

Melissa Villa Nicholas, PhD
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Education

PhD	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, August 2016 Primary Field: Information Science Minor Field: Queer Theory
M.A.	University of Wisconsin-Madison, August 2012 Primary Field: Library and Information Studies
M.A.	Claremont Graduate University, August 2010 Primary Field: Cultural Studies
B.A.	Azusa Pacific University, December 2005 Major Fields: Global Studies, American Literature

Appointments

Associate Professor, University of California Los Angeles	July 2025
Founder & Director, The Esperanza Laboratories	Founded in 2025
Assistant Professor, UCLA	July 2024-July 2025
Associate Professor, GSLIS, University of Rhode Island	July 2023- July 2024
Assistant Professor, GSLIS, URI	July 2017-June 2023
Lecturer, GSLIS, URI	August 2016-June 2017

Affiliations

The Esperanza Laboratories, UCLA
Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA
DataX, UCLA
Latino Policy Institute, UCLA

Scholarly Honors and Awards

Association of Borderlands Studies Book Award, 2025
McGannon Center Book Award, Fordham University, 2024
Honorable Mention, Labor Tech Network Book Award, 2022
Diversity and Inclusive Excellence Awards, URI, 2021
Library Juice Press Paper Contest, 2020
Gender and Women's Studies Smalley Fellowship, UIUC, 2015
I3 Schools PhD Teaching Fellow, University of Pittsburgh, 2014

James Krikelas Award, Honorable Mention, UW-Madison, 2012
REFORMA Scholar, REFORMA, 2011
Dianne McAfee Hopkins Award, UW-Madison, 2011
Advanced Opportunity Fellowship at UW-Madison, 2010-2011

Community Engagement

TODEC Legal Center (2025-present)
MVUSD Ballet Folklórico Corazón de mi Tierra (2024-present)
MVUSD Latino Parent Advisory Committee (2023-present)
Madison Infoshop (2010-2012)
Guadalupe Homeless Project (2007-2008)
Peppertree Kids Lake Elsinore (2006-2007)

Scholarly Research Grants

Community Engagement Course Development Grant UCLA	2025-2026 \$5,000
Mellan Digital Humanities Course Development Grant UCLA	2025-2026 \$10,000
Mexican Migrant Women's Socio-Techno Stories in the Age of A.I. UCLA Institute of American Cultures	2025-2026 \$3000
Community Engagement Research Grant: La Historia Museum SEIS, UCLA	2025-2026 \$10,000
SSIREP Grant SSIREP, URI	2022-2023 \$7000
Dean's Summer Faculty Research Grant Arts & Sciences, URI	2022 \$5000
Subvention Grant Center for the Humanities, URI	2021 \$1000
Project Completion Grant Office of Research Development, URI	2021 \$3000
The Faculty Career Enhancement Grant The University of Rhode Island	2019-2020 \$7,298

Current Research Projects in Process and Under Review

Villa-Nicholas, M. (Spring 2026). "Maria: Las mujeres migrantes en el centro de la historia de la tecnologia." *Relaciones*

“Latinx Metadata.” IMLS Grant Funded Project with Dr. LaTesha Velez and Michelle Rosquillo

Mexican Migrant Women in the Age of A.I. Proposed Monograph under Consideration at UC Press

Border Ecologies: Life in Transit. Co-authored Proposed Manuscript under consideration at Minnesota Press with Iván Chaar Lopez, Diana Irina Córdoba Ramirez, Samuel Fernando Rivera Andrade, Diana Montaño, Felicity Amaya Schaeffer, Nithia Castorena-Sáenz

Books

Data Borders: How Silicon Valley is Building an Industry from Immigrant Data. (2023). UC Press.

Latinas on the Line: Invisible Labor in Telecommunications. (2022). Rutgers Press.

Peer-Reviewed Publications

Villa-Nicholas, M. (Spring 2026). “Shadow Self: Archetypes of Mexican Men and Technology in Michael Peña Films.” *Label Me Latina/o*. 16.1

Villa-Nicholas, M. (2025). “Women’s History in Computing: A Case Study of Women in the Workforce.” Women’s History Database, *ABC-CLIO*

Sweeney, M., and Villa-Nicholas, M. (2022). “Digitizing the Latina Information Worker.” *American Quarterly*. 74.1

Villa-Nicholas, M. and Sweeney, M. (March 2020) "Designing the ‘good citizen’ through Latina identity in USCIS’s virtual assistant ‘Emma.’" *Feminist Media Studies*. 20.7

Villa-Nicholas, M. (2019). “Latinx Digital Memory: Identity Making in Real Time.” *Social Media and Society*. 5.4

Austin, J. and Villa-Nicholas, M. (August 2019) “Information Provision and the Carceral State: Race and Reference Beyond the Idea of the ‘Underserved.’” *The Reference Librarian*. 60.4

Villa-Nicholas, M. (October 2018). “Teaching Intersectionality: Pedagogical Approaches for Lasting Impact.” *Education for Information*. 34.2

Villa-Nicholas, M (May 2018). “Terror by Telephone: Normative Anxieties around Obscene Calls in the 1960s.” *First Monday*. 23.5

Villa-Nicholas, M (Spring 2018). “Discerning Fake Information.” *Teaching Media Quarterly*. 6.1

Velez, L. and Villa-Nicholas, M. (Spring 2017) “Mapping Race and Racism in U.S. Library History Literature, 1997-2015.” *Library Trends*. 65.4

Villa-Nicholas, M. (Spring 2017). "Ruptures in Telecommunications: Latina and Latino Information Workers in Southern California." *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*. 42.1

Villa-Nicholas, M. (Fall 2015). "Latina/o Librarian Technological Engagements: REFORMA in the Digital Age." *Latino Studies*. 13.4

Villa-Nicholas, M. (Winter 2014). "Latina Narratives of Information Technologies: Towards a Critical Latina Technology Studies." *Media-N*. 10.3

Peer-Reviewed Book Chapter

Villa-Nicholas, M., Drake, T., and Tidline, T. (2019). "Healing Justice: An Approach of Caring for Intersectional LIS Professionals." Social Justice and Activism in Libraries: Essays on Diversity and Change. McFarland Press

Invited Book Chapter

Villa-Nicholas, M. (March 2016). "The Invisible Information Worker: Latinas in Telecommunications." In The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class and Culture Online, edited by Safiya Noble and Brendesha Tynes. Peter Lang Digital Editions Series

Edited Journal

Fronteras: migración, corporalidad y trabajo en la relación México-Estados Unidos, siglos XX-XXI. (2026). Guest Editor con Dr. Diana Irina Córdoba Ramírez. *Relaciones*

Information Studies, Race and Racism. (2020). Guest editor with Dr. LaTesha Velez. *Open Information Science*. De Gruyter Publishers

Miscellaneous Publications

Villa-Nicholas, M. (2020). "Data Body Milieu." Commentary & Criticism. *Feminist Media Studies*

Villa-Nicholas, M. (December 19, 2019). "Missing Cells: The Growing Economic Value of Immigrant and Refugee Biological Data." *Bitch Media*

Fiction & Nonfiction Creative Works

Villa Nicholas, M & Nicholas, M. *Pásale: A Novel*. (2017). Floricanto Press

Villa Nicholas, M. and Nicholas, M. (2017). Se Me Olvidó. *The Grief Diaries*

Nicholas, M. and Villa Nicholas, M. (2017). Culture. *Dear Journal*

Invited Speaker and Invited Engagements

"Maria: Las mujeres migrantes en el centro de la historia de la tecnología." (December 2025). Fronteras: migración, corporalidad y trabajo en la relación México-Estados Unidos. Virtual Panel. National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), Mexico City, Mexico.

Data Borders Book Club. (November 2025). Virtual Lecture. University of Maryland iSchool.

“Data Borders.” McCourt School of Public Policy. (October 2025). Georgetown University.

“Data Borders.” Meet the Author Series. ASIST Webinar Series. (May 2025). ASIST.

“Data Borders: How Silicon Valley is Building an Industry around Immigrants.” (March 2025). Virtual Keynote. Brown University.

Libraries, Labor, and Perpetual Obsolescence: A Recent History of the Future. (March 2025). Virtual Invited Response. Massachusetts Historical Society.

“Data Borders: Storytelling in the Age of A.I.” (October 2024). Virtual Panel. Big Data & Society.

“Data Borders: Storytelling in the Age of A.I.” (April 2024). Center for the Humanities. Washington University.

“Data Borders: How Silicon Valley is Building an Industry to Know Immigrants.” (April 2023). Invited Lecture for Center for Internet Inquiry (C2i2). University of California, Los Angeles.

“Data Borders: How Silicon Valley is Building an Industry to Know Immigrants.” (February 2023). Keynote for the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa College of Communication & Information Science Discerning Diverse Voices Symposium.

“[Teaching incarceration in LIS](#).” (June 2023). Invited Webinar for the San Francisco Public Library Jail and Reentry Library Services.

“Data Borders.” (Oct 2022) Invited Webinar for the Center for Latinx Digital Media, School of Communication. (October 2022). Northwestern University

“Innovative Technologies: Opportunities and Challenges.” (April 2021). Innovation and the Future of LIS: Technology, Ethics, and Inclusion. Tenth Annual Allen Smith Symposium. iSchool, Simmons

Latino Tech Talent. (March 2021). Virtual Roundtable. Aspen Institute

“Don’t Call ICE and Other Methods of Resistance in the Library.” (July 2020). Keynote. Library Instruction West. (Conference canceled, COVID19)

“Innovative technologies: Opportunities and Challenges.” (April 2020). Innovation and the Future of LIS: Technology, Ethics, and Inclusion. Tenth Annual Allen Smith Symposium. iSchool, Simmons. (Conference canceled, COVID19)

“Data Body Milieu: How Silicon Valley is Designing Technology around Latinx Immigrants.” (Summer 2020). AI Now Institute, New York University. (Lecture canceled, COVID19)

“Biotechnology and Data Citizens on the U.S. Mexico Border.” (February 2020). IS Colloquia. University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

“Histories of Latinx Tech Labor: 1870-Present.” (April 2019). Harrington Forum. The University of Rhode Island

Sweeney, M. & Villa-Nicholas, M. “Cultural Affordances of ‘Emma,’ USCIS’s Latina Virtual Assistant. (March 2019). Harvard Kennedy School. Harvard University.

<https://vimeo.com/331443862>

“The Intersectional Process: Revise, Fail, Revise Again” (November 2018). The University of Rhode Island Libraries’ Faculty Development Series. The University of Rhode Island

“Latina Information Workers in Telecommunications.” (March 2017). Special Interest Group for Computers, Information and Society. The Computer History Museum

“Latina Information Workers in Telecommunications: Intersectional Experiences in the Bell System.” (February 2016). Colloquia Speaker Series. Department of Information Studies, University of California Los-Angeles

“Latina Information Workers in Telecommunications: Intersectional Experiences in the Bell System.” (April 2015). The Barbara and Donald Smalley Lecture. Department of Gender and Women’s Studies, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Conference Papers, Research Talks, and Presentations

Panel Presentation. (September 2025). “Framing Empowering Conversations about Latinx Patrons.” REFORMA National Convention. Long Beach, CA.

Oxford Summer Media Institute. (July-August 2024). “Technology, Policy, and Democracy in Flux.” Jesus College, Oxford, UK.

Techno Fronteras Retreat. (March 2024). Techno Anzaldua’s. UC Santa Cruz.

Panel presentation. (September 2023). “Data Borders: How Silicon Valley is Building an Industry around Immigrants.” SIGCIS SHOT.

Roundtable. (October 2023). “Latinx Internet Studies.” Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR). Philadelphia, PA.

Panel presentation. (2021). “Strategic Visibilities: Digitizing the Latina Information Worker.” AOIR. Virtual.

Panel presentation. (October 2021). "Borderlands and/as Machine: Technoscience in Unequal and Uncertain Lifeworlds." 4S. Virtual

Panel presentation. (September 2019). "Collecting People as Data." 4S. New Orleans

Panel presentation. (September 2018). "Crossing Institutional Divides: Services to Incarcerated Patrons as a Bridge Between Public Libraries and Library and Information Science Education." Joint Conference of Librarians of Color (JCLC)

Poster presentation. (September 2018). "Teaching and Applying Intersectionality in the LIS Classroom." JCLC

Paper presentation. (September 2017) "I am so Versatile- I can be used for just about Everything": Race, Gender, and the Perfect Digital Latina Laborer." Society for the Study of Social Science

Poster. (January 2017). The Evolution of Critical Theories in Library History Literature, 1997-2015. ALISE

"How to Read and Write for Grad School." (September 2015). Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. (Graduate: Online)

Panel presentation. (March 2015). "Pipelines and pathways into the information professions." iConference. Newport Beach, California

Paper presentation. (May 2014). "Neoliberal Intimacies: Latina/o information workers." Gender, Bodies, Technologies Conference. Blacksburg, VA

Panel presentation. (February 2014). "Social Justice in LIS." iConference. Berlin, Germany

Panel presentation. (September 2013). "The Development of the Distributed Open Collaborative Courses (DOCCs)." Information Technology and Africa: Practices, Potentials and Challenges. Urbana, IL

Panel presentation. (May 2013). "Back to the Future! Adelante: A historical account of REFORMA in the digital age." History and Theory Conference: Responding to Crisis. Irvine, CA

Panel presentation. (April 2013). "Nostalgic Reflections: Producing citizenship with archival social media." HASTAC. Toronto, Canada

Paper presentation. (September 2012). "From the anti-apartheid movement to the Madison occupation: Representing dissent in the digital world." Protest on the Page: Print Culture History in Opposition to Almost Anything. Madison, WI

Poster. (April 2012). "A Collaborative Story: Librarians and Activists Partnering to Preserve Local History." Wisconsin Association of Academic Librarians, Lake Geneva, WI

Panel presentation. (November 2011). "LIS Access Midwest Program." Wisconsin Library Association, Milwaukee, WI

Consulting

Early Career IMLS. 2024-2027. University of North Carolina Greensboro

Latino Tech Talent. 2020-2021. Aspen Institute

Invited Course Lectures

"Silicon Valley Storytelling in the Age of AI." (November 2025). Information Studies. UCLA

"Data Borders." (November 2024). Information Studies. UCLA

"Silicon Valley Storytelling in the Age of AI." (November 2024). Information Studies. UCLA

"Latinxs designed as AI." (March 2023). Science and Technology Studies. Brown University

"Latinas on the Line." (March 2022). Borderlands, Technology, Race. UT Austin

"Data Borders." (March 2021). Introduction to Latinx Studies. University of Rhode Island for Dr. Julie Keller

"100+Years of Solitude." (March 2019). Simmons College, School of Library and Information Science for Dr. Colin Rhinesmith

"The Intersectional Internet." (November 2018) University of Southern California, Annenberg School of Communication Doctoral Seminar

"Latinas in Information Labor." (May 2017). University of California Los Angeles, iSchool Doctoral Seminar for Dr. Sarah Roberts

"Information Labor." (Spring 2017). University of Southern California, Media and Communication, seminar for Dr. Safiya Noble.

"Modern Librarianship." (September 2016). Student ALA Lecture Series. University of Rhode Island

Teaching

Academic Assemblages, UCLA

Information Technology, Borderlands, and Surveillance, UCLA

Critical Disability Approaches to LIS, URI, UCLA

Social Justice in Children's and Young Adult Literature, URI

Immigrant and Migrant Information Contexts and Practices, URI
Searching for Answers: Meeting Users' Information Needs, URI
Multiculturalism in Libraries, URI
Introduction to Information Science and Technologies, URI
Humanities Information and Materials, URI
Document, Assess, and Evaluate, URI
History of Libraries, URI
Race, Gender, and Information Technologies. iSchool, UIUC. (Undergraduate)
Research Methods & Design. I3 Institute. iSchool. University of Pittsburgh. (Undergraduate)

Created Curriculum

History of Libraries	2021/2022
Track in Info Equity, Diverse Communities & Critical Librarianship	Fall 2020
Social Justice in Young Adult and Children's Literature	Spring 2018
Immigrant & Migrant Information Contexts & Practices	Spring 2018
Critical Disability Approaches in Information Studies	Spring 2018

Media Appearances

Bucket List Community Café. (2025). “Denver Residents Protest Palantir Headquarters in Downtown.” Interviewed on the topic of Palantir.

New Books Podcast on Spotify. (2025). Interviewed on the topic of Data Borders.

Sonja Wolf Podcast on Spotify. (2025). Interviewed on the topic of Data Border.

C2I2 at UCLA. (March 2025). Interview on the topic of Data Borders.

Big Data & Society BookCast. (Feb 2024). [Interview on the topic of Data Borders: How Silicon Valley is Building an Industry Around Immigrants.](#)

The Majority Report with Sam Seder. (July 2023). “[Big Tech at the Border.](#)”

Peet, Lisa. (May 2021). Interview. “[The University of Rhode Island Launches MLS Track in Information Equity, Diverse Communities, and Critical Librarianship.](#)” Library Journal.

Moore, Kendall. (2019). Interview in the documentary “Decolonizing Science.”

Hodge, Twanna. (2019). Interview on “[Mapping Race and Racism in U.S. Library History Literature, 1997–2015](#)” in the ODLOS Intersections blog focus by The Diversity Research Grants Committee.

Professional Development

Oxford Media Institute Certificate	2024
Basic Brightspace Competency Certificate, URI	2020
High Impact Teaching Seminar, URI	2017

Office for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning Training
Urban Scholars, UCLA

2016
2007

Reviewer

First Monday
Information and Culture
In the Library with a Lead Pipe
IMLS Grant Reviewer
Journal of Community Informatics (JoCI)
Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies (JCLIS)
Journal of Radical Librarianship
MIT Press Book Reviewer
National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Grant Reviewer
National Science Foundation (NSF) Grant Reviewer
UC Press Book Reviewer

Honors Societies

Beta Phi Mu, an international honor society for library and information studies
Sigma Tau Delta, an international honor society for English

Professional Memberships and Affiliations

Association for Borderlands Studies
Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR)
ALISE (Association for Library and Information Science Education)
Aspen Institute Affiliate
Beta Beta Epsilon, Beta Phi Mu LIS Honor Society. Madison, Wisconsin
Center for Critical Internet Inquiry, UCLA
Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA
DataX, UCLA
Fembot Collective
REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library & Information Services to Latinos
Society for Social Studies of Science (4S)
Social Science Institute for Research, Education, and Policy (SSIREP), URI
Techno-Anzaldúa's U.S. and Mexico

University Service

Faculty Advisory Committee, DataX, UCLA	2025-present
Faculty Advisory Committee, Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA	2024-present
Admissions Committee, IS, UCLA	2025-present
Committee on Accreditation, IS, UCLA	2025-2027
“Going Public” Grant Reviewer, SEIS, UCLA	2025
Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee, SEIS, UCLA	2024-present
Director Hiring Committee for GSLIS, Chair, URI	2023-2024
Admissions Committee, GSLIS, URI	2017-2024
Curriculum Committee, GSLIS, URI	2016-2024

Faculty Senate, URI	2019-2022
Service and Life Faculty Senate Subcommittee	2019-2022
Ad Hoc Committee to Establish an Online Accelerated Program	2018-2022
Committee to Establish a Latin American/Latino Studies Minor at URI, GSLIS, URI	2017
Faculty Committee, GSLIS, URI	2016-present
Committee to Implement the Strategic Plan, Harrington School, URI	2019-2020
Student American Library Association Faculty Advisor, GSLIS, URI	2017-2024
Committee on Accreditation	2016-2018
Technology Committee, GSLIS, URI	2016-2017
Rhode Island Library Association, Full Board	2016-2017
Doctoral Student Representative, Curriculum Committee, GSLIS, UIUC	2014-2015
Planning Committee, Inclusive Illinois UIUC	2013
Co-Chair, REFORMA Student Group. Madison, Wisconsin	2010-2012

Event Planning

Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) 2026 Conference Planning Committee	2025-2026
Voices for Information Equity Webinar Series	2020-2023
RI Statewide Library, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Day	2018-2019
Volunteer GALA, Habitat for Humanity	2007
Revolution (626), Azusa, CA	2002-2003

Prior Work & Volunteer Experience

Women of Justice (WoJ), TODEC Legal Center Inc, Perris, CA (2025-present)

- Organize grocery donations for migrant farm workers in Coachella
- Deliver groceries to TODEC Legal Center Inc
- Migrant toy drive

Website Manager, Dept. of Gender and Women's Studies, UIUC (January 2012- August 2016)

- Publish headlines on current news and events for the GWS department.
- Manage social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook for event marketing and information dissemination.
- Create mixed media, such as videos and posters, to promote GWS.

Research Assistant, Student Affairs, GSLIS. (January 2014- August 2014)

- Wrote grants for GSLIS diversity grants.
- Researched diversity in the LIS field. Research and disseminate information on grants and scholarships for students.
- Drafted grant materials for IMLS grants applications.

Research Assistant, LIS Access Midwest Program (August 2012-August 2013)

- Designed a website using WordPress and Drupal
- Coordinated Summer Institute
- Used multimedia to promote the program

Project Assistant, LIS Access Midwest Program (September 2011- May 2012)

- Coordinated events for diversity in the SLIS department
- Researched and presented data on diversity in Library Science
- Managed digital tools and multimedia technologies

Reference Desk Intern, Madison Central Library (May 2011- August 2011)

- Answered reference-related questions in person and over the phone
- Assisted patrons in technology and Web troubleshooting
- Developed programming for Madison's Big Read book discussion

Info Desk Staff, Media, Education, Resources, and Information (MERIT) Library UW-Madison (September 2010- July 2012)

- Answered reference-related questions and conducted reference interviews with undergraduate and graduate students
- Assisted patrons in software program issues and troubleshooting multimedia
- Taught research methods and software to School of Education classes and individuals
- Collection development of bilingual materials in Spanish with a budget of \$2000

Volunteer Coordinator, Public Counsel Law Center (2007-2008)

- Coordinated pro-bono attorneys in representing tort cases and updating them on the status of the case
- Assemble Immigration documents for clients and update them in ProLaw Software
- Coordinated training sessions for Pro-bono attorneys acting as Guardian Ad Litem

Volunteer Coordinator, Habitat for Humanity of Greater Los Angeles (2006-2007)

- Assisted Habitat for Humanity with the coordination, recruitment, and retention of individual volunteers
- Informed 20-30 volunteers bi-weekly about Habitat for Humanity
- Maintained user-friendly volunteer database

Urban Community Scholars at UCLA (2007)

- Collaborated with UCLA students of Urban Planning to research gentrification and community organizing in Los Angeles
- Conducted qualitative interviews in Spanish on city planning and gentrification
- Present results to invested parties

Dolores Mission (2006-2007)

- Act as a volunteer coordinator
- Volunteered for the homeless resource center
- Coordinate volunteers and database information input

Peppertree Kids (2006)

- Established a tutoring center within the Peppertree neighborhood
- Tutor children K-12
- Organize tutors and materials

Oaxaca Youth Empowerment (2005)

- Volunteer tutor and assistant at a preschool
- Coordinate activities for kids and adults
- Event planning

Associated Student Body, Azusa Senator, Azusa Pacific University (2004-2005)

- Act as a liaison between the university and the city
- Interview students on their goals for further relationships with the city
- Co-plan events on campus and in the city
- Establishing the 'Azusa Board'

AIDs Project L.A. (2003)

- Intake reports for future clients
- Data entry of client reports