DEAR FRIENDS OF WORLD LANGUAGES!

Recently, I returned from a trip to France with a barometer that unexpectedly operates according to its own version of Galileo's law. Displaying the French equivalents of "beautiful," "variable," "rain," and "storm," it now hangs on the wall by my front door, and I check it every day hoping that it will somehow help me decide what to wear. Day 1: light sprinkles; I can see from my window: barometer reads "beautiful." Day 2: rain; it crashes into my gutters; barometer reluctantly inclines toward "variable," still managing to almost read "beautiful." Day 3: sunny and warm; barometer enthusiastically bounces back to the "beautiful" range. Apparently, it never rains in Portland, at least not according to my strangely optimistic version.

In some ways, WILL reminds me of this barometer. No, it isn't a blindly hopeful Gaul with a penchant for declaring it sunny while trying to prevent his baguette from getting soggy. What I mean is that we know that bright days are ahead even when we are dousing through the mud. Last year, we weathered two external reviews, a comprehensive budget analysis by the university, and a seemingly insurmountable "pause" that temporarily froze three of our positions, along with the daily trials and tribulations that any department that serves as many students (approximately 12,000 per year) and employs as many people (approximately 1500) as does ours might encounter. If not quite true, we ended the year nevertheless looking happy and healthy.

I would like to recognize the role that our Department Manager, Drawing Nguyen, has played in keeping us healthy. Drawing is the consummate professional, a font of knowledge, and a voice of reason. He is a true pleasure to work with and we are lucky to have him. He even has candy in his office!

In closing, I would like to encourage you to keep abreast of upcoming lectures or other public events in the department by subscribing to our new announcements listserve for friends of WILL. Just drop us an e-mail at will@pdx.edu and ask to be included on the list.

I can’t wait to see what the winter will bring!

Keep in touch.

Jennifer R. Perlmutter
Grant Farr and Anousha Sedighi receive grant to strengthen Persian/Iranian studies

A SIGNIFICANT $150,000 DONATION from the PARSIA Community Foundation was recently awarded to Grant Farr, Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Anousha Sedighi, Associate Professor of Persian, to strengthen the Persian/Iranian studies program at Portland State University.

The two-year grant provides funding for activities that will benefit students and the community alike starting with the development of a more comprehensive series of classes devoted to Persian language and culture that students will be able to use to earn a minor in Persian starting fall 2012. This career-enhancing prospect will add to PSU’s growing national prominence in world language instruction. Currently, no other college or university in Oregon offers a multi-year Persian language program, and only a handful of universities in the US offer students the opportunity to earn a minor in Persian, which is considered to be a critical language. Dr. Sedighi also noted that her native language’s multi-facets qualities make it an enriching language to study and commented, “Persian has traditionally been known as the sweet language of poetry.”

The guiding vision of the grant is collaboration, and this year traditional Persian music courses are offered in the Music Department. Next year, an Iranian Studies scholar-in-residence will be hired to help coordinate the efforts to develop a stronger Persian program at PSU. The benefits of this program will extend far beyond the classroom into the community. Grant Farr outlined the program’s plans for engagement. “Next academic year we will offer a Parsia lecture series, which will be open to the public and focus on contemporary Iranian topics of significant interest. There will also be a number of public cultural events devoted to Persian music, poetry, and art.” Keep an eye out for announcements!

LESS COMMONLY TAUGHT LANGUAGES continued from page 1

born in Kenya and syrups for Swahili until age six, when she moved to the US. Cindy said, “I’m going to visit my family in Kenya next summer and I want to be able to speak to them.” MacKenzie Adrain, an African Studies major, hopes to teach abroad and thinks studying Swahili is “cooler” than French or Spanish. Kyla Dumas, also an African Studies major, wants to work with recovering child soldiers. Passion and pragmatism motivate these students to study Swahili.

The allure of the Turkish language offers another LCCT option at PSU. Dr. Pelin Bays (Gresham) heads our Turkish language program, and is an eloquent advocate for the importance of her native language. She points out that Turkey is a linguistic’s “dream come true” because of its regulatory: Turkish is a non-Indo-European language written in Latin script since 1928. It’s “different, yet accessible,” according to Dr. Bays, as well as romantic and exotic. It also is considered to be a US critical language, with numerous federal scholarships offered for the study of Turkish. Geographically, Turkey interfaces with Eastern Europe and the Balkans, the Middle East, eastern Mediterranean, Black Sea, and Caucasus. Furthermore, Turkey is a secular democracy with a majority Muslim population, and it is a candidate to the European Union. Studying Turkish can also open vast doors to Christian history.

However, Korean Instructor Kyungah Yoon will tell you her native language is the hot LCCT to study at PSU. Korea is considered to be a critical language due to Korea’s geopolitical importance and its emerging economic powerhouse status, and this language is another strong choice for students interested in working for the federal government or with international organizations. An added attraction, Yoon points out, is that Koreans “pop culture” is, well, very popular among young people in the US. PSU students studying Korean also have a lot of opportunities to spend time abroad. PSU has a sister university in Ulsan, Korea, and every year approximately 25 PSU students are selected to go to Korea to teach English, with most expenses paid.

The intriguing question for thousands of PSU students is this: which LCCT buckles most compellingly? Visit the WLI website for a complete list of languages and courses offered, and imagine the possibilities.

News Briefs

STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS ENABLE STUDENTS TO SOAR LINGUISTICALLY

David Duke, a Political Science graduate student at PSU, took full advantage of two scholarships this past summer to study and explore various aspects of the Arabic language and culture. David spent eight weeks in Amman, Jordan, at the Quaid Institute for Arabic on a national Critical Language Scholarship. He was also able to visit a variety of historically significant sites, including Wadi Rum, where T.E. Lawrence (widely known as Lawrence of Arabia) had his adventures. David then spent six weeks at the Bosphorus Institute for Modern Languages in Turkey, Tunisia, on a Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship granted through PSU’s “In terms of a life experience, this was an unparalleled opportunity, and my language skills improved dramatically,” David said.

The moment Jillian Balderson heard about Assistant Professor Leopoldo Rodriquez’s Senior Capstone project, she knew she wanted to participate. Jillian, a double major in Spanish and Social Sciences, and 18 PSU classmates spent the 2011 winter term in the small town of San Pedro de Céldas, Argentina, helping the indigenous villagers develop plans for a sustainable eco-tourism program. Jillian observed, “We didn’t want to impose our ideas on the locals, and we spent a lot of time getting to know them and their culture, asking questions, and listening.” When asked if her Spanish improved during the term, she responded, “Yes! By the end, I was able to communicate very effectively, in fact, deep communication was possible. This experience was the biggest thing that has happened in my life so far.”

AN ACCOMPLISHED ARTIST AMONG US

Elise Wagner, a PSU graduate, thoroughly enjoys her job as the WLI Office Coordinator and Language Requirements Specialist, and says, “I like working with students and helping people achieve their goals. PSU has given me a lot, and this is my way of giving back.”

Elise also appreciates her day job because it accommodates her life’s work as an encaustic painter and instructor. Encaustic painting is an ancient Greek medium that combines beeswax, resin, and pigment. Elise uses this medium to explore and synthesize scientific and celestial themes. Her extraordinary art has been shown around the country, and this October her work was the focal point of a Distinguished Faculty Lecture, “Quaint or Creative Connections: The Art of Elise Wagner,” at the Westminster Institute of Technology in Ravena, MA. Interested readers can see one of Elise’s creations, Full Circle Universe, a permanent PSU installation on the second floor of Smith Memorial Student Union.

FOUNDER’S DAY HELP SUPPORT SWEDISH AND SCANDINAVIAN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

Two important foundations deserve recognition for their generous support of world language programs available at PSU. The WLI Department extends heartfelt appreciation to the Barbers Ortho Pro Succia Foundation for its recent donation, which will support Instructor Christina (Tina) Krohn-Tangl in our Swedish Language Program for the next two years. Acknowledgment is also due to the Scandinavian Heritage Foundation for its long-term contribution to our Scandinavian Language Program. This year, our Norwegian and Danish programs are benefiting from this gift.

Thank you!