Alumni Spotlight

Carol Ringrose Alexander graduated from Oklahoma State in 1986 with degrees in Journalism and Spanish. She then earned a Master’s Degree in Spanish from Middlebury College, taking the opportunity to complete most of her coursework in Madrid, Spain, fully immersing herself in Spanish.

Following her degree work, Carol worked as a public relations assistant for La Madeleine French Bakery and Café, as a reporter for The Journal Record in Oklahoma City, as the Director of Public Relations for the Presbyterian Health Foundation, and as the Director of Development for Casady School.

In 2000, Carol became an investment advisor and today is Executive Vice President of Retirement Investment Advisors in Oklahoma City. During the last two decades, she has earned a number of financial certifications, taught a financial planning course for Oklahoma Christian University’s MBA program, offered financial literacy seminars for a variety of audiences, and penned articles on financial topics for several magazines.

In addition to her financial career, she sits on the Board of Trustees for the Science Museum Oklahoma. A member of St. Luke’s United Methodist Church, she has previously served as Chair of its Board of Trustees. She has also been President of the Alumni Board of Oklahoma State’s College of Arts and Sciences.

In September of this year, she received the Distinguished Alumni award from the Department of Languages and Literatures.

We had a chance to ask her a few questions for this issue of the newsletter.

What initially garnered your interest in foreign language study?

When I was in high school, my mother and I spent two weeks in Antigua, Guatemala, living with the Ruiz family during Holy Week on a Friendship Force trip. It was an incredible experience! They had four children who were about my age, and I wanted to be able to communicate more fluently with them. I kept studying Spanish until I achieved that goal.

Then it became a passion that changed my life. After earning degrees in Journalism and Spanish, I obtained a Masters in Spanish from Middlebury College and lived in Spain for a year. We have hosted children of friends from Spain during two summers and have travelled as a family to Spain, Peru, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Ecuador, including the Galapagos Islands.

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I am very pleased to present the inaugural edition of the Newsletter from the Department of Languages and Literatures. First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Jonathan Ludwig for putting this newsletter together and our administrative assistant, Megan Robinson, for her work on formatting it.

Since I became Head in summer of 2015, the Department has undergone three major changes: one in name – from Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures to Department of Languages and Literatures; another in location – the main office has moved from the 3rd floor of Gundersen to the 1st; and the third in instruction, as we went from teaching first- and second-year courses 5 days a week to 3 days a week. We also had changes in the faculty. Some of our tenured faculty – in Classical Languages, French, Russian, and Spanish – retired, and our instructors for Chinese and Japanese left. In response, we hired two Teaching Assistant Professors (TAPs) – one for Greek and Latin, and the other for Russian – two lecturers, one for Chinese and one for Japanese – two tenure-track Assistant Professors in Spanish, who are featured in this edition of the Newsletter, as well as four Visiting Assistant Professors (VAPs), one in French and three in Spanish.

Our website: https://www.languages.okstate.edu has been completely revamped at the initiative of Dr. Aaron Roggia and is now maintained by our lab assistant, Nick Howland. The Department of Languages and Literatures was also assigned space for a new Language Learning Center on the 1st floor of Gundersen. We are very excited about this initiative which, at this time, remains a work in progress.

I hope you will enjoy reading Department news, as well as what is going on with our alumni, students, and faculty!

Sincerely,
Karin Schestokat, Ph.D.
Professor of German & Head

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT, CONTINUED:

Carol Ringrose Alexander and Family

Could you tell us about your academic experiences at Oklahoma State? What inspired you to continue your Spanish studies at Middlebury?

I had a great experience at Oklahoma State! Upon graduation, I wanted to live and study abroad and was fortunate to receive a Bailey Family Memorial Scholarship for study abroad. It helped with the cost of the Middlebury College Master’s program.

What do you see as the main values of foreign language study today?

It was on a trip to Cambodia and Vietnam that I realized how much I take the ability to communicate was so limited there. Speaking Spanish has dramatically enhanced my life both at home and when traveling. While it is true that speaking English is adequate in most places, there is a lot that you miss. And people appreciate your effort to communicate in their language. Making the effort to speak another person’s language resulted in better communication, fascinating relationships, incredible travel, and a greater understanding of the English language that I would not have had otherwise. Languages matter!

What advice do you have for our foreign language majors and minors as they progress through their studies and prepare to go out into the world?

- Do it now;
- People will appreciate your effort to speak their language;
- Don’t be afraid to make mistakes;
- Get to the point where you are fluent in the language you are studying. If you do this, even though your skill set may not be perfect if you aren’t diligent in maintaining it, you should always be able to communicate.
The Department of Languages and Literatures is pleased to welcome two new tenure-track faculty to campus this academic year: Stephanie Rohner and Emmanuel Velayos. We had the opportunity to ask both of them a few questions.

**Stephanie Rohner**

*Can you tell us a little bit about your personal and academic background?*

I was born and raised in Lima, Peru. I did my BA in Hispanic Literature at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú and taught there for a few years before beginning my graduate studies. I completed a PhD in Spanish Literature, with a minor in Italian Literature, at Yale University in May of 2018.

*What is your main research interest and what first led you to explore that interest?*

My area of specialization is Colonial Latin American Literature. The questions that drive my research concern the hybridity of colonial cultural production. I address the intersections of European and indigenous literary, historiographical, and visual discourses in the transatlantic circulation of native knowledge.

Most recently, I have focused on the work of the Mexican Jesuit Francisco Javier Clavigero (1731–1787) and his efforts to compile the pre-Columbian history of Mexico and to systematize native epistemologies from his exile in Italy.

When I was an undergrad in Peru I had the opportunity to be part of a research group led by one of my professors that explored 18th-century Peruvian literature and culture. I decided to focus on Mexico during my PhD because I was interested in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which intellectuals reframed the Enlightenment in the many kingdoms of Spain’s empire.

*How do you tie your research to your teaching?*

I have always found teaching to be a fulfilling counterpart to my academic research. I have had fruitful teaching experiences drawing from my research and area of specialization while teaching advanced courses on Latin American literature and culture. But even in intermediate Spanish courses, as I strongly believe in the effectiveness of connecting language learning and culture, I have incorporated pre-Columbian and native colonial iconography, as well as works such as Columbus’ Letter of Discovery to encourage students to reflect on the complex origins of what we know today as Latin America. These materials also have allowed me to challenge students to discuss and contest preconceptions about indigenous cultural production.

*What is your favorite class to teach and why?*

I really enjoy teaching courses on my area of specialization. I am aware of the challenge students face in reading a literary text in a foreign language, especially if it is an Early Modern work. For this reason, I balance working on the comprehension of a text and the development of analytical skills. It is one of the most gratifying experiences to see students engage in meaningful conversations in the target language about works that are challenging even for native speakers.

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**Emmanuel Velayos**

*Can you tell us a little bit about your personal and academic background?*

I was born in Lima, Peru, where I completed a BA in Hispanic Literature. Then I traveled to New York to pursue doctoral studies in Latin American culture at NYU. I completed my PhD in 2017 and held a postdoctoral appointment at NYU for a year. Before coming to OSU, I received a summer scholarship to participate in a postdoctoral seminar at L’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. I was also awarded the 2018–2019 N.E.H. Postdoctoral Fellowship in Poetics at Emory University, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, an honor I declined to begin my tenure-track position.

*What is your main research interest and what first led you to explore that interest?*

My research explores the relationship between lettered and performative cultures in Latin America through the lenses of media aesthetics, postcolonialism, and race studies. I specifically study how literary and intellectual discourses relate to embodied media of visualization and inscription, such as graffiti, tattoos, and penmanship. What led me to explore these topics was the reading of a criminological treatise about tattoos by a late 19th-century Mexican intellectual, Francisco Martínez Baca. I was intrigued by Martínez’s fascination with criminal and indigenous tattoos and by his attempts at deciphering them through literary and lettered means.
How do you tie your research to your teaching?

My research examines the performatic and embodied dimension of lettered practices, which has led me to unearth a fluid relationship between intellectual endeavors and embodied forms of knowledge production and transmission. By the same token, in my teaching I engage with the expressive components of language and cultural pedagogy, so as to structure my classes as dynamic learning environments. I teach grammar and vocabulary through pantomime charades, impromptu debates, and role-plays. Likewise, in my culture and literary courses, I deploy a range of participatory activities.

What is your favorite class to teach and why?

I really enjoy teaching surveys of Latin American and Hispanic Literatures. I particularly like to restructure the contents of canonical surveys by stressing specific categories such as gender and genre, representations of the body, and images and words. In doing so, I pursue two goals for my students: 1) to provide them with a comprehensive understanding of Hispanic Literatures; and 2) to help them develop a moral and literary sensibility to discuss topics regarding gender, race, and aesthetics.

Alumni News:

**Brianna Bulard** (German ‘19) began a global operations management position at Amazon in Seattle in August 2017.

**Alexana Carter** (Russian ‘17) is working as a Special Education Instructional Aide at Lee Middle School in San Angelo, TX while she works on her teaching certification.

**Kayleigh Karinen** (Spanish ‘18) took advantage of the Study Abroad programs at OSU, which led her to study in Spain, Chile, and Finland. For her last semester, Kayleigh attended the University of Helsinki and studied the Finnish language in order to connect with her Finnish heritage. At the completion of the program, Kayleigh decided to stay in Finland and has now been there almost two years. Kayleigh was a member of the historic 2018 Finnish National Cheerleading Team that won the World Championship held in April in Orlando, Florida. Finland became the first team to beat the USA in the women's division since the competition started in 2007. Kayleigh now works full-time coaching cheerleading in Helsinki, Finland and travels to coach within Finland and throughout Europe on the weekends. While Kayleigh is not currently using Spanish in her everyday work, she has just been named the 2019 Head Coach of the Spanish National Cheerleading All Girl & Coed teams.

**Iris Owens** (German/History ‘18) won a Fulbright to teach English in Hamburg, Germany, 2018–2019.

**Calvin H. Warner** (Spanish ‘14) is a student at Vanderbilt Law School, Nashville, Tennessee. In his note to us he wrote: “I'm certainly of the belief that my background in foreign languages is helpful in a field that values precise writing. I think studying another language helps you think critically about your own language and that depth of thought is rewarded on standardized tests like the LSAT and also in reading dense texts in law classes. I also think the small classes and engaged professors in the languages department at OSU help reinforce those skills.” He concludes that he would be happy to chat with any OSU foreign language students who are working on law school applications, especially if they're interested in coming to Vanderbilt!

Faculty News:

**Isabel Alvarez-Sancho** (Spanish) received tenure and was promoted to Associate Professor. In March, she presented “What Does Neutrality Mean? Spain from the Great War to the Civil War,” as part of the series “The Great War and its Legacy” at the Edmon Low Library on the OSU campus. She is currently on sabbatical in Spain, completing a book examining narrative resistance from exile during Francoism. In particular, she is looking at novels and autobiographies written in inner and territorial exile after the Spanish Civil War, positing exile as a phenomenon of not only physical but also cultural displacement.

**Rachael Cullick** (Greek and Latin) is now Teaching Assistant Professor. In January, she presented “Transforming Violence in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses,*” at the annual meeting of the Society for Classical Studies, and in April, she presented “Venus among Poisons: Harmonia’s Necklace and the Evils of Seduction” at the annual meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South.

**Hector Garza** (Spanish) published “The Verisimilitude Effect in William Gilmore Simms’s *Vasconselos*” in *The Simms Review.*

**Perry Gethner** (French) presented two conference papers: one was at a symposium at Washington University, St. Louis, dealing with French women writers, where he spoke about novels influenced by the activities and values of salon culture; the second was at a conference devoted to the theme of civility in early modern French literature, held in Lecce in southeastern Italy, where he spoke about plays featuring honorable or malicious courtiers. In 2018 he published two articles, plus critical editions of two tragedies of the 17th-century playwright Thomas Corneille. He serves as part of an international team of scholars preparing the first modern edition of this author's complete plays.

**Jonathan Z. Ludwig** (Russian) is now Teaching Assistant Professor. In April, he presented “Putin Still Dreams of Asia: The Eurasian Economic Union and the Quest for Regional Power,” at the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies, Cambridge, UK. In May, he presented “Learning Scenarios and the Art of Active Learning,” at the Big 12 Teaching and Learning Conference in Fort Worth, and in July, he presented “The EEU, OBOR, and the Race to Control Central Asia,” at the Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, Sydney, Australia. In May, he published “Uzbekistan’s Second Chance,” for SAGE International, Australia.
Students News:

Stephanie Berson (Latin) presented at the Mid-American Medieval Association in Lawrence, Kansas. She gave a presentation titled “Capturing Christ: Christological Interpretation of the Mystic Hunt of the Unicorn,” an analysis of the hunt of the unicorn from 13th–14th Latin bestiaries in order to find visual and textual connections between the interpretation of the unicorn and medieval ideals about Christ’s gender and sex.

Jacob Burch-Konda (Animal Sciences) won a Critical Language Scholarship for Intermediate Turkish.

Ellie Scheaffer (German/Russian) published “The Opposite of Pragmatism: Nazarbayev’s Astana 20 Years Later” on the blog site for New York University’s Jordan Center for the Advanced Study of Russia.

Phi Beta Kappa:

In May 2018, Phi Beta Kappa inducted 29 new members, seven of whom were majors in the Department of Languages and Literatures: Abigail Elizabeth Buller (French); Ryan M. Hollands (Spanish); Madison Hutchins (French); Caroline E. Lowery (Spanish); Amanda Rose McEnroe (Spanish); Riley P. Smith (Spanish); and Madison Lynn White (Spanish). OSU’s chapter of Phi Beta Kappa (Gamma of Oklahoma) was established in 2013. Perry Gethner (French) has served as chapter president since 2013.

Club News:

The ASL Club participated in Deaf Awareness Week in Tulsa in September, supporting the Total Source for Hearing-loss and Access (TSHA) Agency at Incredible Plaza in an event that attracted over 600 participants. Locally, the ASL Club continues to sign the national anthem at all home football games, hosted a sign-night at the Student Union Theater for the movie Quiet Place, hosts monthly silent dinners at the First Presbyterian Church and offers regularly scheduled deaf coffee nights. In October, they interpreted The Three Musketeers at the Seretean Center for the Performing Arts. Many of their events attract participants from all around the state and region.

The OSU German Club enjoyed the amazing opportunity this semester to participate in the International Expo hosted by the International Student Organization. This semester was the first time the Club was able to participate in the event, and it went amazingly well. The German Club sold Apfelstreusel Cake and authentic German Shortbread cookies for everyone to enjoy. A week later the OSU German Club hosted their annual Oktoberfest, bringing a piece of German tradition and culture to the heart of Oklahoma.
French Club is an excellent way to learn and practice the French language, and experience the culture. We make crêpes, play Pétanque (French lawn bowling) on Library Lawn, and every semester we travel to either Tulsa or OKC to eat French cuisine, all while practicing French and making friends.

**Congratulations:**

Our Spring 2018 Graduates:

- Taylor Barnes (Spanish)
- Brooke Bastie (Spanish)
- April Bullard-Bollinger (Spanish)
- Rebecca Corbin (Spanish)
- Meghan Darst (Spanish)
- Mitchell Ford (Spanish)
- Ryan Frary (Russian)
- Aubry Huff (French)
- Kelsea Hull (French)
- Kayleigh Karinen (Spanish)
- Macy McKay (Spanish)
- Hannah Moriarty (Spanish)
- Maggie Rahhal (Spanish)
- Jordan Rahm (German)
- Lynsey Rinner (French)

Julie Bills and Eric Turcat have been with the Department for five years.
Matthew O'Neill has been with the Department for fifteen years.

Megan Robinson received the Outstanding Staff Award from the College of Arts and Sciences.

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