

# **Desert Humanities Initiative**

**Annual Report  
2023 - 2024**



**Desert  
Humanities**  
**ASU** Humanities  
Institute  
Arizona State University





# **Desert Humanities Initiative**

**Director: Jason Bruner (started role in January 2023)**

**Associate Director: Erika Hanson (started role in July 2023)**

**Print Manager: Daniella Napolitano**

**The Desert Humanities Initiative is located within the Humanities Institute in The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences**

**HI Director: Ron Broglio**

**HI Associate Director: Curtis Austin**

**Desert spaces have long nourished artistic and humanistic work, but also distinctive possibilities for the flourishing of life in the past, present, and future. The Desert Humanities Initiative fosters both of these dimensions by**

**(1.) Supporting work that analyzes, critiques, and transforms our relationships to deserts and is in service to the communities who inhabit them, and**

**(2.) Providing opportunities to immerse in urban and rural desert sites in order to engage their textured histories, diverse ecologies, and possible futures.**











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# GOALS FOR AY 2024-2025

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# Goals for Academic Year 2024-2025

## Grants

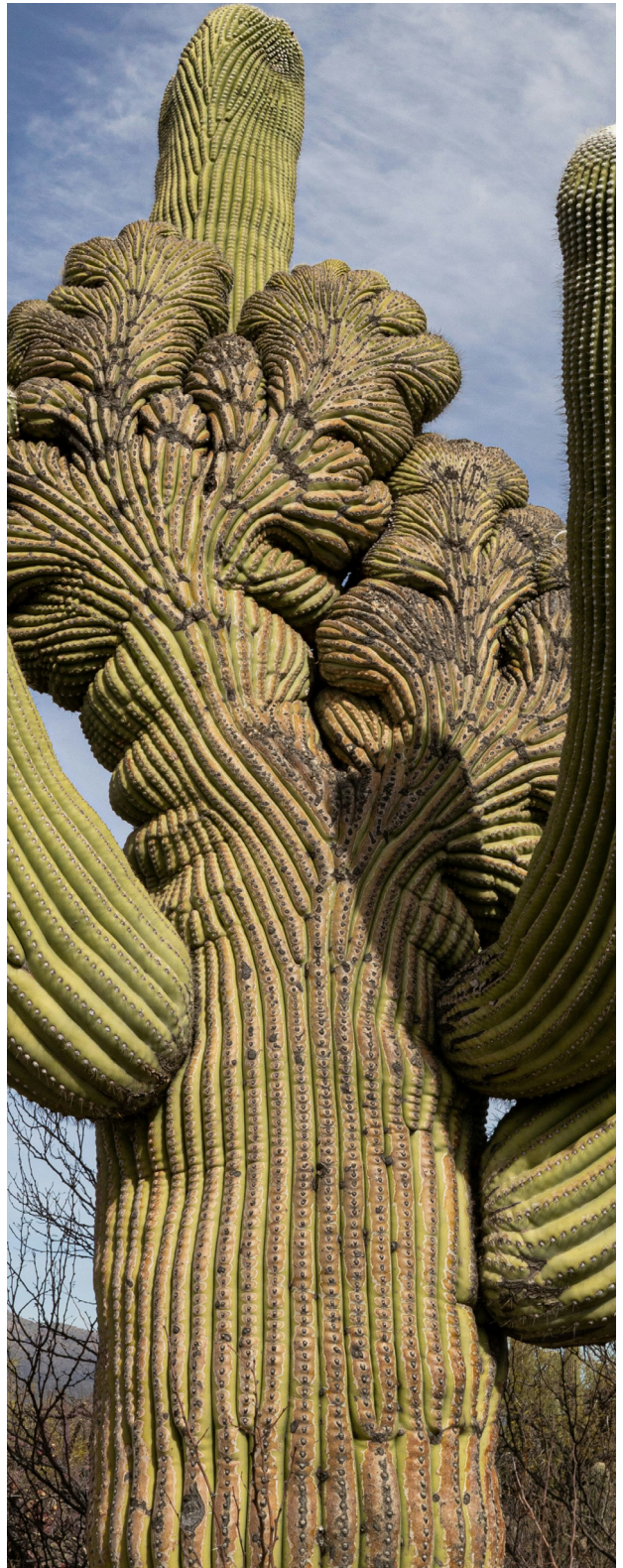
- Complete work on funded projects from AZ Humanities and the Benson Fund.
- Continue to develop collaborations around landscape, art, music, and sound.
- Jason Bruner, Erika Hanson, Osvaldo Sala, and Chouki El Hamel would lead an application to USAID, establishing sustainability partnership with Mohammed VI Polytechnic University in Morocco (see item from “Community Engagement” section below). Proposals due in Winter 2024.





## Community Engagement

- Jason Bruner has begun planning an event featuring recent work by accomplished photographer, Jim Mangan. This event will be co-sponsored by SHPRS and will be a premier event for Humanities Week 2024 (October)
- Jason Bruner, Chouki El Hamel, and Erika Hanson have begun planning a multi-day conference at Mohammed VI Polytechnic University for May 2025, hosted by Ali Benmakhlouf, who directs the African Studies Center at MVIPU.
- Developing our relationship with the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation/Taliesin West at the intersection of design, art, landscape, and sustainability.
- Continuing our collaboration with Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle (Northwestern University; MacArthur Fellow) and Abigail Winograd (University of Chicago, Grey Center) on their public art project on water and migration in the Sonoran Desert.
- In collaboration with Public History (Mark Tebeau) and the Worldbuilding Initiative (Matt Bell), we are reimagining archival collections in Arizona by focusing on artifacts from the history of the Southwestern US that tell “Forgotten Futures,” that is, ideas, plans, sketches, and proposals for buildings, infrastructure, transportation, and design that were never implemented.
- Jason Bruner and Erika Hanson are co-developing a Humanities Lab course on “Desert Futures” that will be offered in the Fall 2025 semester.









# GRANTS AND EXTERNAL FUNDING



# Grants and External Funding

## Summary:

As of March 2024, we submitted 7 grants, of which 3 were funded (total award amount of \$41,000), and the results of 2 are pending. We are working with the Office of International Development to submit a large USAID application, due in Winter 2024.





### Fall 2023

- Jason Bruner was a Knowledge Enterprise Washington, D.C. Leadership Fellow for 2023-2024

- Benson Fund (awarded)

Jason Bruner, Erika Hanson, Evan Berry, Steve Semken, Luke Ramsey “Culture, Technology, and Environment” online class design \$21,360

- AZ Humanities Council (awarded) Jason Bruner and Curtis Austin “Mapping Randolph” Grant which emerged out of community event in March 2023 \$10,000

- AZ Humanities Council (awarded)

Challie Facemire and John Bello, Co-PIs  
Jason Bruner/Desert Humanities project contributor  
\$10,000 (\$800 attributed to Bruner)

### Spring 2024

- ASU Farm (led by Tyler DesRoches)  
Funded through external donation to ASU for Principled Innovation. Idea incubated in year-long faculty discussion group convened in 2023 by Jason Bruner; this group forms the Community of Practice for the project funded at approximately \$700,000 over 3 years

- This grant application is a direct outcome of the No-No Boy artist residency in Jan. 2024. It is also a result of the KE in DC program

### Grant-Funded Work Begun in 2023-2024

November 2023: Project teach for the AZ Humanities Environmental Education grant began meeting to plan teacher training workshops for Fall 2024

January 2024: Hired Kevin Peters, MA student in Geography, to work on “Mapping Project”

January 2024: Assembled project team to begin work on Boyce Thompson/Superior online course development for the “Culture, Technology, and Environment” course (set to enroll students in Spring B 2025)

Spring 2023-Fall 2023: Jason Bruner convened discussion group among humanists and social scientists working on food- and farming-related projects. Those conversations incubated an “ASU Farm” concept. This idea was funded through the Principled Innovation Initiative.





# **RESEARCH EVENTS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

## Research Events & Community Engagement



(photo credit: Eric Ledermann; from March 2023 event: "Power of Community: How Randolph, AZ used its history to fight for its future," which was sponsored by the Desert Humanities Initiative)



### 3. RESEARCH EVENTS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**Summer 2023:** funded collection of oral histories at Boyce Thompson Arboretum, under direction of Mark Tebeau and Erin Craft (Public History)

**June 2023:** Jason Bruner and Curtis Austin gave keynote address at the “Randolph Reunion” Juneteenth celebration in Randolph, AZ (following Desert Humanities event in March 2023 on Randolph)

**Fall 2023:** co-sponsored Inter-Desert Dialogue Series (2 events)

- Engaged 50 scholars and artists from around the world in a series of conversations around comparative research in deserts
- Led by Megan Todd and Jada Ach

**Sept. 29, 2023:** Food-Energy-Water Nexus: A Desert Humanities Workshop

- A full-day workshop featuring four scholars and artists within and beyond ASU
- Presentations and activities designed to foster F-E-W-related projects among artists and humanists
- Outcomes:
  - 25 participants from 6 different academic units
  - 1 participant applied for Benson Fund grant to pursue an original project at Boyce Thompson Arboretum

**Oct. 1, 2023:** DryLab: A 30-Day Challenge to Live Water Wise

- Desert Humanities was a primary co-sponsor of a project led by Adriene Jenik (Herberger) and Marco Jansen (Global Futures)
- Had corresponding public outreach and digital and social media campaign to engage public with how to live sustainably with water

**Oct. 20, 2023:** Challenges to Transdisciplinarity at ASU: A Workshop

- Co-led with Osvaldo Sala (Global Drylands Center)

- Included faculty leaders in The College (humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences)
- 14 participants

**Oct. 21, 2023:** Slow Food, Phoenix and Blue Watermelon Project, Smart Watering event

- A community event on the relationship between local food and sustainable watering practices
- Desert Humanities was a co-sponsor and had a table with literature and print material
- 50 attendees

**Nov. 1, 2023:** Indigenous Knowledge and Public Universities: A Panel Discussion

- Desert Humanities organized, convened, and hosted the panel discussion, featuring four Indigenous students at ASU
- 20 attendees

**Jan. 24-29, 2024:** Julian and Emilia Saporiti artist residency (No-No Boy musical performance)

- Co-hosted with Megan Todd and Jada Ach
- Had 2 undergraduate class visits (40 students)
- Conducted 2 workshops (15 people)
- Public concert at Kerr Cultural Center (80 people)
- Outcome:

Will submit an NEH Cultural and Community Resilience Grant with Julian Saporiti, Megan Todd, and Jada Ach

**Feb. 14, 2024:** Film Screening + Conversation with Sama Alshaibi

- Event organized by SHPRS
- Jason Bruner moderated this conversation
- 25 attendees

**Feb. 14-15, 2024:** Japanese American Incarceration in Arizona: A Community Workshop

- Desert Humanities was a co-sponsor of public-facing 2-day workshop
- Approximately 200 attendees

**March 19, 2024:** "Desert Power": History and Religion in Dune

- Faculty panel discussion on the ways the "Dune" book and movie series drew from historical and religious sources on the Middle East
- 45 attendees

**March 19, 2024:** Boyce Thompson Arboretum Discovery Day

- Desert Humanities' Benson Fund grant and corresponding course development project are featured on the program

**March 21, 2024:** Faculty lunch conversation featuring Tali Keren and Chelsea Haines

- Discussing their collaborative work on water, infrastructure, and public art in deserts (Israel and US Southwest)
- 10 attendees

**April 4, 2024:** Desert Monuments, Desert Memory

- Desert Humanities sponsored panel discussion at ASU about the ways that desert landscapes impact memory, and the unique challenges to remembering history in the Sonoran Desert

**April 5, 2024:** Challenges to Transdisciplinarity Workshop

- Co-led by Osvaldo Sala (Global Drylands Center) and Jason Bruner (Desert Humanities)
- 15 participants

**April 16, 2024:** Desert Humanities co-sponsored panel and art exhibition at Genocide Awareness Week

- Conversation among artists and scholars on violence and Indigenous peoples in the Southwestern US and Middle East
- Jason Bruner will serve as moderator

**May 6, 2024:** Western Jewish Studies Association

- Jason Bruner, along with 3 other ASU faculty members, will give a keynote presentation on a collaborative project that tells the story of the Beth Hebrew building in Phoenix











# **PRINTING PROJECTS AND COLLABORATIONS**



Following the production and release of the risograph-printed Desert Feelz book in April 2023, we have focused our efforts on producing a series of three one-page folded zines that feature plants and animals of the Sonoran Desert.

We have gotten the necessary approvals to sell the zines, and we will use local stores, venues (such as the Audubon Center on Central Ave.) and arts events to sell them in the coming year.







**Desert Tortoise** (Karen Hajek: writer; Luke Watson: artist)

**Salt River Plants** (Luke Ramsey: artist and writer)

**Burrowing Owl** (Bella Goudie: artist and writer)

Is a product of a long-term research project carried out at ASU on the burrowing owls

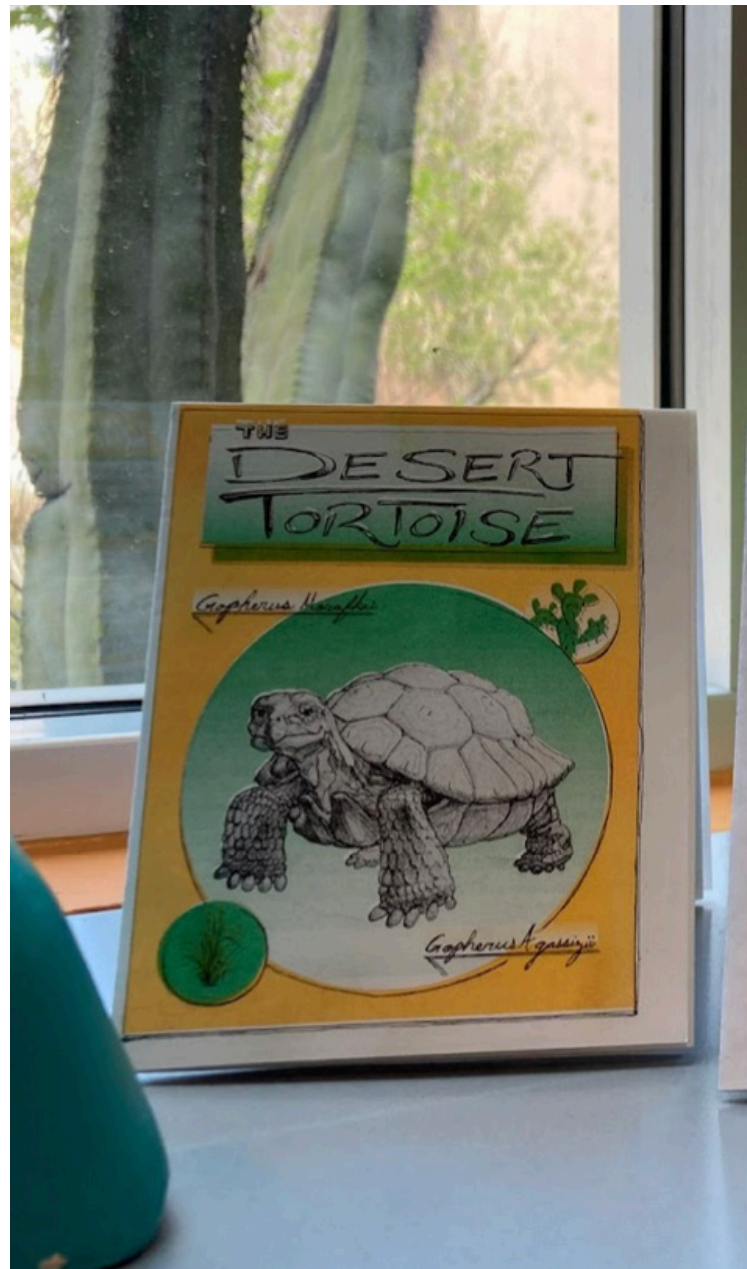
We have also partnered with others at ASU to offer risograph workshops and to produce original posters for events and projects.

**February 2024:**

Center for Imagination in the Borderlands convened a risograph zine workshop using our space and printer  
Original risograph posters produced for an event featuring Emory Douglas at the Humanities Institute

**February-April 2024:**

Original risograph posters produced in collaboration with Public History, commemorating the 60th anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s visit to Arizona













# DESERT HUMANITIES PUBLICITY



## **Desert Humanities Publicity**

Desert Humanities Initiative featured in the summer 2023 flyer produced by The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Julian Saporiti and No-No Boy concert preceded by feature segment in KJZZ.

Forthcoming ASU News story on Boyce Thompson/  
Superior course, funded by Benson Fund grant



**ASU** Humanities  
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# No-No Boy

live in concert

**Saturday, Jan. 27**

light reception at 6:30 p.m.  
show at 7:30 p.m.

free event  
registration required

venue

**ASU Kerr**

6110 N. Scottsdale Rd., Scottsdale  
asukerr.com

register now at

**[links.asu.edu/nnb](https://links.asu.edu/nnb)**

Inter/Desert Dialogues series event

Funded by a Seed Grant from ASU's Humanities Institute

Sponsored by ASU's Desert Humanities Initiative, School of Historical, Philosophical & Religious Studies,  
Environmental Humanities Initiative, Global Institute of Sustainability & Innovation and Public History

Additional support from the College of Integrative Sciences & Arts and Hugh Downs School of Human Communication

Julian Saporiti and No-No Boy concert preceded by feature segment in KJZZ.





## Tackling local challenges, creating global solutions

Communities across the world are dealing with the effects of environmental evolution and climate change, including increased heat, changes in weather patterns, issues with water access or other challenges.

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is leveraging our desert home to not only research and address local concerns but also become a hub for creating solutions that consider perspectives in the humanities, natural sciences and social sciences.

### Helping heat-vulnerable communities

The Urban Climate Research Center has received \$25 million from the U.S. Department of Energy over five years to lead new research and develop solutions for Arizona's most heat vulnerable.

### Creating interdisciplinary dialogues

The Desert Humanities Initiative brings together artists, writers, scientists and more to explore and address critical issues in the desert Southwest.

### Understanding the world around us

The Center for Biology and Society is home to both traditional and more collaborative research projects that draw on the interdisciplinary strengths of programs in the history and philosophy of science, environmental sciences and bioethics, policy and law.

### Empowering future problem-solvers

The Sala Lab in the Global Drylands Center gives students hands-on research experience performing field surveys in dryland ecosystems.

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Desert Humanities Initiative featured in the summer 2023 flyer produced by The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences



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**Insights**

# **Leveraging** **our desert home**

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## **Thank you:**

Jeffrey Cohen, Dean of Humanities

Inter-Desert Dialogue

DryLab 2023

School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious  
Studies

Boyce Thompson Arboretum

Randolph United Council

Genocide Awareness Week

Arizona Faith Network

Tohono O'odham Young Voices





