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These Ph.D. Graduates Leveraged Bass Connections and Other Interdisciplinary Opportunities

13-16 minutes



On May 8, The Graduate School will hold a virtual [ceremony to recognize Duke's 2020-2021 Ph.D. graduates](#). Among them are numerous students who took advantage of the Bass Connections program to strengthen their dissertation research, coauthor publications and hone career-enhancing skills. Many individuals also engaged in other interdisciplinary opportunities across campus (see a related article, [Making the Most of Duke on the Road to the Ph.D.](#)).

Congratulations to all of [this year's graduates](#)!



Kaylee Alexander, Ph.D. in Art, Art History & Visual Studies

Dissertation: In Perpetuity: Funerary Monuments, Consumerism and Social Reform in Paris (1804–1924)

- **Bass Connections:** Kaylee Alexander joined [Creative Industries and the Urban Environment](#) as a graduate team member, then served as a team leader the following year. This year, she led the [Migration, Urban Cultures and the Arts](#) team.
- **More cool stuff:** Alexander took part in the Franklin Humanities Institute's [Ph.D. Lab in Digital Knowledge](#) and was a [Humanities Unbounded Graduate Assistant](#) with Duke Libraries.



Yanyou Chen, Ph.D. in Economics

Dissertation: Essays in Industrial Organization and Environmental Economics

- **Bass Connections:** Soon after arriving at Duke, Yanyou Chen took part in [U.S. Climate Policy Options: Regulating Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Petroleum Refineries and Steel](#).
- **More cool stuff:** Chen received a [Graduate Student Training Enhancement Grant](#) (GSTEG) to participate in the Railway Operations module of Michigan State University's Railway Executive Development Program.



Tom Cinq-Mars, Ph.D. in History

Dissertation: In Search of "Friendship": Energy Policy, Trade and Varieties of Socialism in the Soviet Bloc, 1872-1984

- **Bass Connections:** Tom Cinq-Mars joined the [History and Future of Ocean Energy](#) team and taught Bass Connections courses including [Energy and Society](#).
- **More cool stuff:** With a [Bass Instructional Fellowship](#), he integrated the Bass Connections model of collaborative, interdisciplinary research into an undergraduate course, [Extractive Economies](#). As an Energy Doctoral Student Fellow with the [Duke University Energy Initiative](#), he worked on papers such as "Lessons from the World's Longest Oil Pipeline Network." And he received a [Provost Experiential Fellowship](#) for a summer with RTI International, where he documented the use of off-grid energy products in Sub-Saharan Africa; worked with researchers to identify the impacts of off-grid energy on education, health and agriculture outcomes; and served as head author of a journal article.



Aaron Colston, Ph.D. in History

Dissertation: The World's Problem's Are Your Own: Septima Clark, Elza Freire and Grassroots Freedom Education in the American Decade of Development (1960-1970)

- **Bass Connections:** Aaron Colston was a team member of [The Cost of Opportunity? Higher Education in the Baixada Fluminense](#), in partnership with faculty and students in Brazil.
- **More cool stuff:** Colston was active in the [Center for Latin American & Caribbean Studies](#) and the [Global Brazil Lab](#). He was a research assistant with the [Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity](#) and is currently a [postdoctoral associate](#) there.



**Evan Donahue, Ph.D. in Computational Media,
Arts & Cultures**

Dissertation: Android Linguistics: How Machines Do Things with Words

- **Bass Connections:** Donohue participated in the [SSNAP: Scientific Social Network Analysis Project](#) team and served as graduate project manager on a Data+ summer project, [U.S. Ambivalence About Making Profits](#).
- **More cool stuff:** Donohue was active in the Franklin Humanities Institute's [Ph.D. Lab in Digital Knowledge](#).



Elsa Friis-Healy, Ph.D. in Psychology & Neuroscience

Dissertation: Development and Evaluation of a Web Application to Support Remote Clinical Supervision of Lay Counselors in Kenya

- **Bass Connections:** Elsa Friis-Healy took part in the [Global Mental Health](#) team for two years and served on the [Student Advisory Council](#). She traveled to East Africa multiple times to conduct fieldwork and, in partnership with her team, developed a mobile application to support the training and supervision of lay counselors in Kenya. Later, she was part of a team that received a seed grant from the Bass Connections [ABC Thrive](#) initiative for a project on [optimizing predictive models to improve child neurodevelopment](#). She is currently the Multi-Health Systems/Conner's Fellow in Digital Health in Duke's Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences.



Jackie Gerson, Ph.D. in Ecology

Dissertation: Geochemical, Biological, and Landscape Controls on Mercury Fate, Transport and Impact in Natural Ecosystems

- **Bass Connections:** For three years, Gerson played a central role on a multiyear project, [Impacts of Artisanal Gold Mining in the Peruvian Amazon](#). She is the lead author on a resulting article in [Science Advances](#), and also published pieces in [National Geographic](#) and [The Conversation](#).
- **More cool stuff:** Highly interdisciplinary in her approach, Gerson was a [Duke Environmental Impacts Fellow](#) and a [Global Health Doctoral Scholar](#). She earned the [Global Health Graduate Certificate](#) and received a [Duke Support for Interdisciplinary Graduate Networks](#) grant as well as a [Graduate Student Training Enhancement Grant](#). Gerson was active in the [Center for Latin American & Caribbean Studies](#), and honed her skills in short courses through [Duke Science & Society](#) on science policy and communication.



Meredith Graham, Ph.D. in Music

Dissertation: Multi-Text Anthology in the Choral Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Herbert Howells, Grace Williams and Elizabeth Maconchy, 1919–1979

- **Bass Connections:** Graham spent two years on the [Project Vox](#) team and served on the [Student Advisory Council](#). She was a graduate mentor on a [Story+](#) summer project that explored contemporary echoes of Walt Whitman's [entrepreneurial publishing](#).



Kathleen Hansen, Ph.D. in Environmental Policy

Dissertation: The Politics of Local Service Provision in the United States

- **Bass Connections:** Katy Hansen joined the [ACRE-Duke Partnership to Improve Sanitation Access in Lowndes County, Alabama](#).
- **More cool stuff:** Related to her Bass Connections team, Hansen and other students received a [Duke Support for Interdisciplinary Graduate Networks](#) grant. She also served as the research lead on a Provost Collaboratory, [Innovations in Infrastructure](#). Hansen won a [Dean's Award for Outstanding Graduate Student Manuscript](#).



Bohao Huang, Ph.D. in Electrical & Computer

Engineering

Dissertation: Using Synthetic Satellite Imagery from Virtual Worlds to Train Deep Learning Models for Object Recognition

- **Bass Connections:** Bohao Huang served as project manager for a Data+ summer project, [Deep Learning for Rare Energy Infrastructures in Satellite Imagery](#).
- **More cool stuff:** Huang was selected as an [Energy Data Analytics Ph.D. Student Fellow](#), which supported his work on retrieving energy system information from remote sensing imagery.



Gray Kidd, Ph.D. in History

Dissertation: Surrendering to the Streets in Mid-Century Recife: The Living Legacies of Slavery in Black and White

- **Bass Connections:** Kidd spent two years with a team, [The Cost of Opportunity? Higher Education in the Baixada Fluminense](#), that partnered with a university on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.
- **More cool stuff:** He received a [Graduate Student Training Enhancement Grant](#) to travel to Brazil and film a documentary companion piece to his dissertation. Kidd was a [Humanities Unbounded Fellow](#) and was active in the [Center for Latin American & Caribbean Studies](#) and the [Global Brazil Lab](#).



Brandon Hunter, Ph.D. in Civil & Environmental Engineering

Dissertation: Sanitation Justice: Community-Inspired Academic Research Conducted Under Different Theories of Change

- **Bass Connections:** Like Katy Hansen, Hunter took part in the [ACRE-Duke Partnership to Improve Sanitation Access in Lowndes County, Alabama](#).
- **More cool stuff:** He received a [Duke Support for Interdisciplinary Graduate Networks](#) grant to extend his Bass Connections research, and a [Graduate Student Training Enhancement Grant](#) to intern with the EPA's Office of Environmental Justice. Hunter was also a [Duke Environmental Impacts Fellow](#).



Ryan Juskus, Ph.D. in Religion

Dissertation: The Ecopolitics of Truth and Sacrifice: An Ethnographic and Theological Study of Citizen Science, Environmental Justice, and Christian Witness in Coal's Sacrifice Zones

- **Bass Connections:** Ryan Juskus joined Hunter and Hansen on the [ACRE-Duke Partnership to Improve Sanitation Access in Lowndes County, Alabama](#) team.
- **More cool stuff:** He was part of a [Duke Support for Interdisciplinary Graduate Networks](#) grant and active in the [Ph.D. Lab in Digital Knowledge](#) and [Duke Human Rights Center](#).



Qingran Li, Ph.D. in Environmental Policy

Dissertation: Three Essays in Environmental Economics and Policy

- **Bass Connections:** Qingran Li joined the [Disaggregating and Projecting Electricity Demand in China](#) team.
- **More cool stuff:** She was selected as an [Energy Data Analytics Ph.D. Student Fellow](#), and received an honorable mention for the [Dean's Award for Outstanding Graduate Student Manuscript](#).



Hannah Ontiveros, Ph.D. in History

Dissertation: Caring for Korea: Engendering War and Aid in the American Century

- **Bass Connections:** Ontiveros served as project manager for [America's Sacred Spaces](#) (read her [reflection](#)) and graduate mentor on a Story+ summer project on the [builders of Duke Chapel](#).
- **More cool stuff:** Through a [Graduate Student Training Enhancement Grant](#), Ontiveros took on two research projects for CWS Durham. "CWS was a great fit," she said. "The organization's emergency relief efforts crop up a lot in my dissertation; CWS Durham operates locally and works in grievously under-served communities; and the organization's focus on refugee resettlement and advocacy addresses a timely problem with roots in the historical period that I study." (Read more about her [experience](#).)



Emily Rains, Ph.D. in Public Policy

Dissertation: Negotiating Informality: Essays on Policy Needs and Political Problem-Solving in Indian Slums

- **Bass Connections:** Emily Rains joined a multiyear project, [Studying the Real 'Slums' in Bangalore, Patna and Jaipur](#), and received a [Student Research Award](#) to return to Bangalore and conduct detailed case studies of five slums. This led to a journal article, "[Combining Satellite and Survey Data to Study Indian Slums](#)." Rains also served on the [Student Advisory Council](#).



Jun Shepard, Ph.D. in Earth & Ocean Sciences

Dissertation: Global Energy Systems and International Trade

- **Bass Connections:** Jun Shepard was on the [Coal in America](#) team.
- **More cool stuff:** As an [Energy Data Analytics Ph.D. Student Fellow](#), Shepard enhanced her doctoral research. She is now a senior associate at RMI, where she develops analytics to accelerate state-level climate action.



Emily Ury, Ph.D. in Ecology

Dissertation: Ecosystem Consequences of Sea Level Rise and Salinization in North Carolina's Coastal Wetlands

- **Bass Connections:** Emily Ury served as project manager on a Data+ summer project, [Detecting and Predicting Impacts of Saltwater Intrusion on Coastal Ecosystems](#).
- **More cool stuff:** Through the Rhodes Information Initiative's Data Expeditions, she designed a course module on [Data Analysis for Ecological Modeling](#). Ury was also a [Duke Environmental Impacts Fellow](#).



Edgar Virgüez, Ph.D. in Environmental Sciences & Policy

Dissertation: An Interdisciplinary Approach for the Decarbonization of Electric Cars

- **Bass Connections:** Edgar Virgüez joined the [Modeling Tools for Energy Systems Analysis](#) team in his first semester. "By participating in Bass Connections, I was able to work not only with people in my doctoral energy team, but with undergrads, master's students and postdocs," he said. "Many of my most fruitful experiences at Duke have been working with them." (Read his [reflection](#).)
- **More cool stuff:** He took part in The Graduate School's [Emerging Leaders Institute](#), received the [Dean's Award for Excellence in Teaching](#) and the [Forever Duke Student Leadership Award](#), and served on numerous boards and committees across the university. Expecting to graduate later this year, he has accepted a postdoctoral position at Stanford University. (Read more about his [experience](#).)



Anna Wade, Ph.D. in Environment

Dissertation: Land-Use Legacy Dynamics in Decades- and Centuries-old Soils

- **Bass Connections:** Anna Wade led the [Mapping Legacy Lead in Urban Soils to Help Improve Children's Health](#) team, and published an article in *Environmental Science & Technology*.
- **More cool stuff:** Wade received a [Graduate Student Training Enhancement Grant](#) for an intensive workshop on stable isotopes at the University of Utah. She was a team member on a Catalyst Program grant, [Understanding and Controlling Urban Soil Lead Contamination and Its Impact on Public Health](#). She is now a postdoctoral researcher at the Environmental Protection Agency.



Gabrielle Harris Walker, Ph.D. in Nursing

Dissertation: Parenting After Stroke

- **Bass Connections:** Gabrielle Harris Walker joined her advisor Janet Bettger on the multiyear [Global Alliance on Disability and Health Innovation \(GANDHI\)](#) team.
- **More cool stuff:** She honed her skills in science communication through a short course led by [Duke Science & Society](#).

Learn More

- Read about two graduate students who were honored for [outstanding mentorship](#) by their Bass Connections teams.
- Learn what some Bass Connections [alumni](#) are doing now.
- Browse examples of [publications and other outputs](#) resulting from Bass Connections teams.