

department of
romance
languages and
literatures



Inside

- 3** Celebrating 30 Years:
Annual American Association for Italian
Studies Conference

RLL Welcomes Eloisa Cartonera
- 4** Department News
Professor Emeritus of Spanish Frank Casa

The External Review Committee Visits RLL

- 6** Undergraduate News
Winner of the Prize!

In Her Own Words: Sarah Kesler

- 8** Graduate News

- 10** A Talk with Allison Riccardi

- 11** Alumni News

Message from the Chair



Department Chair
Cristina Moreiras-Menor

First of all, I would like to recognize Michèle Hannoosh for her hard work during her term as Chair. The Department of Romance Languages and Literatures is grateful for her service and we wish her the best in her return to teaching and research.

As new Chair of the department my aim for the next five years is to keep RLL strong in its teaching and research missions. We are lucky to have an excellent group of undergraduates who are interested in becoming proficient in the languages and cultures of the Romance language-speaking world. We are very proud to have one of the largest numbers of concentrators and minors in LSA. Indeed, we are one of the largest language programs at UM. Among this large number of students I would like to congratulate all the RLL seniors that graduated in April 2010, 169 concentrators and 118 minors, and in particular those who won RLL awards. I am very happy to report that our department has been the recipient of a great honor this year, winning the Departmental Award for Contributions to the Undergraduate Initiative. (To learn more, please see pg. 6)

I am very proud of working with our faculty and I would like to share with you some of their accomplishments and awards: During 2009-2010, Alina Clej received a Fulbright Fellowship for a project on the Romanian exile; Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola was awarded a Fulbright U.S. Scholar Grant to teach and carry out research in Colombia; María Dorantes and Ann Hilberry won a Gilbert Whitaker Fund Grant for introducing intercultural case studies into the Spanish 231 curriculum; Dennis Pollard was awarded a Level II Grant from the LSA Instructional Technology Committee for the project "Integrating Advanced Grammar Review and Introductory Literature Courses Through Hybridization"; and Giorgio Bertellini won the 2010 American Association for Italian Studies prize for his book *Italy in Early Italian Cinema: Race, Landscape and the Picturesque*. This 2011-2012 academic year, Catherine Brown has won the Michigan Humanities Award for winter 2011; David Caron won a Guggenheim Fellowship, and Michèle Hannoosh will spend the academic year in Massachusetts as a Clark/Oakley Fellow at the Clark Institute and Williams College. Finally I wish to congratulate Giorgio Bertellini for his promotion to associate professor with tenure, and to Frieda Ekotto and Javier Sanjines for their promotion to full professor. Congratulations to all of them! (To read more of our faculty's accomplishments, please see pgs. 4-5)

I also would like to recognize the outstanding accomplishments of our graduate students. Many of them have been awarded prestigious awards such as the Rackham Pre-Doctoral Fellowship, the Foreign Languages and Area Studies Fellowship (FLAS), and Mellon Summer Dissertation Awards. Some have defended their PhD dissertations with success and have begun their careers teaching at other universities and colleges or are holding postdoctoral fellowships. We wish them the best in their new life! (To learn more about RLL graduate activities see pgs. 8-9)

Last year the department was a very busy place with invited speakers and activities. Among these, the Center of European Studies (CES) organized, with RLL, a series of conferences on Spain as part of its program on emerging democracies. We also enjoyed a visit from the group Eloisa Cartonera, a non-profit community-based publishing cooperative based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. RLL had the honor of hosting the 30th Annual American Association for Italian Studies Conference, which was attended by almost 200 scholars from all over the world. Alison Cornish was a key organizer of this event and I would like to congratulate her publically for her outstanding endeavors. Finally, we said goodbye to Frank Casa who retired after many decades of dedication to the research and teaching of the Spanish Golden Age and Modern Literature. (Please read more about Frank on pg. 4)

I want to end this message by acknowledging and thanking our donors. We are extremely grateful for your generosity and support, which allows us to support both our graduate and undergraduate students with scholarships, internship stipends, awards and prizes for outstanding academic work and initiative. Without your continued support we would not be able to do this for our students. RLL would love to hear from you, so please stop by the MLB if you are ever in Ann Arbor, or send us an alumni update to include in "Alumni News." (For all alumni news, please see pg. 11)

Yours sincerely,

Cristina Moreiras-Menor, Chair

Department Chair: Cristina Moreiras-Menor
Associate Chair: Enrique García Santo Tomás

Graduate Chair: Vincenzo Binetti
Editor/Designer: April Caldwell

Celebrating 30 Years

Annual American Association for Italian Studies Conference

by Pierluigi Erbaggio, graduate student of Italian

In April 2010, a cloud of ash drifting from an erupting volcano in Iceland captured the attention of many. For days, the news shows' opening reports and the favorite subject of casual conversation was the movement of this flying grey blur over the European skies. While around the world concerns mounted about the way the name of the Icelandic volcano is pronounced (a few tutorials are available on YouTube if you intend to learn how to say Eyjafjallajökull), RLL's Professor Alison Cornish started wondering if the closure of European airspace caused by the catastrophic eruption would alter the program of the American Association for Italian Studies (AAIS) 2010 Conference that she had worked on over the previous weeks.

Despite the menacing volcano, though, on April 22, 2010, the XXX Annual Conference for the American Association for Italian Studies (AAIS) opened at the University of Michigan in Palmer Commons. As Professor Cornish had anticipated, the program had to be modified due to a few presenters' inability to travel. Nonetheless, with the participation of almost 200 scholars, the three-day gathering was a successful event.

AAIS is one of the most important international organizations focused on Italian studies. One of the strengths of the association is its annual conference, which offers a clear picture of what is being studied by and what is sparking the interests of Italian scholars. Professor Cornish, Italian Elementary Language Director Romana Habekovic

and Professor Karla Mallette were the key organizers of this event and served as a liaison between UM and AAIS.

Forming a program of more than 60 panels, the conference attracted attendees from a variety of national and international institutions, including Yale University, University of Toronto, UCLA, Princeton University, Columbia University, Cornell University, National University of Ireland, Università Roma Tre, University of Cardiff, and the Università di Lecce. This year's keynote speaker was Professor Salvatore Settis, former Getty's Institute director and currently director of the prestigious Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. His address, without a doubt one of the highlights of the conference, was an engaging presentation on the preservation of the Italian landscape and cultural heritage.

The Italian faculty of RLL participated in the conference with enthusiasm, presenting papers, organizing sessions, and acting as panel chairs. RLL sends a special thank you to them in recognition of their hard work, as well as to RLL staff member April Caldwell for her promotional, organizational, and logistic support.



Hamilton Fountain acquired by UM in 1919, depicts Youth, Labor, Poetry, and Philosophy. It was used on the 2010 AAIS Conference website

RLL Welcomes Eloisa Cartonera



Professor Juli Highfill (L) organized the Cartonera visit



Workshop participants experiment with making their own books

On October 5, 2009, RLL was pleased to host a hands-on workshop and talk introducing Eloisa Cartonera. Eloisa Cartonera is a non-profit community based publishing cooperative located in Buenos Aires. Founded in 2003, Cartonera publishes low-cost, avant-garde works by both established and emerging writers throughout Latin America. Cartonera's books have covers made of cardboard, which is gathered by collectors called *cartoneros*, and hand-painted with tempera.

Cardboard collecting represents a distinctive economic and social phenomenon in Latin America. The *cartoneros* are unemployed workers, excluded from the labor and commercial system, who eke out a living by gathering discarded paper boxes and selling them to the recycling industry.

Eloisa Cartonera emerged in the wake of Argentina's economic crash, when it began purchasing cardboard for its book covers from the *cartoneros* at five times the price paid by the recycling industry. Though it has no formal distribution system or publicity budget, it has published nearly 200 titles and widened the circle of readers by offering the cheapest books on the market. Through its creative and innovative project, Eloisa Cartonera promotes literary culture while simultaneously showing the power of culture to build alternatives to poverty and social exclusion in the midst of extreme social, political, and economic circumstances.

Professor Emeritus of Spanish Frank Casa

Recently retired Professor Frank Casa reflects on 41 years at the University of Michigan



Professor Casa acted as Chair of RLL from 1973 to 1985

Would you talk a little about your background and family life?

I was born in a small town in Calabria, Italy, called San Lucido, although there is no saint of that name. A local historian says that it was originally a Greek colony by the name of Tamesis. I came to the United States with my mother, sister and brother when I was 14 years old. So, I half grew up in the States, particularly, the Southside of Chicago. I have been married for 53 years. I have two daughters: Maria lives in

Rome and works at the Food and Agriculture Organization; and Laura lives in North Carolina and is a lecturer in Italian at Duke University. I have two granddaughters, Olivia and Octavia. My brother and sister live in Chicago.

Were you always interested in teaching and becoming a professor?

No, originally, I thought of going into import-export with Latin America and for that I began to study economics and Latin American history. Along the way, I got side-tracked into literature.

When did you start teaching at UM?

I was a teaching fellow in 1958 and became a faculty member in 1969.

What is your favorite topic of research?

My field of research has always been the theater of Spain's Golden Age but during a sabbatical year in Spain I became interested in 20th century Spanish theater.

What has been the most rewarding part of your time here at UM?

Of course the most rewarding part was teaching, especially the students who were keen on learning and showed enthusiasm for their work. Also, working with colleagues, some of whom became good friends.

What will you miss most about teaching at UM?

Proposing new ideas and concepts to students and seeing their response to them.

What do you think makes RLL unique?

Everything depends on the individuals that compose it. During my 40 years in the department, I have seen the full array of temperaments: the ambitious, the intractable, the gentle, the generous, the person dedicated wholeheartedly to scholarship, and the extremely cooperative. At this particular moment, I see the department as a cohesive whole with people getting along splendidly and working with great success. It's important for the members to work to maintain balance and consideration for all positions.

How has the student body changed over the years?

I think there is a greater preoccupation with grades which makes students worry whether a particular exercise is important or not and how much it will count toward the final grade.

Besides Spanish and English, do you speak any other language(s)?

I speak Italian and French (when I have to). However, my regret has always been that I never became reasonably fluent in French. I also speak my southern Italian dialect which is considerably different from standard Italian.

What are your plans after retirement?

I have no specific plans. What I would like to do is spend more time by the sea. I was born in a coastal town and the sea has a strong attraction for me. I suppose that I will visit my daughters and granddaughters more frequently. However, since my life has always been connected with reading, I presume that will continue. Years ago, I built a brick terrace in the back of the house which now needs repair. I expect that I will replace bricks from time to time. I also look forward to visiting Istanbul.



Consulate General of Spain Javier Rupérez (L) presented Professor Casa (R) with the Encomienda de Número de la Orden de Isabel la Católica, October 2009

Focus on Faculty

Professor of Spanish Ryan Szpiech's articles were recently published in 2010: "In Search of Ibn Sīnā's 'Oriental Philosophy' in Medieval Castile" in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 20 (2010): 185-206; "Scrutinizing History: Polemic and Exegesis in Pablo de Santa María's Siete edades del mundo" in *Medieval Encounters* 16.1 (2010): 96-142; and "Polemical Strategy and the Rhetoric of Authority in Abner of Burgos / Alfonso of Valladolid" in *Late Medieval Jewish Identities* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010).

Italian Elementary Program Director Romana Habekovic and Italian Coordinator Amaryllis Rodriguez organized, chaired, and presented "Ad Alta Voce: A Creative and Proactive Way to Enhance Italian Language Learning," at the American Association for Italian Studies (AAIS) 2010 Conference, at UM, April 22-24, 2010.

Italian Elementary Program Director Romana Habekovic presented "Tommaso Landolfi's Thematic Collisions," by invitation at Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, New York, April 30, 2010.

Professor of Spanish Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes attended the first-ever "Festival de la palabra" literary conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and also participated in the "Terceras Jornadas contra la Homofobia" (Third Annual Week Against Homophobia), both held in May 2010. He also gave talks at conferences in Cartagena, Colombia, and in Tepoztlán, Morelos, Mexico, in March and July 2010.

Professor of French Jarrod Hayes co-edited *Comparatively Queer: Interrogating Identities across Time, Crossing Cultures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). He also published two articles: "Queer Roots in Africa" in *Topographies of Race and Gender: Mapping Cultural Representations* 2 vols. Spec. issue of *Annals of Scholarship* (2009) and "Approaches to Teaching the Maghrebian Novel: Allegory at the Crossroads" in *Teaching the African Novel* (New York: MLA, 2009).

Coordinator of the Business French Program Rachael Criso will present "Using Technology for Global Learning" at the Provost's seminar on teaching entitled, "Educating Globally Competent Students," in November 2011. She will also present her Virtual Partnership with a university in Bordeaux, France for French 380 and French 414, where her students collaborate via Skype once a week.

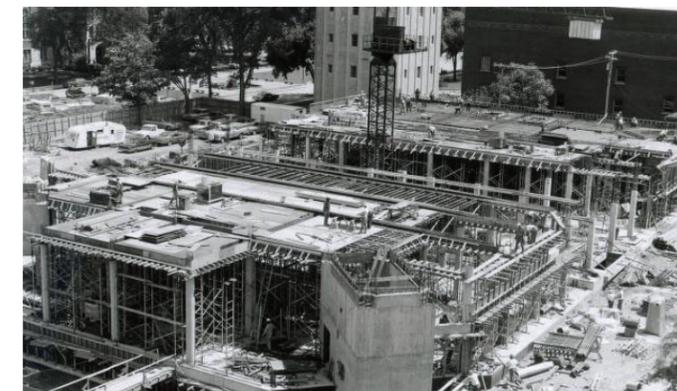
The External Review Committee Visits RLL

On March 29, 2010, RLL had the honor of welcoming external reviewers to the department. Four professors from Harvard University, University of Kansas, University of Notre Dame and the University of Virginia spent two days in the department talking with lecturers, faculty, graduate and undergraduate students, and staff to learn the specifics of our programs, teaching and research.

The External Review Committee stressed the high reputation of RLL as "long, distinguished, and continuing," because of "the very high quality of its faculty, its students, and the excellence of its programs." This was a great compliment and confirmation to RLL which has been teaching Romance languages since 1847.

RLL was commended on the quality of our faculty who "represent all the significant literary periods and cultural topics, and cooperate with scholars in numerous related fields across the university, such as anthropology, history, women's studies, and Latin American studies, to name but a few." We were also praised specifically for our junior faculty and the mentoring support provided to them.

In addition, the Committee was pleased with the enthusiasm and satisfaction our graduate students expressed regarding the quality and climate of RLL. Undergraduates, at several levels of study, were also interviewed and "had high praise



Housed in the Romance Languages Building from 1928 to 1959, RLL was finally moved to the Modern Languages Building shortly after building completion in 1971

for the faculty and for their courses in general."

The Committee left us with a comprehensively positive report that also offered some constructive suggestions to help us become a stronger department in the future. RLL is very grateful for the effort, efficiency and thoroughness of our review guests. We are committed to being a great department in which students, faculty and staff are able to enjoy a happy and productive working atmosphere and we believe that the review will help us continue to reach this goal.



Winner of the Prize!

by Professor Michèle Hannoosh

RLL was selected as the recipient of the 2010 Departmental Award for Contributions to the Undergraduate Initiative



Spanish Elementary Program Director María Dorantes, Spanish Lecturer Tatiana Calixto, and students on the GIEU trip to Perú in summer 2009

programs and research opportunities for undergraduates. RLL is participating in a new “languages partnership” initiative, launched by the School of Education, to send student interns into the Ann Arbor public schools to teach Spanish in the third grade.

RLL has also strengthened advising, and the professional resources and activities it offers for undergraduates. Our website is a major resource for students, with links to special library resources and to international resources on campus, information on letters of recommendation, becoming a tutor or translator, volunteering, or using foreign languages in the Ann Arbor area, extensive material on study abroad and career advising, and a dedicated web-page for job and internship opportunities, with information regarding workshops on career-related topics such as preparing a résumé. We offer career co-advising, in which students can have a joint meeting about career opportunities with an advisor from RLL and another from Career Services. We spearheaded the LSA Language Fair, to provide information to students about the variety of languages offered at UM.

The department is delighted that its efforts to ensure the highest quality experience for students, both in the classroom and outside it, have been recognized by the College in this way. The award will be conferred by Dean McDonald at the first LSA faculty meeting in fall 2010.

Sponsored by the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA), the award rewards units for their contributions to the reinvigoration of undergraduate education in LSA. In making the award, the College recognized the many ways in which RLL has contributed to excellence in undergraduate education. In a letter to past Chair Michèle Hannoosh, Robert E. Megginson, associate dean for Undergraduate and Graduate Education, wrote: “In addition to enrolling more than 7,000 students in its courses during the regular academic year, your department has made significant, innovative contributions to several areas of undergraduate education that are important priorities for the College and University.”

Several areas were singled out for special recognition. First, RLL’s efforts to enable more undergraduates to go abroad and earlier in their academic careers: we have been identifying high-quality study-abroad programs for students in the second, as well as third year; RLL faculty have been very active and successful in taking students abroad through the Global Intercultural Experience for Undergraduates (GIEU) and Integrating Study Abroad into the Curriculum (ISAC) programs; we run a highly successful summer internship program in French; and perhaps most important, we have made a strong commitment to providing undergraduate scholarships for study and internships abroad. We now have the greatest number of scholarships for students going abroad of any unit in the College, and we continue to prioritize this in our development efforts.

Second, RLL was cited for being a leader in transforming language teaching through media-intensive instruction. For example, all sections of Spanish 232 and intensive courses are currently taught in media-enhanced rooms, and instructors are given a database of media-rich activities to support the teaching of the course material. Technology has been used effectively in other courses too, such as improving pronunciation in Italian, and developing intercultural competence through on-line case studies of “real-life” situations in Spanish. Students in Business French log on to Skype each week and collaborate live with peer students at our partner institution in Bordeaux, France.

Third, RLL was praised for its significant curricular innovation. In recent years, we have introduced a new concentration in “Romance Languages and Literatures” which enables students to concentrate in more than one Romance language and explore the connections and interrelations between them. We have reinvigorated our honors

In Her Own Words: Sarah Kesler

Recent alumni Sarah Kesler BS '2009 (double concentrator in Spanish and Brain, Behavior, and Cognitive Science) talks about her love of the Spanish language and the experiences that developed it



Sarah with her students

I developed my passion for language learning after a one month trip to Argentina with UM’s Global Intercultural Experiences for Undergraduates (GIEU) program. Our group of 11 students and Raquel Gonzalez, RLL lecturer in Spanish, spent four weeks travelling through the country with the purpose of immersing ourselves in the culture and the language. We met with local authors, chatted with street vendors, bargained for cheap gifts, participated in workshops with Argentinean students, and attempted to understand the country’s shaky political situation – all in our rudimentary, un-conjugated and ill-tensed Spanish.

I returned from Argentina on a high from having communicated with another person in a different language for the first time in my life. I eagerly continued my Spanish studies and decided to spend a semester abroad in Granada, Spain. German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte said, “The language of a people is its soul,” and it was in Granada that I truly began to appreciate language as a crucial part of one’s culture, as a revelation of who people are and where they come from. As my language skills improved, I also found that the nuances of a language often reveal the attitudes of its people: I could never have appreciated the laid-back, relaxed nature typical of the Spanish without understanding the *No pasa nada* used at least twice in every conversation – It’s okay, doesn’t matter, don’t worry about it. *No pasa nada*.

After graduating from the University of Michigan in May 2009, I received a Fulbright scholarship to teach English this past year in Spain. I was surprised to find out that I would be spending the year in the 3-year-old classrooms at a primary school in Castellón that was undergoing its first year with a new trilingual curriculum (English, Spanish and

Valenciano, the local dialect). I had the pleasure of working with two wonderful teachers, Rocío and Liz, and 48 pudgy, snotty-nosed, curious, adorable little children who couldn’t even speak their own language properly yet and made me laugh every day. Although we faced opposition from some *valencianistas*, certain teachers who were exceptionally proud of their regional culture and language, we managed to persevere with the 80% English curriculum while still teaching kids about their native culture and customs: roasting chestnuts for the *Castañera* festival, parading around the block dressed as Rainbow Fish for Carnival, baking Easter *monas*, climbing up the mountain to a hermitage for Castellón’s Magdalena festivities, and always singing the Happy Birthday song in three languages.



Sarah helps Egor write his name

Aside from teaching in the classroom, my job in Castellón allowed me to work closely with a diverse group of teachers, coordinating, collaborating and using our creativity to establish a solid foundation for the new trilingual regimen so that it might continue to thrive in future years. I was impressed by the Valencian community’s commitment to taking on such an ambitious project and I often thought about how lucky those kids were to be growing up learning three languages. My world has changed tremendously having learned Spanish as an adult; how would my opportunities have been different if I had grown up bilingual or trilingual? An old Mexican proverb says *El que habla dos lenguas vale por dos*. “The person who speaks two languages is worth two.” Or three, I would argue, if you’re a kid from Castellón with the privilege of getting a trilingual education.



The children eating roasted chestnuts for the Castañera Festival

* All photos in this article and the newsletter cover photo are courtesy of Sarah Kesler.

The RLL Graduate Program

Focus

The intellectual vitality and professionalism of our graduate students continues to be proven by their outstanding accomplishments and excellent academic performance.

During the 2009-2010 academic year our grads organized reading groups and film series; presented research papers to national and international conferences; and some of them successfully completed their studies, defended their dissertations and received their doctorates.

Last winter, RLL grads again successfully hosted the annual Charles Fraker Conference titled, "The Turning Point: Crisis & Disaster." It was a very intellectually stimulating and engaging interdisciplinary event, which allowed our students to present and confront their theoretical investigations and research with other scholars from different fields and backgrounds. We are all looking forward to the next Fraker Conference, tentatively scheduled for November 2011.

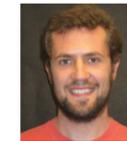
The 2010-2011 academic year for the RLL graduate program has started with great enthusiasm and commitment. This year we will be welcoming to our community an outstanding and vital cohort of new graduate students: Pedro Aguilera-Mellado, Matias Beverinotti, Abigail Celis, Karen Frazier, Francesca Minonne, Alessia Salamina, Elena Skorovsky, Roberto Vezzani, and Giselle Vitaliti. We are all very proud to begin what I am sure will be another very engaging and stimulating collaboration with these new graduate students.

We wish an exciting and productive year to all!



Vincenzo Binetti
Professor of Italian
Graduate Chair

Meet the New Graduate Students



Pedro Aguilera-Mellado (Spanish)
BA, Univ Granada
Interests: Peninsular studies



Matias Beverinotti (Spanish)
BS, Univ Buenos Aires
Interests: Argentina - humor, political resistance



Abigail Celis (French)
BA, Carleton Univ
Interests: Khatibi, Goytisoló



Karen Frazier (Spanish)
MA, Univ North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Interests: gender and race, Mexico, Andes



Francesca Minonne (Italian)
MA, Oberlin College
Interests: Mediterranean



Alessia Salamina (Italian)
BA, Univ Bari
Interests: 19th century poetry



Helena Skorovsky (French)
MA, Tel Aviv Univ
Interests: Renaissance France



Roberto Vezzani (Italian)
PhD, Univ di Siena
Interests: films, literature



Giselle Vitaliti (Spanish)
MA, Johns Hopkins Univ
Interests: Latin American allegories

We also offer our best wishes to the following PhD recipients this year:

Daniel Arroyo-Rodríguez (Spanish)
Assistant professor, Colorado College

Andrea Dewees (Spanish)
Postdoctoral lecturer, Univ of Michigan

Roberto Robles-Valencia (Spanish)
Mellon Postdoctoral Teaching Fellowship, Kalamazoo College

Federica Colleoni (Italian)
Assistant professor, James Madison Univ

Annie Hesp (Spanish)
Lecturer, Virginia Tech

Ofelia Ros (Spanish)
Postdoctoral lecturer, Univ of Michigan

Elena Dalla Torre (French)
Postdoctoral lecturer, Univ of Michigan

Andreea Marinescu (Spanish)
Assistant professor, Colorado College

Rebecca Wines (French)
Assistant professor, Cornell College

RLL Grad Life

by Federico Pous, RLL graduate student of Spanish

RLL Graduate Student Federico Pous discusses graduate students' activities 2009-2011



Charles Fraker Conference 2010

Graduate student life has been perceived as both a privilege and a nightmare. Both impressions have a bit of truth, but what makes it more of a privilege is the constant possibility of creating projects that bring peers together to share their intellectual interests. The 2009-2010 academic year gave RLL graduate students plenty of opportunities to come together as a community and the 2010-2011 year is proving it will do the same.

At the beginning of fall 2009, RLL graduate students Laura Herbert and Mónica Renta played a key role in organizing the public presentation of the third issue of the on-line journal *Tiresias* titled, "By Other Means: The Politics of Sex and Sexuality." The fourth issue of *Tiresias* is forthcoming in October 2010 and will share topics with the Charles Fraker Conference, namely those related to crises and disaster. Some of the papers presented during the Fraker will be published in this issue.

During the 2009 winter term, RLL graduate students Alejandro Quin and Rachel TenHaaf organized, in conjunction with Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS), a series of scholarly presentations in Portuguese called "bate-papo" for which they invited Maria Helena Machado (Universidade de São Paulo), Fernando Arenas (University of Minnesota), Luciano Tosta (University of Illinois), Jose Luiz Passos (UCLA), and Idelber Avelar (Tulane University). The latter also gave a talk in our department called "Human Rights, Universality, and National Sovereignty."

continued on next page

continued from previous page

In March 2010, the graduate students organized the 17th Charles Fraker Graduate Conference, "The Turning Point: Crisis & Disaster." Graduate students from all over the country, including RLL, presented their work. The keynote speakers were Jesse Cohn (Purdue University), Juan Duchesne (University of Pittsburgh) and Josiah Blackmore (University of Toronto). Special mention must be made of RLL graduate student Maria Canal, who played a major role in the organization and success of the event. There will be a Fraker special event around the work of visiting French philosopher Jacques Rancière in March 2011.

There are two ongoing activities that began last year and will continue through this academic year. First, the Freud Reading Group, which read essays by the German author last year, has now moved on to read the work of Argentinean philosopher Leon Rozitchner. Rozitchner be visiting the University of Michigan in winter 2011.

Second, the Interdisciplinary Marxist Working Group discussed texts written by Marxist contemporary scholars and invited two scholars, Brian Holmes and Peter Lenebaugh, to UM. Currently, they are arranging the visit of Colectivo Situaciones, a political-philosophical collective from Argentina, for November 2011.

Finally, RLL graduate students are currently organizing a Peninsular Working Group, which will select a topic, read different authors related to that topic, and also present their own work for discussion.

Fraker web page: <http://2010fraker.wordpress.com/>
Tiresias web page: www.lsa.umich.edu/rll/tiresias

The first recipient of the Chiara Maria Levin award tells us about her love of language, the benefits, and the impact Chiara had on her life

Allison Riccardi graduated from UM in 2007 with a BA in Spanish and Italian with Honors. In addition, she minored in Asian Languages & Cultures and also has an MA in Educational Studies. She received the first ever Chiara Maria Levin for Breadth and Excellence in the Romance Languages Award in April 2007.

Why did you choose to come to the University of Michigan?

I knew that I wanted to study languages, and the University of Michigan was the only university in Michigan where I could major in Italian as well as Spanish. Before deciding to come here, I came to the RLL department and met some of the professors, who were all very accommodating and welcoming. I felt right at home!

Why did you choose to major in Spanish and Italian?

I always loved language study, because when traveling, I was able to talk with new people and build new connections. When my family and I went to Spain my senior year of high school, it was a special feeling to act as their interpreter. It felt as though I had a new responsibility and an 'insider's' view of the country that an English-only speaker did not have. Italian was also important to me because I have many relatives in Italy, and no one else from my generation could communicate with them when we visited each other.

What is your best memory from your undergraduate years in Romance Languages?

There are many great memories, but some of the best times were with the Italianissimo group. Besides the weekly conversations, we had movie nights, and cooking parties where we made homemade pasta.

How did you know Chiara Levin?

I knew Chiara through Italianissimo. Although she studied French, she was also a native Italian speaker and joined us for Italian conversation every week.

What would you like people to know about her?

Chiara was special, in that she was a friend to everyone. She always had a brilliant smile upon her face, and was sincerely interested in getting to know you.

When you were notified that you had been chosen to receive the first ever Levin award where were you?

At the time (Spring 2007) I was studying in Seville, Spain.

What did being the first recipient of the Chiara Maria Levin award mean to you?

I was absolutely honored to receive the award and to be



Allison in Seville, Spain

associated with such a unique, talented and congenial peer. On the other hand, it was not easy, and I was heartbroken, as we had just recently lost Chiara.

How have you been using your language skills in your work life?

As a language instructor, I use my language skills every day!

In addition to Spanish and Italian, what other languages do you speak?

I also studied Mandarin Chinese here at UM and speak Chinese at home with my husband, Daniel. We also plan to teach our daughter Chinese.

What is your best advice for learning another language?

Don't try to master the whole language at once! Learn a few simple phrases and practice, practice, practice. Talk to everyone you can and use what you know. Language is a skill, so if you don't open your mouth, you probably won't learn to speak. Let yourself goof up, make lots of mistakes, but never give up!

**Chiara Maria Levin
(1984-2007)**

Chiara Maria Levin excelled in all four of the Romance languages taught in RLL (French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish) and spoke German as well. She graduated with honors from the University of Michigan in May 2006, with a concentration in French and Francophone Studies. In 2007, during a celebratory weekend with extended family, she was tragically killed by a stray bullet in a gangland shoot-out. In memory of her and her love of languages, family and friends created the Levin endowment, which funds two awards for outstanding students that share the same love of language that Chiara did.

Nancy Michelson Larbi-Aissa (BA French 1975)

"Deeply devoted to Romance languages with a strong foundation from my studies at the University of Michigan, I completed a Master of Arts in French literature from Columbia University and moved to Paris, where I was a member of the UNESCO Secretariat. During my 20-year sojourn in France, I studied more French literature and received a "Maitrise" with "mention bien" from University of Paris VII, Jussieu. My thesis was about Rimbaud's poetry.

One of the experiences I treasure the most in my formative years in France was working as a camp counselor in Ardeche with kids from a village near Marseille that subsidized their summer camp. I made this connection through someone who attended Michigan's Junior Year Abroad program in Aix-en-Provence in 1973.

Also, I did a one-year internship at the Clinique de La Borde in the Loire Valley, a private psychiatric clinic, which was headed by Felix Guattari and Dr. Jean Oury, caring for adult psychotics and schizophrenics. I married an Algerian gentleman and experienced close connection for the next 20 years to the former French colony, in addition to renovating a 300-year-old cottage together in the Loire Valley between the Chambord and Cheverny castles.

Now I am residing in Kansas City, using my English again, and raising my French-born daughter. I work for a software company, SAS Institute, as a technical writer. Remaining an avid Francophile, I have tutored and collaborated with the International Linguistics Corporation on some French textbooks.

Bonne route à vous tous!"

Kris Ostrander Appel (BA Romance Linguistics 1983, MA Romance Linguistics 1985)

"Right after graduation, I got a job as a linguist at the National Security Agency, where I was able to work in all the Romance languages for more than 17 years. I left to start my own company, in a completely different field - stroke rehabilitation. My company makes a device for recovering arm movement after stroke or brain injury. Although unrelated to Romance linguistics, I credit my excellent communication skills learned through the study of languages to my success in business."

Email: kappel1@earthlink.net.

Melisa Klimaszewski (BA Spanish 1995)

"When I was in graduate school at UC San Diego, I taught Spanish to second-year students, and it was one of the most challenging things I had ever done. My studies at Michigan had prepared me far better than I anticipated, and being able to teach Spanish kept me from having to survive on only ramen noodles. I earned my PhD in 2002 with a focus in British literature, and I am now an assistant professor at Drake University, where I am about to take students to South Africa as part of a travel seminar I organized. I credit my time studying Spanish at UM with helping me maintain an active interest in all languages and cultures, and the faculty I studied with have served as excellent models throughout my own academic career."

Andrew Berg (BA Spanish 2005, former president of the Spanish Club)

"Though I haven't been able to use my Spanish skills at work recently, I keep up my Spanish by running a book club for fluent speakers focused on popular contemporary fiction from Latin America and Spain. Additionally, I volunteer as an interpreter for visiting human rights activists and at events such as the Chicago Latino Film Festival, where I was given the Best Interpreter Award this year.

In January, my wife, Margarita Valbuena (BA 2002) and I will move to Guatemala for three years where we will work for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as intercultural encounter facilitators at CEDEPCA, an ecumenical not-for-profit agency. There we will be leading travel seminars, study trips, and cooperative work experiences for groups from the United States, Canada, and Europe that are seeking to learn more about Guatemala and Central America and enrich their understanding of the world, their faith, and themselves. We'll be keeping a blog, guatemalanjourney.org, and invite any interested former classmates or professors to check it out."

We want to hear from YOU!!

Send an e-mail to rll.editor@umich.edu. Be sure to include your full name, your graduation date and degree/language, your email address (optional), and what you're doing these days.



University of Michigan
Department of Romance Languages
and Literatures
4108 Modern Languages Bldg.
812 East Washington Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1275

Non-Profit
Organization
US Postage
PAID
Ann Arbor, MI
Permit #144

The 29th Hayward Keniston Lecture

Distinguished scholar Samuel Weber will deliver the 29th Hayward Keniston Lecture on Thursday, February 10, 2011. One of the leading Anglo-American thinkers across the disciplines of literary theory, philosophy, and psychoanalysis, Professor Weber is Avalon Foundation Professor of Humanities at Northwestern University and co-director of its Paris program in critical theory, as well as Paul de Man Chair at the European Graduate School. He studied with Paul de Man and Theodor Adorno, and his translations of key theoretical texts into English, as well as his critical exegeses, shaped the path of critical theory in the Anglophone world. He has written influential books as diverse as psychoanalysis, mass media, theater, the university, war, and religion. His most recent book is *Benjamin's -abilities*, published with Harvard University Press in 2008.

Professor Weber's talk at UM is titled "On the Singularity of Literary Cognition," and forms part of the larger politics on the politics of singularity. The talk will concern the singular nature of literary knowledge, which, in distinction to the two extremes of the Western humanist project—theo-ontology and empiricism—privileges the dynamics of ways of meaning, critical for a re-thinking of life, history, and politics.

Professor Weber's publications include: *Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis* (1978); *Unwrapping Balzac* (1979); *Mass Mediaurus: Form, Technics, Media* (1996); *The Legend of Freud* (2000); *Institution and Interpretation* (2001); *Theatricality as Medium* (2004); *Targets of Opportunity: On the Militarization of Thinking* (2005); *Acts of Reading* (2006); *Benjamin's -abilities* (2008).

Date: Thursday February 10, 2011

Speaker: Samuel Weber
Northwestern University

Time: 4pm

Where: 4th Fl Rackham Amphitheatre
915 E. Washington Street
Rackham Graduate School

**Reception follows the lecture in the 4th Fl Assembly Hall, Rackham Graduate School*