2015

Somos & Estamos, 2015

Department of Spanish

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Dear friends of the Department of Spanish,

The fall semester has come to a close and I am happy that we can highlight for you a sample of the wide range of last year’s accomplishments generated by our students, faculty, alumni, and friends of the department. This issue will give you a taste of the department’s participation in the life of the University, the community and the discipline. You will also get a preview of the coming year’s activities and of some plans for our future.

As you review this issue of “Somos y Estamos,” I believe that you will agree that the Department of Spanish sustains its reputation for excellence. Our students’ academic recognition, community work, and study abroad participation, among other experiences, underscore their enthusiasm for Spanish. Likewise, the students’ achievements bear testimony to the work our faculty do to give our undergraduate and graduate students a solid educational foundation that will ensure future success in the field of their choice, not to mention personal fulfillment. Faculty research briefs illustrate the quality and quantity of the work our faculty produce in order to remain up-to-date with the professional demands of the discipline. In addition, we highlight our alumni accomplishments, which make us all proud and serve to enhance the strong image of the department. Finally, we report the generous deeds of some of our friends and donors, to whom we are in debt and feel deep appreciation for their heartfelt support of our Spanish program.

We always enjoy hearing from you, so please keep in touch and enjoy reading this issue. Warm wishes to all of you from Sprau Tower,

Irma López
Study Abroad Program in Buenos Aires

In spring 2015, thirteen travelers participated in the study abroad program in Buenos Aires, Argentina. All students advanced their fluency in Spanish and made significant progress in their university studies. With hands-on experience and academic courses in advanced language, literature, history, culture and civilization, and Latin American film, the program brought them to the heart of the big city during the southern summertime.

Our students immersed themselves in the cultura porteña in the best possible way: staying with host families. They had the opportunity to teach English in a local library and to volunteer for a variety of organizations. All of the students traveled extensively around the country and its neighbors, both on organized and independent excursions to Tigre, Colonia (Uruguay), Iguazú Falls, the Atlantic Coast, Salta, Mendoza, and Patagonia, among other destinations.

For our students, the Buenos Aires Program was no less than a life-changing experience, according to their own words:

“The Buenos Aires Program has taught me what type of person I want to be, what type of person I used to be, and what type of people I want to surround myself with. I have learned to love myself, and others; to be more patient with myself, and others; and what growing up means to me. I’ve grown as a Spanish speaker, as a person, and as a citizen of the world. I am about to embark on a four-week long backpacking trip through South America, and I couldn’t have done it without my growth in Buenos Aires.”

Trevor “Paco” Roberts

“The experience I had in Argentina was easily one of the greatest four months of my life, and I have learned lessons that will stay with me forever. I met some of the greatest, most sincere people in my time abroad and I can only recommend this experience to the highest degree for someone to participate. Not only are the educational experiences incredible, the cultural experience is life changing. Making the decision to go abroad was my best decision and I am thankful to Western and the Spanish department for allowing me to have such a life-changing trip.”

Christian Elliott
“My study abroad experience was truly amazing. Everyone asks me what the best thing about my trip was, and I never know how to answer that question because the whole trip was awesome; it is very hard to pinpoint a certain event that was my favorite. I made a lot of great friends and memories that I will never forget. It gave me the tools to be independent and go out of my comfort zone. The three most positive aspects about the program were the other students and teachers, the excursions, and learning the language with our host family. The best way to learn the language is to study abroad and to be forced to speak the language with locals.

Although the program is very challenging, it pushed us all to better our Spanish-speaking abilities. Studying abroad was the best decision I have ever made. If you decide to study abroad you definitely will not regret it.”

Jillian Hooker

“My experience abroad in Buenos Aires has been the best decision I have made since entering college. I learned so many important things about the world and about myself. This program in Buenos Aires comes with the kindest staff, lots of free time and a group of motivated students that have become some of my closest friends. Not only did my Spanish-speaking ability improve, I also now feel a new independence and confidence in myself. I went to the country expecting to learn about the culture and the language but I came home having learned so much more.”

Annalisa Wilder

“The biggest ways I grew from my experience abroad were in language knowledge and confidence. Every day brought new experiences, from learning how to navigate a massive city to the vast cultural differences of countries. On top of this, I faced these challenges in a different language. Due to this trip, my language comprehension vastly increased, to the point where I can think in both English and Spanish and speaking comes easily in both. I grew much more confident, allowing me to speak Spanish more comfortably with more people, therefore increasing the rate of learning into a positive snowball effect.”

Jalen Vanhoeven
Study Abroad Program in Santander

In the summer II session, a record 25 students participated in the study abroad program in Santander, Spain, at the University of Cantabria, after having received another record 49 applications. It was not only the largest study abroad group ever in our department, but likely one of the youngest, brightest, and most diverse cohorts that Professor Pastrana has ever taken abroad. It included 21 different majors, from paper engineering to criminal justice, nursing to supply management (all combined with Spanish, of course), several ethnicities and a respectable 3.53 average GPA. The result? A resounding success!

Their young age did not deter them from travelling on their own and exploring different corners of Western Europe, from Paris to Barcelona. Cody Fridley was brave enough to travel all over Spain for two months on his own, and Keith Lussier did not feel he got enough of Spain (who ever does?) so he returned to La Rioja in October for a prolonged stay. Whether visiting the old monasteries of Santo Toribio de Liébana, Cantabria, or Santa María la Real de las Huelgas, Burgos, or striding along the ample corridors of the modern Guggenheim museum, Bilbao, or the Museo de la Humanidad, Burgos, this group of students, as others before them, soaked up as much of northern Spain as two months can allow. It is no wonder that several students have approached Professor Pastrana after their return to the U.S. to express their gratitude and to tell him that participating in the Santander Program was the best decision they have ever made.
Study Abroad Program in Santander

The most unbelievable anecdote of the entire trip came on their visit to the replica of the Altamira Cave, the famous prehistoric dwelling near the northern village of Santillana del Mar, which houses some of the best preserved and most valuable Paleolithic paintings in the world. Discovered in the late 19th century, it quickly became one of the most visited cultural sites in Europe. The sheer number of visitors in the latter years of the 20th century paid its toll on the paintings. As a result, the cave, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985, was closed to the public almost 50 years ago and only opened its doors to very small groups for decades. In 2002, with the opening of the replica and adjacent museum, the real cave closed its doors to the public altogether. It was only in 2012 that authorities decided to allow a very small number of visitors in order to study their impact on the paintings and on the overall integrity of the cave. Since then, only five people are allowed to see the real cave every week, selected at random using a lottery system whenever the visit is announced.

Upon our arrival to the replica cave, we were pleasantly surprised to learn that there was a raffle to see the real cave scheduled for that day. Bursting with optimism, every one of our students filled out their raffle ticket as if it involved a free trip to the moon. In spite of the doomed sense of reality that quickly sank in, knowing that the chances of being chosen were fairly low, there was a palpable cheerfulness in the air. Every student was hoping that among the dozens, perhaps hundreds, of raffle tickets, theirs was going to be the winning ticket. This, Professor Pastrana thought, was the most exciting lottery he’d ever seen: the winner did not have to pay a penny (most museums and cultural sites in Spain are free to students) and yet could win an opportunity of a lifetime. Lo and behold, right in the midst of our tour of the replica cave, a female Spanish version of Indiana Jones came to fetch one of our students. Professor Pastrana will never forget the look on Allyson Johnson’s face when she was pulled from the group and told she was among the five winners of the latest raffle. Suddenly, she felt as if she had found a golden ticket to Willy Wonka’s Chocolate Factory. Every single one of her peers looked at her enviously, with happy petrification in their faces. Quickly, a sense of relief overcame the group, as the wait was finally over. Allyson was quickly pulled aside, where she was told to wear what looked like a space suit--cap, mask, goggles and gloves included--and was escorted to the entrance of the real Paleolithic “factory.” The rest, as with countless other memories of studying abroad, will stay with her for the rest of her life.
Fourteen students met last summer at Barajas Airport in Madrid, Spain, to ride the bus together to Burgos. All of them, including Ryan Adamczyk, Caroline Aleck, Madeline Baker, Carolyn Diane, Sergio Ferreyra, Karli Fisher, Jackson Freeman, Jessica Graves, Juan González, Maggie Lundy, Miguel Montoya, Nicholas Newman, Carli Polidori, and Brianna Rogers, met their new host families on August 18.

The WMU students earned 13 credits at the Universidad de Burgos and took language, grammar, art and culture classes. Outside of the classroom included activities such as exploring anthropology sites in caves and visiting museums, old cathedrals, and churches. The students also enjoyed tasting unique wines on the famous Spaniards winery landscape, learning how to dance *flamenco* and cooking delicious traditional dishes such as *paella* or *tortilla española*.

The students returned home on December 4. It was the experience of a lifetime and many are already planning to return to Spain in the future.
Study Abroad Program in Quito

The Quito Program is the newest of four faculty-led study abroad programs offered by the Department of Spanish and celebrated its second year in May and June, 2015. It was designed to encourage students to study abroad early in their undergraduate studies and to become Spanish majors and minors upon returning from Ecuador. The Quito Program participants earned seven credits for completing Spanish 2010 and 3170. They lived with host families near the beautiful campus of the Universidad San Francisco de Quito and participated in a variety of cultural activities, including excursions to Quito’s famous historical center, Otavalo, Cotacachi, the Laguna de Cuicocha, and the equator. This year, our students were accompanied by Viridiana García Hernández, a doctoral student in the Department of Spanish who served as the on-site resident director and provided assistance and tutoring during the entire program. Two students shared the following comments about their study abroad experience:

“Studying abroad in Quito was the best thing I could have ever done. I met amazing people, stayed with the most wonderful host family, saw absolutely breathtaking places, and learned a language all the while. I went to Ecuador and matured into the person I want to be. You cannot put a price tag on this experience, although there was one, but it was worth every penny. STUDY ABROAD!”

Louise Marie O’Boyle

“Ecuador was truly breathtaking, down to the plants, architecture and animals. I wish I had more time to explore this gorgeous country.”

Aisha Richards

Congratulations and best wishes to the Quito Program 2015 participants: Valerie Begian, Kayla Cox, Douglass Davidson, Monica Gordon, Viridiana García Hernández, Daphne Hines, Justin Montgomery, Louise O’Boyle, Aisha Richards and Kelsey Walker.
Spanish Language and Culture Experience for WMU Employees

Last May, a group of 14 WMU faculty and staff spent two weeks in Quito, Ecuador, as part of the Spanish Language and Culture Experience for WMU Employees. Participants stayed with host families in Cumbayá, a suburb of Quito, and attended Spanish language and Andean anthropology classes at the Universidad San Francisco de Quito.

While in Ecuador, the group participated in numerous activities: they visited a chocolate factory in Mindo, a small town in the Andes that is surrounded by the Mindo-Nambillo Cloud Forest, as well as the Sachatamia lodge, an ecological reserve located in the tropical cloud forest that is home to different species of hummingbirds. They also had a tour of the Hacienda La Compañía de Jesús, where they visited a rose plantation and spent an afternoon shopping in Otavalo, an indigenous town surrounded by volcanoes that is famous for the textiles. Some of them also visited the Cayambe Coca Ecological Reserve, a nature reserve in Ecuador located about 24 miles from Quito, and spent several hours relaxing in the hot springs of Papallacta, a small town in the Andes. Other activities included visits to the Quito historic center, the Pichincha Volcano, Quito Botanical Gardens, and Middle of the World.

One of the highlights of the program was the Ecuadorian cooking class with Chef Patricia Villafuerte. Everybody participated in the preparation of a typical Ecuadorian meal, which included ceviche de camarón, locro, pristiños, fried plantain, canelazo and guanábana ice cream.
College of Arts and Sciences Awards

Dr. Mariola Pérez de la Cruz Received the 2015 CAS Faculty Achievement Award in Teaching

Dr. Mariola Pérez de la Cruz joined the Department of Spanish in 1999. During the 15 years that Pérez de la Cruz has taught at Western Michigan University she has played a key role, both as a teacher and as a coordinator, in helping the Spanish program to achieve the quality and distinction it currently enjoys. Among the many professional strengths of Pérez de la Cruz are her openness, flexibility, and willingness to continue her professional development by trying innovative methods of teaching and taking on new teaching responsibilities that redound to the benefit of the undergraduate and graduate students and bolster the department’s curriculum.

For all her teaching accomplishments, the Department of Spanish nominated Pérez de la Cruz for the 2015 CAS Faculty Achievement Award in Teaching; she received the award and was honored for it, among other awardees, in April.

Chair Irma López asked her colleagues to send remarks about Pérez de la Cruz for this occasion, and the adjectives flowed with the same resonance and tenor: flexible, willing to compromise, cooperative, tolerant, easygoing, professional, and an excellent teacher.

In terms of her teaching, as one colleague put it, “Mariola is able to teach ‘anything’ the department needs her to, from language to culture, literature, and even basic linguistics, which is not her specialty.” Another commented, “‘Consummate professional’ and ‘student-centered’ are the two traits that most perfectly describe Mariola.” A third colleague remarked, “So patient with certain students who would drive the rest of us to drink!”

The Department is richer, and we are lucky, too, to have a professor of Dr. Pérez de la Cruz’s caliber.
Supporting excellence in teaching is central to the strategic plan of the College of Arts and Sciences. In recognition of the critical contribution part-time instructors make in this vital area, the college has created the Part-Time Instructor Excellence in Teaching Award, an honor based on accumulated record of achievement as a teacher at WMU, as evidenced, for example, by student evaluations, peer and supervisor feedback, and letters of support.

Timothy Erskine, PTI of Spanish, is a WMU alumnus and has been teaching Spanish in our language program since graduating with a bachelor’s degree in Spanish in the spring of 2008 and being accepted into our master’s program with a teaching assistantship that fall. Upon graduating with a master’s in Spanish in the spring of 2010, he has worked steadily as a part-time instructor for the department, including summer sessions. The many positive remarks that students have provided about Tim express a recurrent theme: Tim is a great instructor and a teacher who cares about his students. For his fine teaching and for the many positive remarks that his supervisors have provided about him, the department nominated Tim for the 2015 CAS Part-Time Instructor Excellence in Teaching Award; he received the award and was honored for it, among other awardees, in April.

Chair Irma López asked Erskine’s language supervisors to send remarks about him and this is what they had to say about this accomplished colleague:

“No matter what he teaches, SPAN 1000, 1010, 2000, or 2010, he has always been one of the best instructors in the Department of Spanish, and he is truly inspiring.”

“This very well-deserved award is just a tiny recognition of the many outstanding qualities Tim brings to the classroom: immense creativity in his teaching materials, incredible kindness and respect for his students, and intellectual curiosity; all of which make him the perfect teacher.”

“We are lucky in having Tim Erskine as one of our colleagues and as a dependable resource to aid us in our teaching needs and mission. We were also excited to have welcomed Tim as doctoral student in the linguistics program this past fall.”
Department News

New book by Dr. Hedy Habra

Hedy Habra’s new poetry collection, “Under Brushstrokes,” has been released by Press 53 and is mainly inspired by works of art of different styles and periods. Although poems stem from a flight of the imagination, metaphors tend to explore the creative act, inter-artistic relationships and existential themes. Habra doesn’t attempt to convey a purely ekphrastic rendition of the artworks through a mere description, but rather uses visual art as a point of departure for a surreal or oneiric recreation. In “Under Brushstrokes,” poems often engage in a dialogue with the artist or his model, or offer an imagined version of what might have happened before or after the portrayed scene. Oftentimes, myths are inverted, as characters come to life to present us their own version of legendary tales.

Last August in Buenos Aires, Hedy Habra attended a literary Symposium organized by the Instituto Literario y Cultural Hispánico: XLII SIMPOSIO INTERNACIONAL DE LITERATURA: “La producción literaria de América latina: segunda mitad del siglo XX y comienzos del siglo XXI,” that took place in S.A.D.E., Sociedad Argentina de Escritores. She gave a poetry reading and presented her scholarly book, “Mundos alternos y artísticos en Vargas Llosa.” She was also honored as a recipient of the Rubén Vela Award for her poetic journey.

For a schedule of upcoming readings, visit her website: www.hedyhabra.com.
Department News

Dr. Germán Zárate-Sández joins the department

Germán Zárate-Sández graduated with a bachelor’s degree in English linguistics from the Universidad Nacional de San Juan, in his native Argentina. After his Fulbright Scholarship at the University of Scranton, where he obtained a master’s degree in English as a second language, he pursued further graduate studies at Georgetown University, where he obtained a master’s in Spanish linguistics and a doctorate in Spanish applied linguistics.

Zárate-Sández’s expertise and research lie in the areas of phonetics/phonology and Second Language (L2) Acquisition. In the former area, he studies phonological processes in both Spanish and English, especially at the suprasegmental level. In the latter, he examines issues of cross-linguistic influence between the first and second language (in particular among heritage speakers and high-proficiency L2 users) and the role of individual differences (age, personality, aptitude, etc.) in learning a second language. Most of his research has addressed the intersection of these two areas, that is, the acquisition and use of L2 pronunciation.

Also an expert in foreign/second language education, Zárate-Sández has worked at English teacher-training programs in Argentina. He regularly gives talks and workshops on methodological innovations in teaching Spanish and English as foreign languages. His considerable teaching experience reflects his research interests: he has taught courses in Spanish grammar, English and Spanish phonetics/phonology, applied linguistics, and linguistic theories. He has experience in the coordination and supervision of basic language courses, has co-directed Georgetown’s study abroad program in Quito, Ecuador, and has helped to implement online training programs for teaching in Argentina.

News from Dr. Bob Felkel

For me, having spent most of my travel-abroad time in Spain, the Congreso Internacional de Literatura Hispánica continues to be a huge blessing; a kind of miniature course in Latin American geography and culture. First it was Cuzco, Peru, then Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, Cartagena de Indias in Colombia, and, this year, Antigua, Guatemala. I’ve been in many, many countries, but none even approach Guatemala for sheer abundance of color. One thing is for sure: no city in the world can POSSIBLY have more colorful school busses than Antigua. If you don’t believe me, check out the photo!

The title of the paper I gave this year was “Books as Friends, Books as Enemies: The Causality of Fiction in Dante and Cervantes.” This paper was a bit out of the ordinary for me in two ways: first, I gave it in English, something I almost never do, because I am hoping to expand it for submission to Dante Studies, a journal that only accepts manuscripts in Italian or English; second, this was the only paper I have given in which I study an issue in Dante and Cervantes, two authors who at first glance might seem to be not easily comparable. It turns out that they really are, though, partly because of something that Joaquín Casalduero said in his classic study Sentido y forma del Quijote: the Baroque, at least as far as ideology is concerned, says pretty much the same thing that the Middle Ages said, but it says it in ways that are formally very different. The idea that I found expressed both in Dante and Cervantes is that while some literature can help us, as we see dramatically in the case of Statius in Dante’s “Purgatorio,” there is other literature that has the potential to harm us, which is what we see in the story of Paolo and Francesca in the “Inferno,” and also in “Don Quijote,” whose brains literally dried up because of a program of reading huge doses of literature that was foolish in itself, and reading it in a very foolish way. As Wayne Booth says (The Company We Keep), “silly reading makes silly readers.”
Dr. Benjamín Torres received the Tercer Premio Nacional de Literatura

By Erin White, Asst. A&E Editor, Western Herald (Tuesday, February 3, 2015, pg. 6)

Professor Benjamin Torres was awarded the Tercer Premio Nacional de Literatura (National Literature Award, Third Prize) in the category of Research and Criticism by the Institute of Puerto Rican Literature. The award is part of an annual competition put on by the Institute of Puerto Rican Literature. Every year, the Institute picks books and articles published in Puerto Rico that fit in three different categories: fiction, journalism, and research and criticism. The award comes with a $2,000 cash prize.

The book, titled “Iconografía: lo visual en la obra de Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá,” which translates to “Iconography: The Visual in the Work of Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá,” was published by Ediciones Callejón in Puerto Rico in 2013. The book looks into the visual aspects that Rodríguez Juliá uses in his works. “He has visual images in almost all of his works, either photographs or paintings or, in some cases, there are no illustrations but there are paintings that are verbally described,” Torres said. “To best understand Rodríguez Juliá’s work, you have to understand the function of those images in the work. They’re essential.”

This is the second book Torres has published on Rodríguez Juliá. The first book, titled “Para llegar a la isla verde de Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá,” was published in 2007. The first book took Torres 12 years to write and is a general introduction to Rodríguez Juliá and his work. “You can’t do much during the school year, but in summers, I started [writing the first book] around 1995 until it came out in 2007, and then from then to now working on the other book, which came out in 2013,” Torres said.

Over time, Torres and Rodríguez Juliá have become personal friends. Torres has edited some of Rodríguez Juliá’s work, including his first novel “La renuncia del héroe Baltasar,” which translates to “The Renunciation.” Last year, Torres was asked to speak at the inauguration of the archives of Rodríguez Juliá at the University of Turabo in Caguas, Puerto Rico.

Torres is working on another book, a detective novel set in Puerto Rico, partly inspired by Rodríguez Juliá’s detective novels. He hopes to have it finished in a year.
News from the Classroom

Last April, Waldo Library celebrated National Poetry Month with a series of events and activities in the various libraries on campus. One activity involved reading poetry and different programs were invited to participate. The idea behind the activity was to offer the opportunity for departments to showcase themselves informally and for students to visit the different libraries on campus; a sort of "pop-up" to listen to poetry.

Some Spanish students from the two sections of Spanish 3250-Introduction to Literature voluntarily participated in the event and read their favorite poem in Spanish studied in class under Diomedes Solano Rábago, a doctoral student from Michigan State University and a part-time instructor for the department. Students read in the lobby of Waldo Library and in the Music and Dance Library in the Dalton Center. Those who participated described the experience as unforgettable and also pointed out that presenting the poem aloud gave them a new perspective of the poem itself and of their Spanish language skills as well.

Dr. Hedy Habra is a well-known poet and regarded teacher. In an effort to awake in her students the joy of reading and reciting poetry, she has made a tradition in her Spanish 3250-Introduction to Hispanic Literature- for students to recite a chosen poem by heart at the end of the semester. Students who voluntarily participate in this activity have to memorize a sonnet (or an equivalent in size, number of verses and syllable) and recite it in front of their classmates. The Spanish poem can come from the textbook or from other sources as long that they are from the poets studied in class.

According to Habra, students were not completely sold about participating in the event at the beginning of the semester, but as they studied the poems in class and learned more about the authors, students became more interested. At the end of the semester, eight students read poems from Pablo Neruda, Rubén Dario, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Rubén Dario, Amado Nervo and Garcilaso de la Vega.

“I was impressed of how well they read these poems; they recited them with excellent intonation, the utmost assurance and great poise,” said Habra.

As a whole, the class enjoyed the recitation. All students who participated mentioned that by doing so, they learned more Spanish vocabulary and some lost their fear of standing in front of people. They also discovered that they like poetry after all!
Claudia Ferreyra is this year’s recipient of the Lori Beth Pattison Award. Claudia is an outstanding Spanish student who graduated Magna Cum Laude with a bachelor’s in Spanish and a minor in English: rhetoric & writing studies in summer I. She is continuing graduate studies in Spanish here at the department, as of this past fall.

Claudia has been described by her professors as a superior, committed and gifted undergraduate student. Professor Bob Felkel had the following to say about Claudia’s performance in his Spanish 3220- Life and Culture of Spain- course: “A native of Bolivia (Ferreyra is her married name), she leaves NOTHING to be desired in terms of academics. All her written assignments were perfect, all her quizzes were perfect, and her first exam was perfect. In class she was the ONLY student I could count on to be able to answer any and all questions I might ask.” Felkel also mentioned that Claudia makes the best pulpo a la gallega; this remark coming from one of our best gourmet chefs in the department. One has to admire Claudia’s many talents and excellence in all regards.

The Lori Beth Pattison Award for Literature in Spanish was established by the family of Lori Beth Pattison, a WMU alumna and professor of Spanish who died in 1999. Her family has maintained ties with the Department of Spanish because it was here that Lori received the foundation and encouragement to pursue graduate studies at the University of Kansas. She graduated in 1994 with a doctorate in Spanish literature. This award contribution was made by Mr. Steven G. Allen and Mrs. Linda Pattison of Cary, NC. Congratulations, Claudia!

Bethany Doorlag was selected by the Department of Spanish to be the recipient of the 2015 Presidential Scholar in Spanish, the highest academic honor that WMU can bestow on its top senior. These outstanding students from academic schools, departments and programs were recognized during the 35th annual Presidential Scholars Convocation presided by President John Dunn and Provost Tim Greene. Selection is based on the students’ general academic excellence, academic and artistic excellence relative to their majors, and intellectual and artistic promise.

Doorlag graduated in May 2015 with a bachelor’s in secondary education, and majors in Spanish and English. During her time at WMU, she has interned through the Spanish department’s Service Learning Program with Lift Up Through Literacy at the Hispanic American Council, completed two pre-internships in Kalamazoo Public School Spanish classrooms, and is currently interning at Gobles High School/Middle School in a Spanish classroom. Through her Spanish studies, Bethany has had the opportunity to study abroad for one semester in Arequipa, Peru (2011), and to visit Queretaro, Mexico (2014) for several weeks. In spring 2014, Bethany was nominated by the Spanish department to receive the Mathilde Steckelberg Scholarship, and in spring 2013, she won the Diversity Studies Award from the English department at WMU. For the last four summers, Bethany has worked with Van Buren Intermediate School District in their migrant summer program, Project NOMAD, and during spring 2014, she obtained a long-term substitute teaching position at Portage Central Middle School in a Spanish classroom. Bethany volunteers with high school students at Centerpoint Church, and also occasionally plays violin with the worship team. After graduation, Bethany plans to continue working with the Hispanic community in Kalamazoo, to travel throughout the rest of Central and South America, and to become a Secondary Spanish or English teacher.
In a special ceremony presided by the dean of the Graduate College Sue Stapleton on Thursday, April 30, 2015, Leticia Espinoza, Karina Ortiz Pacheco, Giovanni Salazar and Benjamin Wozniak, along with other Western graduate students, were recognized for their accomplishments and their quality of their work.

At the master’s level, Ben Wozniak received the Department-level Graduate Teaching Effectiveness Award and Manuel Giovanni Salazar received the Department-level Graduate Research and Creative Scholar Award. At the doctoral level, Leticia Espinoza received the Department-level Graduate Teaching Effectiveness Award and Karina Ortiz Pacheco received the Department-level Graduate Research and Creative Scholar Award.

Congratulations, students, for your dedication, passion and enthusiasm in your teaching and academic work towards the excellence of the Department of Spanish!
Donor News

The Robert and Barbara Felkel Cervantes Prize

Thanks to the generosity of our colleague Robert Felkel and his wife Barbara, the Department of Spanish has a new award to honor each year’s most distinguished student. The Robert and Barbara Felkel Cervantes Prize has a value of $3,000, the highest monetary award of all our prizes, and it is guaranteed to continue for as long as the Department of Spanish and Western Michigan University exist.

The Felkels would like the prize to be awarded to the student selected each year by the faculty to receive the Presidential Scholar Award. As Dr. Felkel noted, it is “a strange anomaly that what we describe as our department’s most prestigious award has no money attached to it.” Thanks to the creation of this Cervantes Prize, that will no longer be the case.

Dr. Felkel has been teaching for 44 years in the Department of Spanish at Western Michigan University. He came to WMU in 1971 and received his doctorate from Michigan State University in 1973. He specializes in Medieval and Spanish Golden Age literature, with a concentration on Cervantes’ “Don Quijote de la Mancha.” Since 1980 he has been an undergraduate advisor, guiding hundreds of majors and minors on their professional paths, and in 1989, he received the WMU Alumni Association Teaching Excellence Award.

Barbara Felkel has taught Latin in Kalamazoo Public Schools for 41 years. Her program at Loy Norrix High School is the only Latin program in KPS. This program has been highly recognized and has been featured in articles in the Kalamazoo Gazette and elsewhere. Her students annually win honors in the National Latin Exam and the Advanced Placement Program. Many of them continue their Latin studies at the university level. Indeed, two Loy Norrix graduates are now high school Latin teachers! Latin lives!

The Department of Spanish deeply thanks these accomplished, respected, and beloved colleagues and friends for their deep commitment to education and for their generosity to the department.

(Photo courtesy of the Kalamazoo Gazette.)
Alumni News

By Midwest Peace Corps Volunteer (Monday, February 3, 2015)

Roxana Gamble, 22, of Canton, Michigan, was accepted into the Peace Corps and departed for Panama last February to begin training as a secondary English education volunteer. Gamble lived and worked at the community level teaching conversational English and English as a Foreign Language. She also co-taught, shared resources, and developed instructional materials with local teachers.

“I’ve always wanted to use the knowledge and skills I’ve gained in my life to empower people who haven’t been as privileged as I have,” Gamble said. “In my past experiences, helping people grow and realize the possibilities within themselves is the most rewarding work. I’m also fascinated by other cultures and am excited to spend the next two years really getting to know what life is like in Panama,” said Gamble, prior to her departure.

Gamble is the daughter of Robbyn and Keith Gamble of Canton, Michigan, and a 2010 graduate of Plymouth High School. She graduated from Western Michigan University in April 2014 with a bachelor’s degree in anthropology and Spanish.

“I was prepared for service because of Western Michigan’s inspiring professors, staff, and fellow students who provided me with opportunities to grow and gain useful skills,” Gamble said. “I was able to study abroad in Spain for a semester, which prepared me for life in another country and opened my eyes to the benefits of experiencing other cultures firsthand.”

During the first three months of her service, Gamble lived with a host family in Panama to learn the local language and integrate into the local culture. After acquiring the language and cultural skills that help her make a lasting difference, Gamble was sworn into service and assigned to a community in Panama where she will serve for two years.

Gamble has been working in cooperation with the local people and partner organizations on sustainable, community-based development projects that improve the lives of people in Panama and help Gamble develop leadership, technical and cross-cultural skills that will give her a competitive edge when she returns home. Peace Corps volunteers return from service as global citizens, well-positioned for professional opportunities in today’s global job market.

“My personal goals are to make as much of a difference as I can and to form real connections with the people in my community,” Gamble said. “Professionally, I hope that my experiences in the Peace Corps will help me in applying to graduate programs in anthropology once I return from service.”

Gamble joins the 233 Michigan residents currently serving in the Peace Corps. More than 7,107 Michigan residents have served as volunteers since the agency was created in 1961. In 2014, applications reached a 22-year high for the agency, with more than 17,000 Americans taking the first step toward international service. There are 209 volunteers in Panama working with their communities on projects in English education, environmental health, environmental conservation and agriculture. During their service in Panama, volunteers learn to speak local languages such as Embera, Ngabere, Spanish, and Wounaan. More than 2,370 Peace Corps volunteers have served in Panama since the program was established in 1963.
Greg Sumner was selected by the Department of Spanish to receive the 2015 College of Arts and Sciences’ Alumni Achievement Award. Sumner graduated from Western Michigan University and the Lee Honors College in 1997 with bachelor’s degrees in Spanish and in aviation technology and operations. Greg was hired at United Airlines as a flight officer in 2000 and has held numerous positions outside of the airline. For five years he worked at a multinational avionics firm as a sales manager where he interacted with global customers, and he has taken French and Portuguese courses to leverage his Spanish fluency. Greg completed his Executive Master of Business Administration with the WP Carey School of Business at Arizona State University in 2013.

Greg’s passion for integrating business and public policy coalesced the Federal Aviation Administration, JetBlue Airways, and L-3 Communications into a public/private partnership to develop and promote aviation NextGen technologies. This holds the promise of increasing airspace capacity as well as adding safety margins as air travel grows in the U.S. Greg was a member of FAA Work Groups and won the L-3/ACSS Customer and Performance Plus Awards as a result of these efforts.

As vice chair of the National Gay Pilots Association Education Fund, Greg has the privilege to oversee providing flight scholarships to aspiring aviators who are members and allies of the LGBTQ community. He has also begun his first year as a WMU Alumni Association Board Member and looks forward to further promoting the University as the Alumni Board’s representative in the Southwest region of the U.S. Greg currently flies the Boeing 767, primarily on international routes from United’s Houston hub.