A look back at Spring 2021 in the International and Global Studies Program

Message from the Assistant Director

Dear IGS Students,

I feel as though Spring 2021 has been a roller coaster for all of us. We
ended last semester and began this one in the depths of the pandemic with the uncertainty of political transition hanging over us. As the weather got warmer, things seemed to get better as vaccines became more widely available with each passing week. However, as March rolled around, things changed. I witnessed and felt an intense exhaustion come over myself and my students. After living in this reality for one entire year, we were all tired of staring at a screen, sick of feeling isolated, and generally fed up with the pandemic. From there I feel like we have limped to the finish line and collapsed just on the other side.

At this point, life is beginning to take on a semblance of normalcy for some of us. That being said, the covid-19 pandemic remains a real fact of life for many in our communities. Some of us cannot get vaccinated, have not yet been able to, or are living with the long-term effects of covid-19 that are still poorly understood. Frontline workers, people of color, and low-income folks (including many UNCG students) were hit disproportionately hard over the past year.

Having said all of that, hopefully the worst is behind us.

Therefore I am cautiously optimistic when looking towards the Fall 2021 semester. I hope that you all take a well-deserved break this summer and I am looking forward to perhaps seeing some of you safely in person this Fall.

I would like to end by commending all students and the UNCG community in general for how we handled the Covid-19 pandemic. As Chancellor Gilliam mentioned in his commencement speech, UNCG had the lowest per-capita positivity rate in the UNC System. We acted as a community and kept each other safe. In looking out for your fellow community members you helped UNCG stay up and running, albeit at reduced capacity, throughout the past year (which doubtlessly saved many jobs). Having been a part of the UNCG community since the Fall of 2010 when I began my freshman year, I honestly did not expect anything less.
Dr. Neelofar Qadir presented on her research and teaching as a part of the Ashby Dialogues’ Indian Ocean Currents event on April 7th.

Highlights from this semester

Indian Ocean Currents

- **February 17:** Spiritualities and Religious
  4:00 - 5:15p
  EST
  Noorima Jayachandran (Duke),
  Kimberly Wirtzmann (Wake Forest), and
  Omar H. Ali (UNCG)
  [Register](https://go.uncc.edu/oceanscurrents)

- **March 17:** Political Economy with Enphu Ho (Duke),
  Lisa Bembidahsen (Wake Forest), and
  Hemat Chitra (UNCC)
  [Register](https://go.uncc.edu/oceanscurrents)

- **April 7:** Aesthetics and Cultural Studies with
  May Joseph (Pratt Institute),
  Mira Ral Watts (Appalachian State), and
  Neelofar Qadir (UNCG)
  [Register](https://go.uncc.edu/oceanscurrents)

UNCG College of Arts & Sciences

These conversations are funded by the Ashby Dialogues at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Events will take place via Zoom. Recordings will be available.

Global Spotlight

Global Issues, Local Involvement: Mijente, a Group Advocating for Latinx and Chicanx in NC

With Selene Santiago-Lopez, UNCG Student & member of Mijente

Selene Santiago-Lopez will be speaking about her work with Mijente, a group that advocates for Latinx and Chicanx rights here in North Carolina and around the country. The Global Spotlight is an informal platform for UNCG undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty to share their international work with a larger audience.

Join us on zoom at [go.uncc.edu/gettogether](http://go.uncc.edu/gettogether)

For this semester’s Global Spotlight Lecture UNCG freshman and IGS major Selene Santiago-Lopez spoke to us about her activism with Mijente, a group dedicated to advocating for Latinx and Chicanx rights in NC and
across the country. Over thirty students and faculty attended Selene’s fantastic talk.

Maria Esch chosen as tassel-turner for 2021 CAS graduation

With the highest GPA in the College of Arts and Sciences, IGS and Women’s and Gender Studies major Maria Esch will lead the class of 2021 as they collectively turn their tassels at College of Arts and Sciences graduation on Friday, May 7th.

Congratulations to our graduating seniors!
We have immensely enjoyed getting to know all twenty-seven of you and watching you grow over the past four years. We could not be prouder of all of you, especially for finishing your time at UNCG under such difficult circumstances. We cannot wait to see what you do next! Congratulations!

Olatutu Ajani
Ana Baltazar
Faith Baucom
Nicholas Beliveau

Alexi Green
Matthew Gregory
Ana Newberry
Pricilla Ntibonera
Idelissse Bruno
Nathan Cassano
Kianna Cuascut
Eleni Econopouly
Olivia Ellis
Maria Esch
Gannon Fitzgerald
Jessica Leigh Golden
Fiona Grant

Selena Polk
Max Powell
Ethan Reynolds
Karen Rios Salmeron
Jasmyn Slater
Amaya Suarez-Finlay
Kaisia Torrence
Elizabeth Turner
Denise Vasquez-Martinez

Because we cannot celebrate together, we recorded a message for you. Click here to see it!

**Special Recognition**

Many of our students have done awesome things over the course of the semester. We wanted to recognize them here.

Jordyn Cooper and Maria Esch were elected to Phi Beta Kappa.

Alexis Baldwin received the Gilman Scholarship.

Maria Esch, Sarah Myers, Fiona Grant and were chosen by the Honors Council as winners of the Provost Student Excellence Award.

Sam Sherwood, Maria Zambrana, Chloe Neunsinger, and Matthew Gregory all placed at the 5th annual Greensboro Japanese Speech Contest.
Eleni Econopauly received a Foreign Languages and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowship to study Arabic this summer at Indiana University.

-Several graduating seniors were accepted to graduate programs-

- Eleni Econopauly and Nick Beliveau will be starting MA programs at UNC Chapel Hill this fall. Nick was accepted into the Transatlantic Master’s Program in European Governance while Eleni was accepted by UNC Chapel Hill’s Global Studies MA Program.
- Maria Esch will be starting her MA in justice studies at Arizona State this fall.
- Olivia Ellis has enrolled in UNCG’s post baccalaureate Teaching English as a Second Language certificate program.

-Featured Student-

Eleni Econopouly

Each semester we like to showcase an outstanding student from the IGS program. It is often difficult to choose one person and this year proved no exception. As a relatively recent transfer student to UNCG, Eleni Econopouly was not eligible for many of the official university level nominations we thought she deserved. Therefore we would like to recognize her here.

Tell us a little about yourself
I was born in Asheville, N.C, but have lived in Carrboro, N.C for almost 15 years. I spent my first two years of college at UNC Asheville, before transferring to UNCG in Fall 2020, where I’m majoring in International Global Studies with a concentration in Human Rights. I currently live in Carrboro.

Where did you study abroad? What were the most important take-aways from that experience?
Unfortunately, since my only two semesters at UNCG have been during this pandemic, I did not have the opportunity to study abroad. I have been able to travel pretty extensively throughout my life though. My dad’s family is from Greece, and we return there every other summer. I’ve also been to Iceland, Turkey, Italy, and Mexico. While I was never “studying,” while abroad, travelling definitely taught me so much about the world and myself.

What do you plan to do after graduation?
I received a FLAS fellowship to study Arabic this summer through a program at Indiana University. So I’ll be doing that during June and July. I’m hoping to go backpacking before and after the program, but for the most part I’ll just be hanging out in Carrboro, trying to learn Arabic. In August I will be starting my Master’s degree at UNC’s Global Studies
program. I am planning to focus on human migration movements, nationalism, and ethnic conflict.

What was your favorite class at UNCG and why?
My favorite class has been PSC 352, Nationalism and Ethnic Politics with Dr. Crowther. Beside being totally fascinating, and being taught by one of the most supportive professors at UNCG, I think this is an important class for understanding current conflicts in the world—in this country and especially abroad. I think the biggest thing I’ve taken away from this class so far is the incredible diversity of people around the world, but how fundamentally similar we are at the same time.

What was the most challenging part or aspect of your time at UNCG? Why?
When I transferred to UNCG I realized that I would be able to graduate a year early if I took a heavy load of classes. I took seven classes in the fall semester and seven in the spring. This was extremely difficult, and I do not recommend it to anyone, but it has worked out pretty well in my case. Being able to focus all of my attention on school has actually been helpful for me during this pandemic. My courses have been a welcome distraction from the different types of loss that we’ve all experienced this past year, but the workload has still been challenging. My courses have also been entirely online, so the social aspect of learning has really changed in a way that is pretty disheartening at times. Learning to navigate the social atmosphere of Zoom this past year should count as its own course, in my opinion.

What was the most rewarding part or aspect of your time at UNCG? Why?
While this was also the most challenging part of my time at UNCG, the heavy course load I took made it easier for me to figure out what I want to keep studying, and what maybe didn’t capture my attention quite as much. Now I’m coming out of UNCG with a clear idea of what I want to continue studying, even though I don’t know for certain what I want to do after I finish up my MA. I have definitely crossed a bunch of options off my list, and added some that I hadn’t considered. My courses have been very diverse—one of the benefits of being an IGS major. Before UNCG, I had never studied Latin American or European politics, peace and conflict studies, economic geography, French literature or Spanish film. Now I’ve studied all of these and more!

If you could give incoming IGS students one piece of advice, what would it be?
Let your professors help you—that’s what they’re there for (and that’s what we pay them for). When they give you opportunities to turn in a paper early to get feedback before the final deadline, do it, even if you think that your paper is no good, and are embarrassed to hear their feedback. If they hold optional prep sessions before midterms, go to them, even if you think your questions are dumb, or even if you can’t think of any questions at all. Someone else will ask a question that ends up helping you. Plus, there aren’t many opportunities to engage with your professors outside of class time, especially in the Zoom world, so take advantage of the ones that are offered. At best, you’ll be able to get their help and advice, and at the very worst, you will still have demonstrated to them that you care enough about the subject to show up even when it isn’t required. And I’m sure every professor appreciates that.
For more information about the IGS Program, contact Yvonne Matlosz at ymatlos@uncg.edu, visit our website, or check out the IGS events calendar.