Hello everyone!

As the new Director at the Language Teaching Center, I am very pleased to write in greeting, am thrilled to join the Hopkins faculty, and am looking forward to great years at the LTC. I have received such a warm welcome from students, instructors, faculty, administration, and university leadership, and I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself.

My ethnical background includes Japanese and Swedish, a mix of east and west that earned me the nickname “Yuki” (Japanese for snow). Raised in the heart of Tokyo (Shibuya), I first taught Japanese as a college student, at which time I worked as a radio and TV correspondent. The government recruited me to teach Japanese to foreigners, thinking that an “accent-less” TV announcer would automatically be a good language teacher. It was not long before I learned that language instruction involves much, much more than native mastery of one’s mother tongue, and the challenge motivated me to study more deeply language, linguistics, and pedagogy in graduate school.

Moving to the United States, I obtained a Ph.D. in linguistics (specifically, the syntax and semantics of Japanese and English) at the University of Minnesota. Through theory and practice, I learned the basis of effective language teaching and the most modern, still-evolving theories of language education. The idea that “if one is a native speaker, then one can teach the language” was laid to rest for good, although I have encountered this mistaken notion at numerous turns in my academic career.

Following graduate school, I had opportunity to teach at Harvard, the University of Michigan, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Toronto before coming to Hopkins. At UM and UBC, I served as Director of the Japanese Language Program, working successfully to modernize teaching methodologies at each institution. At UT, I was the Undergraduate Program Coordinator and supervised faculty and students with respect to language course offerings in the Department of East Asian Studies.

As a linguist and pedagogue, my philosophy of language education involves open-minded consideration of modern teaching approaches that are grounded in theory and proven in practice. To be an effective language educator requires a thorough knowledge of the target language (including grammar and usage), of the most up-to-date pedagogical methods, of technologies that augment language learning, and of the culture to which the target language belongs.

Similarly, language learners should be aware that proficiency requires continuous daily effort and that a knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, usage, culture, and communication strategies are essential to mastering the target language. Remember that acquiring a language is not something that can be achieved through overnight cramming; rather, it can only be accomplished through the accumulation of daily effort, and maintenance of proficiency is a lifelong pursuit. We never “finish” learning a language, so enjoy the journey!

With this in mind, my mission at Hopkins is to put our language programs on the map as the best programs in the world, evidenced by expert teaching, active participation and leadership in the field at large in language education, research, and collaboration, and - especially - by the production of outstanding students. Building on the tremendous work already done in the LTC, I am thrilled and energized by the challenges that lay ahead, and I will rely on mutual understanding, strong involvement, and an open-minded commitment from everyone in the LTC.

When you’re in the neighborhood of Krieger Hall with a few minutes to spare, please stop in and say hello. My office is Krieger #509, and the door is always open.

See you soon!

Yours sincerely,

Yuki Johnson
LTC Celebration Honors Uma Saini

On May 5th, LTC faculty, staff, and friends gathered in the Laverty Lounge of Krieger Hall to honor Uma Saini as she steps down from her role as director and rejoins the ranks of language faculty.

After months of planning in secrecy, the entire LTC family showed up for a small party to surprise their beloved director.

And what a surprise it was! As Uma walked in to roaring applause, she was greeted by kind words of thanks from colleagues, a gorgeous array of fresh wildflowers, a lovely buffet spread from her favorite Indian restaurant, Kumari, the sounds of Indian music playing softly in the background, the gift of a hand-made memory book of her years as director, and even a special visit from a former student, LTC’s own Jaclyn Lim.

Uma was also presented with a special spa package and a custom-made serenity fountain inscribed with the Sanskrit words for “Beauty, Purity, and Wisdom” in recognition and thanks of her leadership efforts.

Arabic Students Take Cultural Approach to Language Learning

Ray Simon, Advanced Arabic

Most Hopkins students have taken either French or Spanish in high school. While learning a foreign language is always difficult, what makes taking romance languages easier is the fact that many words bear some passing resemblance to English. When it comes to languages like Arabic, however, this is not the case.

Classified as a Category 3 language by the U.S. State Department, it is one of the most difficult languages to learn. With the exception of a few words borrowed from English, most words in the language are unfamiliar and difficult to replicate by Arabic students. Oftentimes there are many words with similar meanings, but for a student the subtleties and nuances of the languages are very difficult to understand.

In Professor Tahrawi’s Advanced Arabic class we have found the best way to overcome these difficulties is by simultaneously studying new vocabulary and Middle Eastern culture. Through short stories and biographies we are able to see the vocabulary we are learning in its proper context, which is an invaluable tool for any foreign language student. Besides being an opportunity to sharpen our reading skills, we gain a much greater comprehension of the language which is reinforced by writing assignments and oral exercises.

In the beginning we learned about Ibn Batouta, a famous Middle Age explorer who traveled the entire breadth of Asia and made inroads into North Africa. Using the DVD that accompanies the textbook we are able to hear native speakers describe his travels and the importance of those travels in the context of Middle Eastern history. We also read about Tofeq AlHakim, a famous Egyptian playwright and novelist who was critical of the Nasser regime in Egypt. He was one of the most prominent writers of his time and his works have been translated into a number of languages. Most recently we read about Hada Sharawi, a women’s rights activist who campaigned for equal treatment of women under the law. In particular, she opposed the practice of forcing Arab women to cover their heads with the hijab.

After three years of Arabic, students in Professor Tahrawi’s class are very comfortable with conversational Arabic grammar and command a large enough vocabulary to engage native speakers in many everyday situations. What allows students to really pursue proficiency in the language is these cultural exercises. You cannot understand Arabic without first understanding the heritage and the history that has shaped it. By reading these articles about culture and historical figures we are able to walk away from each lesson with a much deeper understanding of the Arabic language.

I have been studying Arabic since my freshman year at Hopkins and I just recently spent a semester abroad in Cairo to try and strengthen my language skills. I hope to continue studying Arabic after graduation and eventually become fluent. While I think the key to learning and language is drilling and repetition, I cannot underemphasize the value of learning about culture of the language you study. Language is shaped by culture and they are dependent on one another. After fourth months in Cairo I can truly appreciate this fact.
A Trip to Yemen: Across the Desert and Back in Time

Colleen Carey

Upper Advanced Arabic

To be completely honest, I had never heard of Yemen when someone suggested I go there for a summer to study Arabic. But of course, that seemed like all the more reason to go see it. And as I learned more, the mystery and charm only increased. A walled first-century city which is, in its entirety, a UN World Heritage site? An arcane local stimulant which is, in its entirety, a UN World Heritage site? An arcane local stimulant that can’t be found outside of the region? A sunny temperate climate and a rugged mountainous landscape? A mild State Department warning? I was sold, not least because the whole summer, for which I was paying out of pocket, would set me back only about $2400. And so I enrolled in ten weeks of classes at the Yemen Language Center and set off. My Yemenia Airlines ticket, which was handwritten, landed me in Sana’a, Yemen’s altitudinous capital city.

There was a lot to get used to, and quickly. The morning call to prayer was thunderous. I was always dressed in loose shirts and long skirts, and usually was wearing a headscarf. The restaurants didn’t have menus; you asked the waiter what they had that day, and tried to follow his terse explanation of the local specialties. Fortunately, my school was a great resource. Each day in my class of five, my teacher would ask us about any new words we had encountered the day before, or help explain any misadventures that had befallen us. We also were assigned errands around town; my favorite was the assignment to go buy a bottle of sesame oil in the Old City. Once I found the place, the bottle that was given to me was a Mountain Dew bottle, but the sesame oil inside it was dripping from a stone mill being turned by camels.

I made significant progress in my speaking ability and could soon carry on a good conversation with a sympathetic listener. Much of the school’s faculty lives in the building, so the teaching continued outside of the classroom. There was no better practice than Qat chewing. Qat, Yemen’s national pastime, is similar in taste to green tea and in effect to Qat chewing. Qat, Yemen’s national pastime, is similar in taste to green tea and in effect to a strong cup of coffee. Qat chews are the main social event in Yemen, and I attended as often as I could.

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There were great travel opportunities outside of Sana’a. The north, an agricultural zone of terraced hillsides, is full of Arab hospitality and stunning landscapes. I took a few excellent hiking trips in the Manakhah region. With my school, I visited the Wadi Hadramaut, an oasis in the middle of the Empty Quarter of the Arabian desert. Gas stations in this area are not just for cars; they maintain water and feeding stops for camels as well. The Red Sea and Indian Ocean coasts have idyllic tropical beaches. With a Middle Eastern history student I visited Kamaran Island, where the oldest villagers could describe in English their jobs under the British colonial regime. I also went to Socotra, a biological hotspot with a huge number of unique plant species.

My trip to Yemen transformed by Arabic language capabilities, and reinvigorated my study of this difficult language. Anyone interested in visiting the country should contact me at colleen.carey@jhu.edu.
Many Hopkins students can point out the familiar face that greets them in the Language Lab. Senior Rebecca Razulis, who will graduate in May, worked as the lead front desk attendant for two years during her time at Hopkins. She wanted to work at the LTC because she called it “the center for languages on campus” and enjoyed getting “to see [her] classmates and teachers at the LTC.” Rebecca will graduate as a Latin American Studies and East Asian studies double major with a minor in History. On campus, she was involved with her sorority, Phi Mu.

One unexpected experience at Hopkins was: “I only knew one girl in my freshman class prior to coming to Hopkins. We had been in choir together since we were 11 and we were not friendly. It turned out that she was on the same floor as me freshman year. We kept running into each other on campus and in the dorms and finally decided to give one another a chance. Now we are best friends (and roommates)!”

Rebecca’s random pet peeve is when ice cream scoops are used for anything that is not ice cream. She won’t eat any food that is served with an ice cream scoop! Now, Rebecca is working at a consulting firm in DC.

We wish her the best of luck!

There are many valuable lessons to be learned from Sanskrit literature. Among these jewels is a special proverb that LTC’s own Uma Saini holds very dear. It reads:

नमिन्त फलिनो वृक्षः ।
नमिन्त गुणिनो जनाः ।
शुंककाष्ठािन मूखार्श्च न ।
नमिन्त कदाचन ॥

“A tree bearing fruits always bends towards earth. Similarly, wise people respect others by bowing. Whereas, unwise people are like dry sticks which break but never bend.”

Having been introduced to this passage by her beloved father, Uma seems to have applied its teachings of humility to all aspects of her life.

Particularly in her career as a teacher—a career that has spanned decades and continents, and touched the lives of so many different people—Uma’s wisdom reaches far beyond the scope of academics. Anyone that has ever taken a class, attended a lecture, or even sat down at tea with Uma knows that she has a passion for learning, loving, and enriching the lives of others that guides her in all that she does.

Uma’s life is itself one that could be the subject of great literature. At the age of 20, the young Uma Arya had already completed a Bachelors with Honors in Sanskrit Language and Literature, with minors in both English and History. Two years later, a Masters in Sanskrit Literature and Grammar followed, as well as her first teaching position at the prestigious Delhi University in India. Doctorate work at Agra University would come next.

When not being praised for her scholarly accomplishments, Uma was also a celebrated radio talent—having earned a certificate in Drama and Theater from the British-American Drama Academy and recognition from All India Radio as Best Radio Announcer and Artist on the Hindi-speaking airwaves.

Making her way to the US, Uma endeavored further. After years of service as Academic Advisor, Counselor, and Acting Dean in the Kogod College of Business Administration at American University in DC, she added a Masters in TESOL to her already impressive resume.

Over the next few years, she shared her wisdom and talents with numerous schools, community centers, and organizations throughout Maryland, Virginia, DC, and Pennsylvania, serving in a myriad of roles including curriculum developer, consultant, public speaker, minister, and teacher of ESL, Hindi, and Sanskrit.

In 2000, Uma brought her gifts to Johns Hopkins, where she began teaching Hindi to undergraduate students. Shortly after arriving, her unmatched commitment to students and inspiring vision of the future of language learning at the University garnered her...
Faculty in Focus Continued

In the eight years she spent in this capacity, Uma made significant changes in existing program structure, introduced LTC events that have now become tradition, developed new programs in Sanskrit and English for International Teaching Assistants, and undoubtedly fostered the close sense of community shared by all faculty and staff of the LTC.

It would be enough to say that for all she does for others, Uma is well-deserving of the respect, admiration, and love she receives as a member of many circles. However, like the tree bending fruit down to the earth, Uma is constantly crediting others for her accomplishments. Recognizing that no person is as good as the team they represent, Uma has stressed time and again:

"With one, you can get things done. With the other, you get them done with. With greater creativity and synergy comes greater effectiveness and in the process, you build the capacity to do more in the future as well."

If influencing the future is a goal of Uma’s, her accomplishments in this regard are nowhere more pronounced than in the classroom. In both her Hindi and Sanskrit language classes, students are filled with praise for the teacher who has opened up new worlds of expression and discovery for them.

Professor Saini is above all a thorough instructor: Ashish Dua, in Beginning Hindi, appreciates how students’ written practice is reviewed on the board so that all students can learn from each mistake, and how Indian culture is incorporated into the course.

“It’s not just language learning. Culture helps put language into context.”

Hwa Hang, in Beginning Sanskrit, enjoys the student-friendly format of the course textbook, and the freedom students have to ask questions.

“It’s not about a grade for Professor Saini. Everyone learns and she never lets anyone fall behind.”

“She treats everyone equally and is very in tuned to what each student has to offer,” adds Ashish.

Uma’s classes are also entertaining, as Chandri Mahtani explains, for their use of songs, films, and different media to enhance lessons. But above all, Professor Saini remains true to her personal commitments – sharing her wisdom with others so that they may in turn share again with others.

“She has a passion for teaching and wants students to do well,” explains Sanskrit student Ravi Gill, “and she’s willing to do anything to make that happen.”

Uma Saini represents the true spirit of LTC in her passion for language, commitment to learning, and ability to inspire in others these same values. Any program benefits from her invaluable input and in her dedication to teamwork, she provides the kind of motivation necessary to bring any idea to its full realization.

Students, faculty, and staff are all very fortunate to share in Uma’s wisdom, and we wish her continued success in the coming semesters as well as in her other endeavors.
Russian Program Spring Wrap-Up

Olya Samilenko

It was another great year for the Russian Program. We had a record turnout at the Olympiada at Goucher, with Hopkins students, mostly from my Conversation and Comprehension class pitching in. That class, by the way, took place in the basement of my home this year, revolving around a series of animated classics featuring a delightful creature called Cheburashka. Amazing, isn’t it, how the human jaw can be loosened with the help of an oatmeal cookie! On the last day of class I took the whole class to lunch at Baltimore’s quaintest Slovak restaurant, Zac Mean Bean, owned and operated by the honorable Father Dornic, who runs St. Johns Community Center near Patterson Park. At graduation the Russian majors and minors came out full force on both campuses. At Homewood Dan Zielinsky, Ben Gibson, Lisa Hersey, and Milena Mikhailova walked off with a double-major in Russian, while Hopkins graduating senior Cathy Derbes took home a minor with her diploma. We were equally proud of our Goucher majors, Bridgette Hendrix, whom we advised in her honors thesis on Belarus, and the very talented Katarzyna Szymbiokiwa, who must have produced more re-writes in the courses she took with me than any other student I know. I recently got a note from her saying that she wants to come back for more seminars! I wonder how I can get her on the official head count!

Reflections: American Culture through Film

Carolina Monte Rosa

There is nothing scarier than feeling powerless when you do not have the words to express yourself. After two months living in the USA, I would still feel afraid to communicate. It was the beginning of a slow process and there was no other option for me than breathing calmly and trying again and again until I could understand what people were saying to me. “Would you like your receipt in the bag?”, the cashier would ask. Silence. She would ask again. Finally, my answer: “Sorry, I don’t understand you”. How many times did I act as if I didn’t hear the other person, so I wouldn’t have to answer! My point of view needed to change.

I decided to take an English course that would strengthen my skills in oral communication. The class, ‘Building Fluency through Film’, sounded interesting to me, and so I started the three-month class in the Hopkins’ ESL program. To my surprise, there were students from Turkey, India, Saudi Arabia, Bulgaria, China and Japan. I was the only Brazilian. Soon I discovered that we were going through the same sort of immigrant experiences. Like a new family, we reflected different cultures connected to one objective: an interest in the American way of life.

The course explored the values shared by people in the United States. Among feature films, documentaries and TV shows, we had the chance to discuss themes such as immigration, government, family, consumerism and education. The dynamic and interactive curriculum brought up a list of some favorite films.

I got caught up by In America, a film by Jim Sheridan. Experiencing such phenomena as different weather, looking for a job, meeting new people, and sharing ones culture are definitely part of an international experience. Yoshito, a friend from class who also enjoyed the movie, expressed his fascination for the theme because of the dramatic stories that immigration can present. His relatives from Japan fought against each other during the WWII, for instance. Despite that fact, he admits that people who experience immigration often get to know at least two cultures, languages, and histories. “What I learned from my grandparents’ life is that knowledge is power”, he said.

The Truman Show, which deals with the issue of media control, was a topic of debate. Ramya, a friend from India who found it initially disturbing, had a different opinion after some reflection. Xiao Fei, a Chinese student, later observed that there is much commercialism in books, magazines and the news. “A lot of implanted commercials are being weaved into the media”, he noticed. In contrast, Yelda, from Turkey, defended the importance of marketing. “Although many people claim that advertising encourages us to buy things we really don’t need, I think advertisements carry more significant aims such as showing new products and improving our lives”, she argued.

In the end, I was amazed by the importance of learning more about the country I was immersed in. Surprisingly, I realized that half of my fear of talking was a reflection of my feeling of inferiority. I used to feel judged for being a stranger. In addition to meeting people from all over the world, I improved my pronunciation and oral presentation skills, learned idioms, and enjoyed some excellent classic movies.

To sum up, ‘Building Fluency through Film’ was a great choice for me. It works!

Carolina is a student in the English as a Second Language program and has recently been admitted to the MLA program for the fall.
Beginning Kiswahili Students Explain "Why We Study Kiswahili"

As a class, we are studying Swahili because the course requirement in my major. Also, he wants to become more acquainted with East African cultures. The professor Jane Kamau gives us many anecdotes and analysis of African affairs which give us a better understanding.

Sarah is studying Swahili because she travels to east Africa every year to work and volunteer with orphans. She wants to work there as a doctor in the future.

Elizabeth is studying Swahili because it will help with her dissertation on trachoma treatment for kids.

Josh is studying Swahili because he wants to go to east Africa. So when I came to Johns Hopkins University, I began studying Kiswahili. Now, I am majoring in public health (global) and I enjoy it very much. A person asked me, "If you could have any job, which job would you want?" I replied, "I want to go to Africa and improve public health. I want to help people and learn about people. Everyone can teach. I want to teach and to learn." Studying Kiswahili will help me do this because it will enable me to communicate with the people of east Africa.

Learn Kiswahili

All articles submitted by Kiswahili students appear in the LTC Connection in both their original and translated versions.

Test your language skills as you read!

Africa one day. He wants to go to Tanzania or another place where they speak Swahili. He also wants to help the people by providing medical assistance.

Sandra is studying Swahili because she wants to work with an organization that helps orphaned children with AIDS.

Rhiannon is studying Swahili because when we are able to communicate with the people of Africa.

Desty is studying Swahili because his family is from Kenya and he likes to be able to speak to them in their native language.

Before Johns Hopkins University, I began to study Swahili. I am twenty years old and I am from Baltimore, Maryland. I am a third year student here at Johns Hopkins University. I am working on my degree in Africana Studies and Business. I study Kiswahili because Africana Studies requires you to learn a language. I thought an African language would be right to study with my Africana Studies.

Intermediate Kiswahili Speaks Up

Kwa nini ninasoma Kiswahili

Carolyn Pearce


Why I study Kiswahili

Before Johns Hopkins University, I began to learn about Africa and decided that I wanted to go to Africa and work with the people of Africa. So when I came to Johns Hopkins University, I began studying Kiswahili. Now, I am majoring in public health (global) and I enjoy it very much. A person asked me, "If you could have any job, which job would you want?" I replied, "I want to go to Africa and improve public health. I want to help people and learn about people. Everyone can teach. I want to teach and to learn." Studying Kiswahili will help me do this because it will enable me to communicate with the people of east Africa.

Whitney Taylor


Kiswahili and Me

Hello everyone. My name is Whitney Taylor. I am twenty years old and I am from Baltimore, Maryland. I am a third year student here at Johns Hopkins University. I am working on my degree in Africana Studies and Business. I study Kiswahili because Africana Studies requires you to learn a language. I thought an African language would be right to study with my Africana Studies.
Congratulations to Pat Palmer on the birth of her first grandson, Patrick!

We’re Moving!
Several faculty offices have moved to new locations over the summer to accommodate programs. In an effort to keep the ESL offices in one area, Pat Palmer, Doris Shiffman, and Nancy Gooding will now be in Krieger 18. Uma Saini, now Director of the ESL Program, will be in Krieger 20. The Arabic and Korean program offices have been moved to Krieger 173 and 172, respectively.

Upcoming Conferences Offer Diverse Opportunities for LTC Faculty

This year, LTC faculty will have the opportunity to attend a number of conferences geared towards language teaching.

In May, the National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC) hosted the Sixth International Conference on Language Teacher Education, or LTE 2009, for short.

The LTE 2009 aims to bring together educators from diverse backgrounds to discuss theory, share research, raise concerns, introduce practices, and build and sustain a dialogue between language teachers across all languages, levels, and settings.

This year’s conference ran from May 28 to 30 at the George Washington University in Washington, DC. For more information, including a schedule of events, visit www.nclrc.org/lte2009.

In November, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) will be hosting its Annual Convention & World Languages Expo in sunny San Diego, CA.

Embracing the theme, “Speaking up for languages: the Power of Many Voices,” the conference brings together more than 6,000 teachers, administrators, method instructors and students of foreign languages at all levels from across the world. At the conference, faculty are invited to attend a number of educational sessions on a broad range of topics—including culture, assessment, research, and methods—relevant to language teaching.

This year’s convention will run from November 20 to 22, with pre-convention workshops beginning on the 19. For more details, including housing and reservation information, visit www.actfl.org and click on the ACTFL 2009 logo.

ACTFL Registration Dates

Early Bird Registration
Wed, July 15, 2009

Presenter Registration
Wed, July 15, 2009

Advance Registration
Wed, October 14, 2009

Registration is now open for the 2009 ACTFL conference.

For registration forms, fee information, and an application timetable, please visit ACTFL at www.actfl.org and click the ‘Registration Information’ link.

Upcoming Birthdays

August
1st Valeria Costadoni
17th James Zhe
21st Liping Feng

September
4th Rachel Qu
13th James Snow
15th Patricia Palmer
20th Jonwen Rao
22nd Carol Young
28th Elliot Fuchs

October
15th Sarah Kim
18th James Fitts
25th Li Zhao
27th Yue Zhou
29th Jaclyn Lim

November
6th Radhi Datla
7th Sudeshna Trivedi
8th Makiko Nakao
22nd Juliana Wu
27th Phyllis Steiner
28th Aaron Lazorwitz

December
25th Khalil Tahrawi
27th Rebecca Razulis

Happy Birthday from LTC!