Somos y Estamos, Otoño/Fall 2019

Western Michigan University

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Queridos Amigos & Dear Friends,

I write to welcome students and colleagues to the 2019-20 academic year, and to send autumn greetings to all of our alumni and friends. I just received news, photos and even a video to show that our twelve study abroad students happily arrived in Burgos for fall: https://www.ubu.es/noticias/una-relacion-de-amistad-internacional-que-continua.

The Department of Spanish has exciting events planned for this fall semester, including co-sponsoring the Sones de México Ensemble of Chicago at the Dalton Center on September 16, hosting a talk by Dr. Charles Nagle, an applied linguist from Iowa State University, welcoming back our alumni achievement winner, Dr. Rose Brougham, for Homecoming weekend on October 11-12, and building our annual altar and educational display in Waldo Library in honor of the Día de los Muertos. Our semester will close with our annual student writing contest.

This fall, we also begin our partnership with Extended University Programs and Kalamazoo Christian High School to provide a dual enrollment program of university Spanish classes for their Spanish immersion program students. Professor Lindsay Jeffers will be teaching the first classes in this pioneering program.

If WMU Giving Day on October 9 inspires you, please consider making a gift to the Department of Spanish to fund scholarships and awards for our students. We are especially proud to help provide life-changing opportunities for Study Abroad in our four faculty-led study abroad programs in Burgos and Santander, Spain; Heredia, Costa Rica; and Quito, Ecuador. And we seek your support to provide scholarships for international students who want to enter graduate programs in our department.

I am especially grateful to Graduate Assistant and M.A. student Nick Blumenau for his excellent work interviewing faculty and graduating Ph.D students for this issue.

Saludos cordiales desde la Torre de Sprau, Kristina Wirtz, Chair
SPRING 2019:
Teatro Nuestro of Battle Creek performed “El Nombre,” by Griselda Gambaro, directed by Tania Fleitas and featuring Martha Calderón, March 15, with co-sponsorship by the WMU Center for the Humanities.

Spring Video Contest: Congratulations to our winner, Ursula Marlies Mayr, for “La sinfonía de mis días,” and to our runners-up, Annika Ehrig, Dakota McCracken, Anne Russell, Heather Price, and Alicia Jurth, for “Como ser Tica,” which they submitted from Costa Rica during their Study Abroad program.

El Sol Dual Language Elementary School Third Grade annual visit to the Spanish Department in collaboration with Anthropology, in April: Many thanks to all of our student volunteers and to organizers Alba Fernández and Mitch Barrett.

The Spanish Department co-sponsored the Medieval Institute Loew Lecture, by Dr. José Suárez Otero, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, “Scars of Silence: The Tomb of Saint James the Apostle and the Origins of Christian Spain”

Planned for FALL 2019 and open to the community:
Sones de México Ensemble of Chicago performs folk music from Mexico, co-sponsored with the WMU Office for Diversity & Inclusion, September 16, 6PM, Dalton Theater.

Guest lecture by Dr. Charles Nagle, Iowa State University: “Unlocking the power of motivation science to promote language learning engagement and achievement,” September 19, 3:30PM, Brown Hall.

Meet Dr. Rose Brougham, Department Alumni Achievement Award winner and Assistant Professor of Global Cultures and Languages at University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, Oct. 11, 2-3PM, Sprau Tower 10th Floor.

Altar para los muertos, an educational exhibit by the Department of Spanish in Waldo Library, October 28-November 4.

Festival del Cine, our twice-annual presentation of Spanish-language cinema, coming in November.

Certamen de Escritura, our annual writing contest for undergraduate students studying Spanish, with a cash prize, coming in November.
Ph.D. Program Spotlight

Our two newest Doctors of Philosophy in Spanish
By Nick Blumenau, M.A. Student in Hispanic Studies

After much hard work, study, and research, Dr. Marlene Camacho Ochoa and Dr. Viridiana García Hernández have completed their doctoral studies and successfully defended their dissertations on December 14 and May 7 respectively, earning their Ph.D.s in Spanish.

Marlene’s career began in a very different field than the one in which she would eventually earn her Ph.D. at Western Michigan University. Marlene had previously earned her M.S. and doctorate in Pharmacology and had enjoyed a long career researching the human brain. However, not content with “just sitting around” after retirement, Marlene decided to continue her quest for knowledge by pursuing an M.A. and Ph.D. in Spanish at WMU. Influenced by her background, Marlene took a scientific approach to her dissertation “Description of the Final Phase of Augusto Roa Basto’s Narrative.” In her dissertation, Marlene analyzes the final works of Roa Basto, specifically Vigilia del almirante, El fiscal, Contravida, and Madama Sui, and examines the structure of folk tales and how the mythic structure that the protagonists develop is seen as a universal characteristic. In addition, Marlene studies the intertextuality and intratextuality of Roa Basto’s texts; that is to say, how Roa Basto’s writings reference other literary and historical works (intertextuality) and his own early works and narrative (intratextuality) in order to add depth or change the plot and heroes of his stories. Lastly, Marlene addresses literary code-switching, which is the use of words, grammatical structures, and/or popular expressions from another language (usually the author’s mother tongue) than that of the one principally used in the work. In the case of Augusto Roa Basto, his work employs the use of Guaraní, which Marlene argues gives voice to the Guaraní culture and shows the linguistic, political, and social worldview of the Guaraní myths and legends.

Marlene’s advice to future master’s and doctoral students is that they diversify their studies. Marlene states that it is not necessary for students to specialize to such a point that they end up limiting themselves. She sees literature, culture, and linguistics as inseparable, and, therefore, advises students to be well-rounded in their studies. Furthermore, Marlene feels that simply having a Ph.D. in Spanish may not be enough. She recommends that students set themselves apart by utilizing other disciplines such as math, science, and music to assist in their Spanish doctoral work. This April, Marlene was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa, the nation’s oldest and most prestigious honor society, in recognition of her excellence across so many fields of study. With regard to Marlene’s future endeavors, she plans to pursue a Fulbright Scholarship in order to continue her research on literary code-switching.

In photo: MA graduates Patricia Arévalo and Josué Ku Gallegos with Marlene and Viridiana at Spring Commencement
Viridiana earned her B.A. from the Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, Mexico and came to Western Michigan University in 2011 in pursuit of her M.A. in Spanish. In 2014 she completed her M.A. and entered the doctoral program. Viridiana’s dissertation, “Traumatic Migration and Identity Reconfiguration in Mexican, Central American and Caribbean Narratives from the Twenty-First Century,” examines the experience of migrants through the eyes of several authors who describe their own experience before, during, and after the journey to the North. Viridiana analyzes the trauma that migrants undergo such as riding “La bestia,” the name given to a network of Mexican freight trains used by thousands of migrants bound for the United States. Moreover, Viridiana explores how writing is one of the ways in which the authors deal with this trauma. Additionally, she examines the concept of the “American Dream” and its relation to the trauma that the authors underwent. Some authors regard the “American Dream” positively, focusing on the fact that they are in the United States, and therefore, the hope for a better life exists, while others become disillusioned with the idea of the “American Dream.” In the first chapter of the dissertation, Viridiana addresses the migration from Mexico and studies the novel Into the Beautiful North by Luis Alberto Urrea and the memoir The Distance Between Us by Reyna Grande. The second chapter focuses on Central America, in particular, El Salvador and Honduras, examining Mario Bencastro’s Odyssey to the North and Sonia Nazario’s Enrique’s Journey. Lastly, Viridiana’s third chapter looks at the experiences of migrants from the Caribbean, specifically Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic through Call Me Maria by Judith Ortiz Cofer and The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Díaz.

Viridiana’s dissertation was in part inspired by the current Latin American diaspora to the United States as well as by the many people that she knew in Mexico who spoke of traveling and working in the North. In addition, she was inspired by a friend from Puerto Rico who discussed the trauma experienced in emigrating to the United States. Viridiana was also motivated by a class on Hispanic American literature that she took with Dr. Patricia Montilla. Viridiana states that she sees all of her life or destiny as leading her to this subject. She says that she plans to continue her research regarding the migrant experience in Latin America and the United States. Viridiana is especially interested in investigating how Mexican writers and migrants view the northern border in comparison to a Mexican American perspective. Furthermore, she would like to explore the migrant experience of Salvadorians and Nicaraguans who seek work in Costa Rica. Viridiana will be Visiting Assistant Professor of Spanish at Michigan State University starting in Fall 2019. As a professor, Viridiana hopes to share her passion for this topic with her students.

The Spanish Department congratulates Dr. Marlene Camacho Ochoa and Dr. Viridiana García Hernández on all of their hard work and accomplishments, and wishes them the very best in their future endeavors. ¡Enhorabuena!
Faculty News

By Nick Blumenau, MA student in Hispanic Studies

FILM STUDIES

Dr. Antonio Isea’s publication, “The unveiling of Pelo malo: The naked truth of co-producing poverty-porn” addresses the film Pelo Malo (Bad Hair) (2013) by Mariana Rondón, a film that presents the life of Junior, a nine year old boy growing up in, at times, a violent Venezuela. Pelo Malo presents a conflict between Junior, who is Afro-Venezuelan and gay, and his mother, who views Junior’s desire to straighten his naturally curly hair and obsession with his looks as unnatural for a young boy, and therefore sees the straightening of his hair as a deviant act. The film received generally positive reviews and enjoyed great success at international film festivals, receiving the Golden Shell Award, the highest award given at the San Sebastián Film Festival.

In his critical article, Isea looks beneath the surface of Rondón’s film by stripping it of its “paratexts,” that is the dressings that producers, directors, promoters, etc. use in order to influence a public’s reception of the film. (continued on p.6)

LITERATURE

Dr. Patricia Montilla has recently published an article “(Re)Writing Women’s History and the Slave Experience in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico: Esmeralda Santiago’s Conquistadora” in which she analyzes the role of women and slavery in Puerto Rico as told through Esmeralda Santiago’s historical fiction Conquistadora. This article is also a chapter in Montilla’s latest book in progress Latino/a Novelists in the Twenty-First Century: Remaking Identity, Nationality and History. Regarding Conquistadora, Montilla writes that the piece “brings to light the lives and stories of countless individuals whose voices were dismissed and silenced…and reveals the impact that Spanish women who emigrated to Puerto Rico, as well as African slaves brought to the Island by force, had in the social and economic development of the colony” (67). Montilla discusses that the role and contributions of women have often been excluded from the history of Latin America, whether it be official historical texts or works of fiction. As a result of this exclusion, recent works by Latino/a writers have sought to reshape the narratives of women in Latin America by making them active (continued on p.6)
(Montilla, continued from p.5) participants in history as opposed to passive agents or victims of it.

This rewriting, or perhaps, rectifying of an incomplete history, is at the crux of Esmeralda Santiago’s *Conquistadora* which tells the story of Ana Larragoity Cubillas, a Spanish noble who emigrates to Puerto Rico in search of personal freedom, which often comes at the price of others losing theirs. In addition to addressing the role of women in Puerto Rico’s history, Santiago brings to light the often misunderstood and misconstrued history of slavery in Puerto Rico. That the slaves in Puerto Rico were treated better and experienced less suffering and hardship than those in other parts of the Americas has been a long held belief that Santiago attempts to dispel in her novel.

Additionally, in *Latino/a Novelists in the Twenty-First Century: Remaking Identity, Nationality and History*, Montilla examines how contemporary novelists, who often identify as both American and with the country from which they emigrated, are creating works that reflect the transnational and multicultural history and identity of Latinos/as. They are rewriting the official histories of their countries of origin in order to give voice to those who have been silenced or excluded from history due to military dictatorships and social injustice; challenge the political systems and ideologies that result in violence, human rights violations, and exile; and undermine traditional constructs regarding race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality through an inclusion of indigenous, African, female, gay, lesbian, and transgender characters. Montilla explores these themes through the works of Julia Álvarez, Junot Díaz, Carolina de Robertis, Esmeralda Santiago, and Luis Alberto Urrea.

(Isea, continued from p.5) These paratexts include the cover art for the film, the interviews that precede a film’s release, and in the case of *Pelo Malo*, the opening credits that show its Golden Shell Award and the logo of the World Cinema Fund. These two images serve to prime the audience that they are about to view a prestigious and masterful work of art. However, Isea argues that once these paratexts surrounding *Pelo Malo* have been removed, a darker truth comes to light, and *Pelo Malo* “shows itself as a cultural commodity that has been co-produced to profit through the scene of the pain of a marginalized other” (154). In addition, films such as *Pelo Malo* are often not only created specifically for the film festival circuit, but are partly produced by the film festival circuit.

Isea explains that his article is the result of an investigation that during the last 3 years has led him to explore the connections that exist between the spectacle of human poverty, the creation of its affect, and the selling of the pain of a very particular other—namely the impoverished youth and adolescent of the so-called Global South. The pain of the other, magnified-porno-graphied, is profitable from a financial and ideological stand point. Isea indicates that this type of cinematographic act is, without a doubt, the most perverse contribution of poverty-porn and therefore, enjoys great success at the most prestigious film festivals such as San Sebastián, Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Sundance, Rotterdam, Park City, and Toronto. Latin America, and in particular 21st century Venezuela, has become a privileged space for the trafficking, cinematographically, of human poverty.
Annual Honors and Awards Ceremony, April 5, 2019

Congratulations to all our award and scholarship winners!

Twelve students received awards for excellence, thirteen of our best graduating seniors won prizes and scholarships in the names of Herb B. Jones, Mathilde Steckelberg, Lori Beth Pattison, Suzanne M. Wheatley, Carolyn Harris, the Spanish Emeriti Faculty, Michael Braun, and Robert & Barbara Felkel, and fourteen received Department Study Abroad scholarships in the names of Suzanne M. Wheatley, Antonia Rostami, Anita Bischoff, and Ruth Kirby.

Please join us for the next Honors and Awards Ceremony:
April 17, 2020 at 12PM in Bernhard 208-210
¡Gracias!

Directory

Dr. Kristina Wirtz, Chair
Dr. Antonio Isea
Dr. Lindsay Jeffers
Dr. Irma López, Interim Dean of the Lee Honors College
Dr. Michael Millar
Dr. Patricia Montilla
Dr. Natalio Ohanna
Dr. Pablo Pastrana Pérez
Dr. Mariola Pérez de la Cruz
Dr. Mercedes Tasende
Dr. Benjamín Torres
Dr. Mercedes Tubino Blanco
Dr. Robert Vann
Dr. Germán Zárate Sández

Ms. Colleen Sante, Office Coordinator
Ms. Madeline Alonso, Office Associate

410 Sprau Tower
269-387-3001
https://wmich.edu/spanish

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Burgos Study Abroad students with Dr. Mariola Pérez, August 2019

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This site also has a downloadable giving form to print and mail with a check, if you prefer.

Thank you: All gifts make a difference in our department and in the lives of our students.