**Welcome to the Spanish Department**

Dear alumnae,

Greetings /Saludos! My name is Rogelio Miñana, and I am the current chair of the Spanish Department. I am hereby sending you our new 2007 departmental newsletter. My colleagues and I feel that we need to stay in touch with our alumni more closely and more regularly to keep you updated on current and future events, professional achievements, and plans for the future.

In the last few years, Spanish became a free-standing department, renovated its faculty, and hired an intellectually vibrant group of young, energetic teachers and scholars. This year alone, our faculty are publishing or submitting for publication six books, numerous research pieces, and have received several prestigious research grants and fellowships (including a Fulbright-Hays and Woodrow Wilson-Millicent McIntosh). We are revising our curriculum to adjust it to the evolving, ever-changing reality of our profession and our society as a whole. With the addition of community-based courses and more attention to the Latin@ peoples in the U.S. (the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world), our curriculum has extended beyond national and disciplinary boundaries. We continue to do literature, but also study film, gender, politics, and cultural production in a transnational, interdisciplinary context. While we continue to expand and improve our language program with, among other changes, the hiring of a new program coordinator and the incorporation of the newest pedagogical technology, the number of our majors and the range of topics we cover in upper-level courses have dramatically increased in recent years.

We hope that you all will enjoy hearing from us and reading about what we do. We have ambitious plans for the future and will share them with you as we continue to grow and improve our offerings. Soon we expect to help create a new Latin@ Studies program on campus that will focus on the issues, history and future of Latin@ peoples in the U.S. We will also be working more closely with Latin American Studies in preparing our students for the kind of careers that our alumni have pursued in the past and that we can only dream will be pursued in the future.

We will continue to work hard to offer our students and alumni the best Spanish Department possible, and hope to enjoy your support and participation throughout this exciting journey. We would love to hear back from you, and to get you involved in the exciting intellectual life of our department.

Have a wonderful holiday season, and un feliz año nuevo.

Cordially / Cordialmente,

Rogelio Miñana
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“Throughout my time at Mount Holyoke, the faculty of the Spanish department have and continue to challenge me to develop my Spanish language and critical thinking skills that were key to my success as an intern in Spain this summer and for many summer internships to come.”

Aviva Elzufon’10

Monica Ballagh’08

Students’ Experiences

This issue will be dedicated to students’ activities at MHC and their study abroad experiences. We hope you enjoy it.

Study Abroad

Trial, embarrassment, friendship and overcoming stereotypes: my study abroad experience in Seville

My first week in Seville was difficult. I did not know anyone in my program or in Seville. I spent the two days in my hotel room. I only ventured out as far as the Starbucks on the street corner. It seems ridiculous now, but I thought that if I went to somewhere familiar I would not feel as homesick. I enter the Starbucks and the woman behind the bar looks at me quickly spits out a phrase I did not even comprehend. I thought that perhaps she was not speaking Spanish, and she was not, she was using the English names for the drinks. Since I did not understand what she was saying in English, I decide to try and order a coffee in Spanish. She nods and spits out options and I quickly say "no," without understanding exactly what she meant. She hands me the drink, I pay, and then I realize the bitter truth. I had not actually ordered coffee but rather "cafe con leche" (cappuccino and steamed milk). In that moment it finally hit me that I was in a completely foreign country, and that even the coffee was not coffee at Starbucks.

It was then that I decided that I was not going to go to U.S. stores or restaurants in Spain and that I was going to make an effort to immerse myself in the local culture. Those were the best decisions I made while studying abroad. I eventually became very close friends with some of the people living in my residence hall. With the help of my Spanish friends I finally became proficient in the colloquial dialect ("el andalu"). It was a process of trial and embarrassment as I tried to master the language and fit in with the people in my residence hall. When I think back to some of the phrases I inadvertently uttered- I still laugh at myself ("embarazada" is not embarrassed). It does not help that my friends still chide me and keep the memories fresh in my mind. For the first weeks I felt like I could not be myself in Spanish, and that I could only have superficial conversations. It was hard to have meaningful conversations because I struggled through sentences. I often paused to search for the words to express my thought, and occasionally the words never did come. However, the people in the residence hall were incredibly patient with me and were genuinely interested in my life in the U.S. They all thought I was weird, but frankly I thought they were weird for thinking I was weird. The younger guys in the residence halls were baffled by the fact that a prissy girl would actually want to come play futbol (soccer). They could not understand why I would want to go running for an hour, why I did not like jamón serrano (ham) or why I refused to eat at McDonalds, but they accepted me as part of their group of friends. They invited me to their homes during the holidays, and on long weekends. I was even invited to attend a wedding next September, which shows how accepting they were of me. I came to realize that I also was quick to judge them at first. I tried to stereotype them before I really got to know them and that in the beginning they were more accepting of me than I was of them.
The people in my residence were from all over Spain. The variety of perspectives helped shatter the misconceptions I had about Spain. However, my friends helped me move beyond political questions and introduced me to the youth culture of their different places. In the end I realized that we did share some commonalities: some of our favorite songs were the same, we all had Facebook accounts, and we liked to watch Prison Break. Most importantly, they helped me see my own country from a different perspective. Their provocative questions about our politics, health care, and educational systems made me question my beliefs on U.S. public policy. I was able to more fully criticize and appreciate the how our country influences Spain, and especially how American culture projects itself in other countries. I learned so much in those six months, and since language and culture constantly change when I return in the fall I will have to learn many more things. This time I will be more prepared for the challenge.

--Monica Ballagh’08

Research as alternative

My study abroad-research experience started well before the summer of 2006, when I spent three months in Santiago, Chile. In fact, it started in the fall of 2005, when I took Professor Christian Gundermann’s seminar on social memory in the post-dictatorships of the Southern Cone. I became fascinated by the interplay between military power, neoliberal economics, and competing ideas of democracy in Chile, and wrote my term paper on political oppression of the left under Pinochet. Thanks to the type of relationships that the Spanish Department fosters between their faculty and students, Professor Gundermann took an interest in my paper, and recommended that I apply for a grant from the Career Development Center to check out the situation in Chile for myself. I won a Summer Research Grant, allowing me to conduct preliminary field research on the student strikes of 2006, in protest of the government’s unjust education policy. Since my return, I have advocated for summer research as an invaluable alternative to semester or year-long study abroad, not only as a way to experience another country independently, but also as a creative way to pursue one’s own academic interests.

-- Melissa Jones’08

Spanish Club

This year several students decided to start a Spanish Club with the hopes to connect with the Spanish speaking community on campus, practice conversational skills, and create awareness about the Spanish-speaking communities on the Mount Holyoke Campus, within the United States, and worldwide. So far, the club has hosted cooking nights, salsa dance lessons, movie screenings, and established a forum for students who are learning Spanish to practice it outside of the. For the spring semester 2008, we are hoping to increase the variety activities we host to include a regular telenovela, discuss the role of Spanish in the world today, and connect with the local Spanish speaking community.

-- Aviva Elzufon’10

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Melissa Jones’08

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