Languages and Culture Studies ushers in fall semester with Language Resource Center facelift

Clean, inviting, and collaborative. These are the descriptors at the heart of Language Resource Center Director Bobby Hobgood’s overhaul of one of the department’s most under-valued spaces. Hobgood’s fall 2014 LRC invasion has brought immediate improvements to the area, and he only intends to keep pushing for these updates and enhancements as his tenure unfolds.

“The Language Resource Center has immense potential to impact the university community and beyond,” said Hobgood. “[The space provides] opportunities to teach, learn, and engage all members of the university community in the joy of learning languages and exploring the richness of cultures from around the world.”

Hobgood has already begun tapping into this potential by riddling the LRC of its “dinosaur” desktop computers, as he refers to them. Instead, faculty and students can now find 40 Dell laptops with built-in web cameras, twenty of which will be permanently dispersed throughout the room. Mobile computing will foster a more collaborative learning experience, according to Hobgood, as students will have more space to spread out books and notes on the LRC’s tables.

Faculty and students can also already find six new Dell desktops and four new iMacs with updated software and much faster loading times.

Of the utmost importance, said Hobgood, is refining and reconfiguring the space such that it becomes more modern, elegant, and able to support today’s language learner.

The LRC’s physical space isn’t the only streamline initiative being undertaken. A more modernized website is well underway at lrc.uncc.edu, with a single calendar from which faculty can reserve the LRC classroom or check out equipment.

With the help of new LRC Coordinator and Technology Support Associate Ryan McCallum, Hobgood shows no signs of slowing down the LRC’s physical and virtual transformation.

“I will personally collaborate with faculty to explore innovative ways of engaging students in language learning through technology, techniques, and transformative practice,” he said.
When Fumie Kato, associate professor of Japanese, arrived on UNC Charlotte’s campus twelve years ago, she had no idea how she would successfully grow the Japanese program, at that time only offered as a minor.

Reflecting today on Kato’s impressive list of successes, it seems impossible to consider her ever feeling anything but self-assured and fearless.

Not so, says Kato. “I was so afraid when I came [to the University],” she affirms, that she would not be able to do a good job with the program she had just inherited.

If worry was the impetus that has since catapulted Japanese to become a program housing more than 450 students, then Kato is surely to thank for its remarkable growth. Under her watch, she has inspired such great interest in Japanese studies that the major was established in 2011. Today, the program houses 100 majors and nearly 70 minors, making it one of North Carolina’s biggest Japanese bachelor degree programs. Kato believes these impressive numbers help maintain high levels of classroom motivation for both faculty and students.

What Kato’s humble approach hardly acknowledges, however, is the tremendous impact of her inclusive teaching and leadership style on both her colleagues and students.

“Without her, I don’t think we could achieve this [type of] success,” observes Yukiko Yokono, lecturer of Japanese. “She cares about every single student in the whole program. I really appreciate and respect her contributions, and I want to do the same for her.”

In 2014, 12 years of ceaseless work culminated in a trifecta of recognition for Kato. She was awarded the Phi Beta Delta Faculty Award for International Education as well as the prestigious Bonnie E. Cone Early-Career Professorship in Teaching. Additionally, Kato was selected as one of five semifinalists for the 2014 Bank of America Award for Teaching Excellence.

The Japanese program promises further expansion under Kato’s direction. Since her arrival as the division’s only full-time faculty member, she has helped secure a Japanese MA Fellow Program as well as four full-time lecturer positions. Grant proposals to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the Japan Foundation, and the Association of Asian Studies have aided in providing seed funding for these positions.

Exchange program provides students chance to study abroad in Japan

In March 2014, the Japanese consulate general in Atlanta informed Fumie Kato, associate professor of Japanese, that she had been selected by the Japanese government’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to participate in a paid exchange program allowing 23 students to travel to Japan for 10 days in June.

Of the participating students, only three had previously traveled to Japan. During the course of the trip, called Kakehashi – A Bridge for Tomorrow, students traveled to both Tokyo and Osaka, where they visited the sumiyoshi-taishi shrine and Asakusa Kannon temple and learned the traditional Japanese tea ceremony. They also presented to Osaka City University faculty and English language students about the University and Charlotte.

While in Japan, students trekked to the top of Japan’s highest building; toured Osaka by boat; experienced a recreation of Osaka in the 1600s; toured the Meiji Chocolate factory; visited the Japanese Diet, or parliament; traversed the fashion-focused Harajuku street; and witnessed a demonstration of Japanese martial arts.

Upon their return, students submitted photo journal reflections, receiving one college credit for the trip.

“This was the most significant experience of my life,” wrote English major Joseph Casper in his reflection. “As a Japanese minor, this trip has made me consider going the route of a double major.”

From left:
1. Anthropology and Japanese Major Emily O’Shall remains in contact with Japanese students she befriended at Osaka University.
2. Japanese major Rosemarie Campone learned about the importance of tradition and order as illustrated in the Japanese tea ceremony.
3. English major Joseph Casper grew from chopstick novice, as evidenced here during his first meal in Japan, to chopstick pro throughout the course of the trip.
Grant affords French Club opportunity to attend film festival

UNC Charlotte’s French Club secured a travel grant from the Student Government Association to attend the 22nd annual French Film Festival in Richmond, Virginia, in March 2014. President Hannah Green Swain proposed a unique idea to the French Club: Why not host a Versailles Masquerade on campus, complete with period attire? Together with the club, Hannah presented a grant proposal to the Student Government Association, received $1,300, and brought her idea to fruition in April. French Club adviser Michèle Bissière, associate professor of French, was impressed by Swain’s initiative and the event’s subsequent success.

“We developed the idea, wrote the grant, and did most of the work,” Bissière said.

The grant allowed Swain to orchestrate a program and order heavy hors d’oeuvres. She was also able to decorate tables and even organize a “head through the hole” board of a Marie Antoinette dress and wig, where people including Allison Stedman, associate professor of French, were photographed.

During the event in Cone’s Lucas Room, French Club members, French students and alumni, faculty, and members of the ballroom dancing club learned about the history and culture of the 17th and 18th century in the Palace of Versailles.

While music played period-appropriate music, the ballroom dance club demonstrated and taught dances. In keeping with the event’s suggested formal dress code, the department’s very own Bissière and Stedman wore period attire with panniers and powdered wigs.

Versailles Masquerade celebrates 17th and 18th century France

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Since 2003, the French Film Festival has been recognized by former French Ambassador to the U.S. Jean-David Levitte as the country’s most important French film festival. This was the fifth trip that UNC Charlotte students have taken to the festival since 2004.

Stedman’s Rococo Fiction in France, 1600-1715 receives accolades

Allison Stedman, associate professor of French, has earned significant critical acclaim since publishing her book *Rococo Fiction in France, 1600-1715: Seditious Frivolity.* In 2014, Bucknell University Press released Stedman’s scholarly title in paperback, after originally publishing the text in 2013 as part of its *Transits* series.

One of *Choice* magazine’s “Outstanding Academic Titles of 2013,” the book’s inspiration dates back 15 years to an unanswered question Stedman had while writing her master’s thesis on 17th century French fairy tales at Dartmouth.

“Unlike in other literary traditions, where fairy tales generally appear as independent stories compiled into collections with other fairy tales,” says Stedman, “French authors by and large published fairy tales in conjunction with other literary genres.”

Why? Further research, including a 2008 trip to the French National Library, led Stedman to discover texts rife with this hybridized publication strategy, driving her to the conclusion that “this radical individuality was exactly the point. The texts existed to celebrate individual creativity, originality, and innovation,” she says.

Especially vanguard is Stedman’s use of the term Rococo, an aesthetic that sought to break with classical Baroque principles and a movement typically associated with the first half of the 18th century.

Stedman noted that these hybrid texts fully supported Rococo themes in spite of their existence 100 years prior to conventional research’s use of the term.

“The culture of the [17th century] period is much more complicated than we had originally thought,” says Stedman, “and the preponderance of Rococo fiction attests to this complexity.”

Stedman considers it one of her scholarly responsibilities to establish more clear connections between the relevance of the past to the present. As such, in February 2014, as part of UNC Charlotte’s “Personally Speaking” series, she gave a talk discussing the link between 17th-century literature and social media.
Wright honored by BEST with Excellence in Teaching Award

What’s the difference between a pistol and a revolver? Shirley Wright, lecturer of Spanish, had no idea until the topic arose in a recent class discussion. It’s one of the things she most enjoys about teaching—not so much knowledge of firearms, but rather the reciprocal nature of teaching.

“As I try to expose [my students] to new ideas, they often show me a way of viewing the world that is different from my own,” said Wright. “As I convey information to them, they teach me new things.”

This mutual appreciation and open classroom environment led UNC Charlotte’s Building Educational Strengths and Talents Program (BEST) to award Wright its BEST Excellence in Teaching and Assisting Undergraduates award this past spring. BEST, a campus organization since 1988, supports those students who are among the first in their family to earn a bachelor’s degree.

Within the confines of Wright’s classroom, students’ backgrounds are less important than their ability to find comfort in the knowledge that everyone, including her, is there to learn. For her, the unknown should never represent fear but rather an opportunity to learn.

“Ensuring the education of all…benefits society as a whole,” said Wright. “We do not want to deny the world access to these [at-risk] students’ talents.”

Performing the Mediterranean world of Shakespeare and Cervantes

During her year at Kingston University (KU) in 2009, Maryrica Lottman, associate professor of Spanish, found herself inspired by a drama class rehearsal she witnessed, to the point that she knew there was a project waiting to be unearthed.

Her idea? To high-light parallels between Shakespeare’s Pericles, Prince of Tyre and an English adaptation of Cervantes’ La gran sultana through a collaborative theatrical effort.

More than four years of work brought Lottman’s study abroad endeavor to fruition. In 2013, while she recruited University students to participate in the trip, KU professors Jon Chu (choreographer), Andrew Nasrat (sound and lighting designer), and Jim Reynolds (director), spent one week in Charlotte casting the production.

Spanish major Norman K. Spencer, one of 10 students that participated in the trip, especially benefitted from the many field trips Lottman planned around London to bring the coursework to life.

“It’s one thing to read about [these works] in a class type setting…but it’s very different to see it, to visualize it in person,” Spencer noted.

The experience culminated in six shows over the course of two days during King-ston’s International Youth Arts Festival.

Translation studies welcomes new faculty member Rodríguez

The Polyglot Press sat down with Mónica Rodríguez Castro, new assistant professor of Spanish and Translation Studies, for a brief interview:

PP: Of all your research interests, what are you most passionate about?
MR: The thing I’m most interested in right now is in creating new methodology for the translation classroom. For instance, I want to explore virtual simulations and virtual reality. I would love to create an application with different scenarios for translating texts in various scenarios, like how to translate medical texts or scientific texts. With these kinds of simulations we can present students with real world problems to help accelerate their learning.

Right now, the 15 weeks of experience they have is just with texts, but they don’t have much of an opportunity for the pragmatics of translation. This would help illustrate the context for the translation.

PP: Would you use this program for your graduate students then?
MR: Yes, my primary focus would be at the graduate student level, but I believe it could be applied to the undergraduates as well. If the program were successful, we could apply it to other languages as well.

PP: There’s a move right now in the video game community toward high quality virtual reality headsets. Your research is quite timely!
MR: I’ve actually done a lot of work in video game localization. But to do these kinds of things, you need to come up with the funds, so I’ve been thinking of creating a very basic one— it has to be simple—focusing on making choices and identifying linguistic problems.

Another problem is that when we do empirical research, there’s almost no background, so first we have to pilot everything, and it’s a challenge to stay current.

PP: And how are you liking the city of Charlotte?
MR: I really like the people, and North Carolina in general. I also like to see all the Hispanics and the diversity of the city. People seem quite open minded here. We are in a big city…It’s a straight shot from Charlotte to Spain across the Atlantic. Also, we have the beach relatively close, and where I am from in Spain, I was also pretty close to the ocean. I’m happy about that.
Exhibit celebrates former professor, Holocaust survivor

In April 2014, Anabel Aliaga-Buchenau, associate professor of German, hosted a photography exhibition and reception on campus to honor Susan Cernyak-Spatz, Auschwitz survivor and LCS professor emerita of German.

The event, titled “Susan Cernyak-Spatz: Auschwitz-Birkenau Survivor and the Lives She Touches,” was inspired in part by current student and photographer Matthew Brien. After attending Cernyak-Spatz’s lecture in his “The Holocaust Through German Literature and Film” course, Brien found himself so drawn to the topic that he offered to photograph Cernyak-Spatz.

Buchenau, who inherited Cernyak-Spatz’s Holocaust course in 2005, suggested to Brien that rather than simply take a portrait of Cernyak-Spatz, why not photograph her with University students and alumni? In doing so, Buchenau hoped that her students would feel more connected to the past and gain a better sense of the reality of the Holocaust. Perhaps being able to more intimately meet a woman who was the age of many of her students when she was captured and imprisoned in concentration camps would hit home. Through Cernyak-Spatz, they could see that the Holocaust is not simply a time period we read about in history books.

“This is real,” said Buchenau. “Susan had the same dreams as they did… And that was all robbed from her.”

The opening for the photography exhibit was held on Holocaust Remembrance Day and was met with a large crowd of attendees.

In addition to the moving photography, students prepared short speeches, performed music, and presented original artwork. Cernyak-Spatz also spoke briefly, encouraging the youth to be a positive force against racism and demagoguery and to “never forget.” The inscription next to the photography further emphasizes this message with the words, “You are my witnesses.”

Inaugural Student-Faculty Collaborative Research Grant awarded

Collaboration with the German Language and Culture Foundation (GLCF) continues to benefit UNC Charlotte students studying German. In 2014, GLCF awarded 28 scholarships to students studying at the Goethe Institut over the course of the summer.

One of those students, Kyle McLain, a 2014 graduate and current History master’s student, was awarded the inaugural GLCF Student-Faculty Collaborative Research Grant, a $2000 grant that allowed him to travel to Vienna, Austria. With Anabel Buchenau, associate professor of German, McLain visited Vienna’s Die Simon Wiesenthal Archiv to conduct thesis research. In the archive he was able to access over 400 primary documents that will aid in his investigation.

“These documents are not available to the public,” says McLain, “so the opportunities provided by the grant truly proved vital for my research.”

Under Buchenau’s guidance, McLain learned the process of conducting primary research and the importance of executing that research correctly, especially in a situation in which his first chance was his only opportunity to access the archive.

Of their experience together, Buchenau says, “Collaboration between faculty and students really serves both parties. I think Kyle has enough material to write an MA thesis, even a dissertation, and for me it was inspiration for all kinds of research.”

From left:
1. Kyle McLain speaks to the German Language and Culture Foundation about his summer 2014 experience at Goethe Institut.
2. German students celebrate receiving GLCF scholarships at the annual Jazz in the Village festival this spring.
3. The German program celebrated another successful year at UNC Charlotte’s 2014 International Festival.
Rodney Stringfellow, lecturer of Film Studies, finds joy in the surprises that each new semester brings. His favorite surprise, he says, lies in attempting to identify who will be his superstar students. His true joy, however, is never being able to pick out these standout students.

“Some semesters it’s the quiet one who says nothing and sits in the back, and sometimes it’s the boisterous one who always has something crude to say,” says Stringfellow. “My students are proof that brilliance comes from everywhere, and I love being surprised.”

Stringfellow was equally surprised when the tables turned this year and he was recognized as a superstar himself with the prestigious 2014 Part-time Lecturer Award for Teaching Excellence. Stringfellow, a four-year faculty member, makes it his priority to foster the passion students naturally bring to the classroom, convincing them that their dreams are not only realistic but also attainable.

“I consciously try to make my students feel welcome by being both an unabashed cheerleader and absolutely flexible. For those genuinely interested in pursuing a career in film or television, there will be no shortage of people who will consider it a sacred duty to discourage them,” says Stringfellow. “Because of that… I consider it my sacred duty to let them know what is possible.”

The Film Studies minor, housed in LCS, enriches department life by emphasizing the visual through cultural production. Stringfellow boasts a wealth of experience to bring to the Film Studies classroom, including screenwriting and television writing experience on Nickelodeon, Disney, BBC, and PBS, but he stands firm in his opinion that he looks to his students as a source of inspiration.

“My biggest reward is, without question, my students. Their enthusiasm, dedication, and depth of knowledge continuously astounds me.”

Diversity grant brings international musicians to campus

Yuliya Baldwin, lecturer of Russian, was awarded the $5,000 Chancellor’s Diversity Fund, a grant she utilized to carry out the project Music of Hope and Resistance: The Jewish Violin and the Roma Guitar during October.

Although rarely properly acknowledged, the Roma (Gypsy) musicians and the klezmerim (Jewish instrumentalists) played a great role in the development of Central and Eastern European culture. The livelihood of both Roma and Jews depended on their performance for the host nations – Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, and Czechs. The Jewish and Roma musicians drew on the existing local folklore, adapting it in a unique and creative way.

Baldwin’s project engaged students intellectually, visually, and emotionally and consisted of two parts: First, an authentic presentation by the scholars shedding light on the shared fate that the Jews and the Roma had during the tragic events of the Holocaust; second, an authentic Roma and Jewish music performance by these world-renowned musicians.

Her project targeted Global Connections, a liberal studies course team-taught by four LCS faculty members. The 150 students that make up the class consist of mostly freshmen representing diverse households, ethnic and racial groups.

Minor in Italian established as program shows continued growth

In December 2013, UNC Charlotte established its minor in Italian Language, Culture and Film. Daniela Dal Pra, lecturer of Italian, reports that the minor program has already admitted 10 students. This semester, a total of 245 students enrolled in Italian courses.

Dal Pra has played an integral role in fostering the program’s development even prior to the minor’s approval. Last year she was awarded two Chancellor’s Diversity Mini Grants of $1,000 each, the first of which she utilized to finance the Piranesi art exhibit, an event featuring 18th century prints by Italian architect and engraver Giovanni Battista Piranesi. With the second mini grant, Dal Pra organized the screening of the Italian film La Prima Neve at the 2014 UNC Charlotte International Film Festival.

The Italian program’s successful spring break study abroad program in Italy, titled La Serenissima: Journey Through the Region Veneto, has also attracted new students to the minor. The trip, which will celebrate its fourth year in 2015, is a three-part program consisting of coursework, the ten-day spring break trip, and finally the creation of an extended portfolio.
First annual poetry slam a literary feast for faculty, students

A truly department-wide effort unfolded as the first annual LCS Poetry Slam took place in the presence of more than 20 rousing student poet performers and over 200 enthusiastic audience members. Bianca Potrykus, lecturer of German and Poetry Slam committee chair, dreamt up the idea during the spring semester with the hope that the event would celebrate the department’s vibrant diversity.

“I think we are privileged in our department in the sense that we all—faculty and students alike—have different mother tongues and cultural backgrounds, creating a very rich and inspiring atmosphere,” said Potrykus. “I wanted the event to highlight this aspect of our international and multilingual academic environment.”

Together with department faculty members Yuliya Baldwin (Russian), Lorena Delgadillo (Spanish), Anastasia Koralova (Russian), and Maria Mahaffey (Spanish), the committee welcomed poems performed in languages including English, Japanese, Russian, Romanian, and Spanish.

Six poets received recognition and cash awards, as determined by a skilled jury consisting of LRC Director Bobby Hobgood, Spanish major Myron MacKenzie, and UNC Charlotte alumni Dr. Pedro Briceno.

Student winners were awarded in the following categories: Best performance (Madison Croy and Patrick Cole), most inspiring poem (Lauren Bosley and Patrice Wilson) and most original poem (Jasmine Isaac and Svanny Wong).

“This event was a clear example of what we can do as a department,” said Delgadillo. “Faculty from different languages collaborated to organize it; students from different languages participated with their inspiring poems; and an impressive, diverse crowd gathered to enjoy some fine poetry.”

Exemplary students across Languages and Culture Studies

Jamie Pointer received her bachelor’s in Spanish and minor in Criminal Justice in 2013. While at UNC Charlotte, she studied abroad at the University of Cantabria and returned with the goal of going back to Spain one day for longer. Pointer is traveling to Spain for the 2014 school year with the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture & Sport’s Language and Culture Assistant Program.

Daniel Little received his bachelor’s in Spanish in 2012. After a year in Chile, he returned to the US. This year he will be a master’s student in linguistics at UNC Chapel Hill, where he plans to deepen his knowledge about language and identity in Catalan-speaking areas. Little’s post-graduation goal is to live in Spain and conduct research in sociolinguistics.

Kristin Shattuck received her bachelor’s in French in May 2013. She traveled to Poitiers, France, during the 2013-214 academic year to work as an English Teaching Assistant through the Teaching Assistantship Program in France. Shattuck taught at the middle and high school levels, where the highlight of her year was working with students and teachers intrigued by American culture.

Lauren Klein was chosen from a group of 1,500 contestants as a 2014 winner of the Many Languages, One World Essay Contest. She traveled to New York in June for a five-day Global Youth Forum, where contest winners presented their essays at the United Nations Headquarters.

Klein wrote her essay in Russian, as contestants were asked to write in a language other than their native one.
Did you know? In LCS you will find...

Undergraduate Certificate in Translation
Business Language Certificate in German
Japanese minor
Graduate Certificate in Translation
French minor
Italian minor
Japanese minor
Chinese courses
Classical Studies minor
Portuguese courses
German minor
Spanish minor
Spanish minor
German minor
Spanish minor
French minor
BA Latin American Studies
BA Spanish
MA Spanish
French Language
BA French
BA Japanese
BA Japanese
Film Studies minor
Business Language Certificate in Spanish
Business Language Certificate in French
Francophone Studies minor

A note from the LCS Department Chair

This fall, as we welcomed new and returning students to campus, the Department of Languages and Culture Studies came together to celebrate many noteworthy events.

In September, we hosted well-known Master Professor Manolo Pérez from the Universidad de Cantabria (Spain), and our own Fumie Kato, associate professor of Japanese, received her third recognition for teaching excellence as one of five Bank of America Award in Teaching Excellence semifinalists.

In November, the department welcomed Mario Röllig, who spent three months in East Berlin’s Hohenschönhausen jail in 1987 for trying to flee communist East Germany. He told his story at UNC Charlotte to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall.

We currently have over 400 language majors. Every year we enroll some 4,000 students in our classes. We continue to offer exciting study abroad programs in Costa Rica, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, and Spain. Our graduate program in Spanish attracts outstanding and diverse students particularly interested in translation from across the country and abroad.

We could not accomplish this important work without help. I encourage you to take a moment to make a gift, which will create a significant and immediate impact on our success by providing vital resources and allowing us to address our most pressing needs.

Thank you all for your continued participation and support of UNC Charlotte and the Department of Languages and Culture Studies.

Sheri Spaine Long,
Professor and Chair

Long and Patrick Cole, local senior at Northwest School of the Arts, at the LCS Poetry Slam.