

**EYE ON ALUMNI:  
WHAT ARE THEY DOING NOW?**



After graduating from PSU with her B.A. in Spanish in 2003, Cheryl Churchek joined the U.S. Department of State in

2005 as an Office Management Specialist. She provided high-level administrative support to U.S. diplomats overseas, including U.S. ambassadors and the advance and traveling teams of two U.S. Presidents (Bush, Obama) and two U.S. Secretaries of State (Rice, Clinton). Her nearly 10 years with the Foreign Service took her to China, Uruguay, Chile, and finally Paraguay. After returning to the U.S. in 2014, Cheryl worked for the Office of Legislative Counsel in Salem until the end of the 2015 legislative session.

How would you describe the  
Department of World Languages and Literatures at Portland State University?  
Here's what past contributors have said:

*Dynamic • Nurturing • Kaleidoscopic • Multi-Cultural  
Inclusive • Stimulating • Collegial • Professional  
Diverse • Accommodating  
Friendly • Alternative  
Multi-Lingual • Engaged  
Committed • Caring  
Eye-Opening  
Ground-Breaking  
International • Collaborative • Research-Based • Success-Oriented  
Experimental • Evolving • Green • Hands-On • Inspiring • Fun*

# Polyglot

Department of World Languages and Literatures

Fall 2015 Newsletter  
[www.pdx.edu/wll/](http://www.pdx.edu/wll/)

## THE CENTER FOR JAPANESE STUDIES PRESENTS: Kabuki at Lincoln Hall

If love, loyalty, betrayal, ritual disembowelment, and gorgeous, 6-foot-long silk trousers sound intriguing, then Kabuki may be the art form for you. This winter, the Center for Japanese Studies in collaboration with the School of Theater and Film will stage a production of the Kabuki classic, *Chushingura*, commonly



Graduate student Nobuko Horikawa dressed as the Lady Kaoyo, wife of Enya Hangan.

*"I particularly love this kind of project because 50 to 60 people will be able to share in it in a way that would never happen if a professor just writes a book...I want [students] to have pictures and memories they can cherish forever."*

*Dr. Laurence Kominz,  
Professor of Japanese*

known in the West as *The Loyal 47 Retainers*. With support from the US-Japan Foundation, this large-scale production will have more than 50 student performers and will feature dozens of authentic kimonos on loan from the University of Hawai'i. WLL's **Dr. Laurence Kominz**, a life-long scholar of Japanese theater arts and a veteran performer in his own right, will once again don his director's kimono to oversee production.

This past spring, audiences enjoyed a Kabuki and Kyogen (traditional Japanese comedy) highlights show that featured a short, two-man scene from *Chushingura* as a teaser. Japanese language and drama students performed under the direction of **Dr. Kominz** to a sold-out auditorium. The production garnered a great deal of praise not only for the skill of the performers but also for its authenticity.

Kabuki is roughly four centuries old and is regularly staged in the present day. Originally, only women performed in the plays. However, the government feared that women Kabuki actors were subverting the draconian Confucian social order and decreed that only men could appear on stage. This led to the unique tradition of the *Onnagata* (women impersonators), male actors who dedicate themselves to embodying an idealized depiction of feminine beauty. PSU's version of *Chushingura* will not adhere to this male-only tradition, and students will be able to audition for any role in keeping with Kabuki's gender-bending spirit.



Graduate students Paolo Menez (left) and Ben Burton (right) enact a scene where the provincial lord, Enya Hanga, prepares to strike down the corrupt Shogunal official, Ko no Moronao, for his insults.

While western dramatic traditions tend to emphasize realism, logic, and plausibility, Kabuki puts its feet down in the fantastical, the outrageous, and the grandiose. Passions are explosive, costumes are outlandish and sumptuous, and the dramatic action is occasionally interrupted by what are known as *mie*, choreographed sequences of dramatic poses representing powerful emotions.

In Japan, *Chushingura* enjoys a Hamlet-like status in the theatrical canon and is loosely based on a historical event known as the Akō Vendetta (1703). The story centers on a group of samurai who are left leaderless after their master is unjustly compelled to commit *seppuku* (ritual suicide) after a corrupt court official humiliates him and manipulates him into attacking. These retainers were prohibited by law from fulfilling their honor-bound duty of revenge, but after planning and waiting a year, they stormed the official's house and took his head. Aware that their revenge was unlawful, they took the head to their master's grave and committed seppuku themselves, becoming enduring icons of

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## Greetings from the chair



JENNIFER R. PERLMUTTER

Dear Friends of World Languages and Literatures,

As a language lover, you have probably had the following experience. You mention that you are learning or hope to learn a second (or third or fourth) language to a friend or a family member, and that person responds, "Why? What are you going to do with that?" If you're like me, this question seems tired to you, stubbornly rooted in an obliviousness to the inherent value of study. My own answers have consisted in more or less coherent strings of words such as "culture," "global citizen," "international," and "communication;" sometimes I add in the old humanities standbys such as "critical thinking," "creative problem solving," and "empathy" for good measure. More often than not, I walk away from these conversations knowing I could have done a better job of defending language learning, of convincing my interlocutor that we should concern ourselves with its inherent value rather than its immediate use.

Part of the problem stems from the fact that we don't do a good job explaining what we do in WLL. We teach languages, about twenty of them in fact, but we also teach literature, culture, film, and linguistics. Earning a degree in a language is similar to earning one in English, I now explain. The primary difference is that the language of instruction is usually not the student's native one. In other words, the tools might be different but the task at hand is the same. I think my non-academic friends finally understand what I

mean when I say that I'm a French professor who doesn't often teach the language itself.

Fortunately, The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has been compiling research on the benefits of language learning as part of its advocacy efforts. It has organized the findings into three categories: academic achievement, cognitive benefits, and attitudes and beliefs. Check out [www.actfl.org/advocacy/what-the-research-shows](http://www.actfl.org/advocacy/what-the-research-shows) and read about why language learners are smarter and more successful than many of their monolingual counterparts. I also recommend two McKinsey Global Institute reports from 2012 entitled "Help Wanted" and "The World at Work" that detail the increasing need for bilingual and multilingual employees. Now those are benefits that we can all understand.

Keep in touch,

Jennifer R. Perlmutter

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► Join our alumni listserv at <http://www.pdx.edu/wll/>  
Click on "Alumni" and follow the prompts.  
Tell us about your continued connections with language learning, and consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Department of World Languages and Literatures.

## AN INTERNATIONAL APPROACH TO VOLUNTEER SERVICE: Joining up with the Peace Corps

For those looking to combine language study and community service with an immersive, overseas experience after college, serving in the Peace Corps could be the ideal gateway to a transformational opportunity. If selected for service, volunteers spend two years abroad in the country they applied for and receive training in



one of five areas. This training also involves a three-month intensive language study prior to service. Volunteers then apply their training to a real-world environment as they work on projects in the communities to which they've been assigned. *Polyglot* had the chance to speak with three volunteers from PSU about their experiences.

When asked what inspired him to volunteer for the Peace Corps, **Alex Hughes** (M.A. Public Administration) replied "[I] feel very privileged as an American, and part of that really bothers me, so I just want to help however I can." He was sent to the Dominican Republic as an education volunteer where he taught literacy and computer courses in Spanish as well as Haitian Creole,

a blend of French and various West African languages. During his service, he also became involved in a human rights initiative. Hughes and 600 other volunteers signed a petition addressed to the Secretary of State in protest against the planned deportations of thousands of undocumented Haitians and their detainment in "welcome camps." The overall experience was difficult but empowering. "You're basically living in poverty, but with health-care...At this point, I could live anywhere and figure it out."

**Jonathan Lewis** (M.A. Public Administration) worked in Kazakhstan as a youth development volunteer helping to build his community's first-ever educational advising center. He had studied Spanish and Italian in college, but knew very little Russian and even less Kazakh. "Before going to Kazakhstan, I only knew the word for 'good' and 'sandwich' [in Russian]... Not knowing what my host family was laughing about at the dinner table really motivated me." His intimate experiences in another culture led to new interests. After learning Russian, he began to read Russian literature and is now contemplating starting a Russian conversation group.

**Pravin Mallavaram** (M.A. Public Administration) served as a business volunteer in a rural



community in Fiji. He taught English at a local school and helped his community build a fish farm and a bee-keeping co-op. "[Peace Corps] gave me a global perspective as to how other people around the world live and what difficulties they face...Through patience, understanding, and intentionally building relationships, my community and I were able to accomplish some amazing things."

Entry into the Peace Corps is competitive. Facility with the language of the host country and a degree that directly relates to the desired project give applicants a definite leg up in the selection process. However, the most important aspect is volunteer experience. Many positions require at least a hundred hours of volunteer work in the relevant sector. Luckily, there are plenty of opportunities to get experience right here in Portland. For those who don't know where to start, the Columbia River Peace Corps Association or the Peace Corps recruiter (peacecorps@pdx.edu) here at PSU can offer guidance. The application process takes seven to nine months, so it's important to plan in advance. For those with a taste for adventure and a desire to improve their language skills, Peace Corps can be a truly transformative experience.

### THE CENTER FOR JAPANESE STUDIES PRESENTS continued from page 1

loyalty, self-sacrifice, and duty.

For **Dr. Kominz**, this will be a special opportunity to present to an American audience a timeless classic of Japanese theater that is rarely performed outside of Japan. Although he has directed numerous works of Kyogen and Kabuki here at PSU, this project surpasses them in scope and ambition. Dr. Kominz remarked: "This will be the biggest, and possibly last, great directing challenge I set for myself...For every student in it,

whether they are a student of Japanese or a drama student, it'll be a once in a lifetime experience."



Thank you to:

**The Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation** and the **Scandinavian Heritage Foundation**

for their generous contributions toward the teaching of Swedish and Norwegian language classes



## News Briefs



This year, participants in the annual PSU Heritage Spanish Literary Contest were asked to submit poems, stories, and essays in response to the prompt "Why Spanish Now?" Nine essays and four poems were selected for publication in the contest magazine. **Natalie Camelio** won the Grand Jury Prize while the Editor's Grand Prize went to **José P. Trujillo**.



Natalie Camelio (left) and José P. Trujillo, prize winners of this year's PSU Heritage Spanish Literary Contest.



**Dr. Anousha Sedighi**, Associate Professor of Persian, published *Persian in Use: An Elementary Textbook of Language and Culture* (Leiden University Press & University of Chicago Press). *Persian in Use* is a college-level elementary Persian language and culture textbook designed for first-year students. It offers a thematically organized and integrative approach with lessons that are accompanied by an interactive website. *Persian in Use* has been ad-

opted by numerous leading institutions such as the universities of Georgetown, Johns Hopkins, and Michigan State. **Dr. Nila Friedberg** (Russian) and **Dr. Emiko Konomi** (Japanese) were selected by students to receive the John Eliot Allen Outstanding Teaching Award for 2015. Congratulations to these two remarkable educators!

Six WLL students were selected to participate in the Overseas Flagship Program in Almaty, Kazakhstan in the 2015-16



academic year. Five students competed at the national level for prestigious Boren Scholarships, and all received the award. Congratulations to Huell White, William Forrest Holden, Connor Michelotti, Anthony Castaneda, Conrad Henkel and Spencer Nieten!

Join us April 2016 for WLL's fifth French film festival held at PSU's 5th Avenue Cinema and organized by **Dr. Annabelle Dolidon**. This yearly festival is made possible by a Tournées Festival grant from the Cultural Services of the French Embassy and the support of local partners. Check out our Facebook page ("French Film Festival at PSU") for details.

### WELCOME NEW FACULTY MEMBERS!

Two faculty members joined the Department of World Languages and Literatures this fall. A warm welcome is extended to **Dr. Carrie Collenberg-Gonzalez**, Assistant Professor of German, and **Prof. Li E** who will be teaching Chinese.



### FOCUS ON FACULTY

**Jonah Eleweke**  
Senior Instructor I of American Sign Language and Deaf Culture

#### PERSONALS:

Born and raised in Jos, capital of Plateau State in Nigeria. Was forced to move to Eastern Nigeria in 1967 due to civil war.

#### LIFE ALTERING EXPERIENCE:

"Losing my hearing just after entering middle school due to a meningitis episode was life altering. With no previous experience of deafness in my family, my people had no clue what to do"

#### CREDENTIALS:

B.A. from University of Jos in deaf and special education; M.S. and Ph.D. from the University Manchester in audiology and education of the deaf; Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Alberta.

#### PROFESSIONAL SOJOURN:

Taught at universities in Indiana, Virginia and Texas before being hired to coordinate the ASL and Deaf Culture Program at PSU.

#### SPECIAL INTERESTS:

Strategies for effectively teaching and learning second languages, services and supports for families of young children with hearing loss and other special needs, disability policies, legislative mandates and their impacts on service provision, international rehabilitation and development issues.

#### WHEN NOT AT PSU:

"I enjoy traveling and visiting relatives. I like to read and write for relaxation."

