

UC SANTA BARBARA

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## **Capping off their doctoral work at UCSB, historian Sergey Salushchev and microbiologist Thomas Lankiewicz win the university's dissertation award**

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For doctoral students, dissertation awards honor the endeavors of their graduate research along with the end of their time as student scholars. On the eve of receiving their Ph.D.s, two UC Santa Barbara graduate students have received the Winifred and Louis Lancaster Dissertation Award: historian Sergey Salushchev in humanities and fine arts, and microbiologist Thomas Lankiewicz in biological and life sciences.

Given annually, the Lancaster awards recognize dissertations with “significant impact on the field in terms of methodological and substantive contributions.”

“The Lancaster awards represent one way we acknowledge the excellence of our graduate students,” said Leila Rupp, Interim Anne and Michael Towbes Graduate Dean. “Recognizing the very best in two distinct areas each year calls attention to the contributions that graduate student research makes in a wide range of disciplines.”

Salushchev’s “Reluctant Abolitionists: Slavery, Dependency, and Abolition in the Caucasus (1801-1914),” and Lankiewicz’s “Biochemical Characterization of Neocallimastigomycetes for the Development of Lignocellulose Conversion Technologies using Synthetic Biology” will now be entered into a national competition sponsored by the Council of Graduate Schools. Each scholar will also receive \$1,000 and participate in the Graduate Division Commencement ceremony’s platform party, where they will be presented with their awards.

For his part, Salushchev, a doctoral student in the Department of History, researches slavery in Imperial Russia and the Caucasus of the 19th century. His interests have led him to investigate religion, religious conversion and the performance of religious identity; the relationship between the state and subaltern groups; and the role of gender in the imperial peripheries.

“My scholarship conceptualizes the Caucasus as a permanent borderland, a site of cultural exchanges, transnational commercial networks, contested memory, and imperial rivalries,” he said. “My book manuscript, ‘Reluctant Abolitionists,’ investigates the history of slavery, the slave trade and abolition in the Caucasus under Russian imperial rule. When completed, it will provide the first comprehensive account of how slavery was abolished in the Caucasus and be in conversation with a global history of abolitionism.”

Salushchev said his dissertation adviser, Professor Adrienne Edger, was crucial to his success, noting that she “played a pivotal role in shaping the contours of the dissertation’s arguments and bringing them into focus.”

Hailing from the Department of Ecology, Evolution and Marine Biology (EEMB), Lankiewicz specializes in engineering metabolisms of non-model microbes and microbial communities, anaerobic digestion of cellulosic biomass. His dissertation adviser is UC Santa Barbara chemical engineering Professor Michelle O’Malley, along with EEMB Assistant Professor Holly Moeller

Of O'Malley, Lankiewicz said she "offered me immense opportunities while pursuing my dissertation. Without the funding she acquired, her excellent academic connections and her leadership, I would not have been able to accomplish what I did."

Currently working at a biotechnology startup called Allonnia, Lankiewicz strives to "prove that waste is a failure of the imagination." At the company, he takes industrial waste streams and tries to produce elegant biological solutions for reducing their impact on the environment and human health. He said he intends to pursue a career in biotechnology, working toward the goal of a more sustainable future. "I hope that by working on technology meant to be deployed immediately, I can maximize my impact on a sustainable future for humanity," he added.

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