“Like a Donkey Playing the Flute”: Developing Environmental Risk Mitigation Technology in Mexico and the US

When a donkey plays the flute, no one notices if he does it very well. They're too surprised that he's doing it at all. That's how an engineer who works on the Sistema Alerta Sismica Mexicano, the world's first and oldest earthquake early warning system, explained the lack of substantive international attention that his innovative work receives. My research supports his observation. As geophysicists develop an earthquake early warning system for the West Coast of the United States, they can fail to engage thoughtfully with lessons learned through the path breaking work and unique solutions developed by Mexican engineers. In this talk, I draw on extensive qualitative research to describe what it looks like when Mexican innovations are marginalized, and to suggest that this marginalization might have real consequences for the international research community and for people at risk. I close by discussing how insights from this research is guiding my current research on the sociotechnical tools and techniques necessary to facilitate what social scientists have begun to call "environmental data justice."

Join Us! Friday April 20th, 12:00-1:00PM Marquez Hall 122

Dr. Elizabeth Reddy is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of San Diego’s Shiley-Marcos School of Engineering. She is a social scientist, holding a PhD in cultural anthropology from the University of California at Irvine and an MA in Social Science from the University of Chicago. She has taught at Bucknell University, and is a chair of the Committee for the Anthropology of Science, Technology and Computing in the American Anthropological Association. She brings a keen interest in sociotechnical practice and diverse qualitative and quantitative methodologies to bear on inquiries about how engineers are trained to solve technical problems; how they design tools, technologies, and policies; and how they develop and manage crucial communications. She holds a PhD in cultural anthropology from the University of California at Irvine and an MA in social sciences from the University of Chicago.

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