UA Authors Will Share Expertise at Tucson Festival of Books

University Relations – Communications
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Every year, thousands of people flock to the UA campus to share their love of reading at the Tucson Festival of Books.

With plenty of passionate writers working on the campus, it's only natural that a number of University employees will participate as featured authors at the festival.

Lo Que Pasa talked with a few of them about what they like best about the festival and what they will talk about at the event.


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Samara Klar

Name: Samara Klar
Position: Assistant professor, School of Government and Public Policy
Author of: "Independent Politics: How American Disdain for Parties Leads to Political Inaction"

What inspires your writing?

My research! It's a pleasure to write about interesting findings or a new theory to help explain why voters behave the way they do – especially when it relates to something currently going on in the world. In those cases, there's definitely a sense of urgency to get my work off of my desk and out there.

What do you like to read?

Ever since I was a young kid, I have always loved biographies and autobiographies. I'll read pretty much anyone's biography; I can't even begin to list all the biographies I've read, but they range from Charles Darwin to La Toya Jackson. One of my favorites, though, is definitely the biography of Jim Henson, written by Brian Jay Jones. Henson was such a fabulously creative and brilliant guy, and the Jones biography offers an extremely candid look at his life, both as the creator of "The Muppets," but also as a father and husband. The ending is so touching, I was sobbing as I read it – while sitting in the middle seat on an airplane, sandwiched between two very concerned strangers.

What will you talk about at the Tucson Festival of Books?

I'll be discussing my new book that I co-authored withYanna Krupnikov [2], an assistant professor of political science at Stony Brook University. The book is called "Independent Politics: How American Disdain for Parties Leads to Political Inaction [2]." We conducted over a dozen experiments and nationwide surveys to help understand why so many Americans identify as political independents and whether it has any consequences for politics. We find that, for many Americans, there is a negative stigma associated with both parties in Washington. As a result, people say they're independent in order to make a good impression – but, in fact, the majority of these independents hold extremely partisan preferences. Unfortunately for candidates, the social desirability of independence also discourages Americans from engaging in any public activity that might reveal their true party preferences. This means fewer people talking about politics, wearing campaign paraphernalia or convincing each other to vote.

Are you working on anything else right now?

I'm working on a few pretty exciting projects, several coauthored with my colleagues here at UA. For example, I'm just wrapping up a big experiment with **Yotam Shmargad** [3], at the School of Information, that tests how political information diffuses through different types of interpersonal networks. I'm working with **Chris Weber** [4] at the School of Government and Public Policy on an analysis of whether Democrats and Republicans in Congress interact in informal networks. I'm also pursuing a few projects related to gender: for example, how women evaluate one another when they disagree on politics. In addition to my academic research, I started a website called **Women Also Know Stuff** [5]. The idea is simply to provide an accessible database of female political scientists, in order to combat the common excuse that women aren't represented in public forums because they do not study relevant issues. There are over 80 areas of expertise on the site, each of which lists dozens of female academics. The site has become extremely popular – with over 75,000 views in its first month – and it is now a collaborative effort with nine other political scientists at universities across the country.

*Klar will give two talks at the festival. The first, **Race in America: Changing Cultural Landscapes,"**will take place from 2:30-3:30 p.m. on March 13. The other, **"The Direction of Democracy,"**will take place from 4-5 p.m. Both are at the Student Union Memorial Center's Gallagher Theater.*


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Alison Deming

Name: Alison Deming
Position: Professor of English
Author of: "Zoologies: On Animals and the Human Spirit" and "Colors of Nature"

What inspires your writing?

Science, art, places, grief, hope, love, death – and the need to balance the inner and outer worlds.

What do you like to read?

I read voraciously. Right now I am researching 19th-century Paris by reading novels by Emile Zola and Gustave Flaubert.

What will you talk about at the Tucson Festival of Books?

I'm on three panels, so I will be talking about how important animals are to the human imagination, how inspiring the Sonoran Desert is to writers and about how the lyric voice connects people across vast spans of time and place.

Are you working on anything right now?

I am working on my Guggenheim project, an essay collection titled "Lament for the Makers" that explores two small-skilled cultures – dressmakers and fisherman – implausibly linked by my family history. And I'm putting final touches on a new book of poems, "Stairway to Heaven."

Do you have a favorite part of the Tucson Festival of Books?

The whole giant feast of books and writers, and what this says about the richness of culture in Tucson. I also love the science tent, since I am a science groupie.

*Deming will give four talks at the festival. On March 12, from 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., she will give a talk on**Animals and Humans**" in Room 204 of the Koffler Building. From 2:30-3:30 p.m. in the Student Union's Kiva Room she will participate in a talk on "**The Sonoran Desert: A Literary Field Guide**" On March 13, from 2:30-3:20 p.m., she will present "**Lyricism and the Natural World**" in the Social and Behavioral Sciences Tent, and from 4-5 p.m. she will participate in*

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Simmons Buntin

Name: Simmons Buntin
Position: Web program manager, Eller College of Management
Author of: "The Sonoran Desert: A Literary Field Guide"

What inspires your writing?

Deadlines, mostly. And I'm inspired by the intersection of the built and natural environments, particularly here in the Sonoran Desert. And also kit foxes, roadrunners, queen butterflies, hummingbirds, tarantulas, scorpions, king snakes, coral snakes, great-horned owls, cactus wrens, desert cottontails, Mexican woodrats, saguaro blooms, Mexican gold-poppies, Santa Rita prickly pear and coyotes. Always the coyotes.

What do you like to read?

I read a great deal of place-based nonfiction and poetry, but I've also been on a kick to read the classics of literature, and particularly fiction, that I didn't read when in school. I just finished Ray Bradbury's amazing "Fahrenheit 451," for example. Wow, what a great book – so compelling and relevant, even today. Otherwise, two works of literary nonfiction helped me set my course early on: Edward Abbey's "Desert Solitaire" and Aldo Leopold's "A Sand County Almanac." Currently I'm also reading Megan Kimble's "Unprocessed," Erik Reece's "American Gospel" and essay collections by Alison Hawthorne Deming and Joni Tevis. "A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge" is also on the list, but I won't bore you with the details of that.

What will you talk about at the Tucson Festival of Books?

I'm reading my poem "Desert Cottontail" from the new **'The Sonoran Desert: A Literary Field Guide,**[8]" a truly beautiful collection of poetry and prose edited by Christopher Cokinos and Eric Magrane and illustrated by Paul Mirocha. Really, this collection is brilliant, and it's published by our own University of Arizona Press, to boot.

Are you working on anything else right now?

For several years now, I've been journaling in anticipation of a book on parenting a child who struggles with depression, anxiety and PTSD. But as the most challenging and visceral of those struggles fade into the past – for now, at least – and as my daughter and I mature – she's in college now – I'm beginning to think that rather than a narrative book of nonfiction, that may manifest itself as a series of poems or, very possibly, nothing at all, which I'm OK with. I'm also drawn to very short lyrical essays and have crafted a few of those.

What is your favorite part of the festival?

Everything. The wonderful array of booths, the children's area, the readings and lectures and workshops, the lovely Tucson weather, walking the UA Mall, the donor's dinner if you get the chance to attend, and the books. Always the books.

*Buntin will read from the book "**The Sonoran Desert: A Literary Field Guide**" on March 12 from 2:30-3:30 p.m. in the Student Union's Kiva Room.*

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Corey Abramson

Name: Corey Abramson
Position: Assistant professor of sociology
Author of: "The End Game: How Inequality Shapes Our Final Years"

What will you talk about at the Tucson Festival of Books?

I'll be talking about my recent book, "The End Game: How Inequality Shapes Our Final Years[10]." The project draws on two-and-a-half years of intensive participant observation in four ethnically diverse urban neighborhoods, along with 60 in-depth interviews to show how key mechanisms of social stratification such as health disparities, neighborhood effects, wealth gaps, culture and social networks create an unequal "end game" that shapes the lives of older Americans. I use these data to demonstrate how durable inequalities continue to profoundly structure later life, as well as what the everyday experiences of older Americans can teach us about inequality and stratification in America more broadly. I will be touching upon some of these themes, and their broader social implications, at the festival.

Who should attend your presentation?

I believe my presentation will be of interest to anyone concerned with inequality, aging or health in America.

What do you like to read?

My favorite works of modern social science are those that use rigorous empirical methods to debunk, or at least problematize, the ideological justifications of inequality. At the risk of dating myself, "Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth [11]," was one of the first books in this vein I read – and one of the reasons I pursued sociology – so it has a special spot in my heart. Recently, I have also been spending a lot of time reading social theory and epistemology. I really enjoy works by social scientists that attempt to grapple with debates in the philosophy of science. I recently reread "The Politics of Method in The Human Sciences[12]" with my graduate methodology seminar and found a number of the essays quite insightful. Finally, I have a toddler who is obsessed with Pete the Cat, so I spend a lot of time engaging with a poorly drawn fictional feline.

Do you have a favorite part of the festival?

This is my first time participating, but I'm looking forward to it!

*Abramson will participate in a panel on March 12 titled "**Difference and Inequality in American Capitalism**" in the Social and Behavioral Sciences Tent from 10-11 a.m.*

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