

THE SUSTAINABILITY AND STORYTELLING LAB
@UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

ANNUAL REPORT MAY 2026



Prepared by
Phaedra C. Pezzullo, PhD
Director of SAS Lab & Professor

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SAS Lab survival whistles (above).
Photography in this report by
Prof. Phaedra C. Pezzullo, unless noted otherwise.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



Last summer, when traveling to Tasmania for work (p. 15), my teenager spotted a platypus in the wild. To me, the platypus was the epitome of 2025: part duck, part beaver, part venomous mammal, the platypus makes no sense, can be dangerous, and yet is very much real. These are trying times for those of us who care about sustainability and the right to share stories that are diverse and justice-oriented. But, this past academic year also held moments of joy, which are important to highlight in an age when some appear determined to silence diversity and science-based evidence, as well as to paint environmentalists and reduced anyone who is not what Audre Lorde (1984) called “the mythical norm” to angry trouble-makers without value. Our lows have been low this year (from national politics to my arm getting broken), but our capacity to care for each other and to imagine more just and sustainable futures remains undeterred. Coming home from a book signing (p. 13), Boulder was treated to a display of the northern lights (pictured below)--it’s cultivating a sense of presence to renew ourselves during such magical moments that we try not take for granted in the SAS Lab.

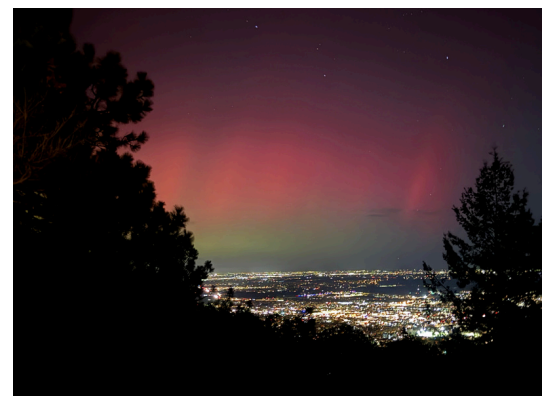
The Sustainability And Storytelling Lab (SAS Lab) was launched in January 2025; so, this was our first full academic year, which included 7 undergraduate students, 9 graduate students, & 2 alumni. To highlight just a few milestones outlined in this report:

- we presented research in Tasmania, Hong Kong, and our own backyard in Fort Collins, Colorado, as well as published a coauthored textbook and planted seeds for a new coauthored book
- we explored postcards and graphic recording as media for storytelling
- our StoryMaps reached over 11,500 views
- we helped persuade campus leadership to ban single-use plastic bottles from our vending machines

I also was hired as the inaugural Faculty Associate Director of Faculty Engagement for the new SPIKE Center for Sustainability Education on campus. This development has catalyzed conversations across campus regarding new degrees and extracurricular opportunities. And, in recognition of my accomplishments, I was named the Department of Communication’s inaugural Kleiman Faculty Scholar (2025-2028), which has bolstered funds for research and goaded me to imagine: *what’s next?*

I remain grateful for the opportunity to direct the SAS Lab and for those who joined or collaborated with us. All labs are spaces of experimentation, and we continue to stretch ourselves in new ways, to be open to new possibilities, and to learn from our actions. It is not easy, but in community we are reminded that we are not alone in these surreal times when giving up is not an option.

Phaedra C. Pezzullo, PhD
Professor and SAS Lab Director



KLEIMAN FACULTY SCHOLAR RESEARCH NETWORK

In August 2025, the Director was recognized by the Dean of the College of Communication, Media, Design & Information (CMDI) and the Communication Department Chair as the inaugural **Kleiman Faculty Scholar of Communication** for a three year period of time. Universities call these types of gifts “transformational” because they don’t just maintain the status quo, but help bring about new possibilities.

Research sometimes is a lonely endeavor, but this year, the fund allowed us to foster a **research network**, including two guest speakers in the fall and 4 virtual guests in the spring.

The first SAS Lab speaker this year was Pezzullo’s former dissertation director and lifetime mentor, **Dr. Robert Cox**. Cox was a three time elected president of the Sierra Club, which Pezzullo’s undergraduate class in Environmental Communication loved to hear about. He also shared captivating stories with the SAS Lab at dinner. And **celebrated the 7th edition of their coauthored textbook** with a hike. Truly a gift.

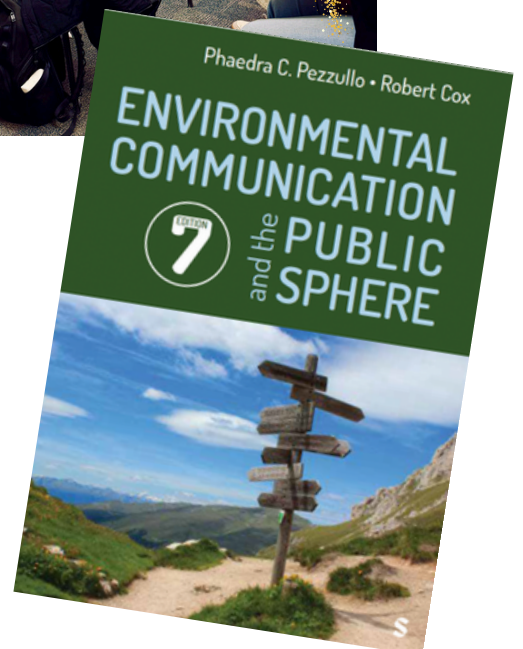


Photography above courtesy of a stranger at Flower Child.

**SPEAKER 1:
DR. ROBERT COX
(KLEIMAN FACULTY GIFT)**



Warren & SAS lab friend Jo Marras Tate (COMM '23) interviewed Robbie during his visit on the podcast they co-host for the International Environmental Communication Association, Confluences. To listen, go to:
<https://creators.spotify.com/pod/profile/confluences/episodes/Confluences-with-Professor-Robbie-Cox-e3c54mr>



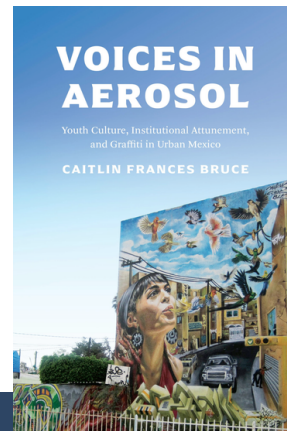
SPEAKER 2: DR. KUNDAI CHIRINDO (KLEIMAN FACULTY GIFT)



Photography courtesy of Dr. Ganesh (left);
Dr. Ochieng (above), Dr. Pezzullo (right).

Dr. Kundai Chirindo and Dr. Pezzullo accepted **the Stephen P. Depoe Top Chapter Award from the Environmental Communication Division**, National Communication Association in November for their coauthored chapter: Kundai Chirindo and Phaedra C. Pezzullo, "Soy Porque Somos: Touring and Planting Trees as Convivial Rhetoric on a Precarious Planet." ***The Routledge Handbook on Rhetoric and Power***. Nathan Crick, Ed. Routledge. 2024, 387-398. Supported by the Kleiman fund, Dr. Chirindo visited the CU Boulder campus to guest teach a graduate course in rhetoric (led by colleague Dr. Omedi Ochieng) and brainstormed about future book(s) at the Trident bookstore (near a tree). Seeds were planted for more research news next year, already under contract in the Routledge Basics book series.

In Spring 2026, four Zoom speakers visited Dr. Pezzullo's graduate course on Rhetorics of Transgression & Resistance: **Dr. T. Jake Dionne (CU Boulder COMM '20)**, **Dr. D. Soyini Madison**, **Dr. Caitlin Bruce**, and **Dr. Noor Ghazal Aswad**. It was a joy to have such prolific and insightful scholars address what rhetorical studies and ethnography can bring to topics ranging from US bison and Ghanaian human rights debates to graffiti in Mexico and the Syrian revolution, as well as global solidarity. *(Apologies for photos--Pezzullo's arm was broken.)*



**ZOOMS!
(COURTESY
OF KLEIMAN
FACULTY GIFT)**

VISIONS OF JUST & SUSTAINABLE FUTURES, A CONVERSATION

In addition to the workshop for students only, Dr. Seema Sohi hosted a dialogue with Rhiana Gunn-Wright. Questions came from Dr. Sohi and audience members who registered ahead of time. The events co-sponsorship list and robust attendance speaks to how many units across campus value addressing just transition policy.

Wisdom from Gunn-Wright (March 26, 2026) included:

- "You can't say a problem is existential and give them crumbs."
- "Energy is the food our society eats and changing energy means changing a whole lot."
- "People aren't stupid. They're busy. They won't remember details but will remember the narrative you tell of what's wrong and what we are going to do."
- "I don't use AI because I have a brain and don't like liars."
- "White supremacy promises the sun will always shine on you."
- "Get used to losing a lot."
- "Government is a collective engine for justice and liberation. Collective problem solving is beautiful."
- "I don't want a world without cake. Your misery isn't helping anyone. Do what brings you joy."



A colorful event poster with a blue and purple background. The text reads: "VISIONS OF JUST & SUSTAINABLE FUTURES", "A CONVERSATION ABOUT GREEN NEW DEAL POLICIES & PATHWAYS FORWARD", "With Rhiana Gunn-Wright (NOTE: Varshini Prakash is ill & cancelled)", "Hosted by Carnegie Fellow Dr. Seema Sohi". It includes the date "THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2026 5:00-6:30PM", a QR code, and the text "Free, but please register". At the bottom, it lists sponsors: "SPONSORED BY CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK, DEPARTMENT OF ETHNIC STUDIES, DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES, DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, CENTER FOR AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES, CU ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER, SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH INITIATIVE, & THE SAS LAB".

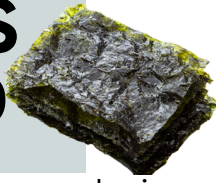


It's important that **Vice Chancellor of Sustainability Andrew Mayock** (above) co-sponsored & showed up,



To the right, our local government partners from CDPHE and DNR showed up, and we were thrilled! (Photography by Dr. Striphas other than one to right)

SEAWEED STORIES (KLEIMAN FACULTY GIFT)



Due to her advocacy and social media work on reducing single-use plastic pollution and addressing eco-ableism, **Emy Kane** (CU '13) was featured on the **Communicating Care podcast** and in Dr. Pezzullo's award-winning book, *Beyond Straw Men* (2024, UC Press). So, when she said she'd be excited to return to CU Boulder for a screening of the film *Seaweed Stories*, produced by Lonely Whale (the NGO where she has been the Executive Director), we were thrilled. With **Jo Marras Tate** (CU '23) and **SarahDawn Haynes** (CU '26), the SAS Lab created publicity and invited speakers:

- Emy Kane (CU Boulder '13 & Executive Director, Lonely Whale)
- Dr. Emily Yeh (Geography Professor)
- Dr. Paige Hoel (Oceanographer, SciComm Influencer)
- Vicki Nichols Goldstein (Exec. Director, Inland Ocean Coalition)
- Clementine Clyker (CU Boulder sustainability student leader)

Lots of exciting insights were shared about what to do locally and globally to use storytelling to talk about oceans, plastics, and power; but, we perhaps were most pleased to have the **Vice Chancellor of Local Government and Community Engagement Lori Call** post on LinkedIn that **this event was “the perfect date night”!**



Lori Call · 1st
Associate Vice Chancellor of Local Government and Community E...
1w · 🌐

It was the perfect date night for us—a **University of Colorado Boulder** screening of “Seaweed Stories for a More Sustainable Future,” followed by a fascinating discussion facilitated by Prof. **Phaedra C. Pezzullo, PhD** featuring experts, including Prof. **Emily Yeh**, addressing the dynamics of seaweed and the oceans. Thanks to **Michael Call**, **Tanya Kern MD**, and **Mike Kern** for the fun evening! And to **Felicia Naranjo Martinez** for the awesome new CU **SPIKE Center for Sustainability Education** hat! 🍷



Photography on this page courtesy of Dr. Ted Striphas.



Now I want to do ocean work!! 🍷🍷🍷
text (above) from a SAS Lab student during the event



WE CARE ABOUT CAMPUS + COMMUNITY

As an interdisciplinary CU Boulder lab

"That is why we're integrating sustainability across disciplines, including engineering, business, policy, science, humanities and the arts. Our responsibility is to ensure that every student graduates with the knowledge and skills to contribute to a more sustainable world. . . . Many of the most important decisions about infrastructure, workforce and investment — our climate future — are being made right now.

The window to act is not abstract. It is immediate."
- CU Boulder Chancellor Justin Schwartz, April 2025

Fall 2025-Spring 2026, as a campus leader on sustainability and storytelling, Pezzullo served on the following committees:

- the Vice Chancellor of Sustainability's Big Ideas meetings in Fall 2025
- one of four faculty in a leadership role for the SPIKE Center for Sustainability Education
- joined conversations on everything from the 150th campus anniversary to Sundance
- a moderator and panelist on the state of environmental journalism (below)

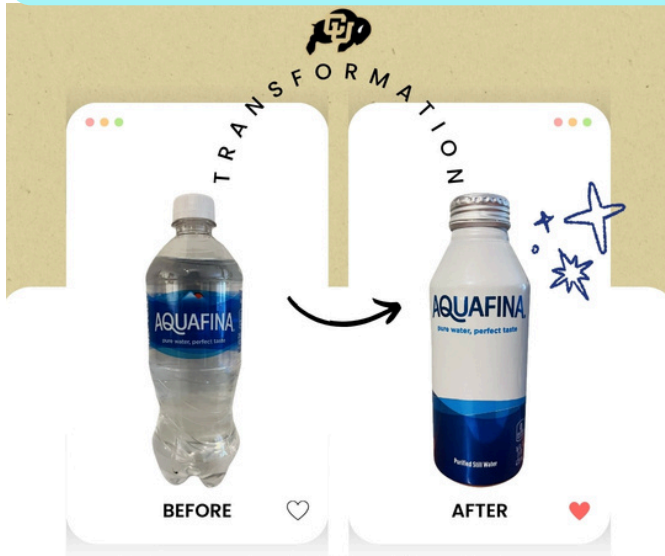
Director Pezzullo moderated a Poynter Center panel at the Boulder Public Library on "Moments of Truth" & spoke as a panelist on the future of environmental communication to collaborate with the new **Center for Environmental Journalism Director, Dr. Hong Vu.**

We need healthy public discourse and journalism for a healthy democracy.



A SOLUTION IMPLEMENTED!

Banning Single-Use Plastic Bottles from Vending Machines on Campus



Did you notice? CU Boulder eliminated single-use plastic beverage bottles from all our vending machines this summer! 




- ✓ **Less microplastics** in your body & the planet
- ✓ **Less waste** that is harder to recycle
- ✓ **Without giving up** convenience or the dream of climate justice 

SUMMER 2025 CAMPUS GLOW UP RECIPE

a multi-year sustainability process 


- ◆ Students spoke up, advocating for less unnecessary plastic pollution to protect marine life, their health & human rights
 - ◆ Faculty conducted research on harms and new trends for the future
 - ◆ Staff identified a practical plan for operations to actualize campus sustainability goals
- And they joined together on the Chancellor's Sustainability Council til... 

Campus leadership boldly announced system-wide change for a more sustainable future 

Can CU Boulder do more for a sustainable future? **YES!!!**

(& every win is important to celebrate)

Feeling left out? Or maybe burnt out? Follow or join changemakers on campus:

 The Sustainability And Storytelling Lab (affectionately called the "sass lab") offers expertise, internships and credits: <https://www.colorado.edu/lab/sas/>

Campus leaders are upping our sustainability game: <https://www.colorado.edu/sustainability/>



And our Environmental Center continues to offer resources & student support <https://www.colorado.edu/ecenter/>



Keeping the conversation going!

This sold out screening of a film Pezzullo endorsed & panel at the Dairy Arts Center with local zero waste rockstars (left to right): Phaedra, City of Boulder's Ellen Orleans, Eco-Cycle's Ryan Call, GreenLatinos' Brian Loma, Nude Foods Market's co-founder + Shark Tank alumna Verity Noble, & Eco-Cycle's Director & former Mayor of Boulder Suzanne Jones. Image courtesy of Eco-Cycle.

WE CARE ABOUT COLORADO

The primary research project of the SAS Lab is a partnership with the **Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ)** in the **Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE)**. The **Colorado Digital Storytelling Project** is a partnership between the SAS Lab Director, CDPHE, and CU Boulder students. Through this partnership, we advance the environment and public health through communicating why we care and how we can make a difference for current and future generations where we live, learn, work, and play. In 2022, we produced five Arc GIS StoryMaps, which qualitatively supplement (with interviews and secondary research) quantitative data identifying the communities most disproportionately impacted by environmental harms: <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/colorado-enviroscreen-storymaps>. In Fall 2025, we published a new StoryMap developed the spring with interviews from Sara Fleming (GEOG, MA) on **Mobile Home Parks**.

Views of StoryMaps as of May 15, 2026:

Mobile Home Parks: 776

Pueblo County: 1.5K

Lower Arkansas River Valley: 2.2K

San Luis Valley: 2.3K

Ute Mountain Ute Tribe: 2.3K

North Denver Communities: 2.6K

TOTAL VIEWS: 11,676



In addition to gaining skills in translating technical scientific data, storytelling across media, and incorporating collaborative feedback, students learned more about community engagement, government policies, and sustainability. One of our partners there, CDPHE OEJ Geospatial analyst Rani Kumar wrote the following email:

“Your dedication to this work has truly opened so many doors and is integral to Colorado including community voice at the state level. Thanks for all you do!”

(personal correspondence). We look forward to continuing this partnership, which offers a meaningful opportunity for all involved in the lab.

Mis- and disinformation are major challenges today for sustainability and storytelling. In Fall 2025, 5 ENVS undergraduate students also met with the director weekly to fact check the pilot StoryMaps we work on with the Office of Environmental Justice. We found broken links and updated data, as well as discussed ways to stay informed. An undergraduate presented on this work at her first academic conference in Fort Collins, Colorado, at a Global Environmental Justice Conference (see page 14).

Pezzullo also shared this work at an invited Department of Environmental Studies talk at Swarthmore College in February 2026 (poster to right).



UNDERGRADUATE ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: CLAIRE LEGG

The SAS Lab encourages student artists as well. Below, the talented **Claire Legg** created thoughtful designs with feedback to imagine postcards & posters for the EnviroScreen StoryMaps and keywords for social media posts based on readings.



DESIRE

vs. DAMAGE CENTERED STORYTELLING

"Research that intends to document peoples' pain and brokenness to hold those in power accountable for their oppression" is damage centric

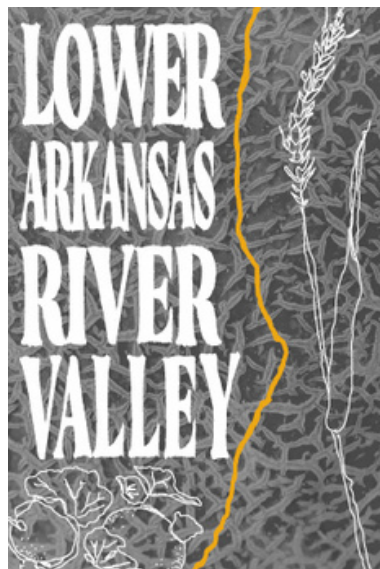
SAS LAB

WE CAN CHOOSE DESIRE OVER DAMAGE

"desire-based research frameworks are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives"

ENGAGE WITH DESIRE-BASED STORYTELLING HERE:
<https://www.colorado.edu/lab/sas/>

COOK, ET AL. "AMPLIFYING DESIRE-CENTERED RESEARCH BEYOND DEFICITS AND FATIGUE: A CASE STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, ARCTIC STORYMAPS IN COLORADO." ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE 11.2 (2024): 152-69.



[THE IMPORTANCE OF] DIGITAL STORYTELLING

"EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL, SYMBOLIC, AND IDEALLY CONSEQUENTIAL IN PUBLIC LIFE."

CONNECTING STUDENT ART & INFRASTRUCTURE OF CARE & NET ZERO GOALS & GENERATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY WISDOM & STORYTELLING & SUSTAINABILITY

SAS LAB

WWW.COLORADO.EDU/LAB/SAS/

COOK, ET AL. "AMPLIFYING DESIRE-CENTERED RESEARCH BEYOND DEFICITS AND FATIGUE: A CASE STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, ARCTIC STORYMAPS IN COLORADO." ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE 11.2 (2024): 152-69.

Artistic students last year & this year have thought about designing art contests for youth living in highlighted communities--and then the semester ends. Future efforts should design community-based dialogue in the future...

ENVIRONMENTAL PRIVILEGE

<https://www.colorado.edu/lab/sas/>

"SOME GROUPS CAN ACCESS SPACES AND RESOURCES WHICH ARE PROTECTED FROM THE KINDS OF ECOLOGICAL HARM THAT OTHER GROUPS ARE FORCED TO CONTEND WITH EVERYDAY."

HOW CAN WE ADDRESS THIS?

- support initiatives to make green outdoors more accessible through groups like:
 - BIG CITY MOUNTAINEERS bigcitymountaineers.org
 - OUTDOOR AFRO outdoorafro.com
 - BLACKPACKERS coblackpackers.com
 - BROWN GIRLS CLIMB [@browngirlsclimb](https://www.instagram.com/browngirlsclimb)
 - LATINO OUTDOORS latinooutdoors.org

LISA SUN-HEE PARK & DAVID MAQUIB FELLOW. THE SLUMS OF ASPEN: IMMIGRANTS VS. THE ENVIRONMENT IN AMERICA'S EDEN. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2011

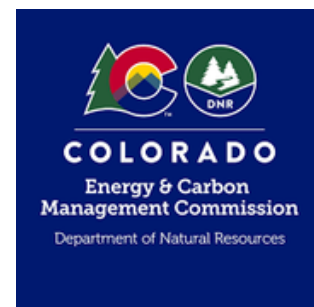


75TH ANNIVERSARY OF ENERGY & CARBON MANAGEMENT IN COLORADO

This spring, at the recommendation of our OEJ CDPHE partners, we developed a new StoryMap partner: **the Energy & Carbon Management in Colorado (ECMC) of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR)** to be launched for their 75th anniversary on August 1, 2026. We have valued working with **Yesica Chávez**, their environmental justice liaison.

Our team of four students focused on this project included: two undergraduate students from Environmental Studies (Anette & Sommer), one Master's of the Environment student (Jack), and one Master's student from Communication Studies (Mel). Students were able to interview three people and receive a round of feedback from ECMC. It was fascinating to learn about how oil and gas regulation has evolved in the state of Colorado, as well as impacts on communities, wildlife, and the economy. In a time when bad corporate actors regularly scapegoat government for not protecting our environment and health, it felt meaningful to consider what a difference government can make.

As this annual report is being written, we are beginning the process of post-semester edits for review from the ECMC and with the support of our longtime lab journalism editor (Anthony). We are excited to consider the possibility of airing parts of interviews on local radio (KGNU) and our podcast. More updates to come next year!



UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOW SPOTLIGHT: ANETTE MARMOLEJO

One regret is that we haven't taken photographs of crowds more.

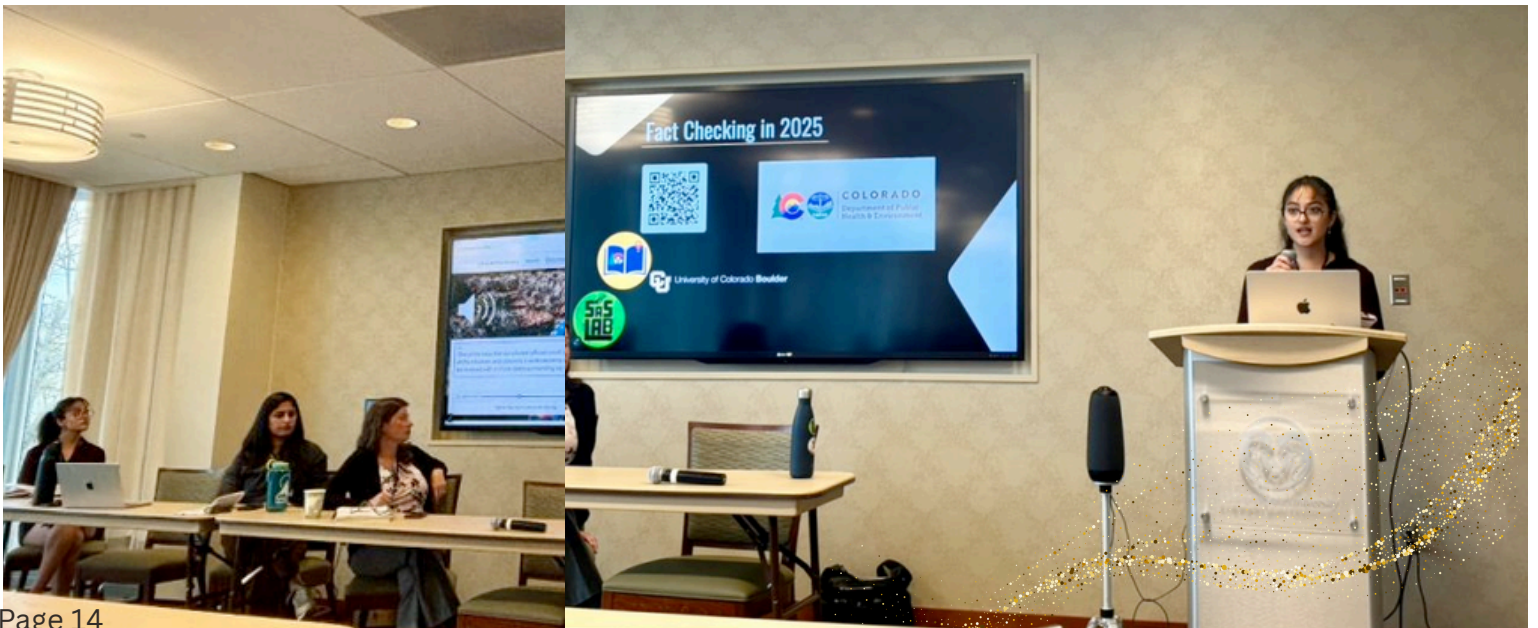
There were so many people at our events this year! But, one thing we did right is call in Anette Marmolejo as an intern who signed up for two semesters this year.

In Fall 2025, Anette was 1 of 5 undergraduates who interned in the lab, fact checking the initial StoryMaps. In April 2026, moving into her role as a research fellow, she presented on that work at her first academic conference (below), The International Environmental Justice Conference at Colorado State University. The panel included Phaedra, Warren, and our Office of Environmental Justice CDPHE partners, Rani and Meghan. **Anette was professional, clear and insightful.**

In Fall 2025, Anette's passion project was analyzing three court cases involving pollution in North Denver. She also worked on a StoryMap in Spring 2026, alongside our Department of Natural Resources partner, Yesica Chávez, through researching, writing and editing alongside the lab StoryMap team.



In Fall 2025, a lawyer, **Eddie Ahn**, who is the Executive Director & lead counsel of the Bay Area NGO Brightline Defense, reached out to meet up and discuss storytelling for climate justice. Interested in law, Anette jumped at the invitation to join our private discussion and attend the larger public book signing at Trident (above).



WE CARE ABOUT THE WORLD

As an international lab with global reach



Supported through endowed funds from **Inside the Greenhouse (ITG)**, which is an initiative housed in **CIRES (the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences)**, the SAS Lab hired hourly student workers edited the podcast *Communicating Care* (Anthony) and assisted on the **International Environmental Communication Association's journal, *Environmental Communication*** (Mel). Under her editorship, the journal has broken submission and circulation records, contributing to the evidence that the more globally diverse our editorial boards and authors are, the more robust intellectual life can be. As a co-director of ITG, Pezzullo is grateful to be working with interdisciplinary and international students and colleagues in the environmental sciences and arts.



Pezzullo presented on her editorship in Tasmania in June 2025 and Warren Cook (pictured left) on his dissertation research.



Photography courtesy of Education University of HK (above), Dr. Ted Striphas (below) & Dr Pezzullo otherwise.



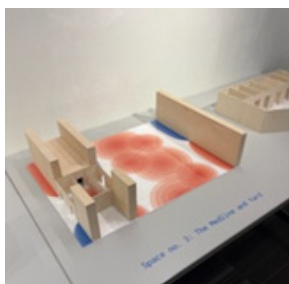
Pezzullo also presented on her research related to care, sustainability, and storytelling in Hong Kong in August 2025, where an artist, Prof. Eric Feng, had included a quotation from her book, *Beyond Straw Men* in his exhibit.

GRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOWS

One of the student opportunities the SAS Lab provides are Graduate Research Fellowships. **Millicent Elewosi** is a COMM PhD student and a founding member of the SAS Lab. With a laptop and podcast recording equipment provided by CMDI, Millicent spent some of her time during her visit back home in Ghana last summer recording stories of women working in the local food economy. We were proud to share six of her initial reflections and photographs on our LinkedIn account this year, and we look forward to these interviews airing on community radio in Ghana, as well as being translated this summer to be shared as a podcast. Sustainability and storytelling are global matters, and we believe we will need to listen to voices around the world to make a difference.



Photography by Dr. Max Boykoff (above) & by Anna Algrey (below)



Sitashma Thapa is an ENVS PhD student and joined the SAS Lab this year. Over winter break, she synthesized research Prof. Pezzullo coauthored on climate disasters and incarceration infrastructure. This interdisciplinary work will become a chapter in book under contract on ecology and carceral systems with NYU Press. *(Image from ENVD Dr. Sophie Chien's DC Exhibit, "Objects of Abolition," inspired, in part, by this interdisciplinary research.)*

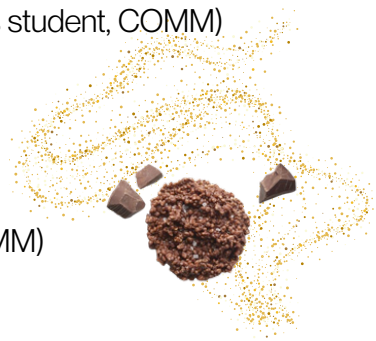
Warren Cook is a COMM PhD Candidate and a Teaching Professor in ENVS on campus. As the founding Associate Director of the SAS Lab, we were grateful he presented his ethically-grounded dissertation research choices to protect Indigenous Data Sovereignty while uplifting voices of people in agriculture as they shape our water futures.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: PEOPLE, FALL 25-SPRING 26

Gratitude to all the good-natured lab participants

- **Anthony Albidrez** (SAS Lab Senior Journalism Editor, Fall 2025–Summer 2026)
- **Warren Cook** (SAS Lab Associate Director, Spring 2025–present, ENVS Assistant Teaching Professor, PhD Candidate, COMM)
- **Jack Carter** (SAS Lab Graduate Research Fellow Spring 2026, Master’s student, MENV)
- **Millicent Elewosi** (SAS Lab Graduate Research Fellow, PhD student, COMM)
- **Alison Friedrich** (SAS Lab Graduate Event Organizer Spring 2026, Master’s student, COMM)
- **Mel Hanby** (Journal Manager Fall 2025& StoryMap Project Lead Spring 2026, Master’s student, COMM)
- **Claire Legg** (SAS Lab UG Intern Fall 2025, ENVS)
- **Anette Marmolejo** (SAS Lab UG Intern, Fall 2025–Spring 2026, ENVS)
- **Paloma McKean** (SAS Lab UG Intern, Fall 2025, ENVS)
- **Sydney Neal** (SAS Lab Graduate Event Organizer, Spring 2026, PhD student, ETHN)
- **Sindhu Nepolean** (SAS Lab Graduate Event Organizer, Spring 2026, PhD student, COMM)
- **Zoe Pao** (ITG Undergraduate Research Fellow, Fall 2025, ENVS)
- **Nat Rake** (Storytelling Artist in Residence: Graphic Recorder, Spring 2026)
- **Sitashma Thapa** (SAS Lab Graduate Research Fellow, Winter–Spring 2026, PhD student, ENVS)
- **Max Trujillo-Acevedo** (SAS Lab UG Intern, Fall 2025, ENVS)
- **Sommer Vermeil** (SAS Lab UG Intern, Spring 2026, ENVS)



Natalie Rake (on the left) presented to the SAS Lab the history and development of graphic recording, as well as how she/they articulate their own aesthetic.



Phaedra (left) with Eddie Ahn, Brightline Defense, at book signing. Photography by Dr. Ted Striphas.



And gratitude to the many that helped actualize our ambitions ...

Dean Lori Bergen (CMDI) for supporting the vision of this lab

Cindy White (COMM) for Department Chair support and encouraging us to run with Kleiman’s transformational gift

Laura Burfield, Max Boykoff, Becca Safran, Beth Osnes-Stoedefalke and **Lin Yang** (ENVS/CIRES/ITG) for accounting support and encouragement in navigating the many hats we wear

Sonia K. Fraser (COMM), **Anna Parsons** (CMDI), **Ana Finchum** (CMDI), and **Deborah Schaftlein** (CMDI) for accounting management, space management, payroll, Handshake platform navigation, and more

Rani Kumar, Meghan Guevera, and more at CDPHE, as well as **Yesica Chávez**, DNR ECMC Community Engagement Liaison, for partnering with us with expertise, trust, and ethical accountability. Your mentorship of our students means the world to us. It is amazing to meet such smart expertise that deeply care about community voice and education.

Ruojia Sun (PACES) for grant application advice and support

Allie Leech (ENVD), **Regan Widergren** (APRD) and **Amanda J. McManus** (CMCI) for website design & updates

David K. Kleiman (COMM donor) for his love of rhetoric & donation, which will fund us for three years at a new level

Brian Daniels (ITG donor) for his love of environmental communication and this planet we share

Seema Sohi (ETHN/HIST) for bringing Rhiana Gunn-Wright to campus, moving us, & Crepe Therapy

APPENDIX 1: FALL 2025 STUDENT TESTIMONIALS ON CDPHE PARTNERSHIP

The work that I have been able to do this semester through CDPHE StoryMaps has allowed me to deepen my understanding of environmental justice and has allowed me to further grasp the need for sustainable policy and practices. In addition, the work I have done has opened my eyes to the environmental impacts that the areas I have been surrounded by my entire life are facing and the work that still needs to be done in order to ensure their environmental health.

Working on the Arkansas River StoryMap has allowed me to practice translating complex environmental information into accessible and engaging narratives. By learning how to communicate environmental justice issues in clear and relatable ways, I've developed a deeper understanding of how communities along the Arkansas River interact with water systems and why equitable access to clean, reliable water is essential. The project pushed me to consider how sustainability and justice can be communicated visually, not just textually, and helped me build skills in synthesizing scientific, cultural, and geographic knowledge into a coherent public-facing resource.

Working with the CDPHE StoryMaps has allowed me to understand how to tell environmental justice stories in a way that shares the issues the community has faced without degrading them. I think the Story maps highlight how resilient communities can be and also educate people about what the community offers today for locals and tourists.

The work that I am doing related to the CDPHE StoryMaps is important to the mission of a public university like CU Boulder because it gives undergrads an opportunity to work with data that is then translated to a wider audience and create connections and trust between government/ state and the public. It also allows students to learn more about the behind the scenes of what goes into these types of projects and potentially gives them an idea of what they want to do in the future.

The work that I am doing is important to the mission of a public university like CU boulder because it represents the environmental issues that exist within the state and the CDPHE StoryMaps interconnects this work to represent the student and faculty's dedication to the environmental inequalities throughout Colorado.

This work directly supports CU Boulder's mission to serve the public good by expanding access to environmental knowledge. The StoryMap helps bridge academic understanding with real-world issues by making information about the Arkansas River Valley accessible to local residents, educators, and students. Through this project, CU Boulder is contributing to statewide environmental literacy and supporting more informed conversations about water, agriculture, and public health. The StoryMap also demonstrates how university resources such as students, research tools, and interdisciplinary thinking, can be leveraged to support Colorado communities, which aligns with CU's broader goals to outreach, impact, and civic responsibility.

The StoryMaps make stories and communities available to everyone. They educate people on environmental issues that communities have faced and how they have become more resilient to them. The StoryMaps also include the ARCGIS data, which identifies what polluting factors that are influencing the environment.

APPENDIX 2: SPRING 2026 STUDENT REFLECTIONS

Sometimes it feels like storytelling and sustainability (science) do not go together in how people say "left brain versus right brain." ...I feel that I now have a niche skill to bridge the gap.

I think my experience related to Storymaps really helped me apply my knowledge from classes to the understanding and reading of policies. I felt as though my understanding and ability to connect research to EJ developed a lot this semester, and I find myself thinking deeper about the issues around me. I think it also helped me develop my writing skills by taking a lot of policy information and simplifying it.

In so many ways! I have made connections with professionals in state land management, as well as with Earthworks. I have learned about the back end of state environmental policy. I have gained (at least some!) technical skills about creating storymaps. I can always learn more teamwork skills, and it was fun and challenging to coordinate with Jack, Annette, and Sommer. I got to experiment with writing for a general audience, which I don't often do. I learned new interview skills and what I can do better next time. So much!

I learned how to manage time as a hybrid worker, I learned how to read Bills, I learned how to communicate effectively, I furthered my knowledge in working as a team, and I learned how to write at a different level to simplify information. All of these skills were translated into a story map and into my speech for the CSU presentation. Both of those things are incredibly important related to sustainability and storytelling as an intersection. Not everyone is going to sit and go through the ECMC website or not everyone know how to access and go through bills. I really enjoyed translating wordy and complex data into more simple and digestible story like content.

SAS lab helped me to build a global perspective on sustainability. As someone who was understanding sustainability in a very community-specific manner or in a regional way, the conversations and the exposure to different things in this lab space helped me to think beyond my Indian and coastal understanding when I think about sustainability.

This semester the SAS lab helped me (a) workshop the research methods and ethical archival practices of my dissertation as they relate to data sovereignty, (b) co-present research with state officials at an international conference on how to conduct community engaged environmental justice research, and (c) design multiple campus events and workshops that center justice in conversations about sustainability on campus.

I really value the team work and collaboration that allowed each of us to contribute in our own small ways, to something so big and impactful. The community here is amazing and I appreciate the continued ways I personally learn and become more aware about environmental justice and sustainability.

I had an incredible experience co-working and collaborating with my lab mates. It was a very respectful environment, so it was very easy to communicate with everyone. I felt like I could always count on someone if I was busy or was unable to carry out a particular task. Apart from this, I really enjoyed our guest speakers. I learned a lot about EJ in Colorado from Yesica. Seema is a hub of knowledge and optimism. Rhianna was surreal! Seaweed stories takes the cake for me as I love learning new things especially if it's at the intersection of science and culture. I will be happy to write about my event contributions and chapter coauthorship in my CV or in an interview.

Being new to the lab, I already learned more about the relationships between the environment, place, stories, narrative, and community. I learned there are so many different ways to enact or engage in storytelling. It can be in the form of a podcast, family conversations, it can be verbal written, photographed, or otherwise. It can happen on many different scales. I have learned though my courses and this lab the type of research I want to do. This space has allowed me to discover those things about myself-- my interests and passions. I am looking forward to understanding how the knowledge and skills learned in this lab can be translated in the future.

We all ❤️ seaweed, the diversity in the group is really great, Phaedra as a mentor is amazing and very kind, and over all the SAS lab is doing important projects that allow for students to gain experience, knowledge, and confidence.

