

Jill Thornton, Ph.D

San Antonio, Texas
Texas A&M University – San Antonio
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EDUCATION

2022 – 2026 Ph.D. in Geography, University of South Carolina

Research Interests: political geography, migration & refugees, humanitarianism, critical geographies of religion

Doctoral Dissertation: “Everyday citizenship in shared migrant spaces: Missionary Imaginaries and interactions with refugees in Germany”

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Caroline Nagel

Dissertation Committee: Drs. Meredith DeBoom, Austin Crane, Breanne Grace

2018 M.Sc. in Human Geography, Radboud University (Netherlands)

Program Specialization: Conflicts, Territories, and Identities

Master’s Thesis: “Strangers in a Foreign Land: A Study of the Christian Missionary Response to Refugees in Greece and Italy”

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Haley Swedlund; *Second Thesis Reader:* Dr. Henk van Houtum

2006 B.A. in Geography, Sonoma State University

Senior Thesis: “The Socio-Economic Implications of California Golf Courses”

Minor: Latin American Studies

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Political geography * migration and refugees * critical geographies of religion * critical and feminist geopolitics * cultural landscape * citizenship and belonging * critical humanitarian studies * (post) conflict resolution * religious and evangelical geopolitics

TEACHING & MENTORING EXPERIENCE

Department of History, Philosophy, and Geography, Texas A&M University-San Antonio

2026-present Instructional Assistant Professor

-GEOG 1301: *Physical Geography & Meteorology* – Fall 2026

-GEOG 3331: *US and Canada* – Fall 2026

Department of Geography, University of South Carolina

2023-2026 Graduate Instructor

-GEOG 314: *Geopolitics & Refugees* – Spring 2026

-GEOG 105: *The Digital Earth*

In-person: Fall 2025, Spring 2024, Fall 2023, Spring 2023

Online: Summer 2026, Summer 2025, Spring 2025, Fall 2024, Summer 2024, Summer 2023

-GEOG 121: *Geographies of Global Change* - Fall 2024 [online]

2022 Graduate Teaching Assistant

-GEOG 495: *Seminar in Geography* - Fall 2022

University of the Nations

2009-2022 Course coordinator & instructor

-HMT 121: *Discover Nations Seminar* (2-weeks), UK (2019) & Online (2020).

-SCI 141: *Mapping in Missions Seminar* (2-weeks), Townsville, Australia (2013); Herrnhut, Germany (2010); Louisville, USA (2009); Kailua-Kona, Hawaii (2009).

-HMT 221: *School of Mapping* (3-month course), Kailua-Kona, Hawaii (2012).

2020-2022	Course staff & student mentor/grader -CHR 343: <i>European Leadership Training School</i> (2-year hybrid: online w/ in-person intensives), Germany, Slovenia, online.
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PUBLICATIONS

Thornton, J. & Kneas, D. (2024). "Stranger Things: Exploring the Infrastructures of Pollution in Columbia, SC." *Southeastern Geographer*, 64(2), 188-203. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/929405/figure/fig03>

Thornton, J. (2016). "Reaching All and Every: 4K Mapping Strategies." *Glocal Conversations*, 3(1), 14-25.
<https://gc.uofn.edu/index.php/gc/article/view/37>

SCHOLARSHIPS & AWARDS

Scholarships & Assistantships

2022-2026 Department of Geography Graduate Assistantship, *University of South Carolina* (\$80,000 [\$20,000/year]) [PhD]

2022-2026	College of Arts & Sciences Graduate Assistantship Enhancement Award, <i>University of South Carolina</i> (\$16,000 [\$4,000/year]) [PhD]
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2017 Holland Scholarship, *Radboud University* (€ 5,000) [Master's]

Research Grants & Awards

2025	SPARC Graduate Research Grant, <i>University of South Carolina</i> (\$4,231)
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2025	AAG Dissertation Research Grant, <i>American Association of Geographers</i> (\$1,000)
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2024	Ceny Walker Graduate Fellowship, <i>Walker Institute at University of South Carolina</i> (\$2,000)
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2024	Constant H. Jacquet Research Award, <i>Religious Research Association</i> (\$2,000)
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2024	Alexander B. Murphy Dissertation Enhancement Award, <i>AAG Political Geography Specialty Group</i> (\$1,000)
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2024	Bennett S. Masaschi Graduate Award, <i>University of South Carolina Department of Geography</i> (\$500)
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Conference Grants

2025	SSSR Student Travel Award (2025 RRA + SSSR Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, MN), <i>Society for the Scientific Study of Religion</i> (\$1,000)
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2025	PGSG Student Travel Award (2025 PGSG Pre-AAG conference, Detroit, MI), AAG <i>Political Geography Specialty Group</i> (\$225)
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2024	Graduate School Travel Grant (2025 AAG Detroit, MI), <i>University of South Carolina</i> (\$500)
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2024 Student Travel Grant (2024 RRA + SSSR Annual Meeting, Pittsburgh, PA), *University of South Carolina Department of Geography* (\$250)

2024 AAG Student Travel Grant (2025 AAG Detroit, MI), *American Association of Geographers* (\$700)

2023	Student Travel Grant (2023 SEDAAG Norfolk, VA), <i>University of South Carolina Department of Geography</i> (\$250)
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Teaching & Student Recognition Awards

- 2025 Career Influencer Award, *University of South Carolina Career Center*
- 2024 Department of Geography Graduate Instructor Award (2023-2024), *University of South Carolina* (\$250)
- 2006 Graduation with Distinction, *Sonoma State University Department of Geography*

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

- 2025 Research Talk. "Heaven, Recycling, and the Integration Aid Paradox: Comparative Definitions of 'Integration' in Germany." *University of South Carolina Migration Lab + Department of Geography*. Columbia, South Carolina.
- 2025 Paper Presentation. "Shared Migrant Spaces: Informal Integration Activities of Missionaries and Refugees in Germany." *Religious Research Association (RRA) + Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) Annual Meeting*. Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- 2025 Invited Guest Lecturer. "Conducting Interviews with Refugees in Germany." GHY 2035: Global Asylum and Refugees. *Appalachian State University* (Department of Geography and Planning) [online].
- 2025 Paper Presentation. "Learning to be a Foreigner: Missionary Intercultural Training as Migration Practice." *American Association of Geographers (AAG)*. Detroit, Michigan.
- 2025 Paper Presentation. "Curricular Shifts in the Mission: The decolonization and feminization of pre-field missionary training." *Political Geography Specialty Group (PGSG) Pre-AAG Conference*. Detroit, Michigan.
- 2024 Paper Presentation. "Temporalities of the Christian Geopolitical Imagination." *Religious Research Association (RRA) + Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) Annual Meeting*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
- 2024 Invited Guest Lecturer. "Short and Long Histories of Pollution Infrastructures in Columbia, SC." EDM 493: Environmental Justice & Hazards, *Western Carolina University* (Emergency and Disaster Management, College of Arts & Sciences). Cullowhee, North Carolina.
- 2023 Paper Presentation. "Stranger Things: Exploring the Infrastructures of Pollution in Columbia, SC." *Southeastern Division of the American Association of Geographers (SEDAAG)*. Norfolk, Virginia.
- 2023 Invited Guest Lecturer. "Maps Overview." SCHC H10: Comparative & International Education, *University of South Carolina* (College of Education). Columbia, South Carolina.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

University of South Carolina

- 2024 *Migration Research Assistant*: Gathered information on H1-B visa, plus list of J1 visa holders in South Carolina for migrant teacher research project (Supervisor: Dr. Caroline Nagel).

YWAM Refugee Circle

- 2018 *Missionary Response to Refugees*: Master's research at Radboud University conducted through Youth With A Mission (YWAM/UofN) Refugee Circle internship. Qualitative and quantitative methods

used to determine missionary motivations in European refugee crisis response.

Thesis access: <https://theses.ubn.ru.nl/handle/123456789/6389>

YWAM Ships Australia

2013 *Village Assessment Surveys*: Conducted in-person public health surveys among elders in multiple villages in Daru province, Papua New Guinea.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE & MEMBERSHIPS

Service

2025-present Journal Reviewer. *Geography Compass*, *Political Geography*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.

2024-2026 Board Member (Student). *Geography of Religions and Belief Systems (GORABS)*, *AAG Specialty Group*.

2022-2026 Graduate Student Affiliate. *Migration Lab*, *University of South Carolina*.

2025 Paper Session Convener. "Comparative Migration Experiences." *Religious Research Association (RRA) + Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) Annual Meeting*. Minneapolis, Minnesota.

2025 Invited Panelist. "SPARC Graduate Research Grant Q&A Panel." Office of the Vice President for Research, *University of South Carolina*. Columbia, South Carolina.

2025 Invited Guest Lecturer. "Zotero Reference Manager Demonstration." GEOG 801: Historical and Contemporary Geographic Thought, *University of South Carolina* (College of Arts & Sciences). Columbia, South Carolina.

2025 Invited Panelist. "GTA/GIA Orientation." Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), *University of South Carolina*. Online.

2025 Paper Session Organizer & Chair. "Religious Actors and Beliefs in Immigration and Border Politics." *American Association of Geographers (AAG)*, *Detroit, Michigan*.

2025 Conference volunteer. *Political Geography Specialty Group (PGSG) Pre-AAG Conference*, *Detroit, Michigan*.

2024 Carolina Core Course Rater. *Office of Undergraduate Studies*, *University of South Carolina*.

2024 Invited Guest Lecturer. "Christianity in Academia." *Executive Master's in Global Leadership*, *University of the Nations* [online].

2023 Invited Panelist. "GTA/GIA Orientation." Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), *University of South Carolina*. Online.

2023 Conference volunteer. *National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE)*, *Columbia, South Carolina*.

2023 AP Human Geography Tutor. *Private tutoring for high school freshman*, *Columbia, South Carolina*.

2022 Geography Awareness Week volunteer. *Department of Geography*, *University of South Carolina*.

Memberships

American Association of Geographers (AAG) [specialty group membership: Political Geography, Cultural Geography, Ethics/Justice/Human Rights, Feminist Geographies, Graduate Student, and Geography of Religions and Belief Systems],

Religious Research Association (RRA), USC Geography Graduate Student Association (GGSA), Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR)

TECHNICAL & RESEARCH SKILLS

ArcGIS Pro, ArcGIS Online, ATLAS.ti, Google Earth Pro, Turboscribe, WordPress, SquareSpace, Blackboard (Ultra), MailChimp, Google Classroom, Microsoft Office (Excel, Access, Word, PowerPoint) * Quantitative and qualitative data collection (participant observation, interviews, surveys, online data mining, content analysis, GPS) * data management * survey design * crisis management

TRAINING & CERTIFICATIONS

2024	Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) certificate, <i>University of South Carolina Center for Teaching Excellence</i> .
2024	Equipping for Cross-Cultural Life & Ministry certificate, <i>Center for Intercultural Training (CIT)</i> .
2023	Graduate Fellowship Application Boot Camp, <i>USC National Fellowships and Scholar Programs</i> .
2022	SHARPGrads Program, <i>University of South Carolina</i> .
2020	Debriefing, Crisis Management, and Resilience certificate, <i>Resilient Expat, UK</i> .
2017	Biblical Studies (SBS) certificate, <i>University of the Nations: School of Biblical Studies, UK</i> .
2008	Advanced Leadership Seminar certificate, <i>University of the Nations, South Africa</i> .

PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE

University of the Nations (Hawaii & UK)

2007 – 2022	Educator and Teacher (Geography, History, Biblical Studies, Leadership Development)
2015 – 2022	Crisis Management Team (Media Relations)
2006 – 2021	GIS Analyst, Researcher, & International Project Coordinator (4K Mapping)
2013 – 2016	Campus Leadership Team (UofN Kona)

Wai'aha International Family School (Kailua-Kona, Hawaii)

Spring 2013	US History; Research & Writing (11 th grade)
2011-2012	World Regional Geography (9 th & 10 th grade)

Sonoma County Office of Transportation and Public Works (Santa Rosa, California)

2005 – 2006	Engineering Aide (GPS & GIS)
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