

A l'écoute

FRENCH/ARABIC/LATIN & ESL Studies Newsletter

Fall 2019 Modern Languages Department

Award winning students 2019-Convocation



Award winners in the French major included:
John Davidson, Brooke Anderson, Emily Willis
Yanilvia Reyes Medrano, Elizabeth Clarke

News from our Programs

Field Trip to Montreal October 5, 2019



Students In front of the Hotel de Ville (City Hall)
Front: Rama Muhammad, Gemma Small, Lee Kenneth-
Walsh; back: Melody Burgos, Windila Balbone, Alexandra
Zagara



Dining at a West African restaurant, in conversation with a
West African student.
Lee, Windila, Melody, Alexandra, Rama, Adama, Gemma,
Professor Catel

One of the highlights of our fall Field Trip to Montreal was visiting with Adama, a student from Ivory Coast who is a friend of Gemma Small. Gemma had arranged for him to have dinner with us and chat in French. To our surprise, he commented that this was the first time that he had encountered a group of Americans who spoke more than one language! We were pleased with our students and their ability to use French to get to know someone from another country and culture.

Comparing cultural notes about holidays, our Potsdam honors student from Ghana reported how Ramadan in Ghana brings together not only families, but the whole community, including Christians celebrating together around the dinner table with Muslims, and with the best of food! She also reported on her Presidential Scholars project, which amazed her fellow students.

Melody Burgos, a first-year student from FREN 103, who bravely joined our group of French majors and minors, reported on the field trip: "We had an excellent guided tour of the building of Quebec art at the Museum of Modern Art. The history behind each piece gave me a connection to the culture or viewpoint represented by each painting. It gave me an internal way of putting me into each painting, which was an amazing experience to have.

"It was difficult for me to communicate in Montreal using the French language because I am not as fluent as everyone else, but being there definitely pushed me to learn more. As I tried my best I also shocked myself by how much better I did than I had expected. This experience has pushed me to work harder in learning this language because it definitely can help me in the future as well as now. If everyone could travel, I would recommend that they take a trip to Montreal! It will definitely put the importance of the French language into perspective."

The SPAIN-MOROCCO Travel course January 13-25

In complete agreement with Melody Burgos about the importance of applying language skills in an immersion experience, professors **Allonah Ezro-Christy** and **Lora Lunt** have designed a travel course to Spain and Morocco on the theme of "Fountains of Knowledge" that will explore a time when Christians, Jews, and Muslims flourished together under Moorish rule in Spain and collaborated in creating a culture of tolerance and high achievements in the arts and sciences; in Morocco we will confront issues of refugees and women and democracy in Morocco and compare Moroccan music to the flamenco in Spain. In support of this valuable experience, Allonah won a **Chancellor's award** and the Modern Language Department has supported the course with a total of 12 scholarships, ten open to students from any major and two specifically for Arabic Studies. With two instructors, a group

of 15 students from diverse disciplines, and a faculty participant from the English Department, Jennifer Michell, we are looking forward to wonderful group reflections, productive research, and some good pictures for our next edition of Al'Ecoute!



The Classics: Latin and Greek offered

Brian Hudak reports that in addition to his Latin courses during the fall, Greek 102 was offered via tutorial to four students. To the best of his knowledge, this is the first time such a course has been made available since full-time Classics faculty were employed at SUNY Potsdam.

French Class Activities

French 103 students researched a prominent Francophone person related to their major or to something they are passionate about, to help them establish more connections with French language and cultures. One favorite example from past years was Elizabeth Radman, who researched Edith Piaf, and then made her oral presentation wearing a little black dress to sing *Non, rien de rien, Non, je ne regrette rien*.



One of this year's highlights was **Jonathan Kim** (above), who lugged his cello across campus from Crane to report on his research and to perform music he loves composed by cellist Paul Tortelier, who was also the mentor of Jonathan's mentor, Michel Strauss. Jonathan also performs with the Orchestra of Northern New York and is planning to do graduate work next year in Montreal.



Our own stories for FREN 103: *The Spark/L'Étincelle: Nos Histoires*

Lora Lunt created a reading book for the FREN 103 classes this fall based on the stories of some of our current and former students with Francophone backgrounds. They included an extremely diverse group of cultures, from the story of Philip Paige in neighboring Madrid, NY and his research on his Quebecois ancestors, who proved to have included Hélène Desportes, the first French baby born in North America; and on to Haiti, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Guinée Conakry, and as far as Ile Maurice, east of Madagascar! and finally an extract from the inspiring 2019 graduation speech of Kadiatou Balde, SGA president- photo above. (translated into French by L. Lunt)

Here are some excerpts from reflections by the FREN 103 students written in French and English. All found a relationship with their fellow students in each account and another student even recognized in Philip Paige a cousin.

CJC (English Literature major)

"This text was extremely useful in giving perspective to the life of immigrants in the US. It relates to me specifically because I technically immigrated to this country. Although young and adopted, I was on the other side of the earth for the first year of my life. My differences are not as obvious as those of some people from different countries: I am American-passing, but my coming from another nation and not receiving this kind of treatment, and other people getting ridiculed simply because of the religion they practice or the color of their skin shows me how shallow and close-minded people can be. ... When we live through the harsh words others can use against us, it makes us stronger. As we get stronger, we can make examples out of the ignorance of other people. They become steppingstones on our path in life and we use them to achieve higher understandings of the way the world works. Moving through hate with love is what allows people to reach greater success, do more in life, and experience what it means to be challenged and win."

Rayvon Davis (Speech Communications major)

emphasized his appreciation of the example of self discovery on a life journey: « Les histoires dans notre texte, *Spark* sont très puissantes et je pense qu'elles devraient être partagées plus. La vie des immigrants aux Etats-Unis semble très éprouvante et je pense que tout le monde devrait lire ces histoires pour que les gens puissent mieux comprendre les autres. Cela permettra également aux gens **de se comprendre** davantage de la même façon que ces histoires m'ont aidé à me comprendre moi-même. »

Joy Jordan (Psychology major): was delighted to find other students she knew and even a best friend among the contributors;

“The *Spark* was a very well put together book. I didn’t think I was going to enjoy it as much because it was made by students but I think that’s what made it better. The fact that everyone is from so many different places in the school is so cool to me. I also liked that I knew some of the people like Sékou, who was in my class last year, and Aladji comes in often just to sit in on the classes (and help out), so it’s nice to put a face to the stories. The story about Haïti was my favorite because the girl that wrote it is one of my friends and I feel like she captured Haïti well. All in all, it was a good book and I think you should do it with other classes as well and have like a little series of them.”

Marie Amell (Art major) was moved by the plight of immigrants and inspired to discover her own identity through story-telling.

« La vie de Kadiatou Balde est une histoire inspirante. Il est intéressant d'entendre parler d'une culture qui est si différent de la mienne.... Son essai m'a permis de comprendre plus facilement à quel point il est difficile pour les immigrants et les étudiants de première génération, car ils doivent mettre en question la stigmatisation des autres, la structure de la société, ainsi que trouver leur propre force et leur propre identité. Je peux me rapprocher d'elle quand elle parle du thème universel de « se redécouvrir » Son essai m'a donné un aperçu de la vie d'une autre personne et de ses efforts pour être la meilleure d'elle-même et de renouer des liens avec son passé, la culture et la religion de ces ancêtres. Si je devais créer ma propre histoire “Spark,” je concentrerais sur ma famille, les amis, mon art, et mon voyage artistique, ainsi que mes rêves d'être un professeur d'art. J'ai vraiment aimé les histoires *Spark* car elles ont combiné le français, l'histoire, les cultures diverses, et les gens. »

T.P. (Business Administration)

“The part of Kadiatou’s story that surprised me the most was how she has been treated since arriving in America. She was called horrible names by people that had no idea about her story or who she even was. It makes me ashamed that people in our country are very in hospitable and ignorant. I’m glad that SUNY Potsdam has made it so important to be inclusive and to see people for who they are in our community. There is no place in this world for hate. Her words and gratitude towards Potsdam was my favorite part of her story and how she overcame everything put in her way throughout her journey.

This text was very helpful in spreading the information about life of Immigrants in the US. Kadiatou’s story inspires me to write about my journey in life so far. Although it may not be as intense and as difficult to overcome compared to that of many immigrants, it may be useful to see where I came from and what led to me being here in America and here at Potsdam. It may even help allow me to understand myself and my future path easier.”

Jonathan Kim (music major):

“I think this text was useful for me to see how someone from a country from Africa [Kadiatou Balde, From Guinée] made the transition and how her identity changed based on that. It makes me interested in researching my own ancestry and telling my own story of a second generation Asian American.”

Alumni news

Yanilvia Reyes-Medrano (French & Sociology)

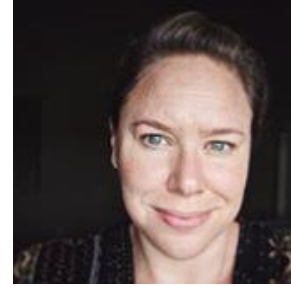
“I want to share the good news that Safe Horizon has offered me the position to work as a case manager with victims of domestic violence here in NYC. I will be working in one of the Mayor's offices to combat domestic violence and gender base violence. I am very happy and thankful for this opportunity. Also, I want to thank you too for the support that you have given me through the process of pursuing my French major. I am 100% sure that Knowing 3 different languages is something that has opened the door for me to work in this position. Safe Horizon has a great population of staff that speak Spanish, but a lower number that speak French and I think that when an employer sees that in your resume, it makes the resume and the interview stronger....I will never stop learning French!”



Caitlin Jones (International Studies and Criminal Justice majors, minors in Arabic Studies, French, sociology and politics –yes two majors and 4 minors!) received a Masters in Social Work (MSW) from Columbia with a concentration in international social welfare and service to refugees and immigrants. She interned at a nonprofit social enterprise called Hot Bread Kitchen in their culinary training program, helping low income and immigrant women get jobs in the culinary industry. Last year she interned at the International Rescue Committee as an Academic Coach helping newly arrived refugee families place their children in NYC schools. She reports, “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.”



Samantha Becker (French): Samantha is still teaching in Baltimore, Maryland. Here is her new classroom at St Joseph’s School, Fullerton, ready for the start of classes. She is proud that St. Joseph’s was named a Blue Ribbon School of excellence by the US Dept of Ed in 2016. “Maintenant j’enseigne seulement l’espagnol mais j’espère que j’enseignerai le français encore bientôt!” Samantha has been resourceful in finding language-teaching jobs in spite of the fact that SUNY Potsdam has lost its language-educator line.



Corrine Spencer (was TA for the ESL program) as an undergraduate, was a great TA in the ESL Conversation Partners program. She has now been accepted into the University at Albany Educational Policy & Leadership PhD program! She reports: “And, everything I’ve been doing counts toward it, soooo...I have 9 classes left!” Her acceptance letter recognized her excellence: “it is our belief that you will be a positive asset to this program and our community.” Of that we are certain!



Heather Sarsfield writes to Mylene Catel:
 “Bonsoir, Madame! ... While I didn’t major in French (that may come later when I go into my PhD work), I will be graduating with my MA in Gaelic Literature in February. And I made First Class Honours! Parce que je suis très intelligente 😊
 J’ai été très occupée, bien sûr. Mais je suis très heureuse d’avoir fini l’école. Ça va?
 Feel free to correct my French...it would seem that I will need it for next semester. Ma fille va prendre 101 au printemps. 😊”



Christopher Witulski (Music major, Arabic Studies), with a PhD in ethnomusicology from Florida State University, is now working at Bowling Green State University, Ohio. In January 2020 he is taking students on a three-week travel course to Morocco, with the theme of *Music and Healing in Morocco*. Unfortunately his itinerary and ours do not overlap. Dr. Witulski is a man of many talents –he is a scholar who published a second book this year, a performer, as in the above image playing the “aoud”, and now also a banjo craftsman: the latest banjo is made of “cherry and ipe with a dyed goat skin head and brass fret markers down the side of the neck.”

Editors:

Mylene Catel, Allonah Ezro-Christy & Lora Lunt