Somos y Estamos, 2016

Department of Spanish

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2016

estamos

the year in review
A group of sixteen WMU students participated in the study abroad program in Buenos Aires, Argentina, under the careful direction of professor Mercedes Tasende: Alexis Armijo, Kaelyn Black, Stephen Cracchiolo, Melia Curtis, Anna Early, Daniel Goodman, Maria Clara Hurtado Becerra, Abby Loewestein, Jessica Ludeker, Elizabeth Mena, Thuy Nguyen, Angelica Pointer, Samantha Pursley, Enrico Raciti, Colleen Richardson and Caitlin Wiley. The program started on January 28 and ended on May 14, 2016. All participants stayed with host families and attended advanced Spanish language and culture classes at the Cultural Experience Abroad (CEA) center in Buenos Aires, an international education provider that is overseen by the University of New Haven.

Students participated in organized excursions to Tigre Delta and Colonia (Uruguay), traveled independently throughout the country, and took part in many co-curricular activities, such as visits to museums and historical sites around Buenos Aires. These experiences provided opportunities for WMU students to experience and learn more about the host culture while engaging in meaningful ways with the community through cultural programming, advancing their fluency in Spanish, and making significant progress toward their degree.
The Quito program celebrated its third year in May and June 2016. Many of the Quito program participants have continued their studies with us upon returning from Ecuador, becoming Spanish majors and minors, and even participating in our Burgos and Santander programs. Quito program participants earn seven credits for completing Spanish 2010 and 3170 in this South American city, full of colonial charm. They lived with host families near the beautiful campus of The Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ) and participated in a variety of cultural activities, including excursions to Quito’s famous historical center, Otavalo, Cotacachi, the Laguna de Cuicocha, and, of course, the equator. Although seamlessly directed and managed by professor Patricia Montilla, this year our students were accompanied by Manuela Olaru, a graduate student in the Department of Spanish who served as the on-site resident director and provided assistance and tutoring during the entire program.

Professor Montilla is quick to point out how big of an honor it is for her to have launched and directed the Quito program during the past four years. However, she is now passing the directorship on to our colleague, Dr. Germán Zárate-Sánchez, so that she can devote more time to completing a book on U.S. Latino/a novelists in the 21st century. She is very grateful that Dr. Zárate-Sánchez has agreed to serve as the new WMU Quito program director, and extends her gratitude to her colleagues in the Diether H. Haenicke Institute for Global Education, the Office of Study Abroad, the Department of Spanish and the USFQ, for their support. Her heartfelt congratulations go to the 2016 Broncos, with whom she had the pleasure of traveling with to Ecuador, for successfully completing the program: Carly Baldwin, Prashant Dault, Micheal Edwards, Karleigh Pleyer, Turner Slaughter and Jacob Smith. ¡Felicidades!
Twenty undergraduate students participated in the study abroad program in Santander, Spain, in 2016: Michelle Ary, Julie Ballast, Raechel Broek, Rachel Callaly, Kayla Cox, Efua Dankwa-Smith, Bridget Dietlin, Raychel Figurski, Maheen Gill, Anna Konstant, Carina Lawrence, Eliza Measzros, Brenna Reder, Aisha Richards, Diajah Ruffin, Janelle Schneider, Mackenzie Sievers, Ari Solomon, Sarah Suchodolski and Daniel VanZweden. The academic program started on July 4 and ended on August 25. During the eight-week program, students took two Spanish language courses with faculty from the University of Cantabria and a Spanish culture course with professor Mercedes Tasende, who was also the faculty director of the program. As in previous years, our students stayed with host families for eight weeks in Santander and had a chance to experience the Spanish culture firsthand.

Students took part in several planned excursions in the month of July; Picos de Europa, Potes, the Monastery of Santo Toribio de Liébana, the Mozarabic church of Santa María de Lebeña, a replica of the Prehistoric Caves of Altamira, the romanesque Colegiata de Santa Juliana in Santillana del Mar, the Palacio de Sobrellano and Gaudi’s El Capricho in Comillas, the Abbey of Santa María la Real de las Huelgas and the gothic cathedral in Burgos, and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. These trips were part of the Spanish culture class and were mandatory for all students. In addition, many students travelled to other parts of Spain (Barcelona, La Coruña, Santiago de Compostela, Granada, La Mancha, etc.) and other countries in Europe prior to the beginning of the program and after the program was over.

The students really enjoyed this experience abroad, while improving their Spanish language skills and their intercultural competence. They all completed the program successfully.
The longest-running study abroad program in the department was another resounding success. A total of nineteen students participated in the study abroad program in Burgos, Spain, in fall 2016: Mitchell Barrett, Rachael Bartholomew, Kayla Bisel, Elena Flores, Liliana Flores, Lesly Francisco Domingo, Katrina Gallardo, Martin Gasca, Marina Geider, Kathryn Grinnell, Jessica Lafler, Aurora Mokris, Austin Mortiere, Kenneth Nelson, Brianne Nyhoff, Maryssa Presbitero, Brendan Sapato, Jesse Whittinger and Annelise Wilp.

Upon arriving in Burgos on August 15, students met their host families, ate lunch, took the customary nap to catch up on missed sleep from the overnight flight, and quickly started getting acquainted with the city that very evening. As in previous years, students earned 13 credits of advanced Spanish language; grammar/conversation and culture. The latter included courses in history and art, several guided cultural trips to Salamanca, Segovia and Madrid, and a score of cultural activities, such as culinary and dancing classes, visits to vineyards and wine-aging facilities, and trekking in the Castilian plateaus. Along the way, students saw world-class museums, such as the Prado in Madrid or the Museum of Human Evolution in Burgos, monasteries, palaces, castles and cathedrals, some of which are in UNESCO’s list of World Heritage Sites. This year, every member of the group was offered a voluntary or paid opportunity to teach English in local schools and city government offices. And for the first time, every student had the chance to sit in a class of their second major at the Universidad de Burgos, from business and economics to music and history.

More than one student in this group of intrepid globe trotters thought of not coming back to the U.S., at least not right away. Our advisors were flooded with requests from students who wished to continue their education at the Universidad de Burgos. This, as professor Pablo Pastrana-Pérez, the program’s director, states, is one of the occupational hazards of taking students abroad: they may like it so much that, feeling so globally engaged, they may have trouble disengaging. Whether they come back right away or not, they will remain globally aware for life. And that is one of our goals, and the main reason why we want every student to study abroad.
2016 proved to be another successful year for the department’s Internship and Service Learning Program under the leadership of professor Michael Millar. A record number of seventeen Spanish majors participated last spring: Valeria Almanza, Emily Bamrick, Rachel Burtka, T’Ausia Bronson, Mary Bezineque, Kathryn Davis, Alejandra Dickey, Maureen Eckdahl, Valerie Horwath, Kelsey Kanthack, Leslie Orduña, Anna Poggensee, Emily Romani, Alex Salinas, Connor Smith, Mary Vallee and Annalisa Wilder. With the help of our community partners, we expanded our available placements to several new sites (see list of community partners below). Participating students completed almost 1100 hours of service learning over the course of the semester, many remained in their placements during summer I, and several were offered full-time positions at their sites for the entire summer.

The SPAN 4400 course provides students a valuable opportunity to improve their Spanish communicative and professional skills through internship or a service-learning experience in the Kalamazoo area. Students work closely with public schools, hospitals and clinics, community services, legal offices and other local organizations to assist in their projects and outreach to Kalamazoo’s Hispanic population. For the first time in the six years of offering this program, professor Millar was pleased to work with two new site coordinators that are not only Department of Spanish alumni, but also former students of the service-learning course.

This class meets once a week to discuss course readings and materials while a minimum of four hours of experiential learning are completed on-site each week. Class meetings focus on discussion of students’ internship and service-learning experiences, readings on issues facing the Hispanic population in Michigan and in the U.S., as well as conversations with invited guest speakers from the Kalamazoo community (see list of names below). All participants are selected by Dr. Millar through an application process and by faculty recommendation. We are very proud of the many years of outstanding efforts by our Spanish students and grateful for the opportunities they have had due to our collaborating partners’ commitment and dedication to their success.

Thanks to our 2016 guest speakers and community partners!

**GUEST SPEAKERS**

- Ana Raquel Devereaux  
  Attorney with Michigan Immigrant Rights Council
- Heather Grisales  
  Principal of El Sol Elementary School, KPS
- Jeffrey Hadley  
  Chief of Kalamazoo Public Safety
- Tom Thornburg  
  Managing Attorney of Farmworker Legal Services

**COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

- Bethany Christian Services
- Bronson Hospital
- Catholic Diocese Immigration Assistance
- El Sol Elementary School
- Farmworker Legal Services
- Hispanic American Council
- Kalamazoo Communities in Schools
- Kalamazoo Health and Community Services
- Loaves and Fishes of Kalamazoo
- Maple Street Middle School
- Michigan Immigrant Rights Council
- The Telamon Corporation
Ever since joining the Department of Spanish in 2004, professor Michael Braun has served as both a teacher and a coordinator, helping with the coordination of the Spanish conversation course (3170). His dedication and hard work both inside and outside of the classroom was dully recognized, as he was awarded the 2015-16 College of Arts and Sciences Faculty Achievement Award in Teaching for his fine teaching over a period of more than 12 years. Before he was hired to oversee the department’s Teaching Education Curriculum, professor Braun was a graduate teaching assistant from 1990-92 and adjunct professor from 2001-04. Since his arrival, Miguel, as he is called by his colleagues and students, has made significant contributions to the instructional program of the department: as a steward of our teaching program, instructor of different levels of Spanish and language coordinator for Spanish 3170-Spanish Conversation, Burgos study abroad director, and more. Of particular value has been his leadership in keeping the department in line with the ever-changing state requirements for future educators. His success comes not only because he is a gifted teacher but also because “Miguel is user-friendly,” as one colleague put it, referring to his devotion and generosity to his students and colleagues—and, indeed, he is. He has always been particularly helpful to education students, preparing them for mandated state exams, and to graduate students. He serves as a role model and makes himself available to them on a daily basis for help or mere mentoring. His office is a small library of pedagogical material, everything from board games that make Spanish fun for beginners to more sophisticated Spanish exercises and materials to teach advanced students the rigors and challenges of learning a second language.

Professor emeritus and once chair of the department, Bob Griffin, upon knowing of Miguel’s award, promptly stated, “I am one of the fortunate faculty who was a close observer of your successes as an undergraduate and graduate student and then as a very popular high school teacher. Now you are being recognized for your contribution to WMU’s Spanish department -- you’ve had a career to be proud of.” Likewise, a more recently retired member of our faculty and also former chair of the department, professor emeritus John Benson, aptly recognized how momentous the return of the “prodigal son” to Sprau Tower has been, as he arrived to occupy the important position of “teacher of teachers.” We are lucky and grateful to have Miguel Braun as our colleague.
Part-timer instructors play a vital role in supporting the teaching mission, one of the strongest mainstays within the College of Arts and Sciences. In its second year running, the Part-Time Instructor Excellence in Teaching Award recognizes long-standing record of achievement in teaching, as demonstrated by student evaluations, supervisor feedback and peer recognition. No one deserves greater recognition for their contribution to our department’s teaching excellence than Dr. Hedy Habra and Lis Torres. They are the instructors most trusted with the teaching of two important pillars in the third-year language curriculum, namely the Introduction to the Study of Spanish Literature (Spanish 3250) and the Introduction to the Study of Spanish Linguistics (Spanish 3240).

Both Hedy Habra and Lis Torres have enduring experience teaching at the college level. Professor Habra has been a member of our department for thirty years, the latter of which as graduate student, culminating in her earning a Ph.D. in 2007. During all these years, Professor Habra has taught a variety of beginning and intermediate Spanish language courses in the old and new halls of Brown, and the not-so-new Dunbar. She has distinguished herself teaching SPAN 3250 for the past eight years, a course that requires a great deal of discretion in deciding how much reading and writing to assign. Not only has professor Habra found the right balance in teaching that course, but she has earned the respect and admiration of her students along the way. Students continue to take her courses with full knowledge that she is demanding because she is approachable and sensitive to their needs; but above all, because she is a consummate pedagogue who prepares her classes meticulously and spends inordinate amounts of time grading assignments and providing valuable feedback to her students. Aside from her teaching prowess, Hedy has distinguished herself in the community as a recognized poet laureate, an award-winning writer of short stories and a scholar of famed Peruvian writer and recipient of the 2010 Nobel Prize in Literature, Mario Vargas Llosa. We could not be prouder of the service professor Habra provides to our students.

Lis Torres came to us in 2008 from the Universidad de Los Andes in Mérida, Venezuela, where she had served as the chair of the linguistics program. For over eight years, Lis has been a stellar teacher and a generous colleague to her fellow graduate students, who hold her in great regard. Lis has excelled in the classroom year in and year out, having amassed an enviable number of student compliments and the unconditional trust of our department. Our college continues to rely on her pedagogical skills for the teaching of just about any course in the first six-semester language sequence. Students seek her company and support because they know she is warm, compassionate and easy to talk to. Aside from teaching in the conventional classroom setting, Lis has been a reliable Spanish tutor to both students and staff alike; and her knowledge of Spanish linguistics, in which she is pursuing a Ph.D., guarantees her a steady flow of fellow students, both undergraduate and graduate, who rely on her advice. Because of her distinction in the classroom and her accommodating temperament, she has been tapped to teach at Kalamazoo College, where she has also left her mark of excellence. We are exceptionally lucky to have Lis Torres as one of our most valuable teachers.

I was very fortunate to have been invited to go to Spain in summer 2015 to give two lectures on Cervantes’s masterpiece *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Professor Felkel’s talks were conceived as part of the inauguration of summer classes at the University of Burgos and the University of Santa Catalina in El Burgo de Osma (Students who are planning to study in Burgos take note: El Burgo de Osma is a relatively unknown jewel in the province of Soria almost directly south of Burgos. I strongly encourage you to visit it on one of your long weekends. You could easily combine it with a visit to the Monasterio de Santo Domingo de Silos, another priceless gem.)

The first of these lectures was co-sponsored by the University of Burgos and the Instituto Castellano y Leonés de la Lengua, and included a response from Emilio Pascual Martín, a well-known writer, editor, and expert in children’s literature who at the time was working on a new edition of the *Quijote*. The attendance was excellent and included several of our former graduate students. What fun it was to see them again! In El Burgo de Osma I shared the podium with the director of the Instituto Castellano y Leonés de la Lengua, who was delighted to hear that I recommended that people read Cervantes’s masterpiece in its original form, not in the recently published modernized version by Andrés Trapiello. My point was that if our graduate students here at WMU, both native speakers and non-natives, can manage to read the Spanish of Cervantes, then surely any reasonably well educated Spaniard can do so as well.

I was surprised to see how widely these talks were reported in the press, radio, and television. There were articles in *Noticias de Burgos, Diario de Burgos, El Correo de Burgos, Burgos TV Online, burgosconecta.es, Diario de Soria, El Heraldo de Soria*, and others. By far the most gratifying aspect of this experience was this comment from *El Correo de Burgos*: “If all professors spoke about the *Quijote* with the same enthusiasm and passion that this WMU professor does, the work would certainly never have gone off the best seller list.” I like that because it sums up as well as anything the way I see my mission here at WMU. Some years ago I got an email from a student who had just taken the *Quijote* class with me in English, Saskia Nangle, and she told me that she bought a copy of the book for her mother just so that she could have somebody with whom she could continue to talk about it. I tell you, I will cherish that email for as long as I live.
Professor Natalio Ohanna was busy at work during his sabbatical in 2015-2016. After conducting meticulous archival research in Spain, primarily at the Biblioteca Nacional and the Archivo Histórico Nacional, both in Madrid, he set out to produce the first scholarly edition of a highly compelling drama by Felix Lope de Vega, the most prolific and acclaimed playwright of the Spanish Golden Age. *Los cautivos de Argel* (1599) stages the life and death of Abdela Alicaxet, a *Morisco*—a Spanish Muslim forcefully converted to Christianity. Twenty-three years before the staging to commemorate the royal wedding of Philip III and Margaret of Austria, Abdela had aroused suspicion in the eyes of Spanish authorities, who considered him the traitor par excellence. He escaped to North Africa and converted to Islam, became a pirate, and returned to his birthplace to liberate entire families from religious persecution. He succeeded before his persecutors caught up with him. Captured by the Inquisition, Abdela was burned at stake during an *Auto de fe*, a theatrical festival of faith celebrated on November 4, 1576 in the square of Valencia’s main church. Cleverly, Lope de Vega puts him back on stage, this time in a recreated drama, before the same audience.

Professor Ohanna’s edition is an important contribution to early-modern Spanish studies, as it sheds light onto the relationship between real life drama and its staging for the entertainment of contemporary audiences. His edition offers a paleographical transcription of the original inquisitorial file of Abdela Alicaxet, which provides a vivid portrait of the interactions between Christians and Muslims in a period marked by struggle against Islam, privateering and piracy in the Mediterranean, and the systematic persecution of religious and ethnic minorities. This particular play also raises interest for its imitation of the first theatrical piece ever written by Miguel de Cervantes, *El trato de Argel* (1580). Numerous notes of this edition seek to clarify the matter, since it is, in fact, the longest intertextual dialogue between the most universal figures of Spanish Golden Age literature. Professor Ohanna’s work on this play, beyond providing an in-depth analysis of its language and many contextual references, helps to illuminate the connections between literature, politics and society, as well as the function of a literary text in its quality as a historical document, capable of bringing us closer to a history of ideas, beliefs and images, ways of thinking and feeling that contribute to the construction of established reality. The book will be published in Spain, during the spring of 2017, in the collection *Clásicos Castalia*.
Professor Robert Vann has had a longtime interest in the Catalan language and in the people that live in Catalonia, an autonomous community in northeastern Spain. He began his research on the Spanish language used in Catalonia back in 1995, when, as a doctoral student at the University of Texas, he was intrigued about the linguistic situation in a region with a language (Catalan) which had been suppressed in favor of Spanish for over 250 years. He wanted to see what the language situation was 20 years after democracy had returned to Spain. Back then, and according to Professor Vann, the speakers he interviewed represented “the first generation of students in modern history for whom Catalan was widely available [as a language of] instruction.” When Spain became a democratic state in 1975, relative freedom came for the heritage languages. But for those of Catalan descent, during the centuries when Catalan was outlawed, “many generations never learned their language in school,” Vann says. “Maintaining pride in their language was difficult when it was prohibited for almost three centuries.”

Professor Vann has been documenting the Spanish language usage in Catalonia ever since. He has published a book and several articles on the topic, and has started a digital language archive dedicated to Spanish in the Països Catalans, the region expanding from Catalonia into parts of France and Italy, where the approximately twelve million speakers of Catalan concentrate. His return to Barcelona in 2017 will allow him to conduct a longitudinal study on the people with whom he spoke in 1995. “It’s fascinating what’s going on in Catalonia,” Professor Vann says. “Those people I talked to in 1995 — decades later they stand as community leaders” as historical social changes are occurring. Catalonia is trying to secede from Spain and linguistic self-determination is one of the pillars of the independence movement. “The time is good for conducting new research,” he says. “Linguistic practices are likely very different now given the sweeping ideological changes that have developed over the last 20 years as the Generation of 1995 has come of age in terms of social, cultural, and political capital in Barcelona.” He expects to find that members of the two social networks he interviewed back in 1995 will use linguistic resources and language ideologies differently than they did in 1995, reflecting the continuous and natural development of Catalan society towards cultural, linguistic, and political self-determination. He plans to return with new sociolinguistic data to analyze as well as fresh digital language recordings to deposit into his linguistic archive for the benefit of students and other researchers.
Professor Pablo Pastrana-Pérez, at the request of Provost Tim Greene, participated in the National Humanities Alliance Annual Meeting and Advocacy Day, which took place in Washington, D.C. on March 14 to 15, 2016. His assignment was to represent not only WMU but Michigan universities during the meeting and lobby for funding for the Humanities in Capitol Hill, together with the other delegate from Michigan, David Barclay, professor of History at Kalamazoo College. After a training workshop run by the National Humanities Alliance in which we reviewed the role of the humanities in higher education, the group was given a list of different and concrete strategies for advocating for humanities research in various offices of the U.S. Senate and Congress.

Once on Capitol Hill, professors Pastrana and Barclay followed a breakneck pace of visits to a score of congressional and senatorial offices. In Prof. Pastrana’s words, “the intensive one-day visit to Capitol Hill made me feel like a mole in a frantic hurry running along the interminable corridors that join the different congressional buildings in a complex underground network.” In a very busy day, they managed to meet with Senators Debbie Stabenow (D) and Gary Peters (D), as well as with staffers for congressmen Fred Upton (R), Dave Trott (R), Dan Benishek (R), and Deborah Dingell (D).

In spite of all the running around and the unpleasant feeling that our representatives have no more than a few fleeting minutes of one-on-one with “commoners,” Prof. Pastrana returned convinced that his time in Capitol Hill was well spent. When all was said and done, the coordinated efforts by the National Humanities Alliance in Washington, D.C. paid off, as they resulted in the restoration of level funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities in FY 2016-17 and in the reduction of cuts to the Fulbright Hays program and Title VI of the Higher Education Act, which pertains to International and Foreign Language Education (IFLE).

Budget fights in Capitol Hill can get lengthy and distasteful, but there is always a glimmer of hope that people like you and me can make a difference at the political level. The beneficiaries in our case are always the students, who will be better citizens and persons as a result of a humanistic education. Upon his return, Professor Pastrana, started his report back to WMU administrators with a sigh and an emphatic “oh, boy, am I glad to be back in the trenches!”
Department of Spanish graduate students Alba Fernández, Sommer Cain and Viridiana García were awarded by the Graduate College for their excellence in teaching and for their academic excellence.

In 1986, the Graduate Studies Council established the Graduate Research and Creative Scholar Award to acknowledge graduate students’ contributions to the scholarly and artistic productivity of Western Michigan University. Likewise, in 1998, the GSC established the Graduate Teaching Effectiveness Award to honor graduate students who are involved in WMU’s instructional mission in a substantial way. These two awards are the highest honors bestowed by WMU on its graduate students to recognize excellence and achievement in research, creative activity and teaching.

In a special ceremony presided by the dean of the Graduate College, Sue Stapleton, on Thursday, April 29, 2016, Alba Fernández, Sommer Cain and Viridiana Garcia, along with other Western graduate students, were recognized for their accomplishments and their quality of their work. At the master’s level, Sommer Cain received the Department-level Graduate Teaching Effectiveness Award and the All-University Teaching Effectiveness Award; and Alba Fernández received the Department-level Graduate Research and Creative Scholar Award. At the doctoral level, Viridiana Garcia received the Department-level Graduate Research and Creative Scholar Award.

Congratulations, students, for your dedication, passion and enthusiasm in your teaching and academic work, which raises the excellence of the Department of Spanish!

Students in Diomedes Solano-Rábago’s and Pablo Pastrana-Pérez’s Introduction to the Study of Spanish Literature (Spanish 3250) participated in an afternoon of poetry reading at Waldo Library, as part of the WMU Libraries’ celebration of National Poetry Month in April 2016.

As Dr. Susan Steuer, Director of the Special Collections and Rare Books and organizer of the events, puts it, “the idea was to bring more activity to the library, and offer programs the opportunity to expose the work of their students to a larger audience.” Among the planned activities, there was music, dance, artwork, interpretive reading and creative writing. The Department of Spanish ensured that the international character of student work was well represented. Many brave students went beyond the call of duty and composed poems in Spanish, which they later read aloud at Waldo Library.
Two of our doctoral students, Karina Ortiz-Pacheco and Leticia Espinosa, or shall we say Doctors Ortiz-Pacheco and Espinosa, completed their doctoral studies in 2016.

Karina finished all the requirements of the Ph.D. program last summer and was hooded by her dissertation director, Dr. Irma López, in the graduation ceremony of June 24. In 2015, while a graduate student in the program Karina received the Department-level Graduate Research and Creative Scholar Award, a Graduate Studies Council award to honor graduate students who are involved in WMU’s research mission in a substantial way. Karina’s dissertation, titled Panorama novelístico de escritoras ecuatorianas en el siglo XXI (Novelistic Overview of Ecuatorian Female Writers in the Twenty-First Century), examines the novels written by female Ecuadorian writers in the twenty-first century. Karina’s analysis focuses on the overlapping themes found in these novels, as well as the differences that exist among them which distinguish each of the individual novels. Her dissertation also considers the latest trends in Ecuadorian fiction in the context of contemporary Latin American literature.

Originally from Quito, Ecuador, she, her husband Jarek William Marsh-Prelesnik and their two-year-old daughter Emilia relocated to Quito this past August. Our best wishes to Karina and her family in this new stage of their lives.

Leticia Espinosa put an exclamation point to her doctoral studies in Spanish with the successful defense of her dissertation, titled “La sexualidad como vehículo de exploración sexual, género e identidad nacional en la novelística pan-hispana del siglo XXI.” Back in 2009, when Leticia was a student in our M.A. program, Prof. López, who will become her dissertation advisor, spotted something in Leticia that made her think she was Ph.D. material. According to Prof. López, “Leticia was full of energy and she had poignant observations about the reading assignments.” As some of our graduate students, Leticia had to balance family life with her academic obligations. As the mother of a young child, she had to make sacrifices to bring the ship of her dissertation to a good harbor. Prof. López adds, “Leticia’s feisty nature, her passion for literature and her willingness to go beyond the master’s degree have carried her to this point.”

Leticia has been working as a Spanish instructor at Cornerstone University, in Grand Rapids, where she shares the halls with another graduate of ours, Emily Watson, formerly Jipping, who is soon returning to WMU to complete doctoral studies in Education.
Phi Beta Kappa (ΦΒΚ), from the Greek Φιλοσοφία βίου Κυβερνήτης (Philosophia Biou Kubernetes), meaning “Love of learning is the guide of life,” is the nation’s oldest and most prestigious academic honor society. Dating back to 1776, PBK has as its tenets liberal education, intense critical study and freedom of thought. Only the very best graduating students get invited to be members, those who have earned on average, a cumulative GPA above 3.7 in at least 95 hours of undergraduate coursework, or 3.8 GPA in doctoral studies.

In a ceremony that goes back to the time of the founding of our nation, 42 WMU students were initiated on April 13, 2016. Among them, there were six of our brightest Spanish students. They join the ranks of 17 U.S. Presidents, 39 U.S. Supreme Court Justices, and 136 Nobel laureates, all of whom can be counted among the ranks of Phi Beta Kappa members.

According to Professor Pastrana-Pérez, the current Secretary of the WMU Chapter of PBK, Theta of Michigan, “this cohort of initiates is not only one of the brightest I have had the pleasure to know, but also quite likely the nicest bunch of human beings you could find on planet Earth.” They joined Dean Carla Koretsky, who was inducted as an honorary member of our chapter.

There are over a half a million living members of PBK, elected over the years by the 280 chapters at colleges and universities throughout the country. The 2016 group is the nineteenth class of initiates of the Theta of Michigan chapter, joining more than eleven hundred students initiated since the chapter’s founding in 1997. Not only does the Department of Spanish enjoy the distinction of having dozens of students ambassadors of this prestigious society, but it also has two of its faculty members among the ranking officers of the local chapter, with Professor Kristina Wirtz as its current Vice-President and Professor Pablo Pastrana-Pérez as the chapter’s Secretary.
Dear Bob Felkel,

I just wanted to check in and see how your summer has been going.

I hope that you are excited for the term to start! I am sure you have a great bunch of students this year! Would you please keep me posted as the term goes on? Anything exciting happen this summer for you?

I did manual labor over the summer and met some very interesting characters. Along with my summer job, I had a lot to do in preparation for law school. I spent a lot of my afternoons packing up my apartment that had accumulated a lot of stuff over the past four years! It was very sad to leave Kalamazoo and leave the campus and faculty that I have grown to see as a home and as family. I know that I will return in a short amount of time to visit campus and you! So far Milwaukee, Wisconsin is a pretty cool place! I have my own apartment at the old Pabst Blue Ribbon Brew House. They kept all the brick and high-beamed wooded ceilings! It is a very cool place. I have met some very kind people; a few of which will be my classmates for the next three years or Marquette Law School! I have met another girl that has a passion for the Spanish language and is applying to study abroad in Madrid, as am I! There are also several native speakers in my class and we all intend on getting together once every couple of weeks to practice Spanish!

All in all, I am truly enjoying myself. I know that the tidal wave of stress is about to start as classes begin next week, but I am sure that I will enjoy some aspects of law school! There is no doubt that I will be one busy bee as I power through my first year! It is thanks to the incredible donation of you and your wife that I could afford to pay for books and tuition. I am truly blessed for what you both have done for me; I cannot begin to thank you both enough for your generosity. Because of how great the Spanish Department treated me at Western Michigan University, I aim to continue my love for Spanish by studying abroad in Madrid (I won’t be able to apply until next semester). As of right now, I am leaning towards international law!

I just wanted to give you an update in my life and I hope that this email finds you well!

Atentamente,
Lizzy
I wish to contribute to further the success of the Department of Spanish at Western Michigan University.

Gifts and donations make possible the extra margin of excellence in our department. Your donations help us attract and keep top faculty, recruit the best graduate students and support undergraduates with scholarships and prizes.

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