As celebrate the 45 seniors and 12 PhDs graduating from Romance Studies this May, we are delighted to share some news and updates about the exciting research, teaching, mentoring, community service, and extracurricular activities that have been happening in the department over the past months. Scroll down for more!
Recent Highlights

The Foreign Language Association of North Carolina invited Professors Tacia Kohl\(^1\), Elizabeth Tolman\(^2\), Valérie Pruvost\(^3\), and Heather Knorr\(^4\) to participate in the Best of FLANC conference this spring in Greenville, NC. Their presentations, “Elevating Language Skills by Promoting Community” (by Profs. Kohl, Pruvost, and Tolman) and “Bilingual Books: From Creation to Publishing (DL/I)” (by Prof. Knorr), were rated in the top 15 out of 98 talks at the Fall FLANC conference.

\(^1\)<https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/anastacia-kohl/>
\(^2\)<https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/elizabeth-tolman/>
\(^3\)<https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/valerie-pruvost/>
\(^4\)<https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/heather-knorr/>
Professor Oswaldo Estrada\textsuperscript{5} received a Fulbright U.S. Scholar award to travel to Spain in Fall 2024.

Prof. Lorna Avilés\textsuperscript{6} earned a prestigious Johnston Teaching Excellence Award from the University. In her glowing nomination, one student relayed how she and others had no intention of carrying on with Spanish beyond the language requirement but ended up continuing in Spanish simply to have more classes with Professor Avilés. Described as a high-energy innovator, Professor Aviles challenges her students while also maintaining an environment that is safe and in which students are encouraged to face the frequently vulnerable situation of learning a foreign language. Her colleagues expressed their appreciation for her passion and enthusiasm.

\textsuperscript{5}\url{https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/oswaldo-estrada/}
\textsuperscript{6}\url{https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/lornaida-aviles/}
Graduate Teaching Fellows Santi Gesteira⁷ and Emanuele Stefanori⁸ both won university-level Tanner Awards for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching by Graduate Teaching Assistants.

Student Successes

Haley Bohn, a double major in Computer Science and Hispanic Linguistics with a Minor in Translation and Interpretation (2024), is collaborating with Mexican journalist and author Guillermo Fajardo Sotelo to publish her translation of his short story “Dobles.” Haley chose the piece as her translation project in Spanish 369 in the Fall of 2022. When contacted, Dr. Fajardo Sotelo responded enthusiastically, immediately secured publication rights from the Latin American Literary Review and provided encouraging feedback. Haley plans to submit her English version to Words without Borders.

⁷https://romancestudies.unc.edu/grad-student/santiago-g-gesteira/
⁸https://romancestudies.unc.edu/grad-student/emanuele-stefanori/
Emerald Izuakor earned a Robinson Fellowship for Summer 2024 to work on her project, "The Romance of Andalusia: Exploring the Historic Arab and Sephardic Influences on Spanish Food through Poetry." Emerald will traveling to Andalucía, Spain, to explore the food, agricultural and culinary traditions of the region through the lens of the Arab and Sephardic poets, guided by their verses and words. She will be embarking on this project because it reflects her academic interests and a reflection of her double major (Hispanic Linguistics, Nutrition (Health and Society). Emerald says, “I have always been drawn to interdisciplinary work that combines food, culture and language. I was especially inspired by SPAN 340 (Cultural Identity in Spain) Fall 2023 with Dr. Cristina Carrasco⁹, where my group project was focused on food in Don Quixote.” Dr. Carrasco is Emerald's advisor for this project.

⁹https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/cristina-carrasco/
French and Francophone Studies major Simon Cook was awarded a Carolina Honors Excellence Award to support work on his honors thesis. According to Simon, "My thesis concerns attempting to break free from domestic and international stalemates by conducting research on the intersections of the humanities, politics, and law – focusing on the idea of 'constraint.' I intend to study French 19th-century symbolism, 20th-century surrealism, and structural approaches to mythology to understand the present-day 'post-postmodern' and to foreground the idea of the 'new': the attempt at breaking free from the constraint of preemption in literature, art, science, and politics."
Megan Shaeffer, double major in Biology and Hispanic Linguistics, has published her article "Genetic Analysis of the Immigration and Emigration of Basque Country Throughout History" in the 2024 issue of UNC JOURney\textsuperscript{10}, UNC’s journal of undergraduate research. Megan studied Basque in SPAN 414-415 (Languages of Spain) with Professor Pello Huesa\textsuperscript{11}.

\textsuperscript{10}https://uncjourney.unc.edu/
\textsuperscript{11}https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/pedro-huesa/
Last year, in Diana Torres’s Spanish for Business course, students were tasked with developing an entrepreneurship project in a Latin American country of their choice. Julius Berger, a Business and Global Studies student, was particularly inspired by the class and decided to apply for a fellowship to volunteer with a local NGO in Colombia. "Proyecto Béisbol" develops sustainable baseball and softball programs for children in vulnerable communities. Subsequently, Julius earned a 2023 Carolina Blue Honors Fellowship, which allowed him to pursue this self-initiated summer internship in the field of international sports entrepreneurship in Bogotá and Cartagena. Julius called the internship "the perfect opportunity to combine my love for sports and passion for Hispanic culture with a valuable, hands-on foreign experience for my future career in international business."

New Book!

https://romancestudies.unc.edu/grad-student/diana-torres-silva/
Professor Jessica Tanner\(^1\) published her first book, *Sex Work / Text Work: Mapping Prostitution in the Nineteenth-Century French Novel* with Northwestern University Press. The book explores the compelling characters who are prostitutes in novels by Émile Zola, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Edmond de Goncourt, Adolphe Tabarant, and Charles-Louis Philippe. These novels emerged in Paris in the context of government efforts to regulate sex work in city-sanctioned brothels, *brasseries à femmes*, and on the boulevards. Professor Tanner’s book shows how fictional prostitutes elude or disrupt disciplining language and practices, both in the fictionalized version of Paris they inhabit and in their author’s narratives. Professor Tanner pushes back against the critical tendency to attribute agency only to courtesans who became published authors and toward a new framework for understanding the political work novels engage in as they circulate. Observing that debates about the regulation of prostitution surfaced in tandem with racialized anxieties about the boundaries of the French nation, Professor Tanner asks how the ubiquitous prostitute characters in nineteenth-century French fiction might also shed light on the history of French colonialism and the politics of immigration in the current day.

\(^1\)https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/jessica-tanner/
A Commitment to Mentoring

This past Fall semester, Martha Alexander\textsuperscript{14} (Teaching Associate Professor of Spanish) began a four-year commitment as a mentor to a group of recipients of the prestigious Pogue Scholarship. The Pogue Scholarship is awarded to in-state, out-of-state, and international students who have demonstrated a commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity within their communities and who plan to continue that dedication during their time at UNC. The scholarship covers anywhere from $10,000 per year up to full tuition, fees, room, and meals.

Dr. Alexander’s group (called a “pod”) consists of twelve students. The students will remain in the pod, with Dr. Alexander as their mentor, for the duration of their time at Carolina. Dr. Alexander’s cohort of students is mostly comprised of North Carolinians, and she also has a student from Boston, Massachusetts; and another student from Ghana.

She and her pod get together about once a month during the academic year. They mainly spend time together over meals (as Dr. Alexander remembers how important procuring food is to a college student!), but they also attend cultural events together. Most recently, they attended the play \textit{Fat Ham} at Playmakers Theater.

As a mentor, her personal goal is to foster a sense of community among her group so that they may be a network of motivation and support to one another. She likes to think of the pod as “a soft place to land” for them as they progress through their years as undergraduates. She enjoys sharing with them the “insider perspective” of a professor, with the hope that this will allow them to take better advantage of their courses. She also wishes to encourage them to take advantage of opportunities like study abroad and travel abroad.

\textsuperscript{14}https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/martha-alexander/
Unforgettable Classes

Combining Creativity and Service
During the Spring 2024 semester, Professor Heather Knorr\textsuperscript{15} won a grant from the APPLES service-learning committee to support the publication and printing of bilingual Spanish-English children’s books to be donated to the UNC Adams School of Dentistry’s free and reduced-cost dental clinic. The clinic’s mission is to provide emergent dental service to those who are otherwise unable to access dental care. The students in her SPAN 329 capstone course called Spanish for Professional and Community Engagement worked all semester to write, translate, edit, and illustrate these books which will be donated to the dental clinic and self-published online through Amazon. This is a project that Heather has been doing for 8 years since her daughter started in kindergarten at a dual-language Carrboro Elementary School and which she has also implemented in San José, Costa Rica with a group of UNC Study Abroad students. We have always donated the books to the local elementary schools and nonprofits such as El Centro Hispano and ISLA Spanish Immersion School but, for this semester, we are excited to announce that all proceeds will be donated to the dental clinic and the SPAN 329 students will have an official publication in their names before graduating!

15\url{https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/heather-knorr/}
During the Fall 2023 semester, Heather worked with Dr. Wendy Clark at UNC’s Dental School to find a group of dental student volunteers who agreed to take photos of themselves at work in the dental clinic to donate as illustrations for our books. We were especially interested in featuring underrepresented minority characters in our books such as Latinx and Asian dentists, dental students, and patients. There are 8 times as many animal characters as there are minority characters in children’s books and we aim to change that! In addition to the fabulous dental student photos, we were also able to include photos of 2 local Latinx elementary school children whose parents signed off on the project and are thrilled to see their kids featured as protagonists in some of our books! The themes of our books include: dental hygiene, how to become a dental assistant or a dentist, a day in the life of a dentist, how to treat cavities aka “sugar bugs” as they are called in pediatric dentistry, the legend of Little Mouse Pérez who is similar to the Tooth Fairy in Spanish-speaking countries and who leaves a little treasure when a child loses a tooth, and many more!

Special thanks to Dr. Wendy Clark and her fabulous student volunteers: Aidee Tejada, Julianne Rivera, Natalie Roa, Molina Shah, and many more. And a huge thank you to our community student volunteers Charlotte and Noé as well as the students from SPAN 329 whose creative efforts will pay off for years to come in the form of educational opportunities for the kids and families who read their amazing stories as well as financial support for the dental clinic.

The print and eReader (kindle) books will be added by early summer to our class Amazon list which already features 15 bilingual books from previous semesters, so please check it out starting in mid-June if you wish to see our dental-themed books and purchase a copy for a little reader in your life! We also invite you to share the link with any school or community librarians you know who might want to purchase a set for their collection. Please contact Heather Knorr (knorrh@email.unc.edu) with any questions. Gracias por su apoyo / Thank you for your support!

---

Capeira

---

16 https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0BMP7355C
You probably have seen a group of students outside dancing, playing instruments and singing in Portuguese in front of Dey Hall building. These characteristics are some of the singularities of the P316 Capoeira class. Capoeira is a Brazilian art form that combines dance, music and martial arts, but Capoeira is also a symbol of freedom, resistance, and resilience in Brazil. In 2014, Capoeira was added to the United Nations’ list of the world’s intangible cultural heritage. This semester, in Dr. Nilzimar Vieira’s PORT 316 class, students had the opportunity to experience Capoeira through movements, readings, lectures, presentations and attending Capoeira workshops taught by Mestra Tigresa. The workshops were supported by the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion grant offered by our Romance department. Students also participated in a series of guest speakers’ presentations. In this class, students had the pleasure to engage in discussing with Dr. Courtney Woods an associate professor in the Department of Environmental Sciences at UNC. Dr. Woods’s research approaches to support communities experiencing environmental racism. In the Capoeira class, Dr. Woods talked about “Orality within Capoeira Angola.”

Thanks to Romance studies support, we had also the pleasure to welcome the Brazilian politician, educator and activist, Douglas Belchior to our campus. Douglas Belchior presented on “Uneafro, Education and Black Resistance in Brazil.” Douglas Belchior was one of the leaders who articulated the

17https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/nilzimar-vieira/
creation of the Black Coalition for Rights, which brings together more than 200 black movement organizations from across Brazil and several other countries. The Capoeira course has been very successful among students, for this reason, we are offering it during the Summer I 2024 session and an extracurricular Capoeira class in Fall 2024. Come and join us! In Capoeira roda (circle), everyone is welcome!

---

**Connecting to Bahia**

Dr. Nilzimar Vieira offered her first-semester Portuguese language students a unique opportunity this year. Her students had the experience of language exchange activities working with students from the interior area of Brazil, in Bahia, in the city of Itagibá, a town well known for its Cocoa plantation culture (described in Jorge Amado's literature pieces such as *Gabriela, Cravo, and Canela* (1958). As preparation for the language exchange activities, students watched the film *Coffee and Cinnamon* (2017) about the Bahia’s region, Reconcávo Baiano, known for the influence of the Afro-Brazilian religion, Candomblé. The students also watched videos and worked on activities on Canvas and discussed the cultural aspects of this region as preparation for the language exchange. These unique experiences can bring together different cultures and enlarge students’ learning possibilities.
The ROMS community was sad to learn of the death of Emeritus Professor J. M. Polo de Bernabé in January 2024. A specialist of modern Iberian poetry and theater, Professor Polo de Bernabé was the author of *Conciencia y lenguaje en la obra de Jorge Guillén* (Editora Nacional, 1977) as well as articles on authors such as Carlos Edmundo de Ory and Fernando Arrabal. "Polo," as he was known, was also a generous mentor to his students. Here are some reflections from his former advisees:
Optimistic, happy, receptive, passionate, engaging. Polo has inspired generations of students, both graduates and undergraduates. Some of us were both, and our loyalty never diminished throughout our careers. His classes were debates, thought provoking and challenging. He was always ready to talk with us outside class. His generosity had no limits, because he loved teaching, he loved to be thrown into discussions without an end about the poets, artists and playwrights he introduced us to. -- Dr. María Cristina Mabrey

Although I knew from Day One that Polo was a tad nervous about having “a nun” in his course (we were reading Don Juan Tenorio, after all), I never experienced anything but interest, welcome and friendship from him. Polo overcame that apprehension – he even survived my reading Lorca’s “Oda al Santissimo sacramento del altar” the following semester. As my interest in Lorca grew and as we worked together on my dissertation, I knew that we were learning together; an experience that brought us both joy and deepened our bond. ... Polo often referred to us, his students, as “my spiritual family,” and I treasure that distinction. Over the years, we stayed in touch through personal and professional challenges and struggles. We offered support in times of death and loss and in moments of celebration. In every encounter, he was warm, interested, supportive and utterly himself – the Polo we knew and loved. -- Cecelia J. Cavanaugh, SSJ
Polo was a lovely human being—kind, tolerant, laid back, brilliant. His enthusiasm, knowledge, and keen insight greatly inspired my own love of and scholarship in 18th-, 19th- and 20th-century poetry. --Dr. Brant Bynum

In memory of Polo, Dr. Brant Bynum has made a generous gift to the department of Romance Studies to fund the Professor J. M. Polo de Bernabé Memorial Summer Research Award for graduate students. Dr. Bynum hopes to encourage other alumni join him in funding this award to continue Polo’s legacy of support for graduate students. Thank you for considering a gift in any amount toward this award. You can make a gift online\textsuperscript{18} and please note that your gift is to support the Professor J. M. Polo de Bernabé Memorial Summer Research Award.

\textsuperscript{18}\url{https://give.unc.edu/donate?f=101346&p=asrl}
In Fall 2020, in an effort to keep our language students engaged and provide a link to our department during the pandemic, Dr. de Fays launched the ROMS Film Club. Every other week, students and instructors gathered on the lawn in front of Dey Hall to watch movies from the various countries whose languages we teach in our department. In fall 2021, as everyone came back to campus, the ROMS Film Club continued its mission to share movies from the Romance World, offering bimonthly screenings outdoors and in Toy Lounge. In Fall 2023, the Film Series morphed into a 4-day Film Festival. The first edition of this event was organized around the theme “The Other No More” and featured films made by and about underrepresented subjects. The four-day event was made possible by a generous grant from the ROMS DEI Committee. The second edition of the festival, in Spring 2024, titled “Animation!”, took
place at the end of February. Students and members of the UNC community (and beyond) gathered to watch animation films in Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian and Romanian. Cristobal Clemente Rodrígálvarez, a graduate student in Spanish, opened the festival with an informative presentation of the history of animation, while Dr. Abel Muñoz-Hermoso, Dr. Cécile Ruel, Dr. Hélène de Fays and Dr. Pedro Lopes de Almeida introduced the various movies. After each screening, students were given the opportunity to share their thoughts, while enjoying refreshments, in a collegial and relaxed atmosphere.

---

**Inspiring French Teachers**

9 - Xavier Gillet presenting at the workshop.

In partnership with the Cultural Services of the Embassy of France, Professors Dorothea Heitsch\(^\text{19}\) and Valérie Pruvost\(^\text{20}\) hosted a free professional development session for local K-12 teachers of French in April in Toy Lounge. Xavier Gillet from CLEMI (the Centre de Liaison de l'Enseignement et des Médias d'Information) led the workshop on "Sports and Olympism in the Media" designed to help French teachers use media coverage of the upcoming Paris Olympics and Paralympics to engage their students.

---

\(^{19}\) [https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/dorothea-heitsch/](https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/dorothea-heitsch/)

\(^{20}\) [https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/valerie-pruvost/](https://romancestudies.unc.edu/faculty-member/valerie-pruvost/)
**Graduate Student Awards**

**Departmental Teaching Awards**
- Buchan Excellence in Teaching Award for Spanish: Jhonn Guerra Banda
- Hardré Excellence in Teaching Award for French: Kirsten Kane
- Jennings Excellence in Teaching Award for Italian: Lorenzo D'Agostino

**Departmental Research Awards**
- Cooper Travel Fellowship for Italian: Giuseppina Gemboni
- Drake Travel Fellowship for Spanish: Mauricio Cabrera
- Druscilla French Summer Research Fellowship: Elena Peña-Argüeso
- Falvo Award for Excellence in Italian Grad Studies: Lorenzo D'Agostino
- Guthrie-Buchan Summer Research Fellowship: Katelyn Smith
- Hardré Summer Research Fellowship: Basma Jaafar
- McCulloch Award for Research Travel in French and Francophone Studies: Angela Gatto and David Gill
- Professor J. M. Polo de Bernabé Memorial Summer Research Award for Spanish: Meaghan Coogan


Gemboni, Giuseppina, "Women and (Im)Possible Journeys in Igiaba Scego’s La línea del colore," in Voyages, ed. by Emily Di Dodo and Rachel Hayes (MHRA Working Papers in the Humanities, 18 (2024)), pp. 25–33, doi:10.59860/wph.a4929a8


---, “El retrato fotográfico, la pose y la identidad. Leyendo la literatura como cámara lúcida,” in *Revisitar a Barthes*, edited by Iván Rodrigo Mendizábal, Editorial UASB


---

21http://doi.org/10.1353/tla.2024.a923804
22http://nacla.org/nayib-bukele-war-against-the-past
It is a bumper year for PhD graduates in Romance Studies. Among this year's graduates, several already have already confirmed their plans for next academic year and will be teaching at colleges and universities across the country:

Azza Ben Youssef: University of Nebraska, Lincoln
Parker Brookie: Converse University
Megan Fenrich: High Point University
Giuseppina Gemboni: Carnegie Mellon University
Alex Goldych: University of San Diego
Ana Maria Pozo: Agnes Scott College
Irina Randriamialdana: NC State
Manuel Sánchez Cabrera: Georgia Gwinnett College

Congratulations to all our PhD graduates!
Contact Us

DEPARTMENT OF
Romance Studies

To stay up-to-date on what we’re doing in ROMS, check out our website, listen to our podcast, follow us on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. And please drop us a note at romladmin@unc.edu if you’d like to share your news. We love to hear from our alumni and friends.

23 https://romancestudies.unc.edu/
24 https://romancestudies.unc.edu/roms-podcast/
25 https://www.facebook.com/uncroms
26 https://www.instagram.com/RomanceUnc/
27 https://twitter.com/RomanceUnc
28 mailto:romladmin@unc.edu