

# The International Buzz

With its interdisciplinarity and global vision of a changing world, the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures contributes to the international education of students.



Issue 2, Fall 2012

## Inside this issue:

- Pg. 1** Letter from the Editor
- Pg. 2** Interview with President Dr. Horvath
- Pg. 3** Interview with Dean Dr. Kijinski
- Pg. 4** Dreaming in Foreign Languages
- Pg. 5** A French Major Awarded  
A Grant and a Symposium
- Pg. 6** News from the Department



## Letter from the Editor

*In our department we have a dream: to help our students to be proficient in a foreign language and this to make them ready for our globalized world. Our visions and dreams meet those of our new President, Dr. Virginia Horvath, and of the Dean of Arts and Sciences, Dr. John Kijinski, who kindly gave of their time to conduct two interviews. This issue of the newsletter focuses on our dreams, initiatives, and accomplishments so far, a path on which we hope to include our campus and community, with a special invitation to our students to take part in it since learning foreign languages is a wonderful journey. I can still remember mine. In Italy, a teenager finishing high school with the goal of continuing on with a university degree must immediately choose the kind of path and career she/he would like to take. At 19 years old, in my home country one may already start law or medical school, or, as in the US, can study every discipline. When it was my turn – several years ago – I was not really sure what I wanted to study. I remember that somebody asked me: “What is your biggest desire?” I immediately responded: “I want to travel, I want to meet people from different countries and different cultures.” Very calmly, this person said: “So, study languages.” I ended up studying Russian and French at the University of Florence, Italy, and as a consequence, I have traveled a lot, communicating with people in their native languages, comprehending their cultures and their ways of being. This path opened my mind to the beauty of our world. It is the reason why I now teach Italian in the US – a foreign language here. The passion that I have for teaching and learning is shared by my colleagues who teach languages such as French, German, Italian, Russian, and Spanish, at various levels from Middle (or even Elementary) School to High School to College. [Continued on page 4]*

*Chiara De Santi, Editor*

# International Experiences Give Shape to New Visions for President Dr. Horvath



*1) During the Inauguration Week, namely at the International Dinner and at the Investiture, you talked about your experiences in Africa and in Japan, which were so formative in terms of learning foreign languages and cultures. How did these experiences change your life as a student and as a human being?*

The first experience as an exchange student when I was 17 showed me that my understanding of the world was very limited and that I needed to be a curious and patient observer of how other cultures work. I learned about communication across language barriers and the alienating experiences of being linguistically and culturally illiterate. I was on a visiting faculty appointment in Japan, where I had similar experiences years later, shared with my children. It was valuable to learn about approaches to family, home, and work than those I'd experienced in the United States, and such a perspective changed not only how I came to understand Japanese culture but my own. Seeing the impact of U.S. popular culture, policies, and priorities is also something I have been glad to have seen first-hand in these and other nations. From sharing meals and baths, talking about our dreams for our children, and helping on community-based projects in other places, I have grown to a deeper understanding of a Biblical passage that has been meaningful to me: "[God] has made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).

*2) In a globalizing world such as this, undergoing continuous change, foreign language ability may*

*represent a valuable passport for the future. What would you hope to see from students graduating from Fredonia in terms of proficiency in foreign languages?*

Without some language proficiency—functional literacy in hearing and speaking—American students are limited in their abilities to be part of a global community. I am hoping that Fredonia can think of innovative ways to address this need for students' learning in the curriculum and encourage students to have at least short-term study abroad experiences that include language learning. I have no doubt that this would be a valuable passport for the future.

*3) Internationalizing our campus also means revising our curriculum for foreign language teaching and learning. For this reason, in our department we established a Task Force: what would you expect from this task force in terms of curriculum revision?*

I have no prescription for the department about curricular change, but I am wondering about some things that I would hope the department might address: How might we approach language instruction on a proficiency instead of credit-hour basis? How might we use available



technology and systems to supplement what Fredonia faculty can offer? What would be needed for reforms in language instruction to happen and make a difference?



# Dean of Arts and Sciences, Dr. John Kijinski, on Family, Languages, and Opportunities

*1) If you have any personal or family experiences with study abroad, how has this changed your perception about language learning?*

One of my big regrets is that I didn't get to spend any time abroad as a college student. I have, however, long been a proponent of an immersion approach to learning languages. During her junior year, my daughter was able to spend a semester in Paris. It was a transformative experience for her. She lived with a family that didn't speak English (I know, as I visited my daughter in Paris while she was staying with this family). Her ability to communicate in French improved dramatically as a result of this experience.

*2) Based on those experiences, how does teaching and learning languages in the U.S. compare to language education in other countries?*

My daughter is now living in Germany (where I recently visited with her) with a family that is fluent in German, English, and Czech. The three children of the family are 4, 12, and 14. It's amazing to see how quickly they shift among the three languages. I'm convinced that the American approach to language learning is faulty in its failure to make language instruction available to very young people. I remember interviewing a candidate for a position in English literature who was from India.

She mentioned to me that, from the time she was six, she had this linguistic opportunity: at home her family spoke Urdu. She attended a school where the social language was Hindi but all of the "official" instructional work of the school was done in English. Furthermore, when she was ten, she began to learn French. Her comment to me was memorable: "As a child, my learning languages was just natural—just like being introduced to new kinds of food. I took to it as naturally as I took to eating." Again, this emphasizes what I see as a need to start language instruction at a young age.

*3) You know that in our department we are looking at various options with the goal of revising the curriculum of teaching and learning foreign languages on our campus. What would you hope to see from students graduating from Fredonia in terms of language proficiency?*

My ideal would be this: Every student graduating from Fredonia would be able to speak a language other than English at a level that would allow this student to communicate conversationally in everyday social situations with a native speaker of the target language. The student would also be able to read popular journalism (e.g., at about the level of *People Magazine*) in the target language.







# Dreaming and Professionalizing in Foreign Languages at SUNY Fredonia and beyond

Chiara De Santi

Across our diverse curricula it is time for change so that our journeys become even more effective and understood by all those involved (students, parents, colleagues from other disciplines, and administrators). For this reason, SUNY Fredonia's Department of Modern Languages and Literatures launched the initiative "Dreaming in Languages: Teaching and Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" through a Task Force established last spring and chaired by my colleague Juan De Urda and me. With the encouragement of some administrators, our discussions and reflections focus on possible changes to the General Education requirement for Foreign Language since we believe that our students should be able to be proficient in at least a foreign language as a passport to this increasingly globalized world. We have opened a blog (<http://modernlanguagesfredonia.wordpress.com/>) to invite students, colleagues, administrators, and friends to become involved in the process since it requires a concerted effort to redefine the position of foreign languages in higher education that can also be spread to all levels. For this purpose, we believed and still truly trust that the discussion should be made as transparent as possible.

The importance of teaching and learning foreign languages is undoubtedly at the core of SUNY Fredonia and certainly of our department, which on August 23 organized the first workshop of our Teaching Academy (a long-time dream of our colleague Ed Kolodziej) on language pedagogy for our community, from elementary to college level. Thanks to the generous support of Dr. Christine Givner, Dean of the College of Education, and Dr. John Kijinski, Dean of the College of Arts and Science, it was possible to have Dr. Tania Convertini, Language Director at Dartmouth College in the Department of French and Italian, conduct a six-hour inspiring and professionalizing

workshop within the college's Lifelong Learning division headed by Mr. Eric Skowronski. The workshop was divided into two parts: in the morning, we focused on "Reading as a Process: Texts as Stage for Language Learning," while in the afternoon we worked on "Getting Our Students to Use a Target Language in the Classroom." Twenty-nine colleagues teaching French, German, Italian, and Spanish from all over Western New York, from high schools, middle schools, and colleges, both public and private, reflected upon, discussed, worked, and re-thought the process of foreign language teaching, helping illustrate the necessity of coordinating teachers at all levels. It would be extremely important that students, parents, principals, and administrators have similar platforms and curricula applicable to foreign languages teaching and learning so it would be easier for students to transition from middle to high school and from high school to college. Language instruction plays

an important role in helping our current and next generation compete and contribute in an increasingly global world. Our journey has just begun, but it is already presenting itself as a very stimulating, energizing, and engaging one.



*Pictured above, colleagues at the workshop on August 23, 2012.*

# A SUNY Grant Will Fund a Symposium on March 16, 2013

Juan De Urda

Modern Languages has been funded by SUNY IITG to organize a Symposium on foreign languages politics and pedagogy.

This summer a team of faculty from the department (Carmen Rivera, Chiara De Santi and Juan De Urda) submitted a proposal to the Innovative Instruction Technology Grants initiative from SUNY. We were awarded the funding and Fredonia will host a one-day Symposium on March 16<sup>th</sup> 2013, meant for instructors involved in teaching languages at any level. It will comprise three sessions, one on the political climate around language teaching (by Dr. Ana Celia Zentella, University of California San Diego), another on current theories on language acquisition and pedagogical approaches (by Dr. Flavia Laviosa, Wellesley College) and an afternoon session on technological innovations and applications for language instruction (by Dr. Fernando Rubio, University of Utah). After the Symposium a website will be created for teachers to share curriculum innovations, and the materials of the Symposium will be posted. Not just Fredonia faculty and students, but everybody in the area involved in teaching and learning languages will be invited and is welcome!

## French Major Awarded for Academic Excellence



Outstanding French and French Education student and college Ambassador Gina Lanfranchi was selected for a CCFLTA (Chautauqua County Foreign Language Teachers' Association) award for academic excellence last year, but since she was studying in Grenoble, France, for a semester, she received the award in person this fall. In Gina's own words:

*This is my fourth year at SUNY Fredonia, and I am a French Adolescence Education major with a minor in Italian Studies. I am highly involved in campus life; I serve as a Resident Assistant, Tour Guide, House Manager, and Ambassador. After starting my university career as a liberal arts major, I declared my concentration in French in the second semester of my freshman year, and I could not be happier. I discovered my love for language and culture through my literature and language courses. I spent five months in Grenoble, France in the fall of 2011 where I studied grammar, linguistics, and translation. I spend my summers on Long Island, my home base, working as a program director at a camp with children ages 10-18, a dream job.*

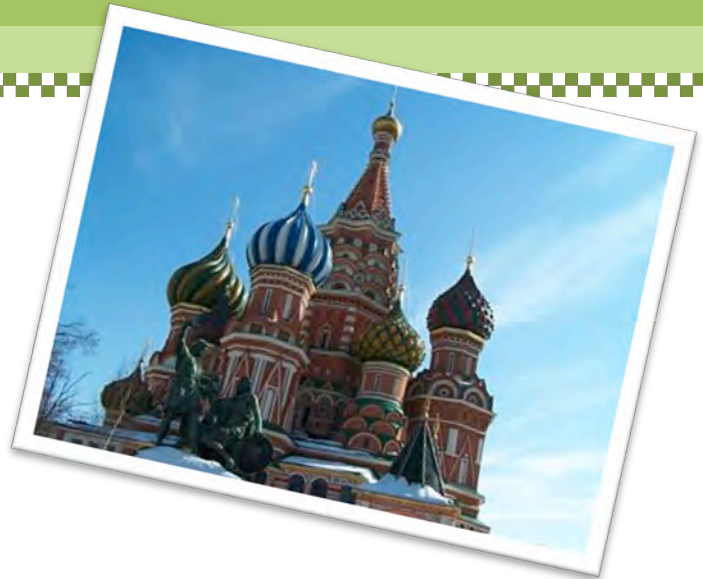


## News from the Department

- We welcome new faculty member, Florence Vach (French).
- In the summer of 2012, faculty member Cynthia Jones published a book chapter: "The Werewolf and Modern Day Woman: The Metaphor of the Female Werewolf as Modern Day Woman in *The Wolf's Bride* by Aino Kallas." In Andrea Ruthven and Gabriela Madlo (eds.). *Woman as Angel, Woman as Evil*. Oxford, UK: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2012. 39-53.
- In the summer of 2012, Dr. Chiara De Santi published a travel series on Italy in the *Dunkirk Observer* (July-August 2012) and a book chapter: "Il Risorgimento di Roberto Faenza via Federico De Roberto: *I Vicerè* come specchio di un'Italia immobile." In Fulvio Orsitto (ed.). *Cinema e Risorgimento: Visioni e re-visioni*. Rome, Italy: Vecchiarelli Editore, 2012. 273-294.
- In the last months, Dr. Juan De Urda published two articles: "'En medio de la lucha': La educación conflictiva de un niño sin nombre" (*Afro-Hispanic Review* 30/2 Fall 2011: 69-84) & "Arquetipos jungianos en la poesía de la guerra civil: El 'Romance de Castilla en armas'" (Gregorio Martín, ed. *Rondas Literarias de Pittsburgh 2011*. New Kensington, PA: Grelin Press, 2011. 103-112).
- Dr. Beth Huerta and Dr. Chiara De Santi attended the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) workshops organized by ACTFL, respectively, in the summer and in the fall of 2012. Dr. Juan De Urda attended a workshop organized by SUNY and MLA entitled "SUNY-MLA Collaborating for Language and Culture Education: Exploring New Structures for a Changing World" (May 2012).
- Cynthia Jones presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Global Conference in Oxford, UK (September 2012) and at the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association in Boulder, CO (October 2012). Dr. Chiara De Santi presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Teaching & Learning Conference at SUNY Fredonia (August 2012) and will present at the Brown Bag Series on campus on December 5, 2012. Dr. Juan De Urda presented at the PFLC conference in Pittsburgh, PA (September 2012).

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We are on the web:

<http://www.fredonia.edu/departments/modernlanguages/>

We are on Facebook too! Look for us!



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