

# Polyglot

Newsletter of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

503-725-3522

## Greetings from the chair

Did you know that our department now is the largest at PSU? At a time when foreign language enrollments are in decline across the nation, ours continue to climb. Nearly



Sandra Rosengrant

3,500 students signed up for classes in a foreign language for fall 2005. I see three factors for interest here at Portland State: the devotion of our faculty; the variety of languages that we teach; and our emphasis on proficiency.

In the 1980s, when much of language instruction focused on grammar, Louis Elteto, who was then chair of the department, asked our faculty to orient teaching to what students can do with the language. Under his leadership, many of the PSU faculty attended Oral Proficiency Interview workshops offered by the American Council of Teachers of

Foreign Languages. Since then, Suwako Watanabe has become a nationally recognized expert in Japanese testing and training; William Fischer and I have published proficiency-oriented instructional materials; and all of us have profited from the ongoing emphasis on making language work—in writing, listening, speaking, and cultural competence.

Building upon that legacy, please consider in your support for the department, a gift that allows us to provide ACTFL training to all of our teaching personnel. At a cost of \$850 per attendee, instructors can attend a four-day workshop on assessment standards and techniques.

In this issue of *Polyglot*, we profile two alumni who have continued to profit from using the language they studied at PSU. How has yours enriched your life? Please sign on to alumni news [www.fll.pdx.edu](http://www.fll.pdx.edu) and tell us.

*Sandra*

Sandra Freels Rosengrant

## Language leads to career surprises

By Stephanie Oliver  
Teaching Assistant, Spanish

Decades may separate the high school studies that led Jim Gilbert and Selina Hickman to their undergraduate degrees in Russian at Portland State University, but both have found ways to put their love of language to work in the careers that followed. For Gilbert, the route was surprising and circuitous; for Hickman, it is still under construction. Both would say that Russian speaks to what they are about. The university regularly counsels students who wish to explore vocational opportunities for language majors. Louise Paradis of the Career Center conducts the sessions. Gilbert's and Hickman's stories illustrate how different those careers can be.

Gilbert is the owner of Northwoods Nursery, a wholesale nursery, and One Green World, a mail-order plant business, which ships all over the country from its headquarters in Molalla. A college dropout in the '60s, Gilbert tried his hand at commercial fishing and boat building before settling into the nursery business. He returned to PSU in the '80s, taking night classes while running a business and raising a daughter. He had started studying Russian at Madison High School in Portland and returned to it as his major in college. But it wasn't until he began to research a specific plant at the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland, that he found a way to connect it to his livelihood.

He noted that a number of the references to a plant he wanted to import—the Arctic Beauty Kiwi—were in Russian. This plant and others, native to Russia's Far East, have led him back and forth across the Pacific, to Siberia, to Uzbekistan—to nearly everywhere in the former Soviet Union—for the past 16 years. Gilbert, who is running for state representative from his district as a Democrat, has made two teaching trips to Uzbekistan under the auspices of United States Agency for International Development (USAID). He has brought Russians, Ukrainians, and Uzbeks to train with him in Molalla.



Jim Gilbert (left) and colleague Felix Ivanenko, from Sochi, Russia.

"I feel so fortunate that I was able to have started studying Russian at Madison," he said. "I originally started PSU as a business major. There seemed to be no obvious connection between my life and Russian until I started the nursery."

For Selina Hickman, who graduated from PSU in 2005, the language component is front and center. Her job with the Housing Authority of Portland through AmeriCorps is as an Early Literacy Specialist. She is in charge of three youth programs at Gateway Park, two of which are oriented specifically toward Russian-speaking youth. She runs a story time for three- to five-year-olds and a homework club for seven- to 13-year-olds. She also teaches English as a second language to Russian-speaking adults two days a week. Teaching at two levels, she can observe the sponge-like absorption of the little ones for both English and Russian, while noting how the older children begin to lose fluency in Russian as their English increases.

"We know that literacy in young peoples' first spoken language is critical for their success in the second," she said.

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 The Campaign for Portland State University

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## Italian interest widens "Circle"

Did you know that Portland holds the title for the highest per capita consumption of Italian red wine in the United States? The statistic only reflects the interest in all things Italian that continues to ferment at Portland State. The Italian program began in the '60s with federal funding and continued through the '70s with support from local community leader Harry Merlo. Enthusiasm and participation from community and student populations continually have increased since that time.

"Students of music, students of international studies, students of business, and students of art history all need Italian to pursue their professional interests," wrote FLL department chair **Sandra Freels Rosengrant** in the summer 2005 issue of the Italian Circle of Friends newsletter.

During the 2004-05 academic year, 460 students studied Italian language, literature, and culture. Italian language is offered at three levels. In recognition of this interest, the Italian Circle of Friends seeks to raise funds to create a tenure-track position in Italian. More than 50 individuals and organizations already have invested in making this dream come true.

In fall 2006, the department will begin recruitment for an assistant professorship of Italian, a position that will make it possible to develop a minor in Italian studies at PSU. Anyone who wishes to contribute to this or other efforts of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, can do so on-line at [www.pdx.edu](http://www.pdx.edu) by following the prompts through "giving at PSU" and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences or by using the envelope that accompanies this newsletter.

## Career surprises . . .

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Hickman says her work is challenging, but gives her a lot of freedom. Her adult students come with accents from all over the former Soviet Union. Like Gilbert, she was first exposed to Russian language study in high school. In her case, it was in Vermont, where she also took part in a two-week exchange to St. Petersburg through a program called Project Harmony. Hickman knew that when she graduated from PSU in 2005, it was going to be very important to her to have Russian directly connected with her work.

"If you don't use a language, it really decays," she said. "I didn't want to go backwards."

## News briefs

### IN PRINT

**Eva Núñez-Méndez**, assistant professor of Spanish linguistics, **Nila Friedberg**, assistant professor of Russian linguistics, and **Inger M. Olsen**, adjunct instructor in Danish, announce recent book publications. Núñez authored *Fundamentos de fonología y fonética española para hablantes de inglés* (Lincom). Friedberg co-edited *Formal Approaches to Poetry: Recent Developments in Metrics* with B. Elan Dresher (Mouton de Gruyter). Olsen co-edited an anthology, *Female Voices of the North II* (Praesens Verlag), with Sven Hakon Rossel.

### PETER PAN IN VIETNAMESE

The Portland State Library announces the addition of a number of "graphic novels" in foreign languages, made possible through a partnership with Dark Horse Comics, a



Milwaukie-based publisher. For more information on how to access the collection, e-mail Linda Absher, foreign languages librarian, [absh-erl@pdx.edu](mailto:absh-erl@pdx.edu). Established by PSU alumnus Mike Richardson, Dark Horse Comics, the third largest such publisher in the United States, produces licensed properties, including *Star Wars*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,

*Predator* and *Aliens*, as well as original series such as Frank Miller's *Sin City*, and Mike Mignola's *Hellboy*.

### FOLGER INSTITUTE

**Oscar Fernández**, assistant professor of Spanish and Comparative Literature, participates this spring in the Folger Institute's faculty weekend seminar, "Europe and the Americas: Human and Natural Worlds in the Eyes of Sixteenth-Century Observers," directed by Sabine MacCormack, Medieval Institute, University of Notre Dame. Founded in 1970, the institute sets the agenda for research and teaching in the humanities.

### EXTERNAL GRANT

**William B. Fischer**, professor of German, is co-recipient of a \$50,000 No Child Left Behind—University/School Partnership grant with Mary Bastiani, Portland Public Schools. The grant supports training K-12 in-service teachers and department graduate students. Funds also support design of a new course at PSU.

### INTERNAL GRANTS

Two undergraduate students, Rian Snider and Cassie Miura, were awarded Scholarly and Creative Activity Grants for research under **David Thompson**, instructor in Latin. Other internal grants have been awarded to **Manya Wubbold**, **Nila Friedberg**, **Angela Zagarella**, and **Kathie Godfrey**.

### RETURNING FROM ABROAD

**Patricia Wetzel**, professor of Japanese, returns from three months at Waseda University in Tokyo on a Fulbright Research Grant. She photographed signs, maps, and advertisements in and around Tokyo for her study of the "Linguistic Landscape of Japan."

### GOODBYE AND GOOD LUCK



**Maureen Sheridan**

**Maureen Sheridan**, scheduling specialist, whose cheerful and even-tempered demeanor graced department offices for nearly 14 years, retired Feb. 28. Sheridan, who has a master's in public health, was still employed at Oregon Health Science University in the neonatal unit when she began working in the department one day a week in 1992, moving to full-time in 1993. We wish the best to Maureen and to administrative staffer **Pam Williams**, who also moved on in January.

### OPEN FOR BUSINESS

With the addition of **Nick Miller** to our administrative staff, FLL hours now extend from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Mondays through Fridays. In addition to reception, Miller's primary responsibilities are accounting and database maintenance. The office in 393 Neuberger Hall can be reached by phone at 503-725-3522 and by email at [flldept@pdx.edu](mailto:flldept@pdx.edu).

### COMING UP

Portland State University again joins Oregon State University's Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures and the Northwest Film Center/Portland International Film Festival for Cine-Lit VI, an international conference on Hispanic film and fiction, to be held at PSU, Feb. 21-24, 2007. Call for papers and volunteer opportunities are available through the FLL Web page ([www.fll.pdx.edu](http://www.fll.pdx.edu)).

## Super profs stay the course

What do good language professors do when they retire? They continue to teach. Such is the case of three of the department's best:

**Louis Elteto**, **Claudine Fisher**, and **George Cabello**.

All three retired in 2003, with some 30 years of teaching at PSU. Elteto, who served as department chair—"on and off" since 1977—has noted some difficulties caused by the department's growth and the loss of Neuberger Hall classrooms to laboratories. Now, without an office



**Claudine Fisher**

and walking with a cane, he finds he is "hobbling all over the campus to conduct classes." These difficulties haven't kept him out of the classroom, however. Elteto taught two classes in the fall, Introduction to German Literature and Languages of the World. He's teaching the latter again this spring.

Nor has retirement slowed Fisher down. "When you are retired, you teach more," said Fisher, who taught two upper division and graduate French classes winter term and is teaching two more in spring. "I am working just as hard as I ever did," she said. "I just don't attend meetings." Is that a problem? Far from it. "I love what I do," she said. Like Elteto and Cabello, Fisher's post-retirement status restricts her to four classes a year, which means she has arranged her schedule to six months on, six months off. Fisher feels profoundly loyal to the university and the department. "I have given my heart to the place," Fisher said. "There is so much freedom in choosing what you teach."

Cabello, who won the Distinguished Faculty Achievement Award when he retired, is equally laudatory. He cites a former colleague who stopped teaching abruptly with retirement and later regretted it. Though permanent retirement will come in June, when his wife retires from Pacific University, Cabello taught two Spanish literature survey courses this year. He also has advised department colleagues who inherited his mantle for organizing Cine-Lit, a conference on Hispanic film and fiction that he pioneered with Guy H. Wood, of Oregon State University.

"It is a wonderful opportunity that PSU has given me to continue teaching," Cabello said.

—Stephanie Oliver