



# ACCENT!

NEWSLETTER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES, LITERATURES, AND CULTURES AT UNCG

## LLC Hands-On Culture Jam

Organized by **Molly Reininger**, the annual Culture Jam was a rousing success with a staggering attendance of more than 600 students. On March 30 from 10am-3pm, students and faculty flooded into the EUC Cone Ballroom to engage with different cultures through activities and workshops ranging from dancing *sevillanas* to picking up a few new ASL signs

All in all, seven different cultures were represented over 15 different workshop stations including the ASL and Deaf Community, German, French, Spanish, Queer Community, Japanese, and even the UK Garage Band community. After such a great turn-out this year, we are excited for the Culture Jam to continue its legacy of celebrating our wealth of diversity at UNCG in the years to come!



## The Language Advantage Series

**Gloria Amerson** graduated with a BA in French from UNCG and later completed an MA at UNC Chapel Hill. She has worked as both a French teacher and an ESL (English as a Second Language) instructor, and currently she teaches French at Green Level High School in Cary, North Carolina. She was our inaugural speaker for “The Language



Advantage,” a speaker series that brings alumni back to our department to discuss their professional careers after graduation, and she shared lots of stories and useful advice for future language teachers in the public system. She told us about creative ways to engage students in the language, culture... and grammar! But she also told us about the



challenges of becoming a high school student, but, in the end, the satisfaction of her daily teaching and contact with her students makes her smile every day.

**Grecia Nandin**, a 2024 UNCG graduate who double majored in Spanish and LLC with a concentration in French, visited our department to share her experiences as a professional interpreter and former TAPIF English teaching assistant. Grecia offered a look into the realities of working across medical settings. She described the wide range of environments she encounters (hospitals, schools, therapy sessions) and the variety of formats her work requires, from face-to-face interpretation to phone and video calls. Grecia emphasized that the job is both unpredictable and deeply rewarding. She has



assisted families navigating complex medical appointments, supported parents during therapy consultations, and even witnessed a childbirth. She also spoke about the flexibility and challenges of agency work, freelancing, and setting one's own rates as a medical interpreter. Her enthusiasm for the profession was unmistakable, and her reflections offered an honest, encouraging perspective.

For TAPIF (Teaching Assistant Program in France), she spent eight months in Corsica working with first- to fifth-grade students as an English teaching assistant.

The experience offered her an early look at public school classrooms in France and life on this small French island in the Mediterranean Sea.

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## ASL Events Engage Students All Year Long

On September 30, the **ASL Program** held *Deaf Trivia Night* in the School of Education Building to celebrate Deaf Awareness Month. Over 50 students came to play and test their knowledge on Deaf culture, Deaf history, and ASL. The winning team received T-shirts with U-N-C-G finger-spelled on the front.

On Oct. 27, *ASL Movie Night* was held in the Bryan Building where students watched the CODA movie which won an Academy Award for Best Picture and for Best Supporting Actor and made history as the first film with a predominantly deaf cast. After the movie ended, we had a Q&A session where students asked questions about what it is like for a hearing child to have Deaf parents.

On the last day of class during the fall semester, ASL students painted specific signs, such as "lizard, or "worm," directly onto their hands. During the spring semester, *ASL Lunch & Learn* in the Bryan Building was

held every other week for students to come socialize and play games using ASL only.



On March 30 at the Hands-On Culture Jam, 30 ASL students volunteered to teach basic signs and provide information about the ASL minor.

On April 2, the ASL program collaborated with the NC Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to host a special program "*Effective Communication with Members of the Deaf Community*," on campus. The ASL students/minors had the opportunity to experience what it is like to be Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind through various hands-on activities. For example, they listened to audio that simulated mild high frequency hearing loss and wrote down the 10 words they heard. In another activity, they participated in a lip-reading exercise. The last activity, which was a challenge, involved wearing a blindfold and inserting geometric blocks into corresponding slots on a cube.



*Odin the service dog visits an ASL 102 course*

## J-Song Jam a Success!

The **Japanese Program** celebrated the success of a new event this spring. J-Song Jam was held on April 10, 2026, from 1-3pm. Designed to celebrate well-being through music of Japan, J-Song Jam invited participants to share their favorite song with event guests. With over 40 guests in attendance, this event also informed guests of many different types of Japanese songs, including its history and roots in Japanese poetry from the 11th Century all the way to City Pop from the 1980's. Performers introduced and sang along to their favorite songs while guests were invited to follow the translated

lyrics on the screen. This event, rooted in student engagement and success, was received by students greatly and is very likely to become a key event for the Japanese program.



## Faculty-Led Trip To Cusco, Peru

UNCG students studying Spanish spent a transformative month abroad this summer in Cusco, Peru, fully immersed in the region's language, culture, and community. Living with host families and attending daily Spanish classes, participants gained invaluable real-world language practice and cultural insights.

As part of a service-learning partnership with Corazón Apu, UNCG students collaborated and taught English to local children through games, activities, and stories - all while contributing to the renovation of a new school site.

Weekends were filled with visits to iconic sites, including UNESCO World Heritage Site Machu Picchu, Lake Titicaca, Rainbow Mountain, Ollantaytambo, Moray, and more. During the week, students participated in rich cultural activities such as salsa dancing and sampling traditional

cuisine, including *cuy* (guinea pig).

The experience not only strengthened students' Spanish skills but also fostered meaningful cross-cultural connections and lifelong memories. *¡Viva la pachamama!*



## Greetings From the Head of the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

This academic year has been marked by both profound challenges and remarkable resilience within the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. Amid significant institutional changes the department worked tirelessly to preserve its core mission: sustaining excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service.

Careful curricular planning and strategic scheduling allowed the department to navigate a complex transition into a six-language department while maintaining stability for faculty and students alike. Even in the face of declining enrollments and last-minute course cancellations, the department continued to foster a strong spirit of collegiality and shared purpose. Faculty and instructors remained deeply engaged not only within the department but across the university through interdisciplinary collaborations, Honors courses, Humanities @ Work initiatives, and participation in major grant projects and fellowships.

Our department also celebrated the scholarly achievements of both tenure-track and part-time faculty, whose research productivity and professional leadership continue to bring distinction to the program. At a time when language departments often confront uncertainty, the dedication of the faculty has demonstrated the enduring intellectual and cultural importance of the humanities.

This year additionally marked the retirement of **Tatia Beal**, whose years of service and commitment to students and colleagues have left a lasting impact on the department. We extend our deepest gratitude for her contributions and wish her every happiness in this new chapter. We also had to say goodbye to **Meiqing Sun**, whose presence and contributions enriched our academic community in countless ways. Her dedication, generosity, and collegiality will be deeply missed.

As always, we are also especially grateful to **Danielle Parmesano** and **Diana Crespín Vejar** for their extraordinary support, professionalism, and generosity. Their dedication and collaborative spirit have been invaluable to the continued strength, mental health and stability of the department.

*-Mariche Bayonas*





## FOCUS ON STUDENT AND FACULTY ENGAGEMENT



In October 2025, **Faye Stewart** organized the annual *International Poetry Hour*. Eleven students from the Fall 2025 German 306 class, "Nature and the Environment," read aloud poems they had chosen on the topics of sustainability and recycling, climate change and the seasons, and human relationships to the earth. The students also provided background information on the poets and the meanings of the texts they had selected. Participants included ten students from UNCG (**Josh Campbell, Leo Free, Lauren Gottlieb, Malin Hauser, Clara Hutchens, Ian O'Neil, Danielle Parmesano, Line Roussel, Ben Tyson, Jess Villanueva**) and one student from NCSU (**Lauren Dinan**).

**Ren Gottlieb** and Dr. **Richard Hronek** received an Undergraduate Research and Creativity Award (URCA) for their project "Voices From Before the Wall: An Oral History of Flight and Memory." The two will conduct a series of oral history interviews with a WWII survivor whose family would later flee Berlin just before the Wall was built as a result of the Cold War. The interviews will explore themes of life in wartime, the emigrant experience, and what it means to find home. Congratulations, Ren and Richard!

The Department of **LLC Majors Mixer and Pizza** event on Monday, March 23, 2026, was an

exciting way for students to connect not only with their cohort but also with other students and professors in the department. We all shared pizza and desserts while meeting with other LLC/GLC, FRE, SPA, and GER majors. We learned more about the classes each one is taking, how they are applying their concentrations in their lives outside the university setting, and of course, spoke our target languages and compared the languages we are all learning. This was also a great opportunity to connect with professors within the department, whom we have cherished having during our time in LLC.



## STUDENT & ALUMNI EXCELLENCE



A special shout-out to recent our upcoming graduates who have secured spots in various esteemed post-graduate programs.

**Eloïse Madjd-Sadjadi** has been accepted to UNC's PhD in Romance Studies, French and Francophone Studies, and **Clev Hernandez** has been accepted to the MA of French at NCSU. Congratulations to Eloïse and

Clev, we are so proud of your hard work and can't wait to see what you do next!

Our wonderful student worker and SPA major, **Annelise Eidt**, is the recipient of the Provost Student Excellence Award, UNCG's highest academic honor for undergraduates. Congratulations, Annelise! We are very proud of you!

Graduate **Alison Brake** is using her LLC education to land her a spot in the North American Language and Culture Assistants Program helping to teach English in Spain. Here's what she has to say about the experience so far:



“Living in the small city of Ávila, I have been working as a teaching assistant in a secondary school, working primarily with students aged 12-18. The staff are very welcoming and have been wonderful points of contact for any questions. I get to create lessons about relevant holidays, popular cuisines, and anything I want, facilitating English practice in the classroom. With my new relationships, I have immersed myself in the Spanish culture, traveling to new cities and having new experiences, all while practicing my Spanish in real time! I have loved this opportunity, granting me a new confidence in my language abilities and widening my worldview in both big and small ways.”

LLC graduate **Megan Wilson** is applying her Spartan education across the pond in Ireland as she pursues her PhD in social sciences. Here's a taste of what she's been working on:



“Hello from Cork, Ireland! I am well into my first year of my PhD in Social Sciences at University College Cork and I couldn't be happier. I recently presented at my first conference on my research titled, "Care for the Narrator, Careful Narratives; Narrating private selves for reproductive justice in the age of repeal". My research investigates the use of personal narratives in political and social movements for reproductive justice in the US and Ireland. My aim is to develop more careful forms of narration for women and other marginalized groups to use in political agitation that reduce the emotional burden of narrating private suffering. I feel so grateful for my humanities education at UNCG and how well it prepared me for my PhD research here. I'll always be a Spartan at heart!”





## FOCUS ON LLC FACULTY



**Faye Stewart** is the recipient of the Mary Settle Sharp Teaching Excellence Award. This distinction is awarded to tenured faculty who have demonstrated sustained and exemplary commitment to the art and scholarship of teaching. Congratulations, Faye! Well-deserved!

**Alex Hortal** received the Best Research Project in Behavioral Economics Prize, granted by the Scientific Society of Behavioral Economics for his article "Behavioral Strategies for Reducing Corruption: From Regulation to Choice Architecture". In this work they show that corruption should not be understood solely as a matter of morality, honesty, or cost-benefit calculation, but rather as a phenomenon rooted in social norms, cultural factors, and cognitive biases, and they propose solutions that take these roots into account. Congratulations, Alex!

**Jesi Routh** has also been awarded a grant to participate in a Special Training Program for Non-Native Japanese Teachers this June. Hosted by the Japan Foundation Los Angeles, the program spans 25 days, with all travel and expenses generously covered. It will begin with a pre-departure day in Los Angeles, followed by a 24-day residency in Urawa, Saitama, Japan. This experience will also provide her with a valuable opportunity to consult and acquire certain less accessible physical media for future pedagogical use. Congratulations, Jesi! We can't wait to hear about your experience upon your return!

**Ana Hontanilla** secured a "Spartans Thrive" grant worth \$8000. The grant is an effort to help foster student wellness and engagement across campus through a variety of events. We would also like to recognize and thank Ana for her dedication to overseeing the publication of the International Poetry Review over the past several years, for which the most recent and potentially final issue, IPR 49.2026, was just released.

**Karen DeNaples** and **Richard Hroneck** are both recipients of this year's LLC Teaching Excellence Award, and **Joshua Lunsford** received the LLC Community

Engagement Award. Thanks for all of your hard work and dedication to your students, and congratulations to all three of you! Also, a big congratulations to **Amy Brabeck**, who was promoted to Senior Lecturer, and **Alex Hortal**, who was promoted to Principal Lecturer.

**Faye Stewart** gave the keynote address at the 2026 Senior Capstone Symposium, an event organized by the University of Pittsburgh's German Department. Her talk, "Black Lives Matter: The Graphic Novels of Birgit Weyhe," was based on an essay that is currently under review for publication and that she co-wrote together with a colleague, Jill Twark, Professor of German at ECU. She teaches the graphic novels that they analyze in this project (Birgit Weyhe's *Madgermanes* and *Rude Girl*) in the LLC 455 and GER 305 classes.

**Autumn Gallegos** represented UNCG at the annual WISE Conference at Wake Forest with her presentation "On-Site Readiness for Intercultural Interaction: Preparing Students for Immersive Study Abroad Experiences". Participants not only connected with campus partners, but also engaged with professionals from institutions across the country, sharing camaraderie while seeking to innovate intercultural experiences for our students. Great work, Autumn!



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