Sofia Varino
Cultural Analysis and Theory
Advisor: Lisa Diedrich

Sofia Varino’s work crosses several genres drawing upon her extensive experience in performance, contemporary art and cultural studies. In the past year, Sofia has published in a top international journal, presented papers at conferences in Barcelona, New York, Lisbon, and Boston. Her doctoral dissertation mobilizes the concepts of indeterminacy and vitality in order to interrogate and destabilize accounts of the biomedical body in contemporary culture. Alongside her scholarly research, Sofia develops projects as a cultural producer and interdisciplinary artist. She is associate director at Harmattan Theater, an NYC-based ensemble developing site-specific performances on ecology and global water politics.

“I have the best advisor anyone could ask for, Professor Lisa Diedrich, as well as a great faculty committee who completely support my interests and understand my needs, both at the Cultural Analysis & Theory department and at the Philosophy department, where I pursued a graduate certificate,” Sofia said. “I also have great colleagues at CAT who inspire and motivate me, and I count myself very lucky to be part of such a dynamic academic community at Stony Brook.”

After graduation, Sofia plans to pursue a post-doctoral position at a European university. Additionally, she would like to work in a curatorial research position and launch an interdisciplinary cultural space in Berlin, where she is currently a guest doctoral candidate at the John F. Kennedy Institute of North American Studies at the Freie Universität.
Matthew E. Aiello-Lammens
Ecology & Evolution
Advisor: H. Resit Akcakaya

Matthew Lammens has been busy this year: he co-authored four papers and has two others in press. He published two book reviews and presented at the Ecological Society’s annual meeting about a sensitivity analysis method he is developing as part of his dissertation research. Moreover, he obtained a research position, with post-doctoral duties, at the University of Connecticut John Silander’s lab. Matt’s approach to plant ecology, population demography and ecological niche modeling, provide a novel framework for assessing the ecological risks posed by invasive species.

A native of Deer Park, N.Y., Matt completed his undergraduate work at Columbia University. After graduation he spent a number of years working for the Appalachian Mountain Club in northern New Hampshire, taking care of camping sites that were accessible only by hiking. As a result, Matt decided to pursue graduate work in ecology and evolution at Stony Brook University.

Matt said he was “surprised and honored” to be chosen as one of the top graduate students. “Many of my closest friends are also graduate students here at Stony Brook and I really believe that every one of them are just as deserving, if not more so, of being considered a top graduate student. I’m fortunate to have been surrounded by such great peers during my time here.”

The E&E department faculty are “also superb and have really fostered a vibrant scholarly community,” he said. “There's real dialogue and exchange of ideas that helps synthesize new science in the department, which makes everyone a better scientist.” Going forward, Matt plans to continue studying ecological processes that can be used to inform conservation planning and management while teaching others about these processes and ways to examine them.
An emerging expert in the field of magnetization dynamics and electron microscopy, Shawn Pollard was selected as a top graduate student due to his consistently high level of productivity, reflected in his many publications and conference presentations. The American Physical Society (APS) awarded Shawn its 2012 Group on Magnetism and its Applications (GMAG) travel award, given to presenters whose work represents a significant contribution to the field. Shawn is also committed to educating future scientists and has taught magnetism to middle-school students and electron microscopy to students in the Brookhaven summer research program.

“Stony Brook is famous for the top quality research of its graduate students, in all fields, and that makes me truly honored to have received this award,” Shawn said. SBU, and its collaborations with Brookhaven National Laboratory, have allowed me “to carry out research that would have been impossible at other universities. I have to thank my advisor, Yimei Zhu, for his constant support and mentoring, which has been instrumental in my development as a research scientist.”

Shawn plans to go into academia after graduation and hopes to continue exploring “the fundamental aspects of materials with novel properties.” Long-term, he wants to “provide the same quality of mentorship and support as my advisor has provided me.”
Autumn Kujawa’s research focuses on the developmental neuroscience of depression and holds important implications for both the basic and the translational science of mental health. She won a three-year National Institutes of Health (NIH) pre-doctoral fellowship for her dissertation research, which examines the effects of parental mood and anxiety disorders, as well as early parenting, on neural reactivity to monetary rewards and losses in children.

“I am grateful to those who nominated me for this award and very honored to have been selected,” Autumn said. “My training at SBU has been an integral part of my success and career development. In particular, my advisors, Drs. Daniel Klein and Greg Hajcak Proudfit, have provided me with endless support and guidance to shape my career. I am also very thankful for my clinical supervisors, instructors and amazing colleagues and lab-mates, who have continually challenged me and helped me to grow both personally and professionally.”

Autumn plans to pursue an academic career, where she can “mentor and supervise graduate students while continuing my research on markers of risk for depression and anxiety across development.”
Shen Zhao, a recent graduate of Stony Brook University, is a post-doctoral research associate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and an affiliated researcher for the Center for Functional Nanomaterials at Brookhaven National Laboratory.

His primary field of research focuses on the development and characterization of heterogeneous catalysts for environmental and sustainable energy applications. He is the recipient of the prestigious National Award for students in environmental chemistry research, a certificate of appreciation from the International Precious Metals Institute, and a Certificate of Merit from the Environmental Chemistry Division of the American Chemical Society. Shen has published six journal articles and co-authored 10 conference presentations. His work has been cited in national media outlets including Newsday and Science Daily.

“It is my greatest honor to receive such a prestigious award,” Shen said. “As a student coming from China, I am so glad to have [had] the opportunity to further my education here at Stony Brook University. My experience here not only broadened my vision but also helped establish my lifelong goal of devoting myself to scientific research.”

Shen hopes to follow in the footsteps of his advisor, Professor Orlov and “become a responsible mentor, dedicated scientist, and a person always thirsty for knowledge.”
Marina Sonia Carrasco-Perezagua

Hispanic Languages & Literature
Advisor: Kathleen Vernon

Marina Perezagua is the critically acclaimed author of *Criaturas Abisales* (Barcelona, 2011) and *Leche* (Barcelona, 2013). Both books include illustrations by the internationally renowned painters Aron Wiesenfeld and Walton Ford, who illustrated the Rolling Stones’ album *GRRR*.

“I believe that expressing gratitude should be one of the columns of our society,” Marina said. “With this award I felt that by means of my work SBU heard what I have been saying to this university for a long time: Thank you.”

Marina continued: “Virginia Woolf said in *A Room of One’s Own* the following: ‘For surely it is time that the effect of discouragement upon the mind of the artist should be measured, as I have seen a dairy company measure the effect of ordinary milk and Grade A milk upon the body of the rat.’ I think that the opposite is also necessary: To be aware of the effect of motivation upon our minds. In my case, SBU, because of its outstanding team of thinkers inside the Department of Hispanic Languages and Literature, gave me the tools not only to succeed but to be able to achieve anything so long as I took seriously this responsibility: To keep growing as a thinker and as a good person.”

Going forward, Marina’s primary objective is “to keep researching and writing to the maximum of my capacities. I am basically focused on fiction, but this fiction is always framed by the parameters of the most recent critical and theoretical studies that allow me to speak about race, gender and other problems that we all have the responsibility of facing. I hope that one day you all will be almost as proud of the progress I have made as I am of having been a part of SBU.”
Huanhuan Wang

Materials Science & Engineering
Advisor: Michael Dudley

Huanhuan Wang graduated with her Bachelor of Science from Shandong University, completing her undergraduate thesis project at State Key Lab of Crystal Materials — famous in China for crystal growth. She joined Stony Brook University’s Materials Science and Engineering Department in 2009, under the direction of Michael Dudley.

Her research focuses on crystal growth and characterizing defect structures in crystals — with the aim of determining their origins. Huanhuan largely attributes her success at SBU to working with her advisor, Michael Dudley, who she calls “the leader in the field of defects in silicon carbide crystals and their influence on device behavior” as well as access to state-of-the-art research tools. Professor Dudley, she said, “has allowed me to grow and exposed me to many international conferences, which has enabled me to reach a position of prominence myself in a very short time.”

In addition to presentations at international conferences, Huanhuan has seven first-author and 11 co-authored publications, and her work has been cited in 17 peer-reviewed articles. Upon graduation, Huanhuan would like to secure a position in industry related to her Ph.D. work, though she is also considering entering into academia.