Letter from the Chair

Dey Hall is moving into the digital age. First-floor spaces that used to house classic language labs—complete with retro-style headsets and tape decks—are being transformed with video-conferencing technology. In these spaces, students practice their language and cultural competency in new ways. They connect with “course correspondents”: fellow UNC undergraduates spending a semester abroad who report on daily life in their host countries. In courses participating in the Dual Language Partnership Program, UNC students welcome young classmates from regional high schools into their discussions of Spanish-language literature and culture (more on this program inside). Portuguese classes on the NC Language Exchange beam in students from sister campuses across the state. Meanwhile, in graduate seminars, students have the chance to “meet the author” of the articles they are studying through video link with scholars throughout the world.

Romance Studies has always been about communicating and making connections across cultures. New tools enable us to extend this work—to let students interact with people and places beyond the classroom walls, to open our teaching to wider audiences. I’m grateful to work with an innovative faculty who are taking a thoughtful and creative approach to teaching language and culture with digital technology. You’ll be reading more about their initiatives in future issues of the newsletter.

Of course, much of our work continues to rely on decidedly low-tech activities: reading, writing, talking, traveling, and mentoring. On the following pages, you’ll discover a small sample of the faculty’s current research and creative writing projects. We celebrate 46 years of the UNC in Sevilla program. And we mark the retirement of Teaching Professor Glynis Cowell after 25 with the department. Looking forward and glancing back, the following pages show how we are building on the strong tradition of excellence that is Romance Studies at UNC.

Ellen Welch
Chair & Professor of French and Francophone Studies

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Celebrating 46 Years of UNC in Sevilla

The Andalusian city of Sevilla holds a special place in many a Tarheel’s heart. In addition to boasting the Alcázar Palace and a world-famous cathedral, Sevilla has been home to UNC’s flagship study abroad program in Spain since 1973. Over the years, thousands of students have had their educations enriched by the program’s combination of coursework, homestays, and extracurricular cultural activities. Patricia Nitz was a student in the program’s inaugural cohort (along with our own Teaching Professor Glynis Cowell!). Nitz remarks on the lasting impact that her study abroad experience has had on her life: “Through the Seville study abroad program I fell in love with a beautiful city, its culture, and its warm people, some of whom are still friends, like my host family. Later, I married a sevillano, pursued a career in the travel industry, and often return to Sevilla with my family.”

Certainly, the Sevilla program has evolved since 1973. Professor Emeritus Larry King served as Resident Director of the year in Sevilla program for the first time in the 1985-1986 academic year. He recalls: “I remember with affection the 20 students who ventured to Spain with me that year, in an age without cell phones, internet and email, or even fax machines. And most student housing did not have telephones, so we were definitely on our own, and probably the better off for it.” Having “jumped at the opportunity” to take over its directorship in 1987, he guided the program through unprecedented growth and diversification. He reflects: “Overseeing the study abroad experience of over 3,000 students over the years was an exhilarating experience, to say the least, with many wonderful moments and memories, such as the 30th year celebration that was held at the Reales Alcázares at the invitation of the mayor of Sevilla. But there were down moments as well—I was in residence with the students in Sevilla on 9/11/2001 when the towers came down and once again for the train bombings in Madrid on 11/M (March 11, 2004). And I was reminded that the world had become very complicated, much unlike 1985 when my adventure began.”

Despite these changes, in many ways the student experience in Sevilla has remained constant over the past 46 years. Undergraduates still stay with host families for a truly immersive cultural and linguistic experience, make life-long friends, and fall in love with Andalusian culture. Current undergrad Caroline Moore recalls of her recent experience: “My host mom was my absolute favorite part about Spain, not only was she the best cook I’ve ever met but she really treated [fellow student] Shelby and I as her own daughters - we talked for hours practically every night after dinner [and] introduced us to all her friends and neighbors.” Thanks to the dedication of program staff, UNC faculty, and the host families they have worked with for years, UNC students continue to experience Spain as true sevillanos and sevillanas.

Community Outreach with Local High School

In Spring 2018, Dr. Hélène de Fays launched the Department of Romance Studies’ Dual Language Partnership program in collaboration with the Dual Language (DL) Program at Jordan Matthews High School (JMHS) in Siler City, North Carolina. The project has two main objectives. First, the program enables high school students who have exhausted all available Spanish courses at their school to take hybrid courses through UNC that suit their linguistic and learning level, while also fulfilling state and county graduation requirements. It also offers UNC students taking upper-level Spanish courses a direct connection with young, native Spanish-speakers, thus offering them the opportunity to practice their language skills and participate in discussions about contemporary, social, and cultural topics.

In the year since the program’s launch, it has grown from one course offering to three per semester, and from 8 participants to 14. The program is now set to expand to other high schools in North Carolina that have a large population of Spanish heritage speakers or Dual Language programs.

Dr. de Fays is the Coordinator for Community Outreach for the Department of Romance Studies and serves as the director of this partnership program. As director, she serves as the liaison between the department and JMHS and oversees scheduling the courses and helping faculty with course design and format, as well as training instructors in the methodologies and technologies required for hybrid courses.
Dr. Tanner’s research focuses on nineteenth-century French literature and culture, with an emphasis on the novel and theories of space, power, modernity, and climate. Her work is fundamentally concerned with the politics of literature: how realist and naturalist novels represent and re-imagine a rapidly changing world, and how readers negotiate and rewrite the space those novels create in turn. Informed by thinkers like Jacques Rancière and Michel de Certeau, Dr. Tanner explores the novel as a potential space of resistance, one where readers become subjects and establish new forms of community by “writing” as they read, in ways that evade authorial design or control. While centered on particular historical contexts, both of her book projects (the first on novels of prostitution, the second on representations of weather and climate) look at what reading nineteenth-century French novels today can tell us about the work literature and literary study do in the world.

Her first book, *Mapping Prostitution: Sex, Space, and the Novel in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (under revision with Northwestern University Press), examines male-authored French naturalist novels of prostitution from the second half of the nineteenth century alongside period maps, treatises, and regulatory policies. The book makes two central claims: first, Dr. Tanner argues that authors like Huysmans, Goncourt, and Zola strategically localize working-class prostitutes—in narrative, in Paris, and in spaces of practice ranging from the brothel to the brasserie—to the streets—in order to make their name by making sense of their space and time. Second, Dr. Tanner contends that the prostitutes in these novels resist their own mapping, even as the novels that contain them reinforce their subject to the “police” logic of prostitution regulation in nineteenth-century France. This is not simply a paper resistance; novels plotted prostitutes where they were not supposed to be, making “clandestine” or unregistered prostitutes indiscriminately accessible to readers—and to prostitutes as readers. With their democratic circulation, these novels allow for the formation of “improper” communities across space, time, and the boundaries of the book. Reading these novels today, Dr. Tanner proposes, reveals how the regulation and representation of prostitutes aims to establish and delimit space and community, and shows how prostitution continues to map anxieties about France’s place in the world.

In Greek mythology, Agamemnon, king of Argos, returns from Troy to meet his death at the hands of Aegisthus, his wife’s lover. Years later, Orestes avenges his father by killing Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, his mother. For the crime of matricide, the Furies haunt Orestes and force him to seek refuge at Delphi. In my latest book, titled *Uso Errado da Vida / Wrong Use of Life* (Portugal, 2019), I draw inspiration from this myth and give life to a contemporary Orestes who wastes his days blaming his mother for everything that happens to him. In a world inhabited by ghosts and horrific creatures, Orestes recounts his past through the lens of someone who feels betrayed by a promiscuous mother and abandoned by a weak father, believing himself condemned to relive his parents’ mistakes and failures. More than a narrative of a man’s traumatic past, *Uso Errado da Vida*, my first novel, is an attempt to meditate upon topics that are relevant to understand the human condition, such as free will, depression, and sexual repression.

In my fictional works, I always reflect on life’s tragicomic essence. My short story collections—*A Prisão do Ético* (2011), *Dicionário das Distâncias* (2012), and *Sonhos de Lobo* (2014)—tell the stories of people who experience suffering, struggle to overcome their limitations, and rebel against the natural order of things. Even though I have never deliberately intended to write about my own life, my fiction could be considered autobiographical in the sense that it portrays a multitude of friends, relatives, and people I came across in Lisbon and in other cities and villages of Portugal, my country of origin. My writings are also a reflection of what the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset described as myself and my circumstances. For example, when I reread certain short stories that deal with young, ambitious writers seeking recognition and fame, I can’t help but think about my own struggles and dreams. Similarly, when I think about all the farmers, mechanics, and construction workers that inhabit my stories, I remember my childhood in the countryside and the resilience of people whose humble conditions were never an excuse to stop fighting. Through writing I recognize pictures of lost places and fragments of bygone days, interpret emotions, and make sense of my present reality.
After 25 years teaching and mentoring in the department, Teaching Professor Glynis Cowell is retiring in December 2019. Since 1994, Professor Cowell has taught Spanish language, overseen key curricular innovations, and trained generations of Graduate Teaching Fellows in the department. Romance Studies graduates teaching throughout the country recognize her lasting impact on their work. Greg Severyn (PhD 2017), now Assistant Professor of Spanish at Susquehanna University, testifies, “Having had Glynis as an invaluable teacher, mentor, and supporter in my life for ten years, it is with certainty when I say that my understanding of strong language pedagogy, in both theory and practice, has been defined by her. … [She] has shaped my career as a professor and, without a doubt, positively influenced so many of my own students’ lives.” Professor of Spanish at Virginia Tech Vinodh Venkatesh (UNC BA 2005, PhD 2011), who met Professor Cowell when he was still an undergraduate, remembers “her wisdom, gentleness, and caring attitude” which helped “chart a plan of study that would forever change my life.” María del Carmen Caña Jiménez (PhD 2011), currently Associate Professor at Virginia Tech, arrived in Dey Hall as an exchange student from Spain and immediately felt Professor Cowell’s support: “More than a professor, a course coordinator, or an institution in the Department, Glynis became my American mum and I will never be thankful enough.”

Teaching Associate Professor Josepha Lindquist speaks for many Romance Studies faculty when she says: “I cannot put into words the greatness that is Glynis. She is more than a colleague and a mentor to me and to all of us; she is a beloved friend.” With gratitude for all the ways she has enriched our lives in Dey Hall and beyond, we wish Professor Cowell much happiness in her retirement!

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