Interim 2017-18 Chair of Ling Lang Appointed

Professor Jason Merrill has been appointed Interim Chair of the Department of Linguistics & Germanic, Slavic, Asian and African Languages. His appointment is effective August 16, 2017 through August 15, 2018. He replaces Sonja Fritzsche, who was appointed an Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Letters.

Merrill is a Professor of Russian and has taught Russian language courses at all levels and various subjects, including IAH, Russian cinema and 20th-century literature, and leads a study abroad program in Volgograd, Russia. An author of Russian-language textbooks, English- and Russian-language pedagogical works, and scholarly articles on Russian literature and film, Merrill received his Ph.D. in Russian Literature from the University of Kansas. He has served as the Director of the Middlebury College Kathryn Wasserman Davis School of Russian since 2010.

Letter from Dr. Fritzsche

The past year has been so full of activity that it is hard to find room for all of it in these pages! We kicked off the year with a Department retreat in September devoted to strategic planning for the Academic Program Review that was submitted on March 2017 to the Dean. Thank you to all of the programs for such sustained hard work on this important task. I know that it helped us all to take stock of where and who we are and where we want to go. Many important goals were set that we all need to continue to strive towards over the next five years. Much of the year included a variety of exploratory discussions and planning meetings on the topic of an exciting new School of Language Sciences & Literary and Cultural Studies. Planning continues this next year with plans to launch the new School in 2018-19!

While many of us were busy strategic planning, our new Indian and South Asian Languages and Cultures minor got off to a great start this past year. Several new study abroad programs were launched and we rolled out our Summer Online Language School open to all even beyond MSU! Our Korean program continued to expand and our Hebrew instructor implemented an innovative project-based learning approach. Swahili developed online offerings as part of an on-going project supported by a three-year $1.2 million grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to the Big Ten Academic Alliance that MSU is leading to strengthen the teaching of less commonly taught languages (LCTLs).

Finally, many of you know that I will be leaving the Chair position in August and have accepted a new position as Associate Dean for Personnel, Administration and Undergraduate Education in the College of Arts and Letters at MSU. I wish to thank all of my colleagues in the Department for the opportunity to serve as Chair over the past two years. I have enjoyed getting to know everyone and was pleased to have the opportunity to help each program formulate strategic initiatives that will allow them to continue to recruit and retain a wide variety of students and quality faculty interested in the study of linguistics, TESOL, our various languages and their cultures. The talent in this Department runs deep and its students are very lucky to be taking classes from such dedicated faculty. I look forward to continuing to work with all of you in my new position and have full confidence in the ability of Interim Chair Jason Merrill to steer you all in the right direction!

Thanks, Sonja Fritzsche
School of Language Sciences & Literary and Cultural Studies

Michigan State University has long been known for its strengths in language literary and cultural research, language pedagogy, and language science. The planned new School of Language Sciences & Literary and Cultural Studies showcases the international reputation of its programs and scholars while fostering new innovative collaborative structures that cultivate engaged learning and visionary research. This new unit will bring together the Department of Romance and Classical Studies, the Department of Linguistics and Languages, the Second Language Studies Program, and the Center for Language Teaching Advancement (CeLTA). If you would like to learn more about how you could support this initiative, see the back cover for contact information.

2017 Linguistics and Languages Engaged Scholarship

The new Engaged Scholarship Award was developed by the Department with an original donation from the Serling family that created a $1,000 scholarship award for original research and/or service opportunities for undergraduate majors and minors of Linguistics and Languages. With financial support provided by the College of Arts and Letters, who matched our initial award, we were able to offer two awards for 2017 and 2018, with long-term plans to make this a sustainable scholarship program. We encourage would-be graduates of 2019 to consider applying next year. The goal of this scholarship is twofold: (1) diversify the student population in our departmental programs even further; (2) engage students in our disciplines more deeply through high-impact learning activities, in which students gain knowledge from the disciplines, while also bringing knowledge from their other programs to our disciplines.

2017-2018 Winners

Evan Dunbar, Management Major/German Minor

Project: A Study Trip to Germany in Conjunction with an Internship at the Multinational Firm Stryker

Bobby Felster, Linguistics Major/German Add. Major

Project: A Study of the Phonetic Behavior of Ambisyllabic Consonants in Ohioan English

Alumni Spotlight: Nathan Bynum

Everyone has heard about the imperative for global competence in 21st century students. Nathan Bynum, an MSU alum with degrees in Japanese and German, not only exemplifies this characteristic, but is paying it forward as a middle school Japanese teacher at the Barack Obama Academy in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Nathan had an early start. He lived in Japan for six months as a high school exchange student. This set the tone for his undergraduate studies, which included study abroad and homestays in two countries: Germany and Japan. He subsequently taught both these languages at an inner-city high school in Troy, Michigan for his student teaching.

Support from MSU has been paramount to his success and he returns to campus every summer for professional development. The contacts he has made keep him informed about workshops and teacher conferences for both German and Japanese. “Relationships with other foreign language teachers is important because our field is so small. My best ideas come from my coworkers and former coworkers.” These include coworkers abroad. In addition to the networking opportunities that he has made judicious use of, Nathan will tell you that going abroad is key for another reason: forming relationships abroad aids his own language development greatly. Nathan maintains contact with his host sister and hopes to go see her and his newborn host nephew soon. He shows pictures of his host families to his students in Pittsburgh, and says it makes the benefits of acquiring a foreign language and global competence “more real for them.” Nathan gets nostalgic every time he returns to MSU.

In addition to the good times, there were some challenges acquiring two foreign languages simultaneously. When asked the biggest difference between learning Japanese and German, Nathan replied “significantly less squiggly lines in German.”
Chinese Language and Culture in Chengdu, China

Last year, MSU launched a new study abroad program at Sichuan University in Chengdu, China. Chinese language students spent eight weeks during the summer in the capital city of Sichuan Province, known as the hometown of both giant pandas and a distinctive and often-spicy culinary tradition.

The program is directed by Chinese faculty member, Dr. Tze-lan Sang. She observes, “Upon arriving in Chengdu, students were impressed with how ultramodern the city looked while still retaining many facets of its vibrant local culture. Besides exploring the city, they visited a tea farm, a sacred Taoist mountain with numerous ancient monasteries, Buddhist grottos, a giant panda research base, the Sanxingdui Museum featuring archeological finds, and other sites. They got a taste of the local Chengdu dialect besides studying Mandarin. And they even learned how to play Mahjong—a popular local pastime—while enjoying tea and having conversations with their Chinese friends.”

Since the creation of the TESOL minor, undergraduate students have been added. In this year’s EPIC course, the average teacher to student ratio was 6:16. Undergraduate and graduate students cooperating has added an element of team-teaching—collaborative lesson planning and even teacher training opportunities for the MA students—to the experience. Finally, there is the annual potluck, where students can flaunt their countries’ cuisine, pick up their certificate of participation, and try out what they learned in class by using English to socialize.

English Partners in Communication (EPIC)

A few years ago, the department’s MA in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program transformed the annual conversational English course into English Partners in Communication (EPIC). EPIC is offered each spring semester to improve conversation skills and strategies for adult learners of English.

The course has always had a dual purpose: serve the English language needs of international students and visiting scholars, and residents of the Greater Lansing area (105 students from 19 different countries this year); and give teachers in the MA program classroom experience.

New MSU Summer Online Language School

The Department is excited to now offer Less Commonly Taught Language courses open to all during the summer session. We started in Summer 2017 with Tamil and Tagalog. More languages will be offered in the coming years, so please check back. Courses are available to the MSU community and beyond through the MSU Lifelong Education Program. If you have questions about the MSU Summer Online Language School, please contact Danielle Steider at steider@msu.edu or visit http://linglang.msu.edu/lctl.

Waseda University Exchange Program in Japan

The College of Arts and Letters, along with the College of Social Science, established a new partnership with Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan this past year. One of the top universities in Japan, Waseda University is comparable in size to MSU. Courses are available to exchange students in both Japanese language and culture, as well as a variety of subject areas in English. Waseda also offers opportunities for Japanese language study in their summer session with both three and six week programs.
Chinese Program Students in Character Hero Contest at MSU
On Mar. 18, 2017, the 1st Annual Chinese Character Hero Contest was organized and held by Jiuge Chinese Classics Studies Club at MSU, with the aim of arousing the public’s love for Chinese language learning, and in particular, Chinese character learning. Both native Chinese speakers and Chinese language learners at MSU were encouraged to participate. This event inspired great enthusiasm for Chinese characters this semester among the students in the Chinese Program. More than 12 students from the 300- and 400-level classes participated in the contest.

Paige Korner (bottom left), a senior student from the Chinese Program, won the group championship in the Character Hero contest.

Linguistics Grad Student Workshop Held
The Graduate Linguistics Expo at Michigan State University (GLEAMS) 2017 was held last February. Organized by the MSU Linguistics Student Organization (LSO), the workshop showcased graduate work in phonology, phonetics, syntax, semantics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and child language acquisition, giving graduate students the opportunity to present their work to colleagues within and outside the department. This year’s invited speakers were Robert Podesva (Stanford University) and Ellen Lau (University of Maryland, College Park).

Arabic Major Establishes Children’s Library in Morocco
Arabic major and recent graduate, Stephanie Saba, spent the 2016-17 academic year completing an intensive Arabic language program in Meknes, Morocco, during which she made a difference in the lives of children who visit the Library of the Grand Mosque. Saba is one of 23 students nation-wide chosen to participate in the 2016-2017 Arabic Flagship Program offered through the American Council for International Education.

As part of this highly competitive program, students are expected to immerse themselves in the culture of Morocco by living with host families and choosing an internship that aligns with their course studies. Saba, a lover of languages, interned at the Library of the Grand Mosque.

Upon arriving for her internship, Saba found that the library did not have a children’s section so she sought to do something about that. Alongside her fellow interns, Saba created a GoFundMe page to raise money to turn a storage room into a children’s reading room.

The project relied heavily on donations, including free furniture from the Moroccan Ministry of Culture, and the money raised was used to buy materials for the children’s reading room. To decorate the room, Saba projected images on the wall and hand-painted them.

Children can now check out books from the library or just sit in the room and read. Saba said, “Before, they never had anywhere to go...I read to 40 students at a time and then watch(ed) them all line up to check out a book. It feels like I made a difference somewhere.”

2016-17 Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistants (FLTAs)
Summer College Research Abroad Monies (SCRAM) Awardees

The College of Arts and Letters awarded three department graduate students fellowships whose research requires significant use of facilities, sources or resources abroad. The SCRAM awards are intended for students in the latter stages of degree completion and support travel in the summer.

Ghulam Rasool, MA student, TESOL – Ghulam will investigate Pakistani undergraduate students’ motivation to learn English in light of a recent order passed by the Supreme Court of Pakistan to adopt Urdu as the official language of the country, and another order passed by the Lahore High Court (Pakistan) to conduct the Central Superior Services (CSS) examination (an examination held every year for induction in civil service/bureaucracy) in Urdu instead of English.

Krnsa Santos, Ph.D candidate, German – Krnsa will be based in Berlin this summer to learn more about the history and current landscape of German hip-hop. He will be documenting oral histories from hip-hop producers, activists and artists to survey the origins of German hip-hop and how it is responding to current events like the refugee crisis. There will be a particular emphasis on graffiti art in Germany and the increasing number of prominent female rappers.

Xiaomei Wang, Ph.D candidate, Linguistics – Xiaomei’s project investigates variation and change in Tianjin Chinese, a Northern Mandarin dialect spoken in Tianjin, China. Previous studies on Chinese language standardization focus on the influences of Standard Chinese on dialects, while the local communities' responses to standardization have been ignored. Wang’s project studies how the Tianjin community responds to Standard Chinese, especially in this period when a great number of migrants have been settling in Tianjin.

Student Spotlight: Anne von Petersdorff-Campen

As part of her dissertation, Anne von Petersdorff, a fourth year doctoral student studying German Studies and Digital Humanities, spent two and a half months traveling with a friend from Egypt to Germany only allowing themselves to walk, sail, or take modes of transportation with wheels – no flights. From this experience, she produced a documentary that has already been accepted at three international film festivals.

The multimedia dissertation, titled “Body, Voice, and Collaboration: Reframing the Woman Traveler in Autobiographical Film and Filmmaking,” is concerned with female bodies in transit and challenges existing representations of women travelers. It consists of two parts: a feature documentary and a theoretical-historical exploration of film aesthetics.

“This project was born out of my personal travel experience and the notion that traveling as a woman is different than traveling as a man,” von Petersdorff said. “Not only was it the experience itself that was different, but also the way it was perceived. I had to justify my decision to travel much more than male travelers, and all these things got me more interested in how the female traveler is seen and represented.”

To create the documentary, von Petersdorff took the trip from Egypt to Germany in 2014 with Maria Perez Escala, co-producer of the film. The pair personally managed every aspect of the experience, including videotaping, sound recording and editing.

After returning from her travels, von Petersdorff completed the documentary, entitled Wanderlust: Cuerpos en Tránsito, and submitted it to film festivals around the world where it was accepted at FEMCINE in Santiago, Chile, the Crossing Europe Film Festival in Linz, Austria; and The Travel FilmFest International Film Festival in Cyprus.
New Faculty

Xuefei Hao
Academic Specialist, Chinese
MA/Renmin Univ.

Cheng-Wei Lin
Instructor, Arabic
MA/U. of Michigan

Premlata Vaishnava
Asst. Prof., Hindi
PhD/Rajasthan Vidyapeeth

Wenyong Zhou
Asst. Prof., Chinese
PhD/Michigan State

Sandra Deshors
Assoc. Prof., SLS
PhD/University of Sussex

Faculty Notes

Brahim Chakrani (Arabic) promoted to Associate Professor, effective July 2016.

Peter De Costa (SLS, TESOL) won the American Educator Research Association (AERA) Language & Social Processes SIG Emerging Scholar Award.

Charlene Polio (Associate Chair) and Peter De Costa (SLS, TESOL) appointed co-editors of the TESOL Quarterly.

Cristina Schmitt (Linguistics) awarded National Science Foundation grant to investigate first language acquisition of Spanish-speaking children under conditions of language contact.

Johanna Schuster-Craig (German) received Spirit of Ability Award by the MSU Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD) for creating a welcoming environment for all students.

Lynn Wolff (German) awarded a C.H. Beck Fellowship from the Archive of German Literature in Marbach am Neckar, Germany for Spring 2017.

Heather Taylor (Linguistics) hired to serve as Assistant Professor for 2017-2018.

New Pod Staff

Jackie Leavitt
Graduate Secretary, Romance and Classical Studies

Benjamin Lampe
Graduate Secretary, Second Language Studies, Linguistics and Languages

Publications

Authentic Materials
Myths Eve Zyzik and Charlene Polio
University of Michigan Press

Understanding, Evaluating, and Conducting Second Language Writing Research
Charlene Polio & Debra A. Friedman
Routledge

Teaching Second Language Writing
Charlene Polio
Routledge

Routledge Handbook of Instructed Second Language Acquisition
Shawn Loewen & Masatoshi Sato, eds.
Routledge

Russian Folktales: A Reader for Students of Russian, 2nd ed.
Jason Merrill & Colleen Lucey
Hackett Publishing
Federal, University, and College Level Awards, Fellowships, and Scholarships

BOREN SCHOLARSHIP
Landon Fortenberry, Chinese major, 2016-17 study abroad to Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, China
Allison Tumas, Arabic major, 2016-17 study abroad in the Morocco Flagship Program

FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND AREA STUDIES (FLAS) FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENTS
Michael Berger, Russian major
Margaret Born, Arabic major
Kayla Draheim, German major and Russian minor
Paige Henderson, Arabic major and German minor
Caroline Hronweigle, Arabic major
Katelynn Klemm, Korean minor
Jacob Leppek, Arabic major
Marissa Marinello, Arabic major
Christian Okeefe, Japanese minor
Sierra Parent, Arabic and German major
Stephanie Saba, Arabic major
Allison Tumas, Arabic major
Cassandra Walker, Japanese minor
Spenser Warren, Russian major
Alainica Zerka, Arabic major

GILMAN SCHOLARSHIP
Landon Fortenberry, Chinese minor
Derek Lacosse, Russian major
Jacob Leppek, Arabic major
Austin Littley, Arabic major
Karen Malone, Japanese minor
Surayya Maultsby, Arabic major

ADDITIONAL AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS
Jacob Blythe, German major, DAAD Scholarship
Erin Degerman, MA TESOL, Shigeo & Isako Imamura English Language Teaching Fellowship
Nicole Koenigsknecht, German major, Baden-Wurttemberg Scholarship
Scott Pelland, Chinese major, Taiwan-US Sister Relations Alliance (TUSA) Scholarship
Joseph Saum, Chinese major, Mosaic Taiwan Scholarship

2017 UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH AND ARTS FORUM (UURAF) WINNERS
Natalie Chemey, Linguistics and German
Bobby Felster, Linguistics and German
Katherine Rock, Linguistics and Chinese
Adam Smolinski, Linguistics and Japanese
Rachel Stacey, Linguistics and Japanese

2017 COLLEGE OF ARTS & LETTERS (CAL) AWARDS
AUDREY AND JOHN LESLIE ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP
Leea Fellows, Chinese major
Kelsey Keefus, Arabic major

RYDER SCHOLARSHIP
Dominic Thelen, Japanese major

ROBERT AND CATHERINE WORKMAN ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FOR STUDY ABROAD
John Bock, Chinese major

Linguistics and Languages Awards Ceremony
Service and Outreach Award:
Edvard (Ellie) Tingstad and Aishwarya Suresh

Outstanding Teaching Assistant in Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian and African Languages:
Carly Lesoski

Outstanding Graduate Student in TESOL:
Jasmin Alfonso

Outstanding Graduate Student in German:
Krsna Santos

Outstanding Graduate Student in Linguistics:
Chenchen Xu

Outstanding Graduating Senior in Linguistics:
Bethany Dickerson

Outstanding Graduating Senior in Chinese:
Paige Korner

Outstanding Graduating Senior in German:
Marie Siegel

Outstanding Graduating Senior in Japanese:
Ruipeng Lu

Outstanding Graduating Senior in Arabic:
Paige Henderson

Outstanding Graduating Senior in Russian:
Emilee Tripp
Hello Alums! Tell us your stories!

We would love to hear more about what you are up to, what you do (your job title and duties), where you work, and how your studies in one or more of our programs helped prepare you for where you are now. Please send us your story of no more than 200 words to Ben Lampe (lampeben@msu.edu) with “My Alum Story” in the subject line. If you wish, you can also include a photo (.jpg or .png format). We’ll include selected ones on our website or in our newsletter.

Make a Gift to LingLang

Please think of investing in the future of the Department and the School via a gift designated for: 1) Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian and African Languages, which supports a program of your choice in the Department (contact us to specify program), 2) Endowed Scholarship for German Language and Culture in Mayen Program, which funds students who study on the Mayen, Germany summer program, 3) George F. Peters Scholarship Fund, which supports students who study on the German Academic Year in Freiburg, Germany program, or (4) Engaged Scholarship.

Contributors/Special Thanks:
Ben Lampe, Cindy Walter, Josh Morey, College of Arts and Letters Marketing and Communications, Ian Solheim, Dr. Tze-Lan Sang, Dr. Debra Hardison, Dr. Camelia Suleiman, Carlos Rivera, Dr. Rajiv Ranjan