Dr. Alison Krögel

University of Denver Department of Spanish Language, Literary & Cultural Studies
Named University Lecturer for AY 24-25

Rachel Jaeger[1], on behalf of the Editorial Board
[1]DUURJ Editor at Large, University of Denver

1 TELL ME ABOUT YOUR CAREER TRAJECTORY FROM UNDERGRAD TO BECOMING A PROFESSOR.

I was an undergrad comparative literature and Spanish student at the University of Washington. My goal as an undergrad was to study abroad as much as possible—I studied abroad in Spain and Ecuador—and still finish my degrees as quickly as possible. I was trying to make my undergrad experience as economically painless as I could, so I graduated in three years. Then I didn't really know what I should do. I felt like all I knew how to do was be a restaurant server or a student, so I went to grad school right after undergrad. In one of my study abroad programs in Ecuador, I ended up studying the Kichwa[1] language, the most widely spoken Indigenous language of the Americas. I found a program at the University of Maryland where they were looking for a graduate student who was interested in Andean studies and Quechua language and culture. That was a little bit niche, and I don't think there were a lot of US-based undergrads with Kichwa language studies, so it worked out well. I ended up getting a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at the University of Maryland from 2000 to 2006. I fast-tracked the Ph.D. as well, but it worked out, and I got to spend a lot of time researching and studying in South America.

I spent a year researching my dissertation in South America, mostly in Peru, but also in pretty much every other South American country except French Guiana and Surinam. I missed those countries, and I missed Venezuela. Other than that, I was in every other South American country in that year, and I learned a lot about the world and how to manage research sites as a young woman and as an outsider. I spent a lot of time in Quechua communities in highland Peru working on a project that became my first book about representations of Andean food systems in colonial and contemporary contexts. That was what my dissertation research was on, so I spent a lot of time in agricultural contexts in the highland Andes.

I graduated with my Ph.D. in 2006 and needed a job, so I worked in a small town in northwestern Nebraska called Chadron, at Chadron State College. Most of my students were first-generation students and from farming and ranching families. Some were from the Pine Ridge Reservation. I learned a lot in that first tenure track. I was the entire Department of Languages and Literatures. I taught many different classes each semester and actually took my Nebraska-based students to Peru on a study abroad program. It was an unbelievable amount of work to be the entire department, so I applied to a lot of jobs after that first year and came to the University of Denver in 2007. And I've been here ever since. I mostly taught Spanish majors and minors

[1]The language is spelled "Kichwa" in Ecuador and "Quechua" in Peru. Kichwa is the northern Andean variety.

in a 3000-level Latin American literature and culture series. In the last few years, I've taught more Advanced Seminars and AI Society classes, so a few classes every year in English.

I was recently named "University Lecturer" for AY 24-25. I'll deliver a lecture sometime next year regarding my Quechua and Andean Studies community-based research projects when the award is formally granted.

2 WHAT WAS LEARNING QUECHUA LIKE? WHAT IS IT LIKE TEACHING IT TO STUDENTS NOW?

By the time I started studying Quechua, I had academically studied Spanish and Portuguese, and I grew up as a first-language English speaker. Quechua was the first non-European language that I studied and to date, the only one in which I have become proficient. It was also the first agglutinating language that I had studied. All of the suffixes and infixes were so exciting to me—the idea that you could create subtle shifts in meaning by just adding an extra infix. As a literary studies fanatic, it was really exciting for me to translate from Quechua to Spanish or English, because I could play with all sorts of poetic descriptions that were coded in the Quechua verse using these particles of speech we call infixes. It was super challenging. It has a lot of sounds and explosive phonemes that don't exist in any of the languages I already spoke. A lot of my students who speak Hebrew or Russian, or other Slavic languages, can pronounce a lot of those glottal sounds, but it's difficult for first-language English speakers in terms of pronunciation. Quechua is also a primarily oral language, so as someone who had formally studied other languages mostly in a school system with grammar, books, and so forth, Quechua really challenges you to work in the real world very early on. You have to focus on oral proficiency before reading and writing, which was new and exciting for me.

The Quechua class here is Intro to Quechua Language and Culture, so it's taught in Spanish as well. All the students who take that course are already at an intermediate or advanced level of Spanish. That's helpful, because a lot of the lexical values in Quechua, particularly nouns for objects that surfaced in the Andes post-conquest, are just Spanish words with a topical marker. Speaking Spanish is really helpful for understanding some of the lexical varieties of Quechua. Quechua speakers who live in regions of the Andes where there is a lot of Spanish influence, particularly urban Quechua speakers, code-switch often between Spanish and Quechua. Students' previous experience with Spanish is really helpful, but I always find it important to emphasize that these are completely different language families, and it's the history of conquest that has brought Spanish and Quechua into contact. They are mutually unintelligible languages. A Quechua speaker isn't necessarily familiar with Spanish. There are millions of monolingual Quechua speakers. Luckily, teaching Quechua in this day and age, there are a lot of online materials, podcasts, and YouTube channels. It's much easier for students to practice and listen to oral recordings of Quechua. That used to be a challenge.

3 WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE CLASS TO TEACH?

My favorite class to teach is my Advanced Seminar, Imagining the Amazon. I love ASEMs because the students come from various majors. Usually, since you have such a wide variety of ASEMs to choose from, everyone who signs up for Imagining the Amazon is interested in the topic. I love having a combination of environmental science students, geography students, Spanish majors, computer science majors, biology majors, marketing majors—everybody comes to this interdisciplinary study of a fascinating region of the world with a lot of beauty and moving artistic production, and also a lot of challenges. It's a great space where we can all learn from each other. I learn so much from students every time I teach that class. It's also always changing, so the materials I teach in the class shift every quarter, which is important for me because I like to keep learning personally.

4 AFTER YOU FIRST VISITED THE ANDES AND AMAZON REGIONS, WHAT WAS SOMETHING THAT STAYED WITH YOU AND MADE YOU WANT TO RETURN?

I was very impacted by care for community members. Individuals were always considering the wellbeing of their families, neighbors, and community members when they were making choices that might seem pretty individual. They were always thinking about the larger context, even the environmental context. Even in communities that were facing a lot of hardship or economic marginalization, there was a sense of community and support that I wasn't experiencing in the United States. I lived in Washington D.C. and commuted to the University of Maryland campus, and I just felt like people who had access to all sorts of material wealth were very hyper-focused on the individual. In the Andean communities where I was spending a lot of time, it was so refreshing to live in a place where there was a real sense of common goals and helping others. The Quechua language itself has terms, vocabulary words, and even a syntactical structure that emphasizes reciprocity. It was so interesting to be able to see daily life practices reflected in the language and vice versa.

5 WHAT ARE YOUR CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECTS? WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION OR IMPETUS BEHIND EACH?

I have two ongoing projects. One of them is *Musuq Illa*, and it's an online extension of my second book. My idea was to expand the book beyond just an academic audience and create an open platform for sharing contemporary Quechua poetry that could be accessible to folks throughout the Andean diaspora and in the Andes, and that could be useful for teachers and the poets themselves. I'm the editor of it, but it includes the work of poets from principally Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru, and then writers who live in the diaspora, mostly Europe and the U.S., but who write in Quechua. The collective is fully trilingual in Quechua, English, and Spanish. It has been a challenge but also a beautiful project to try to create a large, sophisticated platform that is also fully accessible in an Indigenous language. It's also important to me that it is audio-accessible, because a lot of elders in Quechua communities have never had access to formal education in their own language, so they didn't necessarily have access to Quechua reading and writing in schools. They're able to hear the poetry in audio form as well. That's fun and important for students as well because they can take home poems from *Musuq Illa* and intergenerational learning can take place. There are also sample activities where teachers can pull lesson plans and students can interview their grandparents regarding some of the topics that are represented in the poem and so forth. Some of my DU students have actually created learning modules that teachers in the Andes can download as already prepared packets.

My other major project is called *The Aspen Archives*. This project is both a museum exhibition and a digital exhibition. It focuses on the history of sheepherders in the Rocky Mountain West, specifically Quechua and Peruvian sheepherders who make up nearly all of the sheepherders working in the United States since about the 1980s to present. It's a large-scale project that studies cultural history and some of the political and economic contexts related to the sheepherding industry in the American West. You have these transnational labor relationships between the highland Peruvian communities and high country communities in rural Colorado and Wyoming. The "aspen" aspect is the physical inscriptions left by generations of these workers on the aspen trees themselves, the aspen carvings. In the Colorado context, the project traces workers from Mexico and New Mexico in the first decades of the 20th century and then shifts to Peruvian workers starting in the 1980s. The time period of the project is 1925 to present. We showed the museum exhibition here in Denver and in a museum in Steamboat Springs near the forest where many of the sheepherders work. It was set to open in May at the Peruvian embassy in Washington D.C., but that show has been on hold because of concerns regarding an exhibition that describes immigrant communities in the Rocky Mountain West during this particular political climate. We are continuing to work on it on the digital platform, however.

6 YOU'VE MENTIONED THAT YOU TRY TO INCLUDE AT LEAST BILINGUAL, IF NOT TRILINGUAL, MATERIALS IN YOUR DIGITAL PROJECTS. CAN YOU TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

I've taken a good number of social science and anthropology courses, and one of the key points in all of those classes is sharing research with the communities that you work with. Also, for all of the decades that I've spent in Andean communities, the idea of reciprocity is fundamental to the work that any individual or community undertakes. The idea that I would just be producing academic journal articles that are available on databases that require credentials and really expensive subscriptions and are only written in English just seems anathema to everything that I hope to stand for. If I did write an article or a book chapter in English, for many years I would also try to publish it in an open-access journal in Latin America in Spanish. With these latest two projects with Peruvian sheepherders and with Quechua language poetry, I thought I should also try to make it available to a nonacademic public. The number of folks who have the time and access to an academic journal is limited. So, that's why I started working on the web-based options. It's incredibly complicated, especially to make the materials available in Quechua, but the amount of positive feedback that I received from colleagues and from community members has been so nice. It has opened up a lot of opportunities for the Quechua poets, for example, as well, just because when you look up Quechua poetry the site comes up. One of the poets on the site had her work featured in a museum exhibition funded by Prada in Italy because they found *Musuq Illa*. All of these different avenues have opened up because it's digitally available in multiple languages. Quechua language poetry was originally sung in an oral tradition, so not to offer an oral presentation of the verse seems ridiculous when we have access to the technology to provide audio recordings as well. It's nice to use the resources of universities in the Global North to create intellectual communities. Lots of folks benefit from the open-access, multimedia projects in ways that strictly academic articles are limited.

7 WHICH OF YOUR RESEARCH TOPICS ARE YOUR PRIORITIES GOING FORWARD, AND HOW DO YOU PLAN TO DEVELOP THEM FURTHER? DO YOU HAVE ANY NEW AREAS OF STUDY YOU WOULD LIKE TO PURSUE?

That's another thing I like about digital platforms: you can add ongoing research. With these multimedia projects that I'm working on now, new research and new voices can be added much more readily than with print materials. In terms of research going forward...I tend to create giant projects that spin widely beyond what I had first anticipated. My contemporary Quechua poetry book became this massive multimedia platform including dozens of partners and artists from eight or more countries around the world. When I'm envisioning future projects, I have to check in with where I'm going to be able to put my energy because I know that I'm going to make it much more time-consuming, collaborative, and multimedia than I first expected.

I do want to do some work surrounding my interest in practices that involve spending time in forests and open spaces, particularly in alpine contexts, for ritual purposes and practical purposes. For instance, in the Inca Empire, there was a whole system of message transportation, almost like a running relay system, called the chasquis. They were emissaries of Inca rulers centered in Cusco. In order to send messages throughout the vast Inca Empire you would have a relay system of runners who would pass the message from one runner to the next. There's this legacy of using movement across the mountains, of running, for different practical purposes, but also as a spiritual practice. I'm working on a project that traces running and movement through highland spaces for practical and spiritual purposes. I want to look at present-day practices of high-altitude running as community building and bringing attention to particular communities or individuals. A dream coda to this project would be to interview the Bolivian marathon runner Héctor Garibay, who made it to the Olympics and was generally supported by his whole community in that Olympic dream to make it economically possible for him to travel. It's another beautiful example—you would think that an athletic pursuit such as making it to the Olympics would be super individualistic, but instead it turned out to be a whole community behind him. So, the project is a cultural history of highland running within the Andean context, reaching back to pre-Colombian times. I don't know if it'll be a book chapter or an essay, but that's what I'm working on right now. I'm personally a trail runner, so I like to think about some of the psychological and physical reasons why humans like to move themselves through space by running. I was also thinking about the Center for Healthy Aging here on campus and how in highland Andean communities, elders are so active and integral to the functioning of the family and community. Movement is always what we would call a jog in English. You're never walking to the alpaca pasture or the potato field, you're always sort of trotting or jogging. In terms of physical wellbeing, I think that it helps folks to age healthfully, but I haven't gotten into the science aspect of it yet. In the U.S. we always hear that as you age, weight training is important, but how about high-altitude trail running into your 80s? It's practical and there are certainly positive health benefits. There are all sorts of side pathways into this particular research project, things like healthy aging and use of the coca leaf, so maybe it will become something big. I have to control myself and sometimes just do an article or a book chapter, though.