We Changed Our Name

Wondering what happened to the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures? In 2014, we officially changed our name to the Department of Romance Studies. Our new moniker reflects our aim to break down traditional barriers in scholarship, placing more emphasis on the interdisciplinary research and teaching that we have always done in Dey Hall. “Romance Studies” captures more accurately the variety of approaches, languages, themes and methods that our faculty brings to bear in their work on literary and nonliterary texts, languages, and cultures of the Americas, Europe, and the Mediterranean.

What remains the same is our commitment to fulfilling the University’s global mission through engaged teaching and scholarship in Spanish, Italian, French, Portuguese and beyond. We’ve come a long way since our founding, in 1885, as the Department of Modern Languages!

Graduate Alumni

Graduate alumni led a panel at the Carolina Conference for Romance Studies in April. Representing a range of academic institutions, from small liberal arts colleges to large research universities, these ROMS alumni described their experiences working in academia and gave current ROMS graduate students advice on preparing for the job market. We loved welcoming them back to campus! Please visit anytime!

Faculty Highlight

Dr. Patricia H. Fuentes Lima, Teaching Assistant Professor (Portuguese), has been publishing a quarterly virtual magazine for bilingual children in Portuguese since 2014. Revistinha’s main purpose is to provide a variety of intelligent content for Portuguese and English-to-Portuguese learners. As a bilingual magazine, it introduces the Portuguese language to parents and children as a linguistic asset and as a tool of cultural enrichment and appreciation. Aimed at children in the 5 to 10 years-old range, it focuses on developing knowledge of the Lusophone countries of Brazil, Portugal, Angola, Mozambique, Guiné-Bissau, Cape Verdi, and São Tomé and Príncipe through games, activities, culinary recipes, historical biographies, post cards, landscapes, popular songs, poems, and much more.

The magazine also enables students from the Portuguese major and minor levels of Romance Studies to showcase their thoughts, experiences, and feelings in a bilingual format through a creative writing method experimented in the 310 and 323 courses or in any Portuguese course level.

Students and Portuguese faculty are encouraged to contribute with creative sources: recipes, travel logs, poetry, translation, photography, etc. The past six publications and the October issue were created with private funds and collaborations from Portuguese students.

Visit the website! (For both English and Portuguese versions)

http://www.revistinha.org

Arts Everywhere

On April 6, as part of the Arts Everywhere initiative on campus, Frederico Castelloes, Teaching Associate Professor (Portuguese), helped students and faculty experience capoeira, a Brazilian art form that encompasses culture, music, dance and martial arts. Often referred to as a “game,” capoeira is played in a ring to the rhythm of native instruments and songs of calls and responses. At the event, students from PORT 316 and PORT 203 as well as guests from the community formed a roda de capoeira (capoeira ring), attracting the attention of the crowd. UNC’s promotional video for Arts Everywhere captured a few moments.

https://youtu.be/Gltg2Vkm8Q
Chair’s Letter

Dear Friends of Romance Studies,

As I was preparing my remarks for the Department’s graduation ceremony that we celebrated in May, I came across Joseph Caldwell’s June 28, 1827 commencement address to the senior class. I was pleased to see that Caldwell—speaking publically as UNC’s first president—devoted special attention to the “advantages of a character both literary and practical” that come with the “competent attainment” of modern languages. Caldwell insisted that “French must be important,” because it allows “the most diffuse communication with the whole of Christendom. It is the language also of the most scientific, polished, and enlightened nations of the world.”

Clearly Caldwell had a soft spot in his heart for the language of Rabelais, Rousseau, and Diderot. But he also believed that the language of Cervantes was of special interest to our nation, since our proximity and intimate relation with our continental neighbors made Spanish economically and politically strategic. Acquiring knowledge of Spanish or French or Italian, he said, was “a greater augmentation to the learning of the student than could have been compassed by any other mode of appropriating the time and study necessary to their attainment.” In other words, learning languages is a good way to spend your time.

As Chair of the Department of Romance Studies, it is my duty and privilege to advocate for the importance of languages and literatures at Carolina. Every year at our commencement, I ask our students a question: Now that you have this degree, what are you going to do with it? This question is a variation of the same query our students get from their friends who study more “practical” subjects, and from the family members who worry about their future earning potential.

And of course, this is an important question! Aside from mastering the subjunctive mood or navigating the subtle differences between a metonym and a synecdoche, what do our students learn during their time in Dey Hall?

Our students read a lot of books; they watch films, memorize poems, write papers, and devote all-nighters to polishing their final projects. They learn the principles of literary, cultural, and linguistic analysis, and they attain a high level of understanding of how history, politics, and national identity all depend on language for their articulation. They spend a lot of time thinking about how stories, novels, drama, movies, and poetry function, and about the crucial roles played by language, storytelling and image-making in making us human.

And if that is not enough, a 2017 report by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences concluded that having more Americans with competency in languages other than English “is essential from virtually any point of view you can think of,” from economic growth and competitiveness to national defense to increased academic achievement and what we might call “successful functioning in a global economy.”

We know that the earning potential of graduates in the STEM fields has been exaggerated, and that liberal arts majors actually out-earn their more “practical” peers in the long run.

But languages and literatures are also crucial to the health of our Republic. A recent editorial in the Wall Street Journal argued that students who can read and comprehend difficult works, engage with sophisticated ideas, and express themselves clearly are extremely well-suited to contribute to a representative government. Our students do this every day, and they do it in another language!

This is one of the reasons President Caldwell insisted that failure to learn at least one of the Romance Languages would amount to the “forfeiture of privileges most cheaply secured,” and “to disregard the laws of the wisest and most efficient economy in literature.”

So I think the question that we need to ask our students is not “What are you going to do with that?” But instead, “What aren’t you going to do with that?”

Thank you for your support of Romance Studies. If you would like to contribute to our ongoing mission, please consider donating to the Department today. In this newsletter, we have highlighted a few of the funds that help our students and faculty do their important work.

As always, if you are planning to be in Chapel Hill this year, please drop us a line. We would love to hear from you!

Sincerely,

Sam Amago
Bowman and Gordon Gray Distinguished Term Professor of Spanish
Chair, Department of Romance Studies

A Few of Our Funds

Romance Studies Gift Fund
General support to allow faculty to develop new courses and travel to conferences; fund graduate students’ travel to research facilities worldwide; and modernize teaching and research technologies.

The Larry D. King Post-Graduate Fellowship
Awards a graduating Hispanic Literatures and Cultures or Hispanic Linguistics major a 9-month experience living in Seville, Spain.

Department of Romance Studies Hardré Fund
Funds a range of departmental needs and an annual award for undergraduates. With additional funding, we would like to establish summer research awards for undergraduate French majors to allow them to conduct research in a French-speaking country.

To donate, visit romancestudies.unc.edu and click on “Donate Today!” at the top of the page.

Our Funds at Work

Meet Dr. Erika Serrato, Postdoctoral Fellow

Tell us about your research and the work you are doing at UNC as a postdoc:

My research centers around questions of indigeneity in the French-speaking Caribbean (Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique). I see concerns of origins, ruptures, and adaptations as part of a buried but spectral past that haunts Caribbean literature and that is tied to indigeneity. In my view, the question of what it means to be indigeneous appears in myriad ways, be it in a discussion of botanical medicine or the ways in which Amerindian and Afro-Creole history is purposefully altered in certain literary writings. As a researcher of this long-ignored topic, I am obliged to consider various disciplines and media in order to open up the discussion of Caribbean indigeneity in literary and cultural studies. An example of this would be how Amerindian petroglyphs enter the contemporary Guadeloupian imaginary and the kinds of narratives this creates in both official institutions and cultural productions.

I’m expanding on some of these iterations of Caribbean indigeneity as a UNC Postdoctoral Fellow, namely on how non-autochthonous populations come to self-define as the region’s natives following 1492 and its aftermath.

What were some of the reasons you chose to do your postdoc at UNC’s Department of Romance Studies? How is the Department supporting your research?

The program fosters early-career scholars by protecting our first years, namely the ability to focus on research. It also has a strong mentoring philosophy and as such allows us to connect with many active, great minds on campus. UNC has a vibrant intellectual community, and I wanted to be a part of it. The Department’s interest in dialogue and collaboration is evidenced by the colloquia and speaker series organized by graduate students. My mentors, Ellen Welch and Emilio del Valle Escalante, have been incredible in their guidance of both my presence on campus and offering advice on how to best disseminate my research. Faculty and research groups also have welcomed me, allowing me to engage across campus.

Where do you hope your postdoctoral research goes? What are your future career goals?

I’m operating under two complementary goal tracks: short and long term. On the one hand, I am polishing pieces and sending them off to publish as articles. On the other hand, I am working on expanding a section of my dissertation into my first book-length project, tentatively titled Indigeneous Caribbean: Defining community. I will be traveling to Martinique this summer to conduct archival research. Though not quite a career goal, I am very excited about my upcoming “Native Caribbean” course this upcoming fall. I very much look forward to dialoguing with both undergraduate and graduate students about Caribbean literature and culture and to aiding in their discovery of a new favorite book or area of specialization.

4) What is your favorite UNC tradition that you have experienced here in Chapel Hill?

I have to say that I surprised myself on this one. I found myself really engaged in that first UNC-Duke basketball game of the season—a game we won! That’s when I realized I was already invested in UNC as a whole and in keeping up its tradition of excellence.

Newest Postdoc Fellow

In Fall 2018, Romance Studies will be welcoming our newest postdoctoral fellow, Keiji Kunigami, who will receive his PhD from Cornell University this summer. His research on early twentieth century Brazilian and Japanese cinema, photography, and modernist discourses on vision and time will make him an exciting colleague and collaborator!

Newest Faculty

The Department is proud to announce that Serenella Lovino will be joining the faculty in January 2019 as Professor of Italian and Environmental Humanities. Professor Lovino will bring with her the spirit of cooperation, sharing, and communication across disciplines and borders for which she is known internationally.

Café Con Fantasía

On March 7, the Department hosted “CAFÉ CON FANTASÍA – A Conversation with Professor Emerita María Salgado,” where Prof. Salgado discussed the evolution of the Department during her 40-year tenure and related her experiences as a Hispanic woman in academia. Dr. Salgado was one of the first women to join Romance Languages when she came to the Department in 1967.

Her history with the Department dates back to her days as a graduate student pursuing her Master’s degree in 1959-1960. She recalled that at that time, undergraduate enrollment consisted mostly of men, with the exception of a few local Chapel Hill women who also attended. Furthermore, while women could enroll in graduate programs, they were not Teaching Assistants. Prof. Salgado also remembered that many of her Spanish graduate classes were conducted in English and met on Tuesday, Thursdays, and Saturdays! As a married, Catholic, Hispanic woman studying for an advanced degree, Dr. Salgado considered herself a rarity in the Triangle area.

As an Assistant Professor at UNC, French was more popular than Spanish, and Spanish Peninsular figured more prominently than Latin American. Dr. Salgado appreciated introducing Hispanic American literature to her students at a time when Gabriel García Márquez and other Hispanic writers were becoming well known. She also enjoyed teaching courses on modernismo and poetry. Although Dr. Salgado has retired from teaching, she is no stranger to the Department or to scholarly research. When asked about her continuing enthusiasm to publish, she replied that she loves to investigate: “Me ha gustado siempre.”
ROMS Retirements

Dr. Frank Domínguez (at UNC since 1973)

"Those of us who know Frank (Dr. Domínguez to his students) know of his erudition without pretensions, his remarkable ability to transmit confidence even to his least confident student, and his immovable composure, even in the face of excitable others (like me!). It’s hard to imagine Romance Studies without his solid, even-keeled presence; he leaves very large shoes to fill. Don’t go too far away from us, Frank. Ave atque vale!" (Dr. Rosa Perelmuter)

Dr. Ennio Rao (at UNC since 1973)

"What always astonished me about Ennio was the breadth of his abilities as a professor; he was as effective a teacher in ITA 56, a first-year seminar geared toward seventeen and eighteen year-olds, as he was in ITA 526, a graduate seminar on the history of the Italian language. More importantly, he treated those freshmen as if they were every bit as important as his PhD students. I really admired that. I’ve never known another academic to be so engaging at so many levels.

A careful reader, a thoughtful critic, and a patient editor, he had this magic ability to spin straw into gold. Somehow, some way, reading his comments on one chapter would actually infuse me with the energy to write the next.

I regularly assign his work in my undergraduate classes today, and have more than once had a student enter class and confess that he or she had "binge-read" the Rao reading the night before."

(Dr. Tessa Gurney)

Dr. Hannelore Jarausch (at UNC since 1983)

"Hannelore is my trusted colleague, mentor, and friend. Over the past 15 years, I’ve always known her to be kind, understanding, supportive. She listens and advises anyone who needs help, no matter the issue. She has been an invaluable resource to our French language program, but what I will miss the most is our morning discussions about current events, courses, entertainment, the senseless weather and whatever else is on our minds as I arrive on campus each morning."

(Dr. Valérie Pruvost)

Dr. William C. Maisch (at UNC since 1995)

"Since I have known him, Bill Maisch has played many roles in my life. On a professional level, he has been a great mentor and the best colleague I could have wished for. I have always admired his dedication and professionalism. I have learned many lessons from him that I apply daily in my teaching and coordinating duties. On a personal level, Bill has been a good friend and role model. His patience, willingness to help and love for teaching have been an inspiration for me and will continue to be, even after his retirement.

(Dr. Hélène de Fays)

Dr. Julia Mack (at UNC since 1995)

"Dr. Julia Cardona Mack is a treasure we were able to recruit from Duke University. She has been a leader in our department, creating and teaching many courses including those for Heritage language learners and linguistics courses on Spanish in the U.S. She has also been one of our pioneers in incorporating community engagement in many of the courses she has taught through the years. Dr. Mack has worked closely with graduate and undergraduate students interested in studying second language acquisition and Spanish in the U.S. She has been a beacon of support for our Heritage speakers of Spanish through her teaching, her guidance as advisor for the student bilingual journal, Mezcla, and her deep commitment to numerous causes on campus and beyond."

(Dr. Glynis Cowell)

Dr. Rob Anderson (at UNC since 2015)

“Our program was so fortunate to have had Dr. Robert Anderson back in our program. His wide-ranging experience and knowledge, his compassion, teaching skills, his unparalleled collegiality, and his unfailing willingness to take on responsibility (probably to his own detriment) made him a dream colleague and a godsend asset to our program. We will dearly miss him—his personality, presence, and kindness—but love him too much not to wish him the greatest happiness in his retirement."

(Dr. Richard Vernon)