

Neng Thao

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Education

2015 Harvard College, Cambridge MA.

- B.A. Human Developmental and Regenerative Biology.
- Relevant study abroad experiences:
 - Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Bocas del Toro, Panama (spring 2015).
 - Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia (summer 2014).
 - Universidad Mayor, Santiago, Chile (winter 2013).

Research

2024 – Present Research Collaborator, Laura McPherson Laboratory, Department of Linguistics, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH.

- I research the phonetic overlap between 1.) spoken Hmong and 2.) the musical surrogate versions produced on the mouth harp and spike fiddle.
- Mouth harp research submitted and accepted poster to the Linguistics Society of America 2026 Conference, New Orleans, LA.

2022 – 2023 Musical Surrogate Linguistics Researcher, The Fulbright Program & Traditional Arts and Ethnology Center, Luang Prabang, Laos

- Completed 600+ hours of field research in Laos, developing a typography for Hmong musical surrogate languages.
- Produced final research manuscript on the *qeej* surrogate rituals.

2015 – 2016 Programs Manager, The Center for Wooden Boats, Seattle, WA.

- Documented historic sailboat hulls using digital photogrammetry and 3D modeling with Rhinoceros and AutoCAD.
- Increased retention rate of internships by over 50% with annual expenses of \$225,000.

2016 Citizen Science Instructor, Seattle Aquarium, Seattle, WA.

- Contributed to ongoing 20+ year study of Puget Sound beaches.

2013 – 2015 Undergraduate Researcher, Jessica Whited Laboratory, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

- Junior year project investigated AnxA1 gene in cardiovascular regeneration.
- Senior year project investigating repeated limb bud removal published in *Developmental Biology* (detailed below).

Grants and Awards

2023 Blue Chair Independent Film Grant, Awarded with Co-Producer Ting Veu.

2021 DANG! Dane Arts Need Grant, Dane County Arts and Cultural Affairs Commission.

2020	The Fulbright Program, Independent Research Grant in Linguistics, \$22,050/9 months.
2019	Hmong National Development Impact Award, Hmong American Partnership.
2014	David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies International Experience Grant
2013	Harvard Undergraduate International Experience Grant
2011	Doodle for Google Wisconsin Finalist

Publications and Papers

2026	“Tonal and segmental encoding in Hmong ncas (jaw harp) surrogate speech.” <i>Linguistic Society of America</i> annual meeting, New Orleans, LA, poster January 8–11, 2026.
2025	<i>Txuj Qeeg—Hmong Kheng Ritual Teachings</i> , Neng Thao, Nchaiv Tsab Thoj, manuscript, 127 pages: in preparation.
2023	<i>Spirit Bull</i> , Independent Short Film Series, Neng Thao, Ting Veu.
2022	<i>Txua Hneev Hmoob—ວ່າງວ່າງ ຂົງ</i> , Independent Short Film, Neng Thao.
2021	<i>Among Mountains</i> , Independent Full-length Documentary Film, Neng Thao.
2017	“Repeated removal of developing limb buds permanently reduces appendage size in the highly-regenerative axolotl.” <i>Developmental Biology</i> , 424(1). Donald M. Bryant, Konstantinos Sousounis, Johanna E. Farkas, Sevara Bryant, Neng Thao , Anna R. Guzikowski, James R. Monaghan, Michael Levin, & Jessica L. Whited.
2017	<i>Georgia’s Telescope, Discovering the Big Bang for Children</i> , Neng Thao.
2014	“Nathan Dane Portrait, Founder of Northwest Territories,” Neng Thao, oil on canvas, 28 in. x 36 in., housed in the City of Madison City County Building, Madison, WI.

Professional Experience

2020 – Present	Co-Director, Gaur Antiques, Madison, WI. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collected largest body of Hmong antique flintlocks in the world. Pilot research projects to catalog, collect, and deal antique silver, jewelry, and textiles from and across southeast Asia.
2017 – Present	Independent Filmmaker, Neng Now <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current combined totals of 120 million+ views, 90,000+ followers, 500+ videos, and 160+ countries traveled.
2024	The Nature Place, Contracted Hmong Translator, La Crosse, WI. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translated 32 public-facing displays into Hmong educating the public on native flora and fauna.

2016 – 2017	Bilingual Program Specialist, Monterey Bay Aquarium, Monterey, CA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created and implemented six bilingual English–Spanish marine conservation programs servicing 500,000+ Hispanic/Latino patrons annually.
2012 – 2015	Dart Frog Caretaker, Lauren O’Connell Laboratory, Harvard FAS, Cambridge, MA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managed dart frog facility of 300+ animals, including feeding, data entry, breeding, and fruit fly culturing.
2014	Project Supervisor, Amigos de las Américas, Pérez Zeledón, Costa Rica. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed three national park conservation projects with 100+ volunteers. Completed local development projects totaling over \$50,000.

Teaching

2022 – 2025	Whistled and Musical Linguistics Master Teacher and Lead Curriculum Developer, Fresno Unified School District, Fresno, CA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing two courses teaching Hmong whistled and musical linguistics to several hundred bilingual and bicultural students. Assess and coach teachers on their implementation of pedagogical approaches in language and music retention and practice.
2022	Hmong Instruments Instructor, Hmoob Language and Culture Camp, Cia Siab Inc., La Crosse, WI. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taught 30 youth how to build and play traditional Hmong Instruments
2015 – 2017	Science of Sailing Instructor, The Center for Wooden Boats, Seattle WA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attained US Sailing level 1 instructor certification. Developed a hands-on course teaching the physics of sailing.
2014 – 2016	Instructor, Wisconsin Center Academically Talented Youth, Madison, WI. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed curriculum and taught summer courses in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physics (Instructor, 2016). Introduction to Computer Science in Python (Teaching Assistant, 2015). Pathology, Human Body and Disease (Teaching Assistant, 2014).
2012 – 2015	Visiting Classroom Scientist, Harvard Experimenters – Phillips Brooks House Association, Cambridge, MA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted weekly hands-on science experiments with Cambridge elementary school children focused on chemistry and physics. Recruited six Harvard undergraduates to become fellow scientists.

Invited Talks and Presentations

2025, Nov. 2	“Tsa Ncej Ntxheb Ncej Ntxhoo / Raising The New Year Pillar,” Qeej Presentation, <i>Wisconsin Hmong Association</i> , Madison Hmong New Year, Madison, WI.
2025, Oct. 14	“Hmong Musical Surrogate Languages,” <i>Dartmouth College, Department of Linguistics</i> , LING 11.13 The Language-Music Connection, Hanover, NH.

2025, Oct. 14 "Music, Language, and Musical Surrogate Languages," *Dartmouth College, Department of Music*, MUS 45.13 | Global Sounds, Hanover, NH.

2025, Sep. 13 "Music is Political," *Hmong Cultural and Community Center*, La Crosse Hmong New Year, La Crosse, WI.

2025, May 15 "Music for Bilingual Immersion Programs," Lakeview Elementary, *Madison Metropolitan School District*, Madison, WI.

2025, May 14 "Emergent Bilingual Immersion in Metropolitan School Districts," *Madison Metropolitan School District*, Madison, WI.

2025, Apr. 29 "How Music Changes Our World View," *Fox Valley Performing Arts Center*, Appleton, WI.

2025, Apr. 19 "The Extraordinary Vocabulary of Musical Surrogate Languages," *20th Hmong National Development Conference*, Minneapolis, MN. 54601

2024, Nov. 2 "The Talking Flute," *Hmong American Community of Oregon*, Oregon Hmong New Year, Portland, OR.

2024, Aug. 26 "Musical Surrogates Combat Racism and Promote Mental Health," *Txuj Ci Hmong Language and Culture Lower Campus*, St. Paul, MN.

2024, Aug. 10 "Cultural Revitalization Through Musical Surrogate Languages," *Thao National United Conference*, Oshkosh, WI.

2024, May 26 "Qeej and Raj: Why Hmong Music is Special," *3rd Annual Qeej Festival*, *Hmong Cultural Center of Minnesota*, St. Paul, MN.

2024, May 18 "Traditional Hmong Musical Linguistics," *Asian Hmong Alliance & Walser Reconditioning Center*, Eagan, MN.

2024, Mar. 9 "Dreaming Big: Achieving Higher Education in Hmong America," *Vang Council of La Crosse*, Youth Higher Education Banquet, La Crosse, WI.

2024, Mar. 6 "How Surrogate Music Changes the Mind," *Wausau East High School*, Wausau, WI.

2024, Mar. 5 "Musical Surrogate Languages of Hmong," *Wausau Conservatory of Music*, World Beats Series, Wausau, WI.

2024, Mar. 2 "1% of Languages, 1% of 5,000 years, Hmong in America," *University of Wisconsin – La Crosse, Hmong Organization Promoting Education Conference*, La Crosse, WI.

2023, Nov 18 "Hmong Musical Surrogate Languages," *Sun Prairie Public Library, Ripples Project*, Sun Prairie, WI.

2023, Oct. 23 "Raj Nplaim Performance: Fighting Our Internalized Racisms," *Hmong National Development, We Rise United Symposium*, Minneapolis, MN.

2023, Oct. 7 "Masculinity and Mental Health: How Hmong Men Use Surrogate Language to Express Emotions," *MN Zej Zog, Second Annual Conference*, Minneapolis, MN.

2023, Dec. 3 “From Qeej to Raj: What it Means To Practice Our Surrogate Languages,” *St. Thomas University, Hmong United Students Association*, St. Paul, MN.

2023, Nov. 25 “Hmong Musical Surrogacy on the *Raj Nplaim Tsib Nti*,” *musical performance, Hmong American Association of Colorado*, Denver, CO.

2023, Jan. 7 “How the Hmong Speak With Music, Literally,” *Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre*, Luang Prabang City, Luang Prabang, Laos.

2022, Sep. 25 “Hmong Musical Surrogate Languages,” *Fitchburg Public Library, Ripples Project*, Fitchburg, WI.

2022, Sep. 9 “Hmong Musical Surrogate Languages,” *Cambridge Public Library, Ripples Project*, Cambridge, WI.

2022, May 25 “Hmong Musical Surrogacy on the *Raj Nplaim Tsib Nti*,” *musical performance, AAPI Coalition of Wisconsin, Governor Tony Evers campaign ft. Yo-Yo Ma*.

2022, May 21 “Hmong Musical Surrogate Languages,” *Madison Public Library – Lakeview Branch, Ripples Project*, Madison, WI.

2022, May 10 “Hmong Musical Surrogate Languages,” *Verona Public Library, Ripples Project*, Madison, WI.

2022, Apr. 20 “Hmong Musical Surrogate Languages,” *Deforest Public Library, Ripples Project*, Madison, WI.

2022, Mar. 19 “Success Through Identity—Fighting the Microaggressive Narratives in Hmong History,” *California State University – Fresno, Journey to Success Southeast Asian Conference*, Fresno, CA.

2021, Nov. 11 “Hmong Words English Does Not Have,” *Macalester College, Hmong Student Organization, Ua Ke*, St. Paul, MN.

2021, Nov. 6 “Hmong Musical Surrogacy on the *Raj Nplaim Tsib Nti*,” *musical performance, Oshkosh Hmong New Year, Asian American Association Inc.*, Oshkosh, WI.

2021, Oct. 29 “Hmong Across International Borders: Traveling Through the Hmong Diaspora,” *Minnesota State University at Mankato*, Mankato, MN.

2021, Jun. 6 “Community Healing Through Hmoob Musical Language Revitalization,” *Cia Siab Inc., Widening the Circle Speaker Series*, La Crosse, WI.

2021, May. 14 “Community Chords: Engagement Through Music and Art,” *Appleton Public Library*, Appleton, WI.

2021, Apr. 26 “Resiliency Against Racism Through Cultural Pride,” *University of Wisconsin – La Crosse, Hmong Organization Promoting Education*, La Crosse, WI.

2021, Apr. 17 “Higher Education Panel,” *University of California – Merced Hmong Students Association 13th Annual Educational Conference*, Merced, CA.

2021, Jan. 10 “Musical Intervals of the *Raj Nplaim Tsib Nti* Musical Surrogate Language,” *HOPE Center, Hmong Youth and Parents United Pop-Up Event*, Sacramento, CA.

2019, Dec. 7 “Exploring the Hmong Diaspora Through Our Musical Surrogate Languages,” *St. Thomas University, Hmong United Students Association*, St. Paul, MN.

2019, Nov. 29 “From Refugee to Full-Time World Traveler and Filmmaker,” *Saint Paul Public Library System, Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Speaker Series*, St. Paul, MN.

2019, Nov. 20 “Cultural Identity Through Musical Surrogate Languages,” *Century College, AANAPISI Grant Event*, White Bear Lake, MN.

2019, Oct. 25 “Against Static Linguistic Theory: Hmong Musical Surrogate Languages,” *University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, Linguistics Department Colloquium*, Minneapolis, MN.

2019, Sep. 24 “Creating Forward Thinking Media,” *University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh Speaker Series*, Oshkosh, WI.

2019, Aug. 13 “Music, Language, and Culture in the School Curriculum,” *DC Everest School District, Teaching, Leading, and Learning Annual Teacher Training*, Schofield, WI.

2019, Apr. 27 “What it Means to be Hmong American,” *Hmong American Center Inc., Hmong Heritage Month Conference*, Wausau, WI.

2019, Apr. 19 “*Tshuab Nplooj*, Hmong Musical Linguistics,” *Hmong National Development 19th Annual Conference*, San Jose, CA.

2019, Apr. 12 “How Social Media Empowers the Arts,” *Milwaukee Area Technical College, Southeast Asian Youth Education and Career Conference*, Milwaukee, WI.

2019, Apr. 6 “What is Hmong to Hmong?” *University of Wisconsin – Stout, Hmong Stout Student Organization*, Menomonie, WI.

2019, Jan. 10 “Growing Up as a Refugee in America,” *Hamline University, English Language in the Mainstream Project Speaker Series*, St. Paul, MN.

2019, Jan. 2 “Traveling and Learning *Kev Cai Hmoob*,” *University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire Immersion Program, Fresno State College*, Fresno, CA.

2018, Dec. 3 “Changing our Self Narrative,” *Community School of Excellence*, St. Paul, MN.

2018, Nov. 27 “How I Traveled Around the World and What I Learned,” *Hmong American Peace Academy*, Milwaukee, WI.

2018, Nov. 16 “Intercultural Exchange,” *Madison College, Changing the Narrative Conference*, Madison, WI.

2018, Nov. 13 “Hmong Around the World,” *University of Wisconsin – Madison, Hmong American Student Association New Year Celebration*, Madison, WI.

2018, Oct. 12	“Taking a Leap: First Generation Entrepreneurship,” <i>Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce Business Awards Banquet</i> , Milwaukee, WI.
2018, Sep. 12	“Writing Georgia’s Telescope,” <i>HOPE Community Academy, Visiting Author Speaker Series</i> , St. Paul, MN.
2018, Aug. 18	“Media Begets Social Capital,” <i>Hmongmentum Convention</i> , St. Paul, MN.
2018, May 15	“Writing Georgia’s Telescope,” <i>Madison Metropolitan School District – Lincoln Elementary, Visiting Author and Alumni Speaker Series</i> , Madison, WI.

Media Appearances

Apr. 2022	“Neng Now Leads Ripples Project at DAPL,” <i>HNGNews</i> .
Oct. 2020	“Meet Neng Thao of Neng Now,” Thay Yang, <i>Nyob Zoo Milwaukee</i> .
Jun. 2020	“Milwaukee’s Hmong leaders turn to traditional and cultural approaches to get information out about coronavirus,” Ricardo Torres, <i>Milwaukee Journal Sentinel</i> .
Jul. 2019	“Nathan Dane helped ban slavery in Wisconsin,” Tom Emery, <i>Wisconsin State Journal</i> .
Feb. 2019	“What’s it like growing up a Hmong immigrant in America?” Tesha M. Christensen, <i>Monitor St. Paul</i> .
Oct. 2018	“Meet Neng Thao of Neng Now,” Seng Alex Vang, <i>Hmong American Experience</i> .
Dec. 2017	“Neng Thao, El Cazador de Felicidad,” Esteban Mora, <i>El Mundo Costa Rica</i> .
Jan. 2014	“Dane County’s Namesake Comes Home,” Doug Moe, <i>Wisconsin State Journal</i> .
Nov. 2014	“Origin Story: How Nathan Dane got to Wisconsin”, Lana Birbrair, <i>Harvard Law Today</i> .
Aug. 2014	“Who Put the ‘Dane’ in Dane County?” Helen Zhang and Lucy Ji, <i>Simpson Street Free Press</i> .

Service

2022 – Present	Community Musician, <i>Txiv Qeej</i> , Wisconsin & Minnesota. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I routinely perform six to twelve hour musical surrogate language cultural and religious ceremonies within the Hmong community
2016 – Present	Alumni Interviewer, Harvard University Admissions Office, Cambridge, MA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have interviewed 21 undergraduate applicants, 2 of which were admitted
2015 – 2016	AmeriCorps, Washington Service Corps, Seattle, WA.

2015 – 2016

- I served as the Youth Job Skills Coordinator for the Center for Wooden Boats and was hired as full-time staff after term completion.

Arthur Foss Liveaboard, Northwest Seaport, Seattle WA.

- I lived on the oldest wooden tugboat in the world as a deckhand, repairman, and “floating museum” docent

Skills and Certifications

Programming: R, Python, Javascript, C, PHP, CSS, HTML, SQL.

Lab Techniques: ELAN, Praat, Sonic Visualizer, Stata, Gene-E, Southern/northern/western blot, gel electrophoresis, sterile technique, cell culture, PCR.

Design: Adobe Creative Suite, Autodesk Fusion 360, AutoCAD, Rhinoceros.

Office: Musescore, Microsoft Office, Google Suite, Dvorak Keyboard.

Languages: English (native), Hmong (native + surrogate languages), Spanish (fluent).

Scripts: ພາກ ປັກ ລັກ ພົມ ດັກ (Pahawh third stage).

Certifications: US Sailing Level 1 Instructor, PADI Open Water diver, Red Cross First Aid, Hmong musical language *Txiv Qeej* apprenticeship completed under *Nchaiv Tsab Thoj*.

Interests: Woodworking, blacksmithing, sailing, marine aquarium hobbyist.