

# Polyglot

Newsletter of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

503-725-3522

## Building on early language acquisition

By Linda Godson, Ph.D.  
Coordinator, Heritage Language Initiative

**T**huy Ho, a senior, grew up speaking Vietnamese at home, but reading and writing her first language was difficult. Raised in California, Ho wanted to reconnect with her cultural roots. "Our parents are really busy," Ho said. "It's not a top priority for them to teach us."

Iris Galloza Vance learned Spanish from her Puerto Rican parents. As a child, moving with them from base to base with the U.S. Army, she lost ground.

Ho and Vance are typical heritage language learners. They learned their immigrant parents' language at home, but did not master it before switching to English at school. Both enrolled in an innovative new program at Portland State University.

The Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures created the Heritage Language Initiative in summer 2004. In the fall of that year, the department began offering heritage courses in Arabic, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Urdu, and Vietnamese. Now, in 2005-2006, students also can enroll in Cantonese, Hindi, and Persian. The initiative meets the unique needs of heritage speakers—students who do not fit in the traditional foreign language teaching environment. These students frequently are more advanced in oral communication, but not as proficient at reading and writing. With instruction tailored to their needs, however, they are most likely to develop the level of language skills essential for professions requiring bilingual competence such as international trade and national security.

"This program helps Portland State respond to the needs of some of the large ethnic communities in our region, such as the Vietnamese, Pakistani (Urdu), and Filipino (Tagalog) communities," said Pat Wetzell, professor of Japanese, who spearheaded the creation of the program.

Challenges facing the new program are many. Instructors need to be both qualified and willing to take on an unfamiliar task. Textbooks—if even available—

are scarce. For the first year, training and support had to be created. Some instructors were already on the faculty: Gladys Pérez, Spanish; Nila Friedberg and Galina Kogan, Russian. Two Fulbright foreign language teaching assistants, Ala Al-Abahadali (Iraq) and Zafreen Jaffery (Pakistan), were signed on to teach Arabic and



Zafreen Jaffery

Urdu, respectively. The department recruited Alfonso Pioquinto, Tagalog, and Vinh Do and Hung Le, Vietnamese, from the community. Xiaoquin Sun-Irminger, of the Graduate School of Education, taught "Methods in Heritage Language Teaching" the summer prior to the program's beginning.

Instructors attended monthly workshops to discuss topics of mutual concern.

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## On site in Guatemala

By Stephanie Oliver  
Teaching Assistant, Spanish

It sounded like a good deal: eight upper-division credits for a three-week community involvement project in Guatemala. But what looked like a cakewalk on paper was anything but in practice.

"Those were well-earned credits," said senior Spanish major Andrea Horna. "We did so much. Every day was packed full. We wrote papers; we read books. We needed to answer 19 very involved pedagogical field-research questions related to what was going on in the classrooms we observed. We had language classes in the afternoons and lectures in the evenings."

Horna was among the 16 students and three teachers who earned credit for this three-year-old Community Based Learning program in rural Guatemala. Launched by Spanish instructor Manya Wubbold, the program enrolls students with 300-level language proficiency for a culturally relevant overseas experience that combines service with learning.

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## Greetings from the chair

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Polyglot*, the twice-yearly newsletter of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures. With *Polyglot* we hope to create a forum for exchange with our supporters and to provide information on departmental developments. In each issue you can expect to find news of the major language programs—Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Spanish and Russian—and of those in our many lesser-taught languages. We'll keep you posted on new endeavors—such as the Heritage Language Initiative in this issue. You'll read about the department's achievements—such as the community-based learning program in Guatemala and our Fulbright teaching scholars.



Sandra Rosengrant



The department is a wonderful and dynamic place


to study and work. The breadth of our instruction—23 languages through the regular program and five languages through the Heritage Language Initiative—surpasses that of any other institution in Oregon. We're honored by the devotion and expertise of our faculty. We're proud of our students, and miss you, once you've graduated. Bring us up to date. If you know of classmates who have not received this newsletter, encourage them to let us know where they are and what they are doing. We want to hear from them, too.

Keep in touch,

*Sandra*

Sandra Freels Rosengrant  
Chair,  
Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures


  
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## Heritage language

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Except for Russian, where textbooks specifically targeting heritage learners are available, instructors must develop their own materials. Since so little is known about how a heritage language is acquired, the instructors must use students as their best guides to teaching. But student groups are not homogeneous; they often speak different dialects and have widely differing abilities and pre-existing (and conflicting) ideas about their native cultures. The first-year Urdu class, for example, had both Muslim and Hindu students. Jaffery, the Fulbright scholar who taught this course, searched for cultural interests and needs to provide a richer context for the students. She encouraged respectful exchanges of views of religious differences with emphasis on connections to the larger culture. She also found that cooperative learning activities were particularly successful. Often, more advanced students were paired with beginners, an arrangement that turned out to be a valuable experience for both. Typically, heritage students enjoy working together and form a kind of family atmosphere in the classroom.

More than half of Oregon's heritage language speakers live within commuting distance of Portland State. By addressing heritage language learner needs, the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures' Heritage Language Initiative contributes to making the university responsive to communities that might otherwise be fearful or mistrusting. It was necessary to focus strongly on making the courses successful in year one. In 2005-2006, the initiative is strengthening its ties to the community with outreach to K-12 teachers and students, cultural events both on and off campus, and service learning opportunities for heritage language students. The Heritage Language Initiative has created a database of more than 650 organizations, individuals, colleges, high schools, and media contacts for marketing and fund-raising. A heritage language bibliography will soon appear on the Web site [www.fll.pdx.edu](http://www.fll.pdx.edu). Portland State University staff and faculty can check out heritage language educational materials through the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures.

This program is the first of its kind in Oregon. Successful heritage language students have the potential to enter a job market that is hungry for proficient bilinguals. Opportunities exist in law enforcement, medicine, the court system, government, international commerce, and public safety services.

## News briefs

Five international scholars with expertise in teaching critically under-represented languages received Fulbright fellowships, joining the department for the 2005-2006 academic year. They are: **Abdurrahman Kara**, Turkey (Turkish); **Anisa Maskari**, Oman (Arabic); **Anita Chaudhuri**, India (Hindi); **Musa Kuchaksaraie**, Iran (Persian); and **Elena Sukhina**, Russia (Russian).

**Anousha Sedighi**, a native of Iran, who received her Ph.D. from the University of Ottawa, Ontario, joined the department in 2005 as assistant professor of Persian. **Nila Friedberg**, who received her Ph.D. from the University of Toronto, joined the department in 2004 as assistant professor of Russian linguistics.

A Fulbright teacher exchange has enabled **Manya Wubbold**, instructor in Spanish, to trade places with **Liliana García Peralta** of Sonora, México. García is teaching three fall-term, third-year Spanish grammar classes at Portland State. Wubbold returns winter term.

The 48th German Summer School on the Pacific (Deutsche Sommerschule am Pazifik) took place June 22-July 28 at Lewis & Clark College. Fifty-four students participated in the five-week language immersion program.

**Pat Wetzel** served as academic director of the first Japanese Intensive Teacher Training Institute held at Portland State, June 20 to August 12. The program drew 25 graduate students who will teach beginning Japanese at colleges throughout the U.S. **Suwako Watanabe** was among the faculty members who conducted the classes at this eight-week program.

The editorial board and invited international guests of the "Charrette" Project, a Web-based archive, will meet at Portland State University for a three-day meeting Jan. 5. **Gina Greco**, associate professor of French, is co-director of the project. The archive, which includes searchable transcripts and a database of grammatical usage, is accessible at [www.princeton.edu/~lancelot/](http://www.princeton.edu/~lancelot/).

## Coming up

The Oregon Foundation for Greek Studies will sponsor a concert by renowned mezzo soprano Nadia Weinberg, 7 p.m., October 21, Room 75, Lincoln Hall. For tickets (\$75): contact the PSU Box Office, 503-725-3307.

### Keep in touch

What have you been doing since graduation?  
Sign on to alumni news: [www.fll.pdx.edu](http://www.fll.pdx.edu).  
Join our listserve: click on "alumni" and follow the prompts.

## Putting their language into practice

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It was perfect for Horna, who plans to pursue a graduate degree in elementary education. The project takes participants to three village schools, where they observe classes and work with town folk on community improvement projects.

"A lot of programs allow you to go and learn, but you don't give back," Horna said. "We were going to help others in the process of learning." In the three years since its start, the program has made possible refurbishing schools, building latrines and creating sports playing fields.

Participants attend several meetings and conduct three fund-raising activities before departure. Each student is required to provide one empty suitcase, in addition to his or her own, into which is packed a year's worth of donated educational supplies, sports equipment, and children's clothing for each village. Funds also are raised year-round through coffee sales at [www.guatemala.pdx.edu](http://www.guatemala.pdx.edu). The project provides \$1,000 to \$2,000 per school, according to director Wubbold.

Jabel Tinamit, a Mayan-owned, Spanish language school in Panajachel, provides the afternoon Spanish classes and arranges the home stays for the participants. Teacher/student ratio for these two-hour classes is 1 to 3. ("I can't believe how much difference that ratio makes," Horna said. "I learned so much Spanish.")



Andrea Horna (right) and Leslie King were among 16 students who spent three weeks in rural Guatemala.

Students stay in Panajachel, a 90-minute ride by open truck to any of the three villages they serve. The villages themselves are inaccessible by paved roads; few of their homes have electricity or water. All of the schools are bilingual, taught in both Spanish and the native Mayan tongues: Quiché or Kaqchikel.

"We have a lot we can learn from these communities," said Leslie King, a senior majoring in international studies and community development. She underscores the importance of having decisions come from the local committees that request and oversee improvement projects. "Mayan culture is based on dialogue," King said.

Camilo Sánchez, who coordinates the GED outreach program for Clackamas Community College, was one of three teachers who observed classes, shared pedagogical techniques with Guatemalan counterparts and taught workshops during their stay. "We should encourage teachers from different levels to have these kinds of connecting experiences," Sánchez said.

## You can make a difference

The Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures has identified two important ways in which you can further our work in language instruction.

### Connecting Educational Communities.

Programs such as the Guatemala project enable the department to provide a cultural exchange of students and teachers with counterparts abroad and at home.

**Scholarships.** Four scholarships require ongoing support from donors to provide aid to deserving students in language study:

**Arabic:** The Noury and Lamia Al-Khaledy Endowed Scholarship in Arabic provides scholarships in varied amounts for applicants who are full-time PSU students who have formally studied Arabic for a minimum of two years, have a cumulative GPA of 3.40 or higher, and have a commitment

to complete third-year Arabic and spoken Arabic successfully or minor in Arabic at PSU.

**French:** The Earl Chiles Scholarship provides up to \$1,000 annually to a junior majoring in French with a minimum GPA of 3.50 for use at PSU or to study in France.

**German:** The Deutsche Sommerschule am Pazifik Scholarships provide a number of awards of \$250 to \$800 to students admitted to the program.

**Spanish:** The Hulda A. DeVaughn and Jeanne DeVaughn Dowd Endowed Scholarship provides a \$1,000 scholarship to a female Spanish major with a 3.25 minimum GPA in the major.

You may make your tax-deductible gift through the PSU Foundation online at [www.Foundation.pdx.edu](http://www.Foundation.pdx.edu) or use the enclosed envelope. Thank you for your support.