

# The Foreign Languages Newsletter

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## A VIRTUAL NATIONAL IMAGINATION

Next Spring, the Foreign Languages Department core course, CMLT 130, "Studies in the National Imagination," will be offered with some new and exciting technological innovations. Faculty members have been working under the guidance of Professor Constance Montross, coordinator of the LARC, and Anthony Helm of Information Technology Services on ways to integrate new visual and internet technologies into the activities of the course. This Spring's edition of the National Imagination, featuring an exploration of French, Japanese, and Argentine constructions of national identity in literature and the arts, will highlight some of these new technology-based activities. Among these will be video archives of mini-lectures and round-table discussions on course topics, accessible through Blackboard; digitalized slide archives to be used by both faculty and students; and student projects incorporating digital technology and internet research.

"Conceptually, 'The National Imagination' will remain the same course that students have known since its inception eight years ago," says Prof. Marvin D'Lugo, who will be course coordinator next semester. "We will continue exploring the way cultures construct and perpetuate notions of community identity, social affiliation and allegiance. What will be different is the new emphasis on visual artifacts and ways both students and faculty can employ them. We have been exploring a wide range of pedagogical and thematic issues related to the technological dimension of this course, including the effects of digital technology and the Internet on identity and the national imagination."

As Professor Montross notes, the revamping of the course comes from an increasing on-campus emphasis on technologies such as Blackboard. It also has, however, an important cultural and intellectual basis. She cites Thomas Friedman's recent book, *Longitudes and Attitudes* (2002), in which the New York Times correspondent observes "that while the world is being globalized, shrunk, and tied together ever more closely in technological terms, this has not been accompanied by a better mutual understanding between cultures, countries and civilizations. There is a mismatch. We are technologically closer—and culturally and politically as far apart—as ever, at least among certain communities" (373). "In some ways, in fact, technology is

actually making understanding more difficult. The Internet not only allows you to selectively choose your news from only those sources you already agree with, it also connects you with other people who hold your views, in chat rooms and on Web sites, so you can feel part of a community—no matter how loony your views are" (174). "One of our goals," as Montross explains, "is to try to use some of that technology as both a tool and as the subject matter of understanding the evolution of the national imagination for various communities."

Professor Michael Spingler, who will be presenting "The French Experience," and has taught four of the previous annual editions of the course, notes: "We have always emphasized the visual dimension of cultural production and the way it promotes cultural identification. We've done this through slides and films, as well as music and literature. Previously, however, our approach had been rather traditional: students read books and wrote papers. With the new capability of Internet technology, we are designing activities, including student projects, that will emphasize the power of visual culture."

"In 'The National Imagination,'" Spingler continues, "I have always relied heavily on theater, film, and images of political and popular culture in France (17<sup>th</sup> century almanacs and etchings of theatrical productions, illustrations from newspapers and magazines from the 18<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> century). One possible assignment that would replace a conventional short paper might be for students to organize a range of images thematically in a kind of *catalogue raisonné* (or montage) in which the images would be explicated by written analysis and commentary. They could also 'paste' visual images into their regular written assignments citing and analyzing them as they would textual sources. *Imagination* suggests *image*; finally we have the means to make visual imagery an essential component of the course."

Professor Alice Valentine, who will be teaching "The Japanese Experience" for the first time, is far from a novice when it comes to working with internet materials for the Japanese culture curriculum. The possibilities are extraordinary, she believes. "Technology can help free us from overdependence on translated texts and allow students the immediacy of visual images of everything from calligraphy to tea ceremony to No drama, kabuki, and sword fighting. In Japan, where re-imagining the past is such an integral part of modern constructions of national identity, visual repre-

sentation offers another way to focus on the questions of how, by whom, and for what purposes certain aesthetic/moral values have been generated, maintained, and transmitted. With Connie and Anthony's help, we are expanding not just how we teach, but also how students respond.

"For 'The Japanese Experience,' given links to certain web-based resources of text, image, and sound, students could explore modern Japanese web sites for normative ethical values revealed in 11th and 12th century women's diaries or trace the reinvention of the samurai warrior from 17th century texts, through 18th century drama, to Kurosawa films, to current anime. Small group projects could include crossing the national borders of the class: for example, students might create a presentation that shows how the elevation of traditional Japanese art to the status of cultural icon was shaped by the European models of taste that Michael introduced; or they might show how both Japanese samurai and Argentine gaucho warrior traditions were re-visions of national identity in response to new political realities. Of course, we are currently bound by space and equipment limitations, but I think these new directions can only expand learning and enrich teaching."

Professor Montross notes that while all previous collaborations on "The National Imagination" have included faculty seminars involving the entire Foreign Languages faculty, this year's course is a little different. For the first time there will be a collaborative technology team involved in the course as well, including support from reference librarian Rachael Shea, and Anthony Helm, Academic Technology Coordinator for the Humanities.

#### FACULTY NOTES

Professor of French DOROTHY KAUFMANN gave a presentation in June at the University of Paris, Nanterre, for the conference "Les Juifs: Utopie et Nostalgie." The subject of her paper was a social experiment for refugees

in Cambridge, Massachusetts from 1939 to 1949. Proceedings of the conference will be published in France next spring.

MICHAEL SPINGLER, associate professor of French, has been asked to be a regular contributor to *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, Europe's oldest continuously published literary review (founded in 1829). He will write an occasional "lettre d'Amérique" dealing with cultural and artistic questions. The first *lettre* will appear in the December 2002 issue.

In October, IVY SUN, instructor of Latin, hosted a Latin/Roman banquet for her students at her home. It was pouring rain, but two brave students volunteered to supervise the meat on the grill outside. *Per aspera ad astra!*

Professor of Spanish MARVIN D'LUGO's review of Mark Allinson's *A Spanish Labyrinth: The Films of Pedro Almodóvar* appears in the most recent issue of *Film Quarterly* (Fall 2002).

Professor D'Lugo has also been invited to present a paper at the annual meeting of the Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos de Cinema (SOCINE), to be held in Rio de Janeiro on December 8. He will be speaking on the theme "Sonia Braga and the Brazilian Feminine Imaginary in US Media." His talk is part of a special panel jointly sponsored by the Latino Caucus of the US-based Society for Cinema and Media Studies and SOCINE in order to promote greater North-South scholarly cooperation.

#### TWO SENIORS TO RECEIVE KING PRIZE

The Fannin King Prize for Excellence in French will be awarded to two seniors this year: Anna Lyssiotou, who is graduating in January, and Christine Turkovitch, who will graduate in May.

Our warmest congratulations!

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