This year’s 2020 French AWARD WINNERS: All are involved in many academic pursuits as well as contributing to extracurricular and volunteer activities.

Award Winners: Gemma Small, Liz Clarke, Lee Kenneth-Walsh, Windila Balbone

Gemma Small (French & History majors) won the 2020 Departmental Scholar award as well as the 2020 Plante award for a semester abroad in a Francophone country. Due to the pandemic her studies at the French-language Université de Montréal have been postponed until spring 2021. Gemma served faithfully as teaching assistant with the French 102 class this spring right through the pandemic. The students found it quite comforting to have her working with us when our classes went virtual on Zoom and were thankful for her help in the breakout groups and for her extra tutoring sessions. Gemma has a summer project to investigate stereotypes in the famous French-language cartoon series, the *Adventures of Tintin*, featuring a young Belgian journalist and adventurer, by Belgian artiste Hergé. Gemma is working with history professor Shiho Imai on the stereotypes of Japanese and Chinese characters, often reflecting on historical events, and possibly stereotypes of African characters in scenes set in the former Belgian Congo, consulting with Lora Lunt as needed. We are proud of Gemma’s 4.0 average this spring semester!

Elizabeth Clarke (French & Anthropology, Linguistics minor) received the Canfield Award for the most promising scholar in her class. Liz is a superb writer, and someone who takes the initiative to support French activities on campus such as la Table Française lunchtime discussion group and the French Club, and who cares to help other people, even, for example, by walking their dogs or shoveling their snow!


Windila Balbone. (French minor, International Relations major)

“Je reste à Potsdam cet été pour suivre une classe de relations internationales et aussi j’ai envoyé mon CV pour devenir “dialogue facilitator” avec le program de SOLIYA. J’ai reçu deux prix (awards) pour ce semester”- an award from the politics department and the Philibert Award from the French department. I was also admitted to the French honor society which I’m very excited about and I won the Political Students Association elections as the President of the club.” Windila Balbone is passionate about the French language. She grew up speaking French because her country was colonized by France, but also because she loved learning new languages. Her expertise in French has allowed her to work for non-profit organizations as an interpreter and to pursue her career. The French language has also permitted her to connect with the Francophone diaspora.
everywhere, as it provides a sense of togetherness and common ground for multilingual people who sometimes find that there are some things in French that cannot be expressed in English! Speaking French is something she is very proud and passionate about. “After all,” she says, “who wouldn’t want to speak another language, particularly French?” We agree, Windila!

**Phi Delta Phi French Honors Society**
Award winners are Liz Clarke, Gemma Small, and Windila Balbone, but the induction ceremony is postponed until next spring.

**FACULTY-LED STUDY ABROAD**

The spring field trip to Montreal for students studying French or Arabic was canceled because of the virus, but the Modern Language Department did sponsor a successful two-week Winterim travel course to **Spain and Morocco: LITT 350 Spain & Morocco**, literature & culture. The Department provided ten scholarships of $1000 open to any student and two scholarships for students in Arabic studies, which made the course possible, and we kept down the costs in Spain by staying with families instead of hotels, much to the benefit of our students who applied their Spanish language skills - or who acquired some very quickly!

**LITT 350 Spain-Morocco Jan 13-25, 2020**

![Photos: our first night, Grenada, January 14, 2020; & group photo in Morocco](image)

The highlight of the semester for many of our students and for professors **Allonah Ezro-Christy** and **Lora Lunt** was the travel course to Spain and Morocco on the themes explored in the book, **The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Christians and Jews Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain** (by Maria Rosa Menocal), themes of a culture of collaboration and inclusion fostered by Islam, which struck us as a message for our times. In Spain we were immersed in the history of the culture of religious tolerance under Muslim rule over a period of centuries, from 755 to 1492, a culture which was the source for the transmission of knowledge from East to West and which helped to spark what we know as the Renaissance. Fortunately, we finished the travel portion of the course in January before the pandemic. Listening to the voices of our students, we are reminded of the importance of the faculty-led, applied-learning study abroad experiences, and conscious of the fact that even a two-week immersion can change attitudes, build skills, and foster an open-minded approach to international issues. The following comments show some of the highlights for the 15 students.
Sarah Accetta (Psychology Major, Women’s Studies Minor) appreciated living with host families in Spain who spent the time with us to help us speak Spanish with them; the thrill of riding a camel in Morocco (our only typical tourist activity, but one that seemed important to experience); and enjoying time to explore and to see the cities from the perspective of a local, not as a tourist.

(L) Sarah & Nabil Hteman; (middle) Shannon’s photo looking into the entrance to the oldest university in the world, the Qairawaniyya, Fes; (R) Lora Lunt & Julissa Santana, Qairawaniyya University

(L) Shannon Boyle trying on a hand-woven scarf in the weavers’ workshop, Fes; (Middle): Susan Boyle, Matt, Sarah, Shannon outfitted in traditional dress by their host families, Chefchaouen, Morocco; (R) Potsdam students with members of their host families, showing signs that they all felt like family after only one afternoon together.

Susan Boyle (Music Major) loved learning about and making personal connections with the places we visited and experiencing family life with our host families.

Matthew Dammar (Criminal Justice Major, Arabic Studies Minor, here in a museum in important as a student abroad to person’s country so you must customs. He noted that it was Morocco each had influenced various aspects of the other’s country, from architecture and language to demonstrating how the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religions of those regions could, at different times, became fused into one harmonious community.

For Rose Delgado (Creative Writing, minors in Spanish & Criminal Justice), the best parts of the course were Chefchaouen, a small city in Northern Morocco where we had time to speak with locals and get to see their point of view and to explore their way of life; and, in Spain, studying the Alhambra in Granada and staying with host families in Granada and Seville.
For Lauren Derflinger (Music Performance & Business) the most memorable moments included realizing the importance of conversation during Moroccan meals as the heart of family life; attending a fabulous Flamenco show in Seville and singing along with Andalusian music performers in Chefchaouen; and studying the architecture of cathedrals, mosques, and synagogues in both countries.

Brandon Donovan (Business Administration, Communications Minor), like many of the group abroad for the first time, thought that the musical experiences of both Spain and Morocco were amazing. “The Flamenco in Spain was so bold and romantic that it really got my heart-rate going up. The Andalousian music in Chefchaouen was special because everyone got involved, creating a very friendly, inclusive atmosphere. Every bit of food I had was good. I was expecting to try new things and not like at least a couple, but I loved everything. My favorite was trying the goat meat in Morocco and the churros and chocolate in Spain. A truly amazing experience was getting to see the massive cathedrals. The architecture was breath taking. It amazes me that they built everything with advanced math but simple tools.” We applaud Brandon for demonstrating an open mind and his willingness to experience new things.

Taylor Hayden (Community Health, Nutrition Minor): “Although it seems like forever ago that it was snowing in New York and I took a plane to Spain to begin my big journey, it was not so long ago. Through my unique experience I made new friends that I probably would have never had met and we all bonded over this trip. In Granada the Alhambra was a beautiful sight that I really enjoyed. The gardens within the Alhambra were absolutely breath taking. It was gorgeous and unlike anywhere I have ever seen before. The structures and building amazed me because everything within them had more details and more meanings that one would ever think. So much thought and emphasis is put on the aesthetics of the building, with the complex mosaic and
calligraphy designs of the interior walls and the intricate geometric patterns of the “artesonado” (coffered) wooden ceilings. This trip was so eye-opening that I will keep my memories with me forever.”

Nabil Hetman (Music Performance, Arabic Studies minor) reported: “Crossing the Mediterranean was a beautiful experience and it was the first time that border guards were less suspicious because of my name[!] In Tangier we visited a women’s shelter and I was impressed by the hospitality and warmness of our hosts. Traveling to Chefchaouen was the highlight of the trip for me. The city was smaller, more accessible, and friendlier. I never felt unsafe and even strangers were extremely respectful and welcoming. .... I was impressed by the languages the people of Morocco spoke; in Spain it was difficult to find an English speaker, but in Morocco people spoke Arabic [Moroccan & Standard], Spanish, French, and English [and in some regions Berber/Tamazight] often with no formal training in languages.”

Some of the aha moments in Fes for him: “The oldest university in the world was part of the Al-Qarawiyin mosque, built by a woman from Tunisia, Fatima al-Fihri [founded 859, UNESCO site] ...We had the opportunity to travel around the Suq and buy miscellaneous items and souvenirs. I definitely felt that people were asking for higher prices because we were tourists, but I noticed that after I spoke to the shop owners in Arabic they were much more likely to significantly reduce the price.” Thank you, Nabil, for the example that when we try to speak their language, people appreciate our efforts!

Faith Kuliszewski (Music Performance) was one of the students who applied her knowledge of French by keeping her journal in French. Demonstrating her command of if clauses, she wrote: “Si j’habitais au Maroc, j’habiterais à Chefchaouen !” She notes that part of the lasting impact of traveling to Spain and Morocco was “realizing how much I didn’t know I didn’t know!” a humbling experience (especially about the history of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish relations). She reports on her home visit with students in Morocco about the variety of topics they discussed: “Nous avons discuté l’Islam, le hijab, la religion, la musique, et l’université. Elles étaient très aimables.” After studying the architecture of Spain and Morocco, she notices that she pays more attention to architecture now, wherever she goes. Some of her advice to herself for the next time she travels: “Quelques conseils pour moi pour l’avenir :
- Apprenez la langue du pays où vous voyagez. [learn the language before you go]
- Portez plus ou assez d’argent. [bring more/enough money]
- Sois très gentille. [be very nice]
- Brossez les dents avec l’eau potable. [use drinkable water to brush teeth]
- Apprenez du gouvernement du pays que vous visitez." [research facts about the government of the country you are visiting]
other hand, she cherishes the warm welcome from her Moroccan host Salma and her family, and realizes how much Islamic culture has impacted us and our Western heritage.

Rama Muhammed (International Studies & Politics), wants to remember the history in Chefchaouen and the mountains of Northern Morocco, the beauty, simplicity and cultural inclusiveness of the Mezquita mosque in Cordoba, and the wonderful Moroccan food. For those of us fascinated by the geometric designs and the art of calligraphy, Rama was very helpful in interpreting the meaning of the Islamic quotations that were an integral part of all the Islamic buildings that we studied.

Samantha Paige. Remarks, “It was so special staying with the host families in Spain and everybody was so lovely” and she was pleased with acquiring basic Spanish in Spain through everything we did (a bonus because she was doing the readings and journals for credit in French). In Chefchaouen she enjoyed the dinner we had with host families and exploring the market area, accompanied by our hosts, who typically had command of Moroccan Arabic, French, English, and Spanish.

Julissa Santana (International Studies & Criminal Justice majors, Spanish minor). Photo (left) with Salma El Bouamri, a member of one of the host families with which we were invited to spend the afternoon and share a meal. Having dinner with a family, sitting around the table and talking, was one of the best reminders that we share common humanity with our Muslim neighbors. Photo (center) with Rose and Rama, and (right) contemplating art in the museum, Seville.

A number of students concluded their journals with the thought, “I would like to stay here and not go home,” a testament to the generous hospitality that we experienced in Morocco. For Lora Lunt the incident that exemplified that hospitality was the Good Samaritan she met in a gas station. On the path back from the country home where we had lunch along our way, she had picked up a “Tiin hindi”, in order to ask our guide for that forgotten word in Arabic. The painful and almost invisible thorns of the fruit too late reminded her that it is a “prickly pear” in English. At the gas station she tried unsuccessfully to wash off the thorns, explaining to a woman next to her what she was trying to do. Before we got back on the bus a few minutes later, that woman reappeared with tweezers and patiently plucked out every thorn.
Our faculty team - Allonah Ezro-Christy, Jennifer Mitchell, Lora Lunt
(including the eyes of Faith Kulischewski) – overlooking Chefchaouen, Morocco

Jennifer Mitchell (English Department) joined the travel course and set the scholarly example for our students with her response to the “tour guide” assignment, with her presentation on the Medieval Jewish philosopher/scholar, Maïmonides (1135-1204) while we were visiting his hometown of Cordoba. She writes:

“I was so impressed by the range of history that we observed every day, as we walked 6-12 miles around each city. Every day was filled with half a dozen important sites, which were explained by our guides. Each site represented some aspect of the historical importance of both harmony and conflict among Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Thanks to great planning and guides, we had a seamless experience.

I really enjoyed learning with this group of students and watching them handle this fast-moving trip with maturity. They each shared their reactions to and reflections on what we were learning, noting how little we had learned about this history in our mainstream education. At the end of our Morocco trip, several students said they felt they had a much better and more positive impression of Muslims. They were questioning the anti-Muslim attitudes that are so common in the US since the 9/11 attacks, which occurred when these students were just toddlers.”

OUR STUDENTS

Hanna Rosicka (International Affairs, Arabic Studies, 2020) is starting an internship working with Kim Smith for State Senate (District 61) on her executive campaign team. She reports, “It's a small team so we are doing a ton of different things for the campaign.

“With what is going on now, I miss the campus and the Potsdam community greatly, and while I am saddened that my last semester was cut short, I know it's for the best. For now, everyone must do their part by staying home when possible, social distancing, and wearing masks in public.”

ALUMNI NEWS

While professors Ezro-Christy and Lunt and Potsdam students were in Spain and Morocco, alumnus Christopher Witulski (Music and Arabic Studies), now with a PhD in Ethnomusicology, led a travel course entitled Music and Healing in Morocco with his students from Bowling Green State University of Ohio. He has been inspired by the workshop with his students in Fes to create intricate geometric designs, which, as our students learned in Granada, all stem from two basic shapes, the circle and the square, but with infinite possibilities. Chris also recently participated in an interview on Radio Gnawa for over an hour, speaking in Moroccan Arabic with Gnawa musicians. (May 19, 2020)
Here is Chris in his element, playing in a band. He has also been turning his hand to crafting his own instruments. On the right: Chris in his Zoom interview.

Shannon McLaughlin (French major, Arabic Studies minor) was also in Morocco in January, on a semester of study to build her skills in Arabic, but she had to evacuate because of the pandemic. She thought that the response to the virus in Morocco was better organized than that in the U.S.

Colby Cyrus (French & International Studies major, Arabic Studies minor). After finishing his M.A. in International Relations at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Colby has been hired as Program Services Coordinator with Interfaith Works of CNY. “I work within our five programs: Center for New Americans, Center for Dialogue, Senior Services, Interfaith Initiatives, and Development. Essentially, I take on projects that usually encompass some degree of 1-2 of those programs. And yes! I just completed the 4-week introduction Soliya course, and signed up for the advanced one this fall. In terms of living through the pandemic, I think we’re simply seeing increasingly that people can only be isolated for so long. We’re doing what we can at Interfaith to make sure our refugee and senior citizen populations are managing well.” Colby concludes that it is “Only fitting that I start my career in the same place it began!”

Justin Westbrook (Teaching Assistant in Arabic Studies in the early years of the program, trained in Arabic by the military at the Monterrey language institute) just finished an MA in Philosophy at the University of Arizona. “I’m grateful that you continue to think positively of me and I will never forget your mentorship. Your impact was so significant for me in cultivating a love for higher education. I’m glad to hear you are still passionately teaching Arabic and I know your students will receive much from you - and not just language skills either! Thank you for being a fantastic educator and mentor.” We are glad to see our students continuing their higher education.

Laura Capito Araujo (French and Music majors) volunteered to sing for us at a Zoom ceremony this spring for the induction of new students into the French Honor society, Pi Delta Phi. As it turned out, the students decided to postpone the event until next year in hopes of having a more
normal ceremony, since they have another year until graduation. Photo above from her wedding at the Château de Saint Martory-in France, June 22, 2019. Her current project is “MAPS.” MAPS “is mindfulness, activation, purpose & surrender, the four tenants we believe are essential to maintain humanness -- but we are launching next month an asynchronous program called ‘The Focus Factor’. The point being that in the new ‘digital era’ we are bombarded with a barrage of stimuli, which makes it nearly impossible for us to create new habits, maintain our purpose-driven existence in a healthy sustainable way, and finally, Focus. The program is approaching Focus from the infrastructure of things, spending 6 weeks on Routine, Movement, Nutrition, Mindfulness, Breath-work, Sound, and how we can move forward using technology in the new human age. I've spent way more time on google scholar than I ever have reading about neuroscience, brain function, and our nervous system! LOL It's almost made me consider studying it in earnest!” Check out her newsletter at themapsinstitute.com

**Caitlin Jones** (*Arabic and French* minors &*International Studies* major ) obtained her Masters in Social Work at Columbia last spring with a concentration in international social welfare and service to refugees and immigrants. She last reported: “My international studies and criminal justice majors have been helpful with my current studies as well as my French and Arabic minors as I am working with many French and Arabic speaking clients.” Photo is from her internship working for an NGO in NYC where she organized the Housing Rights Program. She writes with sympathy that she can’t imagine how finishing the semester this year has been while coping with all the difficulties brought by the pandemic. She hopes that we are staying safe and healthy.

**Ingrid Taveras** (*Arabic Studies and history minors, International Studies major*) just started her first day as HEOP/CSTEP Counselor at Mount Saint Mary College. Congratulations!

**John Liquori** (above right) (*History major, ESL Conversation Partner*) reports that he won a $1,000 grant from the New York State Retired Teachers Association to pay for the PBL project his students do every year where they research and create an authentic museum exhibit on a topic in local history. “With the budget cuts and COVID impacting school budgets statewide, I didn’t want to rely on school funds to complete the project. This is a big win for my students!”
Corinne Spencer (English major and one of our best teaching assistants in the ESL Conversation Partners program), now working on her PhD in educational policy and leadership at SUNY Albany, exclaims, “Trying to write an international student work policy for an imaginary university is more complex than I feel like it should necessarily be, but dang I'm good at this.” Last summer she spent seven weeks in Beijing working with the Binghamton University readiness program at New Oriental's Changping campus (shown above with the students receiving a certificate from the program). She writes, “One of my grad students came up from Shanghai and we did the big touristy things [like the Great Wall of China]. I was hoping to go back this year, but instead I get to redesign all of my writing courses for online.” Bon courage! to all of us who are redesigning our teaching and our lives to meet the current crisis. Right now she is hanging out with her dog and two cats.

Faculty news
Mylene Catel has published a new anthology of poetry, called *l’Atteinte*, with Editions Stellamaris. The book explores the intricate relationships between life and death.

Bryan Hudak (classical languages) was busy during the spring semester with third semester introductory Greek via tutorial to three students and intermediate Latin poetry tutorial on Ovid to three more students.

Lora Lunt, working with Gisele El Khoury (St. Lawrence University) had planned a second annual Conference for Language Teachers of the North Country for March 20, 2020, but they were forced by the pandemic to cancel. Both presented last fall at the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in Washington on instructional technology, exactly the kinds of tools that have helped engage students during the pandemic.

The SOLIYA dialog program:

Left: Alex Dumouza.
Right: Montreal fieldtrip 2017 with French students Autumn Capucco, Sara Loukili, Colby Cyrus, Alex Dumouza, and Caleb Thompson – How does this international experience relate to what our alumni are doing now – working internationally for NGOs and volunteering for SOLIYA?)

Professor Lunt, like current students Windila Balbone, and Potsdam alumni Julissa Santana, Colby Cyrus and Alex Dumouza (international Studies, French minor) and some of our colleagues, is participating in the facilitator training for the SOLIYA dialog program for first year students, aimed at creating community and a safe “learning space that welcomes all participants” (Rob Hinkley, Politics – SOLIYA 6/26/20) to discuss contemporary issues and foster communications among people of different backgrounds.

Editor Lora Lunt