very generous support from The Henry Luce Foundation. Finally, Professor Wilcox is continuing to support and grow the two signature Holstein Chair projects: the Holstein Dissertation Fellowship and the UCR Conference on Queer and Trans Studies in Religion.



*8th Annual Sikh Studies Conference*

# STUDENT UPDATES

## Fadime Apaydin, *PhD Student*



During her first year at UCR, Fadime dedicated her time to completing coursework and engaging in a number of scholarly activities. Notably, she participated in two presentations, one of which explored the Turkish culinary culture within the framework of religion, gender, and society at the "20th Annual Religion Graduate Student Symposium"; the other focused on Muslim classifications and was delivered at the "Thirteenth International Conference on Religion & Spirituality in Society." Additionally, Fadime collaborated as a co-author on a book chapter that examines faith-based organizations' participation in disaster response and recovery efforts in the United States. Furthermore, she received an invitation to deliver a talk about Kabir Das, a prominent Bhakti sant, as part of the Folklore Society's series of online talks scheduled for 2024. Currently, she is working on a research project aimed at investigating the integration of female Muslim students into the university environment within the University of California System. Fadime is looking forward to beginning her second year and stepping into the position of TA.

## Kimberly Diaz, *PhD Candidate*

This summer, Kim was a visiting researcher at the National Photo Library of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (el Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia) in Pachuca, Mexico. As the National Photo Library houses over one million photos/assets relevant to Mexico's history, Kim rigorously conducted archival research about the Mexican Young Men's Christian Association during the Mexican Revolution. This research will be an integral part of her dissertation.



## Kori Pacyniak, *PhD Candidate*



During 2022-2023, Kori focused on teaching and dissertation research. They served as Associate Instructor for Violence Against Women at UCR and Intro to LGBTQ Studies at San Diego State University. In 2022, they presented "Transfigured & Transformed: Church Beyond the Binary" at Dignity USA's 50th anniversary conference in San Diego and served as one of the liturgical presiders. They were part of a panel honoring Mark D. Jordan at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion where they presented "Queer Calling: Imagination & Becoming in the work and teaching of Mark D. Jordan." They also co-organized the Queer and Trans Studies in Religion conference at UCR and organized a roundtable on "New Horizons in Queer Catholic Theology of Color." In spring 2023, they received the Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award from the department of Gender and Sexuality Studies for the 2022-2023 year and were awarded the Dissertation Year Fellowship from the department for the Study of Religion.

# STUDENT UPDATES

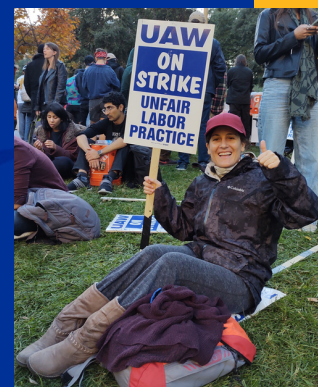


*J Selke, PhD Candidate*

Over the course of this past year, J has done research for the dissertation, with their dissertation prospectus approved in November 2022. J presented their Master's Thesis research at the November 2022 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in the Popular Culture and Religion Unit. J also presented two invited lectures, one a campus-wide lecture at Defiance College in Ohio on Gender, Sexuality, and Religion, entitled "Sexing the Devil" and the other a classroom lecture at DePauw University in Indiana on Critical Theories of Religion. J is currently working on their dissertation proposal on the areas of queer theory, transgender theory, popular culture, horror, and representations of the devil. Their research investigates contemporary and historical popular manifestations of the Satanic figure in Satanism, Occultism, and Witchcraft through a queer, transgender, and feminist lens. Outside of classroom spaces, J completed the University Teaching Certificate Program through GradSuccess, finished their third year as a peer mentor in the Graduate Student Peer Mentor Program, and co-organized the Queer and Trans Studies in Religion Hybrid Conference.

*Alba Rodriguez Juan, PhD Student*

I have completed coursework and I am moving into my 3rd year in September. I presented the paper "Haribhadra's Philosophy in the Yogabindu." at the South Asian Studies Association (SASA) Conference "Resilience: Environment, Politics, Economics" hosted online by Loyola Marymount University. I participated at the roundtable "Reflections on the University of California (UC) Strike." at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) Western Region Conference: Civil Rights, Religion & Responsibility, at the University of California, Davis. I provided an analysis of the biggest strike in the history of higher education in the United States, within a basic frame of human rights that prioritizes a high-quality education in public settings. I was a panelist at two roundtables at UCR - "Pathways in Psychology" and "Fasting Across Faiths." I was awarded with the Douglas M. Parrot Graduate Service Award from the Religious Studies Department for writing a guide for international students that aims to facilitate the move of incoming international students to the States and their integration at UCR and was awarded with a student grant to participate at the 2023 Cortona Week Student Grant in Italy. I shared some of my current research in an invited talk. Lastly, I enjoyed and learned much from teaching Introduction to Religious Myths and Rituals and Introduction to Asian Religions.



# STUDENT UPDATES

## Adam Tyson, PhD Candidate



Over the past year, Adam had the privilege of co-organizing the 8th Jasbir Singh Saini Chair conference in Sikh studies last May, which marked his 3rd time on the organizing committee for this conference at UCR. As co-chair, Adam also moderated the Asian Religions panel at the AAR Western Region conference at UC Davis. Finally, Adam was afforded the opportunity to present his dissertation research on Islamic mysticism in one of last Spring's colloquium sessions and is planning to finish and defend his doctoral dissertation in Fall 2023.

## Chris Valencia, PhD Student

This past year, I finished course work and I am moving on to my qualification exams. I served as a TA for the RLST department, and worked at the Graduate Writing Center. I am also revising my MA Thesis and will submit it this upcoming school year.

This past school year, I received the "Lifeways of Hope Spring 2023 Archiving Fellowship" from the Center of Religion and Cities (CRC). This summer, I received the inaugural "Walking Fellowship" from the Center of Religion and Cities. During this fellowship, I am going to walk and explore Los Angeles with Dr. Harold Morales, and we will discuss general topics related to waking, and walking methodologies.



# GRADUATES & AWARDS

## GRADUATES

### BA:

- Kevin Alatorre
- Samuel Boudreau
- Melissa Morales

### MA:

- Danya Mohammad
- Christopher Valencia
- Alexandr Zamuşinski

### PhD

- Hassanah El-Yacoubi
- Stephen Quach

## AWARDS:

- Donner Essay Award – Brian Hornor for the paper “The Mahsa Amini Revolution”
  - Shrimad Rajchandra Essay Award – Kyle Murphy for the essay “Necessary Qualities”
  - Achievement Award (For an undergraduate student who has demonstrated meritorious achievement ) – Emani Cohen
  - Encouragement Award (For an undergraduate student whose achievements demonstrate promise and potential) – Winny Magana
  - Edwin S. Gaustad Award (For an undergraduate student who has demonstrated interest in attending graduate school) – Brian Hornor
  - Holstein Chair Undergraduate Award (For an undergraduate student who has demonstrated commitment to the connections between religion and social justice) – Briana Pineda
  - June O’Connor Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award – Beth Miller
  - Douglas M. Parrott Graduate Service Award – Remy Ilona, Alba Rodriguez, Xin Ren, Brigid Boll
  - Dr. J.S. Saini Graduate Award for Leadership and Collaboration – Tejpal Baniwal
-



J Selke presenting at Defiance College



Alba Rodriguez Juan's TA Group



Sikh Studies Conference



Kori Pacyniak and Melissa Wilcox presenting at AAR



# STAFF TRANSITIONS

## **Diane Monroe & Diana Marroquin**

In June of 2022 long time FAO/Financial Administrative Officer for the Multidisciplinary Unit, Diane Monroe retired after 30+ years of dedicated service to UCR. Diane had been with the Religious Studies Department since 1990. With Diane's departure came the restructure and reorganization of the Multidisciplinary Financial and Administrative Unit. The unit separated into three free standing administrative units, the MCS/GSST Administrative Unit, the ETST/RLST Administrative Unit, and the Centers and Interdisciplinary Programs Administrative Unit which consists of a Divisional FAO, Academic Personnel/Payroll Assistant, Administrative Assistant, Graduate Student Affairs Officer, and a Financial Analyst. Each of the other 2 Administrative units consist of an FAO, Financial Analyst, and Administrative Assistant/Event Coordinator. The GSAO and Academic Personnel/Payroll Assistant still work with the 2 additional Administrative units.

Diana Marroquin who joined the RLST department in 2001 was promoted to FAO and now oversees the daily operations and financial activity for the departments of Gender and Sexuality Studies and Media and Cultural Studies. This restructure is ongoing, recruitments were carried out, new staff were hired, and each unit moved to their new spaces. The goal of the restructure was to make workloads more manageable and adequately staff departments with the support needed. Diana is still in communication with Diane Monroe, she is doing very well and enjoying retirement.

# STAFF INTRODUCTIONS

**Geneva Marie Amador**, *Event Coordinator and Administrative Assistant III for the Study of Religion and Ethnic Studies.*

I have worked for UC, Riverside for the four years in the Gender and Sexuality and Ethnic Studies Departments. I started working for the Study of Religion in July 2023. I will be celebrating five years with UCR on January 19th. Prior to coming to UCR, I worked for the County of Riverside, Behavioral Health as an Administrative Assistant and Events Coordinator for the Friday Night Live program where I fell in love with event planning and coordinating for thirteen years. I have a BA degree in Business Administration -Management from Cal State University of San Bernardino.

I have four daughters (Myka, Tori, Naomi and Amora), Grandchildren (Anerehs, Curtis, Riff) and my fourth grandchild is on the way this summer. I have three dogs, (Max, Kash and Luca). I create and make t-shirts, wine glasses, cups you name it I can produce. It is a great way to have fun and relax. I have taught my daughters to be creative and to hustle with a purpose.

**Kasondra Lopez**, *Budget Analyst II for the Study of Religion and Ethnic Studies*

I started my career as a budget analyst with UC Riverside in July 2023. My role is to analyze spending, problem-solve financial needs, financial reports, and funding requests as well as provide guidance to staff and faculty. I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps out of high school and spent four years on active duty. Following my time with the Marines I held various jobs, most recently working for the Riverside County Sheriff Department where I spent close to 13 years of my career. My last position with the Sheriff's Department was as the accounting supervisor for the Coroner's Bureau and Public Administrator's office. My experience with the Sheriff's Department includes developing budgets for the county jails and inmate special programs, monitoring spending, and projecting future financial needs. I received my Bachelor's degree in Sociology from California State University San Bernardino, a far cry from the accounting field I find myself in now. I credit my last employer for much of my professional development and hope to bring the experience, skill, and knowledge I gained there to my new position as Budget Analyst with UCR while growing my own expertise in the field. I was born in New York and moved to California as a young child but spent most summers growing up with family back east, so I still feel a connection with New York whenever I visit which isn't often enough.

I've been married for 15 years and have two daughters, Suraya (22) and Alexa (11). We love to travel, take day trips (hello San Diego and Palm Springs), and create memories. Our current favorite place to visit and explore is Puerto Rico where (half) my family is from and is probably why I love the beach so much. It's in my blood. The other half of my family is from Ecuador, a country I have yet to visit. We are in the process of building a pool and plan to bring the resort life we love to our home. I've had so many interests and hobbies in life but the three that have stuck are working out, reading, and gaming. I (mostly) enjoy working out and have been doing so consistently for over 10 years. I've gone from competing in Crossfit competitions, to running half marathons, to now focusing on weightlifting and staying healthy. As for reading, I love curling up with a book by the water or in the evening before bed. And gaming, that's been a thing for me since the days of Atari. I love a good role-playing game.

# STAFF INTRODUCTIONS

## **Cynthia (Cindy) Redfield**, *Financial and Administrative Officer (FAO) for the Study of Religion and Ethnic Studies*

I have worked for UC, Riverside for the last fifteen years in different departments. I was promoted to FAO for the Study of Religion and Ethnic Studies, last April. Prior to coming to UCR, I worked for University of Maryland, College Park in a similar position. Prior to that I was a business owner, and a Marketing project manager for Denny's Restaurants International.

I have a BS degree in Business and Contract Law and a minor in Marketing Law, from Cal Poly Pomona where I fell in love with horses. I have owned several horses and a wide variety of animals including a 10-year-old Sulcata Tortoise named Paco. I wrote a children's book about my life on my farm in Norco a few years ago.

I have a daughter (Melissa), daughter-in-law (Vanessa), son (Lucas), son-in-law (Daniel) and my first grandchild is on the way this summer. I have three rescue pups, two chihuahua's (but one thinks she's a rottweiler) and a lab mix puppy.

I make soap to give to family and friends for fun and relaxation. I hope one day to have a pottery studio set up at my house to really relax and create! I spend time listening/watching to true crime podcasts/shows. I am getting back to reading; sitting still is an issue for me.

## **Mariella Valdivia**, *Graduate Student Services Advisor for Study of Religion, Ethnic Studies, and multidisciplinary programs*

I have worked for UCR for the last fourteen years. I previously worked in CNAS for the last thirteen years and was recently promoted to my current role in Sept 2023.

I received my bachelor's degree in liberal studies with a minor in Human Development from California Baptist University. Originally, I intended to pursue a career as a Special Education teacher. Though, that changed when I started working at UCR. I immediately fell in love with higher education and helping students who are first generation college students. In 2016 I went on to receive my Masters in Higher Education & Leadership from California Baptist University.

I have been married for 8 years and have three little ones Mila (5) and Emma (3) and a Labradoodle Gracie (6) who keep me on my feet. We love to travel as a family. I've been known to plan our next family trip while still on our current trip. Our next trip this summer will be to Europe to celebrate my dad's 70th birthday.



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