

Department of World Languages  
and Literatures  
Post Office Box 751 (WLL)  
Portland, Oregon 97207-0751

Return Service Requested

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



**Aaron Viengkhou** graduated from PSU in 2014 with a B.A. in Arabic and Philosophy. He then moved to Cambridge, MA to pursue a Master's degree at Harvard Divinity School with a focus on Islamic Studies. In the summer of 2016 he was awarded the degree of Master of Theological Studies (MTS), and in the fall he began working towards a Ph.D. at Harvard University's Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. His research focuses on post-classical Islamic intellectual history, especially in relation to traditions of philosophy and esoteric theology. Aaron has presented his work at professional conferences.

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*

Greetings  
from the Chair



GINA L. GRECO

Join our alumni listserv at  
[pdx.edu/wll](http://pdx.edu/wll)  
Click on "Alumni"  
and follow the prompts.

Follow us!  
 [facebook.com/PSUWLL](https://facebook.com/PSUWLL)  
 [@PSU\\_World](https://twitter.com/PSU_World)

**Dear Friends of World  
Languages and Literatures,**

Last year all departments at PSU were asked to review and update their governance documents. In the process, we in WLL chose to rewrite our mission statement to represent more accurately the work that we do. Specifically, we wanted a statement that would convey the diversity and breadth of our department and, at the same time, our shared values. It's a bit long because we chose to avoid simple statements such as "prepare students to be global citizens" and, instead, to articulate what it is that we expect our graduates to achieve, and what we as a faculty hope to contribute. Here is the result of our discussions:

"The Department of World Languages and Literatures prepares students to participate in a wide array of intercultural contexts and communities, to achieve linguistic and communicative proficiency, and to develop skills in research and critical inquiry. In addition to providing instruction in more than twenty languages, WLL faculty engage students in a variety of courses that utilize the faculty's expertise in

different components of culture, including literature, film, pedagogy, linguistics, and the historical contexts of these subjects. While WLL faculty conduct research in a wide range of fields, we also share an understanding of language as an essential element of the human condition. Our faculty and students contribute to the cultural and linguistic enrichment of the community within the University, the city of Portland, and national and international settings."

Please let us know what you think!

And on this topic, or any other, please stay in touch,

Gina L. Greco

[world@pdx.edu](mailto:world@pdx.edu)

# Polyglot

Department of World Languages and Literatures

Summer 2017 Newsletter  
[pdx.edu/wll](http://pdx.edu/wll)

## Let Knowledge Serve the City: Community-based Learning Courses through WLL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS MORE THAN A MOTTO AT PSU; community-based learning classes are a requirement for all undergraduates. The Department of World Languages and Literatures embraces this ethos, and contributes by offering Capstone classes in which students use their knowledge, in addition to their language skills, to help improve the world around them. These classes, however,

are not only an opportunity to serve; students develop practical and professional skills and also sharpen their language proficiency through practice. Two examples of WLL Capstone classes that have had a lasting impact on the community are **Dr. Yoko Sakurauchi's** Japanese & Chinese Language Program for Youth Capstone and **Dr. Anna Alsufieva's** Russian Flagship Capstone.

In Dr. Sakurauchi's Capstone course, students with Japanese or Chinese proficiency work as volunteer teaching assistants at The International School (TIS) where they participate in classroom instruction and help develop teaching materials while learning what it takes to educate children in a multilingual environment. Through this Capstone, PSU Senior **Hai Bi** gained experience with skills such as classroom management that will be essential in his future career as an elementary school teacher. Hai shares his observations about some of the challenges in second language education that he encountered at The International School:



PSU student **Erin Theuninck** helps a student at The International School.

*"For anyone who is interested in an eye-opening experience, I highly encourage participating in this course."*

**Koji Pinto** on the Japanese & Chinese Language Program for Youth Capstone

*I noticed that learning all the subjects in a second language is a huge change for young students. [...] Most of the time they would rather use their dominant language (English) to communicate with each other or sometimes even with the teacher.*

Dr. Alsufieva's Russian Flagship Capstone is divided into two groups: students who travel abroad to spend their fourth year in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and students who stay on campus and engage with Portland's Russian-speaking community. Those who remain in Portland use their knowledge



PSU student **Koji Pinto** works together with students at The International School.

of Russian language and culture in a variety of ways including assisting teachers in public schools with Russian language after-school programs, undertaking translation projects, and assisting immigrants in various ways. For example, students have worked with a local church to help Russian-speaking immigrants prepare for the US citizenship exam. Students have to exercise patience and use their Russian skills to the fullest when teaching the content of the exam. As Dr. Alsufieva explains:

*The students need to explain the material in Russian first, and then go back and translate the question into English, and finally teach them the vocabulary and structures they need to formulate their responses in English.*

The Capstone students' latest translation project involved producing a Russian-language version of a smartphone app used to help feed premature babies - giving many Russian-speaking orphanages, caretakers, and parents much needed resources for ensuring the health of the children in their care. Another recent project involved translating the Oregon DMV's Driver's Manual into Russian.

Through PSU classes such as these, professionals of the future are given chances to gain experience in diverse fields, improve their language skills either abroad or right here in Portland, and contribute to their communities.

## Understanding Global Issues Abroad and at Home

THROUGH STUDY ABROAD UNDER the guidance of their instructor, a group of students from PSU directly experienced the tensions and ramifications of the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean and came to understand more about the situation - as well as the crisis back home. While the experience was two years ago, students and instructor alike remain transformed by the events that they so unexpectedly witnessed.

In the summer of 2015, Senior Instructor II of Italian **Angela Zagarella** took a group of nine students on a three-week study abroad course in Sicily. A few months before their departure, tragedy struck in the Mediterranean, and 850 migrants lost their lives when their boat sank near the coast of Lampedusa. After hearing about these events, Instructor Zagarella decided that it would be important for the students to experience the situation firsthand. Thanks in large part to the **Italian Studies Endowment** at the PSU Foundation, she was able to secure funding to include in the itinerary a three-day trip to Lampedusa, one of the epicenters of the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean. The students and their mentor boarded a plane from Sicily to Lampedusa with mostly policemen as their flying companions. A feeling of dread set in for some of the students.



Awaiting the group from PSU was an organization known as Askavusa. Founded in 2009 and named after the Sicilian word for 'barefoot,' Askavusa is an organization dedicated to promoting multiculturalism and protesting the systematic expulsion of migrants. Askavusa generously arranged for the PSU group to attend presentations by experts on local history and migration. We asked some of the students to reflect on their experience, and how it continues to affect them two years later. One offered the following:

*It's impossible to think about the refugees and their dilemma without thinking of our border issues. In every presentation my thoughts went back to the U.S.-Mexico border and the untenable situation the United States has created.*

It was through PortoM, a museum organized by Askavusa, that the students interacted intimately with the material side of migrant journeys across the Mediterranean. The objects that supported the migrants on their journeys such as clothing, food, pots, and religious texts, were put on display to tell the stories of migrants. After spending time interacting with the situation in person, viewing these artifacts and connecting with the parties involved, students found that their previous feelings of dread began to fade, replaced by an understanding of the human aspect of the crisis. As one student describes:

*[...] I found that my fear was irrational; I had to face that I had stereotyped them as rebellious and dangerous, but I can see now that they are simply humans, trying to escape a terrible situation.*



The entrance to PortoM, where stories of migrants are told through their belongings.

The students attested that although they had been scared at times, their lives were deeply changed through their experiences in Lampedusa. They were exposed to human rights issues of grave importance, which led them to understand better the global migrant situation in a broader context:

*The migrant issues in Lampedusa are closely related to immigration issues between the United States and Mexico. Though many differences do exist, the migrants are still stereotyped, exploited and mistreated. There seems to be this expansive xenophobia that is quite irrational.*

Instructor Zagarella notes that not only were the nine participants affected by the trip, but she was also very moved by the experience and it has influenced her professional life. In the two years since, she has given presentations about the story of the immigrants and has incorporated the material into some of her classes. Finally, she remains grateful to the Italian Studies Endowment for making this opportunity available to her students.

### RETIREMENTS

The following faculty member retired in June 2017:

**Dr. Dirgham Sbait**, Arabic

We thank him for his contributions to the department.

### UPDATES ON EMERITA/EMERITUS FACULTY

**Claudine Fisher**, Professor Emerita of French, published a historical fiction novel, *Southbound French Settlers* (volume 2, the continuation of *The Reluctant Paris Rebel*, volume 1).

**Sandra Freels**, Professor Emerita of Russian, co-authored an article on interdisciplinary language learning in *Exploring the US Language Flagship Program* and edited the English portion of *Dostoevsky and Chekhov* by N. V. Zhivolupova. She continues to participate in reviewing Language Flagship programs nationally and attends all presentations by students of the PSU Russian Flagship Center.

**Patricia Wetzel**, Professor Emerita of Japanese, continues her work on the tropes of Japanese advertising.

### KABUKI SHOW SPRING TERM

WLL, the Center for Japanese Studies, and the School of Music collaborated to present two kabuki plays in Lincoln Performance Hall on May 30 and 31.

### THANK YOU TO DONORS

The **Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation** covers the cost of providing Swedish language instruction.

The **Nordic Northwest** (formerly called the Scandinavian Heritage Foundation) provides funding for Norwegian language instruction.

The **Max Kade Foundation** provides major financial support to the Deutsche Sommerschule am Pazifik summer program for German Studies.

## Student News

### FRENCH

**Etienne Lussier**, M.A. French (2016), is currently a Ph.D. candidate in French/Francophone Studies at Northwestern University.

### JAPANESE

Five students of Japanese, **Miguel Conner**, **Christina Guiang**, **Taylor Hoffman**, **Samantha Queener**, and **Michiko Yoshinaga**, were accepted into the JET program. They will leave for Japan this summer to teach English at Japanese elementary and secondary schools.

### PERSIAN

Congratulations to **Laila Mottaghi**, a second-year student in the Persian program, who was accepted to travel to Iran with "Nonviolence International" as part of their "Student Peace Trip."

Congratulations to **Robin Brackett**, **Nilofar Soleymani**, **Taylor Yoshihata**, and **Laila Mottaghi** for receiving Persia House Scholarships. We are grateful to **Dr. Kazem Tehrani** and **Dr. Dian Tehrani** for their constant support of the Persian program.

Two students of Japanese did a superb job in this year's Toyama Cup Speech Contest held on April 23. **Nikolas Pahomsky** won 2nd place in Division 1 (less than 2 years of study), and **Emily Carlson** won 2nd place in Division 2 (2 years or more). Congrats!

### RUSSIAN

Congratulations to the six PSU students in the Russian Flagship program who won awards in the 2017 National Post-Secondary Russian Essay Contest sponsored by ACTR. At the elementary level, **Brandon Brown** won a gold medal, and **Erik Dant** and **Yves Wienecke** received honorable mentions. At the advanced level, **Gabriella Hoffman** won a gold medal, **Hope Ovcharenko** won a bronze medal, and **Chase Riegel** received an honorable mention.



### FOCUS ON FACULTY

## Cassio de Oliveira

*Assistant Professor of Russian*

### PERSONALS:

I grew up in Petrópolis, Brazil, a city in the mountains about one hour inland from Rio de Janeiro. Petrópolis is Greek for "Petersburg," which never ceases to amuse the Russians I meet; and, like Portland, the summers in Petrópolis are gorgeous, and the winters are gloomy, foggy, and rainy.

### LIFE ALTERING EXPERIENCE:

Taking a seminar on the literature and culture of St. Petersburg in college made me want to learn Russian and travel to Russia. It sounds over the top, but it's true: I wouldn't be where (or who) I am now if it weren't for that course to pique my curiosity about Russia.

### CREDENTIALS:

B.A. in Russian and Eurasian Studies, Bard College; M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. in Slavic Languages and Literatures, Yale University. Research and study abroad in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and in Konstanz, Germany. Previously taught at the University of Arizona, Dickinson College, and Vanderbilt University.

### SPECIAL INTERESTS:

My research focuses on various forms of cultural exchanges and intersections involving Russia and the Soviet Union: translations, film adaptations, literary forms borrowed from foreign literatures, etc. We tend to think of Russian and Soviet cultures as hermetic and isolated, but actually, throughout its history, Russia has engaged in an extraordinarily rich dialogue with foreign cultures, and my teaching and research aim to reflect and explore that.

### WHEN NOT AT PSU:

I'm usually hiking, cycling, or exploring Portland's food scene with my wife, or else we are looking for cats to say hi to in our neighborhood.

### SPANISH

**Abel Cruz** is pursuing a Ph.D. in Hispanic Linguistics at Georgetown University.

**Darryl Dedelow Jr.** was admitted to the Hispanic Studies Ph.D. program at the University of Kentucky. He delivered a paper at the Kentucky Foreign Language Conference on April 20, 2017.

**Amanda Gerke** completed a Ph.D. in Hispanic Linguistics at the University of Salamanca in 2016.

**Stephen McNabb** has received a Fulbright ETA fellowship for 2017-2018. He will travel this August to Leticia, Colombia for 10 months to teach English at the University level and take classes in Indigenous Studies.



Fulbright recipient **Stephen McNabb** and **Dr. Enrique Cortez** at this year's WLL Graduation and Awards Reception.

**Kathleen Orcutt** is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Hispanic Linguistics at UC Irvine.

**Molly Petersen** is pursuing an M.A. in Epidemiology at John Hopkins University

### CRITICAL LANGUAGE SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

Six PSU students received prestigious U.S. Department of State Critical Language Scholarships. Congratulations to: **Mina Pournaderi** (Swahili), **Paolo Menez** (Japanese), **Tara Mandella** (Russian), **Kelsey Canoy** (Russian), **Gabriella Hoffman** (Russian), and **Ryan Donovan** (Russian).