AAUW Funds Moreno’s Study of Puerto Rican Authors

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) recently awarded Marisel Moreno, assistant professor of U.S. Latino literature, a prestigious American Fellowship in support of a project she hopes will be a model for exploring links between Latin American and U.S. Latino/a cultures.

“This is the first book-length study to examine the literature of Puerto Rican female authors on the island and the U.S. mainland,” Moreno says. Thanks to the AAUW fellowship, she is spending the 2009–10 academic year on leave pursuing research for the book.

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Grants for International Language Study Make Immediate Impact

If experience has led you to believe a “productive meeting” is an oxymoron, then you should know the story of Notre Dame’s Summer Language Abroad (SLA) Grant Program, as its whirlwind success may soften the stance of even the most ardent office cynic.

First you’ll need a little background. The SLA program offers grants to both undergraduates and graduate students in the College of Arts and Letters who are interested in undertaking intensive study of a foreign language abroad over the summer (other resources are in place to support research projects).

Faculty representing seven departments and offices team with Lance Askildson, director of the Center for the Study of Languages and Cultures (CSLC), to review applications for the grants. A five-tiered rating system guides the faculty evaluations, and the committee also considers students’ financial need when making awards.

As for funding, the Nanovic Institute for European Studies, the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, and seven other campus entities contributed to the SLA program in 2009, nearly doubling the $95,000 Arts and Letters had already committed to it.

Given these details, it wouldn’t have seemed unreasonable to allot a couple semesters, maybe more, for organizing the initiative and selecting the first group of grant winners.

Askildson and his colleagues, however, pulled it off earlier this year in about two months.

And it turns out the ambitiousness of the program, which is run by the CSLC, was due not only to institutional desire and administrative dexterity but also to the efforts of the applicants themselves.

“They had these brilliant statements of purpose,” says Askildson, who didn’t seek matching funds until after applications started pouring in and the number of deserving students kept growing. “We asked them to justify both in an academic sense and just in an intellectual curiosity sense: ‘Why would this be valuable to you? What’s it going to do for you?’ … And I was absolutely blown away, as were the other committee members, by the eloquence of these statements.”

All told, approximately $186,000 was awarded to 55 students, including 18 working in the Romance languages, for study abroad during summer 2009. Each was required to complete an oral proficiency interview both before leaving and after returning to campus this fall.

It’s also worth noting that other grants are available for summer language study abroad. Several of the units that are partnering with the College to fund the SLA program still offer their own grants to particularly outstanding students. For instance, the faculty review committee was so impressed by senior Bronwen Elizabeth Mitchell’s application that Askildson thought she would be a strong candidate for the Nanovic Grants for International Language Study Make Immediate Impact

Lance Askildson in his CSLC office

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Notable Conferences, 2008-09

"New Paradigms for Revolutionary Studies: French-American Colloquium"
Oct. 6-7, 2008

Scholars from France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Japan gathered at Notre Dame for “New Paradigms for Revolutionary Studies,” an interdisciplinary research conference on the French Revolution. Part of an ongoing collaboration among faculty from the Université de Provence, the Université de Toulouse, Indiana University South Bend (IUSB), and Notre Dame, the event was organized by Julia Douthwaite, professor of French, and Lesley Walker (IUSB) and included exhibits in Notre Dame’s Hesburgh Library and Snite Museum of Art. It was included exhibits in Notre Dame’s Hesburgh Library and Snite Museum of Art. It was

"Dante and the Italian Duecento"
April 6, 2009

"Dante and the Italian Duecento," sponsored by the department as well as the University’s Medieval Institute and Devers Program in Dante Studies, focused on the earliest period of Italian literary history, particularly the lyric poetry of the 13th century (Duecento) that prepared the way for Dante. The colloquium examined not only the Ducento poets but also the extent to which Dante’s interpretation of their work—chronicled its history and commented on his predecessors in his Divine Comedy—helped to advance the development and realization of his own writing. 

"Why Italy?"
April 20–21, 2009

The follow-up to a similar event held at the University of Rome “La Sapienza” in June 2007, "Why Italy?" was an interdisciplinary symposium that brought together scholars from that institution and Notre Dame to discuss research related to Italian history and culture. Notre Dame’s Devers Program in Dante Studies, Nanovic Institute for European Studies, Ph. D. in Literature Program, and College of Arts and Letters joined with the department in hosting the conference. In addition to furthering relationships between faculty at the two schools, the symposium highlighted Italian studies scholarship at Notre Dame in fields ranging from anthropology to architecture.

Grants, continued from page 1

Instituto’s Pessoa Grant for Advanced Language in Portuguese. The institute did indeed award it to her, and in the process, helped broaden the reach of the SLA program by essentially freeing it up to support another student.

That idea of maximizing the impact of the awards led to an important departure from the previous Arts and Letters summer language grant system—which predated the creation of the CSLC and was significantly smaller in its scope—that benefits students of the Romance languages. Under the old guidelines, Mitchell could not have applied to study Portuguese because it’s taught at Notre Dame. However, Arts and Letters Dean John McGreyvel believed there should be no restrictions placed on the languages eligible to be funded. “We wanted this to be about what Arts and Letters students need,” Askildson says, “what they’ve identified as priorities, and not what we think they should learn in terms of less commonly taught languages.”

He emphasizes that undergraduate applicants need not be language or even liberal arts majors; the lone requirements are that they have at least a minor in the College and have studied the chosen language for a minimum of one year or achieved an equivalent level of competency. Similarly, any Arts and Letters graduate student who possesses a basic understanding of a foreign language is eligible to apply.

Hannah Zdansky, a student in Notre Dame’s interdisciplinary Ph. D. in Literature Program working in English, French, Latin, and Irish, received an SLA grant to attend a program at Institut d’Études Françaises d’Avignon administered by Bryn Mawr College. “Being able to study in Avignon, France, this summer was one of the most rewarding and formative experiences of my graduate career thus far,” Zdansky says. “In fact, this summer was the first occasion that I was able to spend time abroad in France, and the linguistic immersion, her Ph. D. in Italian literature and focuses on works produced during the 18th century, specifically the relationship of literature and the visual arts to scientific, historical, and material cultures. Her time as a graduate student included spending a year as a Geballe Dissertation Prize Fellow at the Stanford Humanities Center.

Ferri also received one of Stanford’s Centennial Teaching Assistant Awards in recognition of her classroom instruction. At Notre Dame, she has introduced the graduate-level course “World Literature in France and Truthful Stories: Autobiography in Eighteenth-Century Italy.” “Notre Dame has one of the best programs of Italian studies in the country and a dynamic Department of Romance Languages and Literatures with a strong tradition of academic excellence,” Ferri says. “It is an honor for me to join such a group of scholars.”

Department Welcomes Italian Literature Scholar to Faculty

You won’t find too many scholars who can refer to one of their past projects as “a wild, mad rollercoaster ride through a lysergic, hallucinogenic prose.”

That said, Assistant Professor Sabrina Ferri, who joined the department this fall, seems perfectly justified in doing so, given that she’s tackled the work of Jack Kerouac on behalf of Italian speakers around the world. “Joking aside, it was a challenging experience both linguistically and culturally,” Ferri says of co- translating Kerouac’s Book of Dreams for publishing house Mondadori while she was a doctoral student at Stanford University.

Memorable though it may be, Ferri’s Kerouacian exploit constitutes something of a footnote to her primary academic pursuits. She earned

Authors Moï and Devi Meet With ND Students

Thanks to a pair of two-day visits organized by members of the French faculty, students had the chance not only to attend lectures by Anna Moï and Anaúda Devi last year but also to interact with the noted Francophone authors both inside the classroom and in more informal settings.

Moï came to campus in September 2008 at the invitation of Assistant Professor Allison Rice and spoke on “Immigration and ‘World Literature’ in Contemporary Francophone Literature.” In addition, she joined faculty and students for meals, sat in on three undergraduate courses and a graduate seminar, and met with students in Notre Dame’s Ph. D. in Literature Program.

Invited by Associate Professor Catherine Perry, Devi delivered a talk titled “A Question of Engagement” at the end of March. While at Notre Dame, she too shared meals with faculty and students and participated in a reading of Rico’s “World Literature in France” as an undergraduate class designed for seniors. Devi’s visit was sponsored in part by the Cultural Services of the French Embassy.

And when it comes to literature, she believes Puerto Ricans living on the island have more in common with those on the mainland than one might expect.

“The comparative approach of my project challenges the tendency to view insular and diaspora productions as two distinct literary bodies based on linguistic, stylistic, and thematic differences,” Moreno says. “While it is important to acknowledge these distinctions, it is also crucial to recognize the points of contact that exist between them, such as the presence of certain cultural myths that also prevail in the diaspora.”

Her research considers the work of key writers, including Judith Ortiz Cofer, Rosario Ferré, Nicholasa Mohr, Magali García Ramis, Esmeralda Santiago, and Ana Lydia Vega. Each of them, Moreno says, takes on the idea of “la gran familia puertorriqueña” (the great Puerto Rican family), which she describes as a foundational myth that has long informed cultural and political discourse on the island and off. “My analysis shows that their narratives challenge the central tenets of racial/social harmony, an idealized past, and patriarchal authority that sustain the myth of la gran familia,” says Moreno, whose book is tentatively titled Ties That Bind: The Literature of Puerto Rican Women Authors on the Island and the Mainland.

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her Ph. D. in Italian literature and focuses on works produced during the 18th century, specifically the relationship of literature and the visual arts to scientific, historical, and material cultures. Her time as a graduate student included spending a year as a Geballe Dissertation Prize Fellow at the Stanford Humanities Center.

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For the last decade, Julia Douthwaite served Notre Dame in an administrative capacity, including as assistant provost for international studies from 2003 until this past July. Now the professor of French is back teaching and researching in the department on a full-time basis, and her return couldn’t have come at a more fitting time. In July, she made something of a scholarly splash with an article revealing the existence of a French Frankenstein that predates Mary Shelley’s masterpiece by 28 years.

The article, published in European Romantic Review, will be a chapter in Douthwaite’s forthcoming book, *The Frankenstein of 1790 and Other Missing Links From Revolutionary France*, for which she previously received a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship. Recently, Douthwaite sat down with *Fellae Romana* to talk about her experiences as an administrator, the University’s initiatives in study abroad, and what’s next on her agenda. An excerpt of the conversation appears here.

**FR:** Is there one achievement from your tenure as assistant provost of which you’re particularly proud?

**DOUTHWAITE:** For a while, I think I erred, as many young or inexperienced administrators do, by leaning over the shoulder of colleagues who didn’t need my help to provide information that was not requested. And I gradually learned that what I really should spend my energy and time doing is what I’m good at, which is talking to my faculty colleagues, reaching out to people across the wide range of the disciplines and listening to them, and trying to work with them in any way that they might see fit. So that was an ongoing focus of my work there, and it really culminated in the strategic planning process that I launched on a directive from [Provost] Tom Burish.

**FR:** How do you see Notre Dame’s international study programs evolving even further over the next five to 10 years?

**DOUTHWAITE:** [An] idea that we are aiming for ... is to create niche programming—probably short-term, like 10 days—in different fields. … That’s a new kind of programming that we haven’t been promoting and supporting so far. But after doing all those listening sessions around the University in 2008–09 as part of the strategic planning, I believe it’s an important way to complement our on-campus studies with reallyational sensory experiences led by our faculty. And one more thing, back to my status as a faculty member in the Romance languages department, I would like to also see, and will help to make it happen, a program in Francophone Africa for our students in French.

**FR:** Have you written the book, *The Frankenstein of 1790 and Other Missing Links From Revolutionary France*?

**DOUTHWAITE:** Each chapter focuses on a signal event of the Revolution and shows how the literature produced in the wake of spectacular events—with fantastic personalities and much drama—can be seen to constitute the missing links between old regime and modernity. **FR:** How do you plan to use your newfound “free” time?

**DOUTHWAITE:** I plan to use it to write my book, my third book, which is under way. I plan to use it really enjoy my students in ways that I’ve felt too rushed to do, in the past six years at least, in the administration here on campus. I also have a project that I’m hitching for a University-wide celebration of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 2012. … The good thing that I’ve learned from administration is how to use your time wisely and that time is precious. And I certainly don’t indulge in any complaining or self-pity. I think the life of a professor is the most wonderful career that anyone could have.

**FR:** Would you describe your third book, *The Frankenstein of 1790 and Other Missing Links From Revolutionary France*?

**DOUTHWAITE:** Each chapter focuses on a signal event of the Revolution and shows how the literature produced in the wake of spectacular events—with fantastic personalities and much drama—can be seen to constitute the missing links between old regime and modernity.

**FR:** What excites you most about returning to full-time teaching and research?

**DOUTHWAITE:** Well, I’m really excited about this book project because of the response I’ve had already to the article that came out this summer on the Frankenstein of 1790. And the research I did in Paris in June 2009 produced spectacular results, too. I just went to the National Archives one day with a bunch that there might be something to the preface in one of these novels that we have actually in the Rare Book Collection here at Notre Dame; it’s called *Le Cimetière de la Madeleine*, *The Madeleine Cemetery* in English. … I discovered that in the National Archives there was an entire folder dedicated to this book and to the French police’s efforts to pursue and destroy all copies of it. … This book was very popular during its time and for at least 20 years afterwards, and it’s just not known at all today. The reasons for its prohibition are fascinating. So this is one of the missing links … that I think will really open up the way we understand how history got from point A (the old regime) to point B (the modern age).

**Ph.D. in Literature Student on the Trail of Italian Dialect Poetry**

Students in the Ph.D. in Literature Program at Notre Dame approach their work from transnational, transdisciplinary, and theoretical perspectives, completing an innovative course of study that requires proficiency in multiple languages.

For Damiano Benvegnù, one of those languages is Italian, although his recent research illustrates how it could easily count for two.

“From the very beginning of Italian literature,” Benvegnù says, “we can see two different movements: the first trying to create one poetic language by the production of written works shareable in the whole peninsula, and the second influenced by the amazing differences that there were—and in a way still are—between the various Italian regions in terms of dialect.”

He spent summer 2009 in Italy building on research he conducted previously that looked at 20th-century authors who combined elements of these traditions by employing both regional dialects and “standardized” Italian in their writing.

“One of my major points [before] was the idea that we cannot overlook the dialectic between the two languages,” he says, “nor can we ignore that their use is related to what [author Pier Paolo] Pasolini called ‘anthropological mutation’ of the entire socio-cultural environment.”

Supported by grants from Notre Dame’s Nanovic Institute for European Studies and Albert J. and Helen M. Ravarino Italian Studies Travel Scholarship, Benvegnù’s summer research focused on Italy’s new brand of dialect poetry, which he says is rooted in the “metalinguistic awareness” of those authors he studied before. He is particularly interested in the writing of Gian Mario Villalta, whom Benvegnù interviewed as part of his project.

His time abroad also benefited the University’s Hesburgh Libraries, as he used funds provided by the Department of Special Collections to acquire rare volumes of contemporary dialect poetry.

“I’ve found here at Notre Dame a really exciting intellectual environment,” says Benvegnù, whose other primary language for the Ph.D. in literature is Spanish. “In my program as in the other departments—but inevitably I’m especially talking about the Romance languages department—I’ve met very good scholars who are real experts and open to every discussion.”
The Department of Romance Languages and Literatures annually hosts a special ceremony during Notre Dame’s commencement weekend to recognize its seniors, who this year numbered 160. Among those honored are the winners of the department’s undergraduate prizes; for the second year in a row, they included the recipient of the Robert D. Nuner Award, a College-wide distinction given to the graduating foreign language major with the highest GPA.

These students are asked to offer brief remarks about their language studies at Notre Dame. Here, Fabella Romanica is pleased to share excerpts from several of this year’s speeches.


“My freshman experience at Notre Dame have been an adventure that is beyond a second year of study within our research programs. It has been an adventure filled with experiences that have changed my perspective with experiences that I will never forget—imagined. It has been an adventure filled with experiences I have had in the past four years.”

—Gabrielle Miller (Spanish)


“I was exposed to a variety of ideas, as I was able to have deep conversations with French people and find out what they thought about a host of issues, from politics to religion to human rights. I didn’t always agree with them, but I was able to have deep conversations with people from different backgrounds. It was to ask whether literature excited me. Professor Amago’s immediate response was to ask whether literature excited me. Professor Amago’s immediate response was to ask whether literature excited me. Professor Amago’s immediate response was to ask whether literature excited me.

—Howard Kelly (Italian)


“Among the 12 candidates for valedictorian of Notre Dame’s class of 2009, an impressive five completed a major or minor in one of the Romance languages and literatures. Those students were: John Hennessey (French), Anne Huff (Italian), Bryan Jackson (Spanish), Howard Kelly (Italian), and Adrienne Murphy (Spanish), who offered the invocation at commencement.”

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—Anne Huff (Italian)
Dante Series Releases 10th Volume, Wins (Another) Award

The troublesome topic of Francis Petrarch’s relationship to literary predecessor Dante Alighieri is the focus of Petrarch and Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition, the latest addition to Notre Dame’s William and Katherine Devers Series in Dante Studies.

Co-edited by Theodore Cachey, Albert J. and Helen M. Ravarino Family Director of Dante and Italian Studies, and Zygmunt Baranski (University of Cambridge), Petrarch and Dante is the 10th title in the series, which is published by the University of Notre Dame Press. The book represents the culmination of a 2004 lecture series celebrating the seventh centenary of Petrarch’s birth and features the work of nine leading scholars of Italian medieval literature.

Several months before the publication of Petrarch and Dante, Winthrop Wetherbee (Cornell University) saw his The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets, the series’ ninth book, included in Choice magazine’s list of Outstanding Academic Titles for 2008. Each year, Choice reviews some 7,000 works and places only 10 percent on the annual list; this marked the third time a Devers volume was so recognized.

The Dante series—home as well to a winner of the Modern Language Association’s Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Publication Award for a Manuscript in Italian Literary Studies—was founded in 1995 and is one component of Notre Dame’s William and Katherine Devers Program in Dante Studies. Cachey, who is also professor of Italian and chairperson of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, and Christian Moevs, associate professor of Italian, serve as editors of the series, which publishes works on Dante from a wide variety of disciplinary viewpoints and in diverse scholarly genres.

Visit http://www.dante.nd.edu/ for more information.