

Romance Languages

& Literatures

*The heart of the
humanities*



2025

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear friends of Romance Languages and Literatures,

It is a thrill and an honor to begin my first year as RLL Chair. Since 2005, when I arrived at Michigan, I have seen our extraordinary department grow and transform, and I expect to see even more transformation in the coming years. Just in the past year we have seen big changes in the staff and departmental administration, two retirements in Spanish and two new tenure-track hires in French, with more retirements and hires on the way. After the strange and difficult pause caused by the Covid 19 pandemic, we are finally back in the swing of things, with a buzz in the hallways and a stream of exciting events in the RLL Commons, including weekly conversation hours, cinema screenings, and lectures on topics from trade in Medieval Italy to contemporary Latin American indigenous activism.

During a time in which Humanities programs in general and foreign language departments in particular are facing tremendous challenges, our numbers have been holding steady. We graduated over 240 majors and minors last June, and last fall we had over 4500 enrollments. We recently held our most successful RLL Major and Minor Fair to date, with many students declaring a major on the spot. Our study abroad programs are more popular than ever and are frequently cited as a chief attraction for majoring in one of our languages. Some of our success is undoubtedly due to staff and faculty efforts to promote our classes and programs, including personalized visits to bridge classes (spearheaded by Associate Chair Lorenzo García-Amaya and Spanish 277 coordinator Michelle Orecchio), and appealing introductory classes on topics such as the Mafia (taught by Professor Karla Mallette) and Game of Thrones (taught by Anna Julia Cooper Distinguished University Professor Peggy McCracken).

Our faculty have recently won some prestigious honors and awards. Professor Nick Henriksen was recently honored with a Thurnau Professorship, and Teresa Satterfield received the inaugural Robert M.Sellers Faculty Outreach Ambassador Award. Professor McCracken was elected a Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America, an honor that recognizes major long-term scholarly achievement within the field of Medieval Studies. Frank P. Casa Collegiate Professor of Spanish Enrique García Santo-Tomás won both a Michigan Humanities Award and a Newberry Residential Fellowship to support work on a book project titled *Sparks of Recreation: Playing with Fire in Spain, 1560–1760*, and Ryan Szpiech won a Michigan Humanities Award for a book project titled *In the Name of the Father: Translation and Anxiety in Medieval Castile*. Two of our faculty recently won UM New Initiatives/New Instruction (NINI) grants: one provided support for a team



Kate Jenckes, Chair

of faculty, led by Professor Henriksen, to develop materials on gender-neutral pronoun usage across the Romance languages, and another for Lecturer Mar Freire Hermida to increase accessibility for students with disabilities in Spanish 280.

We have nearly fifty graduate students in our doctoral programs, with interests ranging from narratives of migration in the US, Latin America, and Spain, to metaphors of immunity and illness in contemporary French literature. We saw a number of students defend dissertations in the past year, with two securing tenure-track jobs at Ohio State University and the University of Utah, and another a Visiting Professorship at the University of Cambridge (UK). Many of our graduate students have also been exploring or non-academic career possibilities, with some recent graduates accepting exciting and impactful jobs such as Program Coordinator for Engagement at the UM Arts Initiative, and Associate Dean for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility at the University of Virginia.

University departments are woven into the fabric of our changing worlds, and the future, as always, is uncertain. Whatever the coming year brings, I am confident in our resilience and certain that together our department will continue to thrive.

Wishing you all the best,



Kate Jenckes



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HIGHLIGHTS

A Warm Welcome: A Visit from the Dean Susanna Coll-Ramírez, Assistant Director of Elementary Language Program; Lecturer IV of Spanish and Catalan

On August 22, 2024, **Dean Ceballo** joined the Elementary Language Program (ELP) Orientation to welcome instructors to the new academic year. We were delighted that, despite her busy schedule and the demands of a new semester, she accepted our invitation. Her presence was both inspiring and uplifting.

During her talk, Dean Ceballo shared how at home she felt in a Romance Languages department, having grown up between two worlds, speaking Spanish at home and English at school. She warmly referred to us as “*mi gente*,” expressing a genuine sense of connection with our Department.

Dean Ceballo also shared her journey back to Michigan and her aspirations as

she begins her term as Dean. Dean Ceballo also emphasized the significance of the Elementary Language Program (ELP)

within LSA, highlighting the impressive numbers: around 100 instructors teaching French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish; approximately 350 courses taught each year; and serving over 6,000 students.

Dean Ceballo’s visit provided a wonderful start to the semester, celebrating and motivating the ELP instructors.



Rosario Ceballo, LSA Dean



FACULTY NEWS

Federico Fabbri

Elementary Language Program Director

Lorenzo García-Amaya: Can you share a bit about your background and how you came to this role?

Federico Fabbri: I have had the privilege of working with languages in various capacities throughout my career, specializing in Language Program Administration, which was also the focus of my doctoral studies. For my dissertation, I explored language enrollment and retention in US-based Romance language programs, while contributing to curriculum development. Prior to joining RLL, I served as the Director of Language Instruction and First-year Coordinator in Italian at the University of Minnesota.

LGA: What excites you the most about leading the ELP at Michigan?

FF: I am thrilled to serve as the new ELP Director within RLL. The department's vibrancy, talent, and diverse backgrounds and experiences are truly inspiring. Together with the ELP team, including our dedicated instructors, coordinators, and assistant director, we have the exciting opportunity to further develop a successful and impactful Romance Languages program. I am grateful to leverage my expertise in Language Program Administration and Romance languages to contribute positively to the personal and professional growth of our students.

Q&A with our new hires!

LGA: What are some key goals or initiatives you're focusing on for the program?

FF: As I integrate into the ELP team, my priority is to provide a balanced mix of continuity and innovation. In my first year, my main goal is to familiarize myself with the program, particularly focusing on the talented individuals working within or closely connected to the ELP. Additionally, I aim to enhance our current tools for needs assessment to gain a deeper understanding of our student body and to guide our decision-making process effectively.



Federico Fabbri

LGA: How do you see the ELP evolving or growing in the coming years?

FF: In these challenging times where isolation is a growing concern, I envision the ELP maintaining and expanding its role as a pillar of community building, both on campus and beyond. Technological advancements and ongoing challenges to diversity and sustainability highlight the importance of staying connected to the world outside the classroom. This includes fostering digital literacies and smoothly integrating language and culture within ELP courses to better serve our students.

Sophia Mo

Assistant Professor

Kate Jenckes: Tell us about the book-length study you are currently writing.

Sophia Mo: *Rescripting Liberation from the Margins* explores the question of what scripts women have to perform to become legible as historical figures via a case study of transnational revolutionary print culture in French and Arabic during Algeria's War for Independence (1954-1962) and its first post-independence regime (1962-1965). I focus especially on periodicals published by the *Algerian Front de libération nationale* (FLN). I argue that through processes of discursive world-making that I name "rescripting," female freedom fighters inscribed themselves and other women into transnational historical narratives of liberation from colonialism and patriarchy. In doing so, they were able to exercise power from a position of marginality.



Sophia Mo

KJ: Are there any specific challenges to doing this kind of work?

SM: The biggest challenge I've faced over the past four years has been a series of visa restrictions in Algeria due to a combination of Covid and geopolitics. The silver lining to this, however, has been that these restrictions have pushed me towards creative research methods that focus less on interviews and more on the process of worldmaking within the periodicals themselves. More broadly, I've been documenting and reflecting on the messy, frustrating, and serendipitous journey that archival research entails: ripped out pages in the archive, missing boxes of files, refused visas, chance encounters... We tend to think about what it is we do as scholars when we approach an archive, but I flip that question to think about what the fractured archive does to us and our ideas of what it means to do research.

KJ: What are your impressions of the department in the months since you arrived?

SM: I've been extremely grateful to be surrounded by colleagues who are working on cutting edge projects and who have been enthusiastic in their mentoring and efforts to integrate me into the Michigan community. I've also appreciated how motivated my undergraduate students have been, and very much look forward to learning more about the graduate students; work in the department!

Are you enjoying this section?

We post faculty features, upcoming events, and more on our Instagram: **@UM_RLL**



Amber Bal

LSA Collegiate Fellow



Amber Bal

Kate Jenckes: *Please tell us about the book-length study you are currently writing.*

Amber Bal: I am currently working on a manuscript which argues for West and Central African rural spaces' capacity to enrich contemporary ecocriticism and

existing understandings of modernity. My place-based chapter structure moves through [1] the Village, [2] the Catholic Mission, [3] the Serer groundnut basin, and [4] the African railway system. Each site reveals watershed yet ambivalent shifts in land and social organisation: the town-country split, evangelism, agrarian capitalism, and transport's bridging of the urban-rural divide. To allegorize Hans Christian Andersen's famous tale, these are the "peas" beneath the proverbial mattress of colonial modernity, unaccounted for by the urbane, deterritorialized, and/or narrowly cosmopolitan perspectives more regularly favoured in literary studies. Throughout, I intentionally privilege the unfashionable designation of "rural" over ecology or environment when attending to the depiction of non-urban spaces in literature. This is because "rurality" challenges how we envisage and name the African natural environment; not solely as an "extreme landscape", whether "the jungle" or "desert", nor as a binary choice between a pristine or violently degraded "nature". Instead, "the rural" shifts attention to "grey areas" within ecological history which were not-so-coincidentally some of the most formidable tactics and economic prerogatives of "brokers of power" (colonial and independent) in West and Central Africa.

KJ: *Are there any specific challenges to doing this kind of work?*

AB: Conceptually speaking, one central difficulty is that I am essentially trying to argue that the unique contribution of Francophone African literature to a broader discussion about the environment is to highlight enduringly ambiguous human attitudes towards the environment (as opposed to literally depicting land-use change, degradation or similar phenomena). Very regularly, when literature registers the prevailing "epistemological uncertainty" that humans have about the natural environment, it does so by hiding or annihilating either ecological change or the landscape altogether. In other words, I'm sometimes looking for the invisible. A necessary component of unravelling this enigmatic relationship is that I must read non-fictional literature treating the relevant rural spaces or "real geographies". This means I spend a lot of time attempting to track down and decipher agronomic literature. Trying to figure out where certain archival documents are held between France, Senegal, Ivory Coast, DRC (and where they are located within the archives themselves) is certainly the biggest logistical challenge.

KJ: *What are your impressions of the department in the months since you arrived?*

AB: I am delighted to have joined a vibrant and collegial Romance Languages and Literatures department which is a very similar environment to the Romance Studies department at Cornell in which I completed my doctoral studies. Here, I have been most impressed by the impetus towards continuous auto-evaluation and improvement of the curriculum in French Studies as well as by the various modes of collaborating and exchanging ideas with Spanish and Italian!

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Faculty Spotlight

Faculty Spotlight
Publications
Awards
Grants
Connections & Community
Retirements

Teresa Satterfield

Professor of Spanish and Romance Linguistics



Teresa Satterfield

A busy spring, summer and fall! Spring: Satterfield supervised undergraduate Chloe Collon's Senior Honors Thesis, which was selected for the Agnes Nicolini Vincenti Award for an Outstanding Thesis in RLL. (Special thanks to Viviana Vélez Negrón, Satterfield's graduate student in Education and Psychology.) A research publication based on this work is now in press. Satterfield received a Public Engagement Faculty Fellowship for her proposal to work with SEAS graduate student, Ariana Bautista in "Project JARDÍN, Cultivating Spanish-language education and Latino community outreach interaction with botanical gardens," that

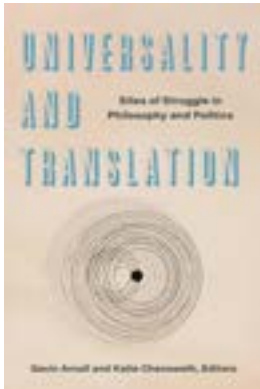
brings Latino families from Jewish Family Services and En Nuestra Lengua (the bilingual literacy and culture program that Satterfield founded and directs) into partnership with Matthaei Botanical Gardens. Satterfield was selected to be the inaugural recipient of the Robert M. Sellers Faculty Outreach Ambassador Award for 2024, for faculty members who have contributed exceptionally to advancing educational outreach on campus and beyond. Summer: Spanish Majors Lisa Luecke, Anastasia Minkova, Antonella Ortega Sara and Tori Wilson participated in the RLL Internship,

working with Satterfield and the En Nuestra Lengua Project. Satterfield is Cecilia Solís Barroso's co-advisor (Linguistics). They were awarded the exciting inaugural Rackham Partnerships for Access, Community, and Excellence (PACE) Fellowship for 2024-2025. Satterfield and former UM graduate student Luis Méndez published an article on Latino children and language/racial discrimination: "Nadie Me Ve Como Latinx: Language and attributed ethnic racial group bias effects on Latinx children's identity" in the Journal Language, Culture & Society. Satterfield and collaborators at University California-Irvine and Harvard were awarded a National Science Foundation grant to advance literacy and science learning in bilingual children through the implementation of AI-generated e-books, "Project ACCESS." Fall: Satterfield and long-time collaborator, Dr. Ioulia Kovelman (Psychology) continue work on their recent second National Institutes of Health-funded project on bilingualism, brain imaging, language and literacy. Satterfield and RLL graduate Dr. Martín Vega were selected to present their paper, "La justicia de Chimalpahin: traduciendo el contacto de lenguas y la innovación lingüística en el México colonial multilingüe//Chimalpahin's Justice: Translating language contact and linguistic innovation in multilingual colonial Mexico," at the Segundas Jornadas de Filología y Lingüística Histórica in Mexico. To finish the fall season, Satterfield will be featured as an invited "Community Leader" in an NEH-Dept of Education funded video project that centers Blackness in Latin America and supports [Minority Serving Institutions positive impacts on student success](#).



Teresa Satterfield (Center) pictured with Robert Sellers (Right) and Catalina Concha-Ormsby (Left)

Publications



Universality and Translation: Sites of Struggle in Philosophy and Politics

Gavin Arnall



Carnets de voyage au Maghreb et en Andalousie

Michèle Hannoosh



La Excritura de Juan Benet

Cristina Moreiras-Menor

Gavin Arnall, Associate Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures and Director of the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and Katie Chenoweth (Princeton) edited the recently published book [*Universality and Translation: Sites of Struggle in Transparency in Politics*](#). Both universality and translation can be used for inclusive democratic practices or can promote oppressive, colonial, and capitalist systems. The publication discusses the tensions and social struggles involved in diverse critical theories, particularly deconstruction and Marxism with respect to universality and translation.

Michèle Hannoosh, Professor of French, has recently published a fac-simile edition of the sketchbooks of the painter Eugène Delacroix from his trip to North Africa and southern Spain: [*Carnets de voyage au Maghreb et en Andalousie. Édition en fac-similé avec 6 carnets et un volume de commentaires*](#) (Paris: Citadelles et Mazenod, 2023). The edition includes six notebooks, including two previously unpublished ones that had been unknown since 1864, and a volume of commentary about the historical and political circumstances of the trip, the different stages of his journey, its importance for Delacroix's art, the issues addressed in the notebooks (customs, festivities, dress, inhabitants), the relation between text and image in them, and their influence on later artists.

Cristina Moreiras-Menor, Kathleen M. Canning Collegiate Professor of Spanish and Women's and Gender Studies, and Pedro Aguilera-Mellado, edited a book published by Editorial Comarés (Granada, Spain). [*La Excritura de Juan Benet*](#) collects theoretical approaches to the oeuvre of one of the greatest Spanish writers of the 20th century by exploring his stories, narrative strategies, and language in ways that transcend mere representation in language and move beyond the purely historical, political, or vital dimensions of his writing. This exploration, inseparable from an existential trace that ominously shadows its pages alongside the historical and political context, as well as the lives of its characters, beckons us towards the murky depths of what is known as *infrapolitics*. It leads us towards a 'symbolic action in reality' that eschews identification with the political realm, instead opting for an ethical retreat from the sphere of power to delve deeper into the unfamiliar realities of the most intimate aspects of human experience. *La Excritura* scrutinizes Benet's work from an existential perspective, where the order of representation—spanning the political, historical, and psychological registers—is interwoven with a project that directs analytical focus towards the liminal spaces, the realms of unfamiliar intimacy, and unsettling depths that the narratives also contain.



Ryan Hendrickson

Ryan Hendrickson, Lecturer IV and first-year French Coordinator, was featured on the [LSA Year of Sustainability website](#) for incorporating discussions of climate into the classroom. Topics related to sustainability are a way to engage students in the target language. Conversations are not limited to increased temperatures and rising sea levels: they also include sustainable fashion and environmentally-friendly cars. Ryan encourages instructors to take the leap and introduce aspects of the environment and sustainability into their courses.



MAR Sotelo-Padrón

Photo Courtesy of Mar Sotelo-Padrón

MAR Sotelo-Padrón, Romance Languages and Literatures Lecturer and Puerto Rican author, has had four literary works published this year: "[Morfología de la inmortalidad](#)" (short story, *Versal Revista Literaria Digital*), "[La silla](#)" (poem, *Nagari Magazine*), "[Blanca Blas me habló en la banca](#)" (short story, *Punto en línea*), and "[Sirena](#)" (poem, *Latin@ Literatures*).

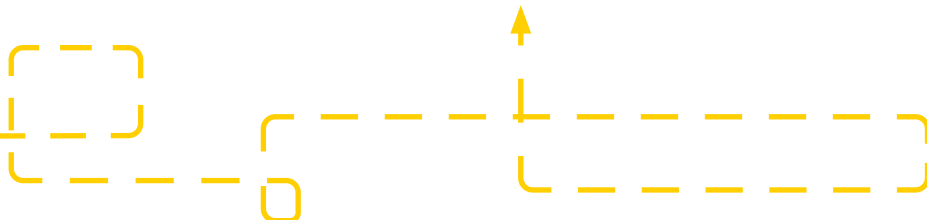
Grants



Michèle Hannoosh, Professor of French

Thanks to Professor **Michèle Hannoosh's** initiative, RLL just won a grant from the French Institute for Culture and Education to support French and Francophone Studies.

Professor Hannoosh proposed several initiatives to promote recruitment of French students, including a corps of student ambassadors from among the majors and minors in French to go to their own high schools and ultimately to other high schools in the state to give presentations and meet with students.



Awards

Nicholas Henriksen Named Thurnau Professor

Gareth Williams, Professor of Spanish

Five tenured faculty members from the Ann Arbor campus are designated annually as Thurnau Professors and hold this title for the remainder of their careers at the university. In 2024, **Nick Henriksen**, Professor of Spanish and Linguistics, was the recipient of this most prestigious award. There is not enough space here to outline all of Nick's achievements as a teacher and scholar in our department. Suffice it to say that he is an inspiration to his students and since 2012 his course offerings have become not only a staple of our upper-level curriculum in Spanish but also of our department's commitment to teaching the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion to LSA's students. It is in the topic of gender diversity that we see the full extent of Nick's commitment to focusing on the needs of students from underrepresented groups both in the department and across the college. Thanks to Professor Henriksen, the

work of the "RLL Gender Diversity Committee" has led a major DEI-related curricular reform effort that speaks directly to his ability to take on leadership roles that focus on the needs of underrepresented groups. In addition, Nick is the co-director of Michigan's Speech Production Lab, served as Associate Chair and Assistant Interim Chair from 2019-2023, and has been supported by LSA's New Initiatives/New Instruction grant and the ADVANCE Faculty Fellowship. Congratulations to Nick Henriksen, upon being named Thurnau Professor of Spanish and Linguistics!



Nicholas Henriksen

Giulia Riccò's Essay Won Prestigious Award

Giulia Riccò, Assistant Professor



Giulia Riccò

Assistant Professor **Giulia Riccò** was honored with the twenty-seventh annual [Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Publication Award for a Manuscript in Italian Literary Studies](#) for her forthcoming book, *The Italian Colony of São Paulo: Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Brazil* (Fordham University Press). The committee's citation for the winning manuscript describes how the book is a "bold study of Italian immigration to São Paulo, Brazil... [The] innovative manuscript draws on diaspora studies, mobility studies, and border studies to show how Italians in Brazil were racialized as white, in the process challenging received histories about Italians in the Americas and racial democracy in Brazil. Riccò's compelling contribution to transnational Italian studies analyzes travelogues, short stories, newspaper columns, political essays, and memoirs to show how this twentieth-century history helps illuminate contemporary Italy's struggles in addressing its multiethnic and multiracial identity."

Brava, Giulia!

A Visit to the Frankfurt Book Fair

Barbara Alvarez, Librarian for Romance Languages and Literatures

As a librarian dedicated to building international collections, I have the privilege and joy of attending international book fairs as part of my professional travels. This week, I have just returned from the Frankfurter Buchmesse, the largest and oldest book fair in the world. Frankfurt has been an important hub for book trade since the 12th century, and with the advent of movable type printing, invented by Gutenberg in the neighboring town of Mainz, it has flourished as a European center of book trading.

At present, the Fair serves as a primary marketplace for the publishing and translation rights, and licenses. It attracts thousands of publishers, literary agents, authors, translators, illustrators, book and digital content vendors, media producers, cultural institutions and trade associations. This year, the Fair welcomed 115,000 trade visitors and 115,000 members of the public who explored the exhibit halls and participated in over 3,000 events on the fairgrounds and around the city.

Each year, the Fair invites a country to be a guest of honor with a dedicated pavilion to showcase its cultural and publishing achievements. This year's invitation was extended to Italy, which was one of the reasons for my visit. The Italian pavilion, with its central Piazza Italia, was packed with exhibits, presentation venues, multimedia rooms and, of course, an excellent caffè bar. Some 90 Italian authors were in attendance in Frankfurt, giving talks, interviews, and book readings. Italian-themed concerts filled the city, culminating with the performance of Il Volo, the operatic pop trio. It was both illuminating and inspiring to hear discussions about the current state of publishing affairs, as well as democracy, cultural diversity, and the uniting power of reading. I had the opportunity to see award-winning authors and translators, and to explore miles of magnificent books for children and young adults. Additionally, I was delighted to reconnect with our vendor, Casalini Libri, who supplies most of our collection materials from Italy, Spain, and Portugal.

A book fair is always a priceless experience!



Barbara Alvarez next to a book fair sign

Sant Jordi

Susanna Coll-Ramírez

April 23rd celebrates Sant Jordi, patron saint of Catalunya, and it is a tradition to give books and roses to family and friends. Every April 23rd all towns in Catalunya sell books and roses. More than 1.5 million books and 6 million roses are sold on that day.

At the end of the Winter semester, RLL instructors were invited to stop by the Commons to pick up a complimentary book, with a selection available in various languages and genres.

Sant Jordi 2025 is already in the planning stages. I am looking forward to establishing this celebration as a tradition in RLL and bring to the department an event that celebrates literature, culture, and community.



A Career of Excellence: The Retirement of Juli Highfill

Cristina Moreiras-Menor, Kathleen M. Canning Collegiate Professor of Spanish and Women's and Gender Studies



Juli Highfill

I am pleased to honor my colleague Dr. **Juli Highfill**, Professor of Spanish in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, who retired on May 31, 2023, after an impressive career in Peninsular Studies (Spain). She kicked off her academic journey with a B.S. in History and Social Studies Education from the University of Kansas in 1976, then went on to earn her M.A. in 1982 from the University of Missouri and a Ph.D. in Spanish from the University of Kansas in 1993. That same year, she joined the University of Michigan as an assistant professor, climbing the ranks to associate professor in 2000 and full professor in 2012.

Professor Highfill is highly respected in her field, known especially for her work on 19th and 20th-century Spain. She's made her mark with groundbreaking research on the 1920s avant-garde and the politically charged 1930s, authoring two major books: *Portraits of Excess: Reading Character in the Modern Spanish Novel and Modernism and Its Merchandise: The Spanish Avant-Garde and Material Culture, 1920-1930*. Currently, she's wrapping up a book called *Images in Flight: Popular and Political Affect in Spanish Cinema, 1920-1940*. Her research dives into the cultural codes behind literary characters, the Machine Age's impact on Spanish avant-garde artists, and the evolving experience of cinema in early 20th-century Spain. Through it all, she brings a sharp, interdisciplinary approach, weaving together literature, history, economics, and various elements of pop and material culture.

Professor Highfill has also left a lasting impact on her students and colleagues. She's a two-time winner of both the Excellence in Teaching Award and the Excellence in Concentration Advising award, and her dedication as a mentor and advisor has been invaluable. She served as Associate Chair of RLL and led the Spanish Curriculum Committee, making huge contributions to the department, especially in the 1990s, when she helped establish a cultural studies track for Spanish majors. Her work drew many students to Hispanic Studies, and her influence on the program can still be seen today, particularly in curricular reform, student mentoring, and departmental governance.

If you're interested in history, democracy, and the fight against fascism, don't miss this engaging presentation by Dr. Juli Highfill. Back in 2020, she delivered an inspiring talk titled "Anti-fascism at U-M: Defending Democracy During the Spanish Civil War", sponsored by the U-M Bentley Library, where she dives into the university's role and values during a pivotal time in history. This session, originally presented over Zoom, resonates well with today's discussions on democracy and activism. Click the [link to watch and explore](#) the powerful ways people have stood up for democratic ideals!

The Cultural Insight and Scholarship of Javier Sanjinés

Enrique García Santo-Tomás, Frank P. Casa Collegiate Professor of Spanish

Professor **Javier Sanjinés** retired from active faculty status on May 31, 2023, after twenty-six years at the University of Michigan.

Javier attended the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (La Paz, Bolivia) where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science in 1971. He studied literary sociology at the Ecole Pratique de Hautes Etudes in Paris, France, where he also earned in 1974 a master's degree in Latin American Studies at the Université de Paris- III.

After working two years as an attorney in La Paz, Javier moved to the United States in 1982, earning a Ph.D. in Spanish and Portuguese from the University of Minnesota (1988). After faculty appointments at the Catholic University of Bolivia, the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, and the University of Maryland, he joined the University of Michigan as Assistant Professor of Spanish in 1997 and was promoted to Associate Professor in 2003 and to Professor in 2010.



Javier Sanjinés

Javier is a distinguished scholar of modern Latin American literature and a highly regarded specialist in the cultural politics of postcolonial societies. Throughout his career, he was invited professor in several universities in Latin America, such as the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar (Ecuador) and Duke University. He has given numerous invited lectures in some of the most prestigious universities in the US (Berkeley, Duke, Stanford) and abroad (Cambridge, Shanghai, Goethe Institute), as well as in different institutions such as the World Bank, the Department of State, and the Library of Congress.

His five books include *Mestizaje Upside Down: Aesthetic Politics in Modern Bolivia* (2004, with a Spanish version in 2014) and *Rescaldos del pasado: Conflictos culturales en sociedades postcoloniales* (2009, with an English version, *Embers of the Past*, in 2013). In addition, he has published more than 100 articles and book chapters in the many areas of his expertise; a volume of his selected essays, *Canon y subversion: ensayos escogidos*, was published in La Paz in 2022.

Javier's work garnered him several honors and awards. In 1991 he received the Fundación BHN (Banco Hipotecario de Bolivia) Book Award for *Literatura contemporánea y grotesco social en Bolivia* (1992), a seminal study that was selected in 2017 as one of the two-hundred books re-edited by the Bolivian Bicentennial Library (Vice-Presidency of the Plurinational State of Bolivia); and in 2005 he was elected Member of the prestigious Académie de la Latinité. Previously, he had been a Tinker Foundation Research Fellow in Center for Latin American Studies at University of Pittsburgh (1981-1982) and a Rockefeller Foundation Post-doctoral Fellow in the Chicago Humanities Center at the University of Chicago (1995). Over the years, Javier taught numerous undergraduate classes and graduate seminars on a broad range of topics in Latin American literature and culture, as well as graduate proseminars for the Program in Latin American and Caribbean Studies and sophomore seminars for undergraduates. As researcher, professor and colleague, he has left an indelible mark in the Department of Romance Languages and at the University of Michigan.

Congratulations on your retirement, Javier! We are deeply grateful for your friendship. You will be missed!

GRADUATE NEWS

Graduate Research Spotlight

Fernando Valcheff-García, Graduate Student



Fernando Valcheff-García with the poster for "Invierno"
Photo courtesy of Fernando Valcheff-García

Supported by a Rackham International Research Award (RIRA), **Fernando Valcheff-García** conducted dissertation fieldwork on the state of the independent publishing industry in Argentina during the summer. His research was featured in the local newspaper [La Capital](#), which covered his interview with Esteban Prado, founder of "El Gran Pez" (winner of the 2021 FED National Best Bookstore Award) and organizer of "Invierno," an annual independent book fair showcasing ~100 artisanal and small self publishing houses. More recently, results from a previous fieldwork experience funded by a Tinker Field Research Grant were published by [Latin American Literature Today](#): a bilingual version of Fernando's interview with Argentine author Agustina Bazterrica, one of the most influential contemporary writers in the region. The resonance of these

dialogues has motivated him to co-create the reading and discussion group "[Thinking Latin America in the Age of Catastrophe](#)." This collaborative project, which received Rackham Interdisciplinary Workshop grant funds, aims to foster critical conversations around women's writing and political imagination in contemporary Latin America. Fernando has presented partial results of these collective exchanges and his current research this year at the International Symposium [Agents of Exchange: Women's Roles in Forming the Latin American Canon](#) (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), the [42nd LASA International Congress](#), and the [5º Congreso Internacional de Estudios Exocanónicos](#) (Universidad de Salamanca). He is excited to continue advancing his academic work on meat/flesh imagery in current Latin American literary production by female authors through a Rackham Humanities Research Fellowship during the Winter 2025 term.

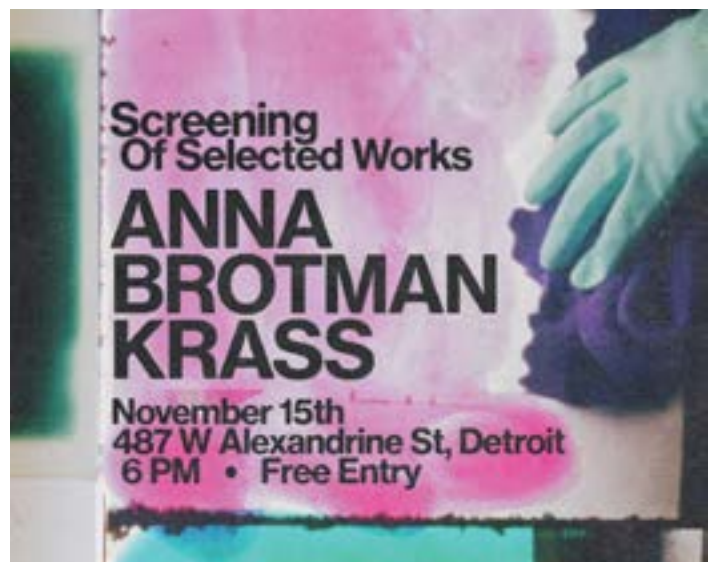
A Screening of Selected Works

Graduate Student and independent filmmaker Anna Brotman-Krass

The screenings featured a variety of short analog films made in collaboration with the activists-artists-care workers of el colectivo Territorio Doméstico in Madrid, Spain and Brotman-Krass.

The films feature poetry, personal anecdotes, quiet moments, and public protests as ways to illustrate how members of Territorio Doméstico confront the invisibilization domestic laborers, care workers and other essential workers face.

To learn more about the project, check out [Anna's website](#).



Poster for Anna's film screening.
Photo Courtesy of Anna Brotman-Krass

Undergraduate Research Spotlight

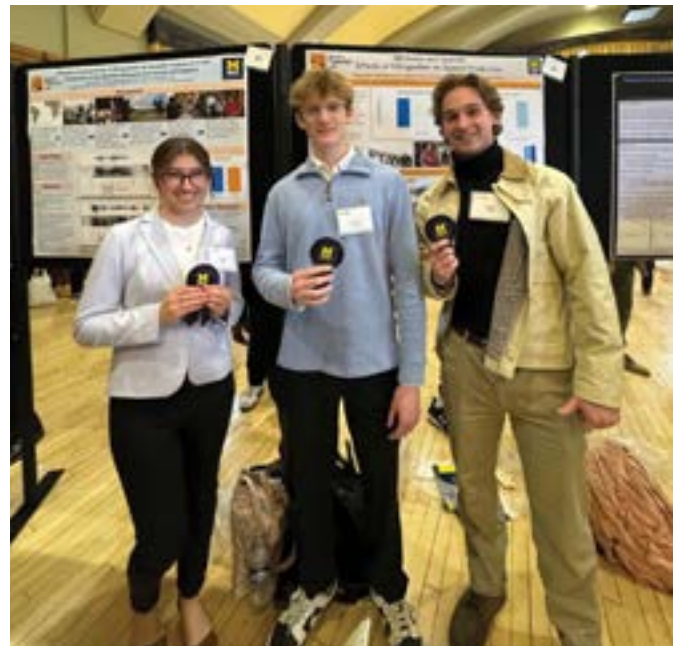
RLL Students Earn Top Honors in Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program

Lorenzo García-Amaya, Associate Chair and Associate Professor of Spanish and Linguistics

In the academic year 2022-2023, all three students mentored by Lorenzo García-Amaya and Nicholas Henriksen through the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) in their Speech Production Lab received top honors. Claire Byrd, with her presentation on *Phonetic Consequences of Bilingualism: An Acoustic Analysis of 'R Trill' Production in the Spanish-Afrikaans Community of Patagonia*, and Riley Stipe and Michael Levin, with their presentation on *Afrikaans and Spanish: Effects of Bilingualism on Speech Production*, each won the prestigious Blue Ribbon Award for their research. Congratulations, Claire, Michael, and Riley!



Blue Ribbon Award



Claire, Michael, and Riley (left to right) standing with their presentation and Blue Ribbon Awards

Study Abroad Features

For this edition of *The Romance Languages and Literatures Newsletter: The Heart of the Humanities*, U-M Romance Languages and Literatures instructors discuss the study abroad programs that they've lead, and our undergraduate students reflect on their enriching experiences while studying abroad.

Siena, Italy
Photo Courtesy of
Amaryllis Rodriguez Mojica

Italian Program in Siena

Amaryllis Rodriguez Mojica, Lecturer IV of Italian and Coordinator of first year Italian Language Courses

Since 2021, our program has been offering the Italian 230 course during the spring semester in a new location: the picturesque city of Siena, Italy. This beautiful medieval walled city, nestled in the heart of the Chianti vineyards in the Tuscany region, provides an exceptional setting for our students to immerse themselves in Italian culture, particularly the unique Sienese and Tuscan traditions.

The program spans just over five weeks, during which students reside with local Sienese families. These host families do not necessarily speak English, encouraging students to practice and enhance their Italian language skills both from prior knowledge and newly acquired lessons. Our classes are conducted at the CET organization's headquarters in Siena, a space that facilitates the needs of both teachers and students from various universities.

The CET staff in Siena is exemplary, always willing to assist in any way possible. Under the leadership of Victoria Van Luit, the director, all programs at the CET center are closely supervised. Victoria is known for her attentiveness, friendliness, and kindness, quickly earning the trust of those who study and teach there.

This program offers a fantastic opportunity to experience life outside the USA and to embrace the beauty of living in Italy. Now, Let's hear from Lauren, an undergraduate student who went on this program!

Lauren Carlson, Siena Program Spring 2024

When she arrived at U-M, Lauren Carlson enrolled in Italian courses her freshman year because of her interest in Italian culture and cuisine. In Spring 2024, she embarked on the Siena 230 Program. Lauren recalls that she had only taken two semesters of Italian at the time. She says she was "speaking Italian primarily, every single day. It was challenging, but my language skills



Lauren Carlson in Siena on study abroad in Spring 2024

improved significantly."

Having come back from Siena, she maintains a strong connection to the host family she stayed with in Italy, saying "I have a second family in Siena. I miss them everyday...I am still in touch with my host family and I have promised myself I will make it back to Siena one day to spend valuable time with them again. The experience I got to have, in just a few short weeks, was life-changing and priceless. The most special part of study abroad programs is being in a place that is completely different than anything I've ever known, different people, different customs, different culture, and it was hard to adjust at first, but now there are so many things I miss."

Now Lauren finds ways to use her Italian knowledge in her daily life. She works in a downtown Ann Arbor Italian restaurant to be near Italian cuisine, and even speak Italian. "More often than I thought, people come into the restaurant that are Italian and I always get excited to practice my speaking skills and talk with them."



A photo from Lauren's time on study abroad. Photos courtesy of Lauren Carlson

Spanish 400 Credit in Granada, Spain

Lorenzo García-Amaya



In this section, Lorenzo García-Amaya interviews three students who attended the Spanish 400 level study abroad Granada, Spain program: Natalia Dussán, Brady Nichols, and Jake Kroepel.

What was the most memorable part of your experience in Granada?

BRADY My best memories are walking around the city with other students, taking in the beautiful architecture, enjoying the weather, and forming deep friendships. Exploring the shops and restaurants on a whim always led to something unique and exciting.

JAKE Initially, I was anxious since I hadn't met most of the other participants, but I was amazed by how quickly I built a community. The warmth of the locals and the chance to explore with new people made the transition smooth and enjoyable. The friendships I made in Granada are something I will cherish for life.

NATALIA Unlike Jake and Brady, I stayed in a dorm (rather than a homestay) with 11 other IES students; five of us were from U-M! The most memorable part of my experience was our daily commute together between the dorm and classes. Exploring with classmates and friends is truly precious. I still remember the smell of bread from the bakery and the aroma from the chocolate shop that always kept its doors open to the Granada breeze.

How did the study abroad program impact your understanding of Spanish culture and language?

JAKE I entered the program with a solid grasp of Spanish but knew little about the culture. Immersion through my homestay, friendships, and classes significantly improved my language skills, especially in adopting everyday phrases. I loved learning about Andalusian dishes, which became staples for me. Two courses, Urban Art & Culture and Islamic Art & Architecture, enriched my connection to Granada's culture.

NATALIA My understanding of Spanish culture was shaped by my Latin American heritage—a strictly colonial perspective. This program challenged those notions and revealed a richer, more nuanced reality of Spain. Even as a native Spanish speaker, there was so much to learn beyond language. Granada, in particular, is a vibrant blend of Islamic, Jewish, Christian, and Romani history showcasing its Arab and European influences.

BRADY The trip deepened my understanding of Spain's regional cultures. Hearing directly from locals helped me realize that many don't see themselves as Spanish at all. This experience also made me appreciate how speaking a second language can bridge gaps and build trust.



Did you have any unique or unexpected experiences that stood out?

NATALIA Jake, Brady, and I teamed up to make Tortilla de Papa and Salmorejo. I don't usually cook and tend to avoid stressful situations, like flipping the tortilla in front of actual Spanish people. However, I gave it a shot and succeeded. I'm grateful that IES provided so many opportunities to try new things.



Natalia, Brady, and Jake on a day trip to Seville

BRADY Interning at Unión Iberoamericana de Municipalistas was unique, as many of my coworkers were Latin American, which felt familiar given my background with Latin American Spanish. My solo adventure through four countries during Semana Santa was also a dream come true.

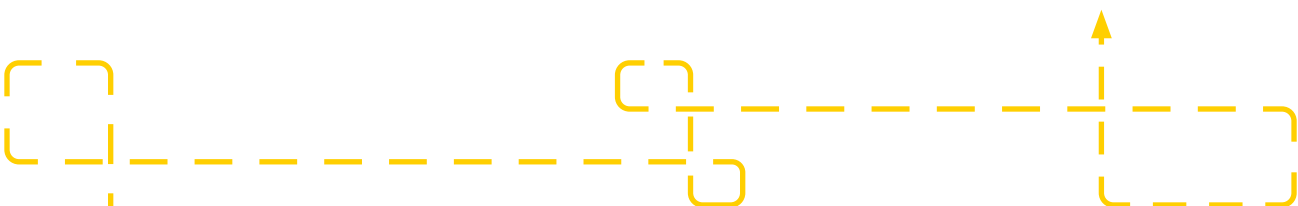
JAKE Granada's location amazed me with its variety of nearby landscapes. I could ski in the Sierra Nevada one weekend and visit the Mediterranean beaches the next. Its proximity to Málaga's international airport also made European travel convenient and affordable.

How has this program influenced your academic or personal goals moving forward?

BRADY The program gave me a clearer understanding of living and working abroad. It's one thing to consider moving abroad, but actually doing it provided invaluable insights. I feel better informed about this option and inspired to continue building bridges with people from different walks of life, even at home.

NATALIA I've always been confident in my decision to study International Studies on the Comparative Culture and Identity Track, and this experience solidified that this is the right path for me. I now feel even more prepared to pursue my academic and professional goals in this field.

JAKE My time in Granada strengthened my confidence in Spanish, allowing me to engage professionally in Spanish-speaking communities. My internship with Farmamundi gave me insight into the pharmacy profession's role in underserved areas, reinforcing my commitment to furthering my education in this field.



French Program in Grenoble, France

Ryan Hendrickson, Lecturer IV of French, Coordinator of first year French language courses

I really enjoy the opportunity to teach abroad as it gives me the opportunity to get to know and to connect with students on a deeper level. Not only do I interact with them in class and on excursions, but running into them around Grenoble and seeing how they are tackling the challenges of living abroad is such a rewarding experience. My class focused on Sociolinguistics, which is the study of how culture and society impacts language use. During the class, students explored ideas such as how vocabulary is changing to reflect our modern world, how accents can affect peoples' perceptions of language ability, and even graffiti and street art. While teaching abroad, I always make space for students to share their challenges, successes, and questions while living abroad. Perhaps they had an interesting discussion with their host family the evening before and they didn't understand where some of their opinions were coming from - we can help to unpack that as a class! Finally, one of our last activities as a program is called Acro-Bastille, which is a ropes course and zipline on top of a mountain! I very much enjoy participating in this with the students so that I can see them overcome a different type of challenge, and so that the students can see me overcome being nervous as well.



Photo courtesy of Ryan Hendrickson

Willow Sky, Grenoble Program Summer 2023 and 2024

Willow Sky, current French and Honors Linguistics double major, studied abroad in Grenoble in the French 230 program in the Summer of 2023 and in the Intermediate French program in Summer 2024. She says she was drawn to the scenery of Grenoble. Regarding the programs in Grenoble, Willow says "Grenoble is surrounded by three grandiose mountain ranges, tucked into a magical little valley that features two big and beautiful rivers that run right through town, as well as forests full of waterfalls and moss-covered ruins; it was right out of a fairytale (with a bonus: it's educational!)."

Looking back on the experience, Willow recalls that she was one of the only students that had only taken French 101 and 102 going into the study abroad program. "I only had those two classes in my pocket: no experience beyond that. I come from a small town where it's a rarity to get outside of Michigan, let alone go to another country....This was a big contributing factor when deciding to go on both these trips, as I didn't want to spend my whole life in one spot. In addition, I saw this as an

opportunity so rare and special, thinking about how lucky I would be to go, as kids like me don't usually get to experience something like this."

In addition to courses taught by U-M instructors and courses taught by instructors at the University of Grenoble, Willow's learning experience extends beyond the classroom. "My favorite experience outside the classroom, honestly, was to eat. Grenoble's cuisine is genuinely the most delicious food I've ever had so I tried it all; from sushi to crepes to curry, no matter what it was, Grenoble had it mastered."

Lastly, Willow reflects on how these programs have impacted her life. "My life would be so much different without either of these programs. I made unlikely friends in all sorts of places, I learned about culture and politics, toured museums and learned history I would have never known, I tried foods and sweets I would have never known of before, and the immersion taught me how to speak so much more natively, more than I would by staying here."

ALUMNI FOCUS

Inspiring Success: From Campus to Career

Shayna Greenley, Public Relations Coordinator

RLL's Undergraduate Advising Coordinator, **Carrie Berger**, knows the value of an academic advisor. When she was an undergraduate student herself, finding her way working and studying in the environmental field, Carrie frequently saw her advisor for guidance regarding major requirements, study abroad, and career trajectories. Reflecting on this experience, Carrie herself "wanted to work with undergraduates because she wanted to support their futures."

The goal for the Alumni Panel came out of Carrie's desire to show current undergraduates the value of an RLL degree. "Students in Romance Languages and Literatures have a multitude of career options available to them," Carrie says. Despite these options, "students in humanities or liberal arts often are unsure of their career path." By introducing current RLL students to alumni in their chosen careers, students can see a version of their future selves, making a successful career with a degree in RLL a tangible possibility. "I [also] wanted to create opportunities for connections with alumni for students post-graduation. This [alumni panel] is just one of the resources that is available to help them. Alumni can help speak to the value of an RLL degree differently than we as faculty or staff are able to," Carrie says.

The panel (outlined on page #) consisted of six students across various careers and two French and four Spanish alumni. **Mary Basso** and **Brett Graham**

both studied French. **Jean Cutter**, **Jessica Czapla**, **Marley Duerst** and **Claire-Elizabeth Gawel** studied Spanish at RLL. Despite their different career paths (and for some, a difference in the language they studied) it was clear to see the immediate camaraderie among the alumni. Ultimately, a love of language, culture, and a shared experience permeated their answers to each question.

During the webinar, Mary notes an overarching similarity among the group of RLL graduates "It seems like folks are really commenting on the flexibility that they're experienced with their language has given them, and that's something that really resonates with me." A degree in Romance Languages and Literatures gives graduates a unique sense of cultural and linguistic flexibility.

Marley adds that when finding their path, students and young adults are often concerned with how the steps they take will contribute to their career, but they have to be flexible and open with their vision of how their goals are achieved. She says "When you look forward, it never really makes sense. But as you get there, you'll start to see the pieces come together."

Carrie advises undergraduate students to "follow their passions and think critically along the way about how to incorporate those passions into a career that brings them joy."

Hey, RLL Alums!
Let's Connect

Tell us what you're up to & your favorite memories from RLL!

Email us at rll.mailbox@umich.edu



meet the panelists



MARY BASSO, '20

"And I actually found it [French] to be really helpful because the skills I learned in developing my language were actually crucial in my first year of law school because if you're not familiar with the law, and I'm sure this goes the same for medicine or any other specialty, your first year in that professional school is much like learning a new language."

"How can we be as inclusive as possible... and question assumptions of like what success looks like for an event in our US terms and what it could look like for employees in another culture and another country. So that's been, I think, a big asset that I've gotten from learning Spanish..."



JEAN CUTTER '21



JESSICA CZAPLA '22

"Studying Spanish kind of shaped what I wanted to accomplish as a physician and what my goals within medicine were. Specifically for that, I think that's really beneficial when applying, being able to have your narrative and show, like, what you're going to accomplish in medicine. And, like, studying Spanish can make you stand out within that."

"I've been teaching English abroad for the past three years since graduating...And so I think that now, in our globalized world, everyone's looking for people who have skills in cross-cultural competence. And it's a necessity... especially in the United States, a country that's so diverse."



MARLEY DUERST '20



BRETT GRAHAM '18

"I had a partner who didn't speak the language and wasn't really able to connect with my client on the same level that I was able to. And I really, not only as an advocate, but as sometimes as her translator, I really became sort of a voice [for the client]. And I think that was something beautiful that I got from my French degree in my legal practice."

"And now that I'm a speech therapist, I've had the opportunity to use Spanish with bilingual evaluations. So [I am] helping to determine if a student has a language disorder or a language difference."



CLAIRE-ELIZABETH GOWEL '20

RLL Goes Further: Sarah Awad-Farid & Eva McAlister López



Sarah Awad-Farid,
M. Ed and RLL class
of 2013

Lorenzo García-Amaya:
What led you from Michigan/RLL to your current role at Google?

Sarah Awad-Farid:

I've taken a pretty non-traditional career path. I started with studying languages thinking I'd have a career as a researcher.

After choosing to live abroad to better my

Spanish, I was given the opportunity to manage study abroad programs abroad. From there I continued in the education space eventually working in tech supporting underrepresented students in their careers before moving towards the business strategy side.

LGA: How did your time at Michigan/RLL prepare you for a career in tech?

SAF: RLL really instilled in me the importance of curiosity. What's the origin of the way someone speaks? What comes through of someone's values and heritage when they use a certain expression? That simple practice of asking questions is a skill I use every day – what does my customer need and why? What is the root of the gap? What is the best and most effective way to support them?

LGA: What advice would you give current students looking to pursue a career in tech?

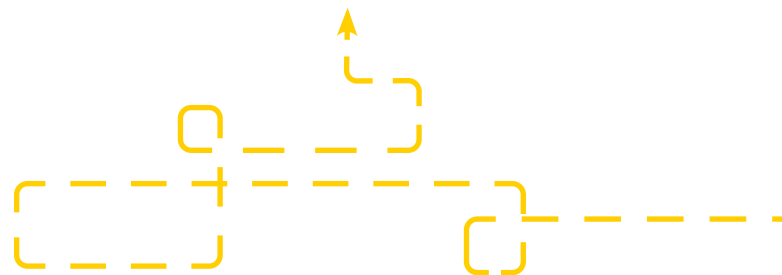
SAF: Balance your professional development in two ways – become technically skilled in a specific niche while really honing your people skills, which takes time. Use the curiosity of languages you learn at Michigan to build better relationships, understanding, and excitement in both your personal and professional lives!



Eva McAlister López,
RLL class of 2022

“As a policy officer at the European Commission, I use Spanish and French every day to humanize otherwise formal, english-by-default interactions. But it would be a mistake to conclude that the skills I acquired in my RLL courses

can be reduced to being merely the “cherry on top.” My language skills proved to be an essential requirement for securing the job I have now. Since joining the team, they have also enabled me to rise to meet colleagues and stakeholders in their language rather than force them to accommodate me in English, while my literature background has provided me with a unique cultural and aesthetic angle for the urban development work I do. In our mission to revitalize neighborhoods to create a more sustainable, inclusive, and beautiful built environment, understanding the role of language and cultural heritage is crucial to answering the broader questions about behavioral change. The holistic value of an RLL degree, however, extends beyond the course content itself, thanks to exceptional faculty who always fueled my open mind and who, ultimately, fundamentally contributed to my ability to go forth and explore an adult life in Europe.”



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