

2024 Marianne Schmink Outstanding Dissertation Award

Our congratulations go to **Dr. Vanessa Luna Celino** for being selected the 2024 recipient of the Marianne Schmink Outstanding Dissertation Award from UF's Tropical Conservation and Development Program in the Center for Latin American Studies. Dr. Luna is the 15th recipient of this prestigious dissertation award that honors Dr. Marianne Schmink for her significant and transformative contributions to graduate education, the Center for Latin American Studies and the TCD Program. Dr. Marianne Schmink was instrumental in establishing the early interdisciplinary research and training programs that evolved into the Tropical Conservation and Development (TCD) program in the 1980's.



Dr. Luna completed her dissertation in Interdisciplinary Ecology in the School of Natural Resources and the Environment in May 2024 under the supervision of Dr. Karen Kainer (advisor) and Dr. Bette Loiselle (co-advisor). Her dissertation was entitled ***"Fire in the Peruvian Andes: Agricultural burns, changes in community-based management, and key actor perceptions."***

The Schmink Dissertation Award selection committee was impressed by Dr. Luna's ability to engage Indigenous communities to better understand the complex issues related to fire governance and decision-making around fire use. The committee felt she addressed an important gap in knowledge that integrated fire use and control techniques, local knowledge and state control policies. Vanessa's dissertation highlighted that fire is an essential practice in tropical subsistence agriculture, as it readily and economically allows for release of nutrients, reduction of crop competition with weeds, and prepares land for agricultural production. Yet fire use has been prohibited by governmental policies, resulting in conflict, sanctions and discourses of blame. To better understand how Indigenous communities used and managed fire, Vanessa placed her work in a social-ecological framework and employed innovative approaches in her research methods to reveal new insights and guide further action. Her work was considered especially relevant and timely given how climate change has altered fire frequencies and intensities in much of the region. The committee noted that her dissertation was an outstanding example of interdisciplinary research that both advanced scientific understanding while also addressing fire governance strategies and potential collaborative solutions to reduce risk of escaped fires, which can destroy property and impact adjacent protected areas.

Dr. Luna's research methods were diverse and combined participatory observations, stakeholder interviews, focus groups, agricultural calendars, participatory mapping and timelines, and Q-sort methodologies to better understand dynamics of fire use and governance in two Quechua communities in the Peruvian Andes. These diverse approaches revealed how Quechua farmers had adapted their agricultural practices over time and how they had collectively learned to adapt to changing fire risks, including through collaboration with external actors. Her research also provided insights regarding the diversity of viewpoints in managing fire from both top-down and bottom-up approaches. Through workshops, focus groups and participatory methods, Dr. Luna facilitated dialogue and reflection among the various stakeholders, and contributed to understanding the importance of engaging communities in problem-oriented research targeted at finding solutions.

Vanessa has complemented her research with a TCD Practitioner Experience grant where she returned results to the Quechua communities and worked with local universities in the organization of symposia that brought together young fire related scholars. She also worked with a local filmmaker to create a short documentary that communicates her findings, highlighting the participatory processes she used to generate results and encourage reflections regarding fire management and governance strategies. Prior to coming to UF, Vanessa worked as a conservation practitioner with the Amazon Conservation Association (ACA) in the Peruvian Amazon and as an educational instructor for Peruvian study abroad programs. She completed her Master's in Latin American Studies at the University of Florida in 2019. During her PhD at UF, Vanessa was a key contributor to UF TCD's Governance and Infrastructure in the Amazon project. After leaving UF, Vanessa has polished three manuscripts from her dissertation for publication and is currently collaborating

with Dr. Kainer and TCD to develop a proposal focused on Amazonian conservation and collaborative learning with support from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

The Selection Committee was composed by Dr. Vanessa Hull (UF Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation), Dr. Mickie Swisher (UF Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences) and TCD alumna Dr. Laura Kowler (SCS Global Services). The TCD program congratulates Dr. Luna on her selection as the 2024 recipient of the Marianne Schmink Outstanding Dissertation Award!



Agricultural burn to open a new farmland in Apurimac



Conducting Q methodology with a protected area agent



Interviewing a Quechua farmer with the support of a local interpreter