MADISON, Wis. (January 23, 2019) – For most assistant professors in the humanities, the key to tenure is publishing a major academic book. UW-Madison’s Center for the Humanities provides a boost to junior faculty in this pivotal endeavor. The Center’s competitive First Book program allows junior faculty to assemble a “dream team” of readers for their first academic book-in-progress. Winners get to invite leading scholars in their field to join an interdisciplinary group of reviewers from among the faculty at UW. All read the scholar’s manuscript and meet together in Madison for a hands-on workshop to collectively devise strategies for improving the manuscript and placing the book with a top academic publisher.

The Center recently announced three recipients of the First Book Award for the 2018-19 academic year—cultural and linguistic anthropologist Falina Enriquez, urban history researcher Paige Glotzer, and historian of science Catherine Jackson.

The goal of the program is to turn solid and promising manuscripts from UW-Madison humanities researchers into first-rate, field-shaping books. Enriquez, Glotzer, and Jackson will expand their scholarly networks and draw on the expertise of readers within and outside of their own fields to ensure their work reaches broader audiences across disciplinary boundaries.

Assistant Professor of Anthropology Falina Enriquez’s First Book award-winning manuscript, “Musical Scales of Belonging in Recife, Brazil,” examines how various actors negotiate the discourses of state sponsorship as they perform, consume, and evaluate music, from folk genres to cosmopolitan pop. Enriquez’s ethnographic study reveals how people with varying relationships to state sponsorship and the Brazilian state situate themselves within multiple, and often intersecting, musically-mediated scales of belonging, including the local, regional, national, and global.

Paige Glotzer, Assistant Professor and John W. and Jeanne M. Rowe Char in the History of American Politics, Institutions, and Political Economy, received the First Book Award for her promising manuscript, “Building Suburban Power: The Business of Exclusionary Housing Markets.” The book project charts the history of segregated American suburbs from their first large-scale emergence in the 1890s until the 1960s. Glotzer details how builders, developers, realtors, and real-estate institutions established links between property value and race through ad-hoc discriminatory practices and appeals that were then codified by federal housing policy. Through her re-examination of the New Deal, post-war housing boom, Jim Crow housing policy, the fair-housing and anti-discrimination laws of the 1960s, and other landmarks in the history of the housing market in the U.S., Glotzer presses historians (and policy-makers) to better understand the racialized history of capitalism.
In her manuscript, “Material World: Making Modern Chemistry,” historian of science (and chemist) Catherine Jackson provides a history of the rise of synthetic organic chemistry in the nineteenth-century. Jackson’s impressive book project relies on detailed research in three languages and moves beyond studies of singular scientific figures, analyzing scientific practice, pedagogy, and material culture to establish organic synthesis as a major landmark in the history of chemistry, which launched mighty industries and changed our understanding of organic nature. Jackson’s study not only provides the first historical explanation of the “turn to synthesis,” it also contributes to our understanding of technical modernity.

Past recipients of the award have not only seen their work through to press but garnered major prizes for their books. The inaugural First Book seminar centered on the manuscript of Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, Merle Curti Associate Professor of History. Her book, American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas, received the American Historical Association John H. Dunning Prize, the Society for U.S. Intellectual History Annual Book Award, and the Journal of the History of Ideas Morris D. Forkosch Prize for the Best First Book in Intellectual History. First Book Award Winner Mitra Sharafi, Associate Professor of Law, received the 2015 Law and Society Association’s J. Willard Hurst Prize for her book, Law and Identity in Colonial South Asia: Parsi Legal Culture, 1772–1947. Historian of Science Pablo Gómez’s The Experiential Caribbean, subject of a First Book seminar in 2015, garnered the 2018 Albert J. Raboteau Book Prize from the Journal of Africana Religions and a 2018 Honorable Mention for the Bolton-Johnson Prize for the best book in Latin American History.

Initially funded by a short-term humanities programming grant from the A.W. Mellon Foundation, the Center’s First Book program is now supported by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education (with funding from the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation) and the International Division. Additional support has been provided by the Offices of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Staff and Vice Provost for Diversity and Climate.

A full list of past recipients and their projects, more details on the now published “First Books,” as well as information on how to apply for the award, can be found here: http://humanities.wisc.edu/research/first-book