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PRESS RELEASE

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Fresno State students gain research experience through collaboration with American Antiquarian Society

Worcester, MA (April 25, 2023)—This spring, students at California State University, Fresno, gained valuable research experience in a collaboration with the [American Antiquarian Society](#) (AAS), a national research library located in Worcester, MA. AAS houses the world’s largest collection of printed material from before the twentieth century in what is now the United States. In this pilot initiative Melanie Hernandez, associate professor and chair of English at Fresno State, introduced students in her class, “U.S. Mexican Racial Formation,” to the vast resources available in the AAS collections and how to use these primary sources in their research. The undergraduates learned about children’s literature, graphic arts, and books that related to their class theme. The virtual class provided individualized attention from AAS staff, customized workshops with collections materials, a behind-the-scenes video of the library, and catalog search tutorial videos.

“As a Hispanic-Serving Institution, approximately 66% of Fresno State’s students are the first in their families to go to college and 59% are eligible for Pell Grants. This collaboration gave my students a learning experience they may not have otherwise had, one that may open new opportunities as they continue with their studies,” said Professor Hernandez, who is a member and past fellow of the American Antiquarian Society.

The Fresno State-AAS collaboration began in the summer of 2022 as an initiative for the [American Council of Learned Societies’ Intention Foundry](#), which has the goal of addressing issues of inequity within academia by leveraging the clout of institutions and professional organizations. Professor Hernandez approached AAS President Scott Casper with the idea for developing a class at Fresno State that would provide access to the Society for undergraduate research. Casper enthusiastically



embraced the proposal, and AAS staff worked with Hernandez to create a curriculum for this spring's course.

“It has been a pleasure for our staff to work with Melanie Hernandez on this initiative,” said Casper. “The collaboration is especially meaningful to us at the Society because it engages an audience that traditionally may not have been served by our organization. We hope the experience will inspire a new curiosity in the students about America’s past and help them take advantage of the extensive historical materials available to them at AAS as they continue their academic programs.”

The pilot initiative between Fresno State and the American Antiquarian Society also explores the potential for undergraduates to conduct research remotely. “Our two organizations combined our existing resources to give students the experience of doing archival research at a library on the other side of the country, without having to leave their hometown or incur additional expenses,” said Hernandez. “We brought the archive to them and introduced them to a previously unfamiliar research option that falls well within the purview of their English major.”

About the American Antiquarian Society

The American Antiquarian Society (AAS) cultivates understanding of the American past, grounded in its ever-growing collection of printed and manuscript sources from the colonial period through 1876. Through wide-ranging programs, community engagement, and support for researchers and students of early American history, the Society works to cultivate a broad community of inquiry—locally and nationally.

Since its founding in 1812 by Revolutionary War patriot and printer Isaiah Thomas, AAS has assembled what is today the world’s largest and most accessible collection of books, pamphlets, broadsides, newspapers, periodicals, children's literature, music, and graphic arts material printed before the twentieth century in what is now the United States. The library of over four million items also includes a substantial collection of secondary texts, bibliographies, digital resources, and reference works. AAS is also a learned society with more than 1,100 members, who are elected



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based on distinctive achievement in academic or public life. In 2013, the Society was the first independent research library to be awarded the National Humanities Medal and was cited for “safeguarding the American story.”

The American Antiquarian Society is located at 185 Salisbury Street in Worcester, MA. The library is open Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Tuesdays from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. To learn more, visit americanantiquarian.org.

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