

2025 Marianne Schmink Outstanding Dissertation Award

Our congratulations go to **Dr. Katharine McNamara** for being selected the 2025 recipient of the Marianne Schmink Outstanding Dissertation Award from UF's Tropical Conservation and Development Program in the Center for Latin American Studies. Dr. McNamara is the 16th 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. McNamara completed her dissertation in One Health in the Department of Environmental and Global Health in May 2025 under the supervision of Dr. Sarah McKune. She also received Graduate Certificates in Latin American Studies and Tropical Conservation and Development. Her dissertation was entitled ***“People, Plants, and Pandemics: Tracing multispecies relationships during disease crises.”***

The Schmink Dissertation Award selection committee was impressed by Dr. McNamara's ability to “highlight the intersections of ecological conservation, public health, and local livelihoods during the COVID-19 pandemic in Loja in the Ecuadorian Andes”. Her project is an outstanding example of how theory can inform practice during a socio-ecological crisis such as COVID-19.

Dr. McNamara's dissertation examined how communities engaged with the endangered quina tree (*Cinchona officinalis*) from cultural and medicinal perspectives, as well as its role as a vital resource during health crisis. Her dissertation significantly advances our understanding of socio-ecological relationships by introducing and developing innovative concepts, such as *multispecies resistance* and *multispecies solidarity*, which illuminate the complex connections between human health, medicinal plants, and ecosystem well-being. The work is exceptionally strong both theoretically and practically, particularly in its analysis of how “cultural memory, ecological agency, and affective ties influence both human and environmental health”. The dissertation stands out for its interdisciplinary approach bridging anthropology, conservation, environmental humanities, and public health. Reflecting this integrative approach, she has collaborated with a wide range of social actors, including scientists, conservationists, traditional healers, policy-makers, and private businesses.



Dr. McNamara's research methods were diverse, partly in response to the impact of COVID-19. She incorporated on-line research to follow events when travel was not possible and then followed up with archival research in Europe and ethnographic fieldwork in Ecuador when travel restrictions were relaxed.

The committee found that the historical research was “fundamental to situate current Quina experiences within a historical context of disease, medicine and natural resource extraction”. These approaches effectively connected “the colonial exploitation of cascarilla bark to combat malaria to present-day global debates and political discourse about chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine to combat COVID-19”. In alignment with TCD values, Dr. McNamara returned results via community cafes, grant development meetings, and continued collaboration with local actors.

In summary, Dr. McNamara's dissertation is an exceptional fit with this prestigious dissertation award. Her research is innovative, creative, and theoretically strong, while also designed to bridge theory and practice through meaningful engagement with local communities and stakeholders. Currently, Dr. McNamara is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, where part of her work focuses on developing climate mobility indicators using arts-based methods for studies in South Africa, Nepal, and the UK.

Dr. McNamara is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at Carleton University, Ottawa, where she is working with the PATH Project, a multi-national research consortium spanning Canada, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and Nepal. The project aims to improve climate adaptation practices and policies by incorporating the voices of those on the move due to climate change. As in her dissertation research, Dr. McNamara is working across diverse spaces and methodologies as the Postdoctoral Researcher at PATH's Global Hub to position local stories of adaptation within the broader political ecological context.

The Selection Committee was composed Dr. Bette Loiselle (UF Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, TCD Program, Center for Latin American Studies), and Dr. Angelica Almeyda Zambrano (TCD alumna and UF Center for Latin American Studies). The TCD program congratulates Dr. McNamara on her selection as the 2025 recipient of the Marianne Schmink Outstanding Dissertation Award!