CLE Connection

NEWSLETTER FOR THE CENTER FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION

FALL HAS ARRIVED, AND CLASSES ARE ROLLING

BY DR. YUKI JOHNSON

Baltimore has the loveliest fall. Among all the places I’ve lived (most of them extremely cold), autumn at Hopkins is really the best: with the blazing heat of August behind us and the leaves rapidly turning, Fall exudes an air of welcome and comfort that makes you glad to be back at school. I hope you are all having a productive and enjoyable fall semester. The term is already well underway, and classes have now all settled, so I hope things are rolling smoothly. As everyone knows, the end of the year will be all too quickly upon us.

The new academic year started with a busy but educational and rewarding series of events. Before the first day of class, we held a two-day workshop (August 29th and 30th) marking the 15th and 16th such workshop since I joined the Center in 2009! We also had our Open House, followed by the annual Business Meeting.

During the workshops, everyone gave a PowerPoint presentation to demonstrate each other’s culture. It was a blast! The focus was on “low culture”— something that could be incorporated in one’s own language classes. We learned so much about the cultures represented by our Center, and the progress we’ve made together as a unified Center over the last three years truly became evident in this two-day workshop. Some moments captured from the workshop, Open House, and Business Meeting are below. Sincere thanks to all who participated.

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I owe thanks to everyone who helped to carry out so many positive changes. The growing strength of programs and continuous ongoing improvements are evident in the workshop and classes now underway. Although we will offer two fewer languages this fall than in the past, the Center is more organized and unified than ever with full-time faculty placing great value on their work. The effort will continue with valuable input from all.

1. Congratulations to Dr. Choonwon Kang for receiving a TEACHING AWARD!

The Center for Language Education is proud to announce that Dr. Choonwon Kang, our Korean language lecturer, has received The George E. Owen Teaching Award presented by the Student Government Association for the academic year 2011-2012. Choonwon has been teaching at CLE since 1998, and the Korean Language Program was developed originally by her. This award recognizes the many years of contribution to our institution, and she certainly deserves such recognition not only from students but also from all of us. Thank you and congratulations, Choonwon!

2. Welcome to Dr. Julia Yarmolinskaya and Ms. Christine Waddail

Two great additions to CLE! Dr. Julia Yarmolinskaya joins us in the International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Program, and Ms. Chistine Waddail joins us in the English as Second Language (ESL) academic year program. Dr. Yarmolinskaya received her Ph.D. in Cognitive Science from Johns Hopkins University in 2011. Though she has been teaching summer ESL courses and is a familiar face to us, her official appointment as full-time faculty, teaching accent reduction and American culture, began this year. Her training includes bilingualism and phonology—a perfect background for teaching these courses. We are truly lucky to have a person like Julia who is so well qualified. Welcome to Julia, and we all hope that you are going to be with us many more years.

Ms. Waddail is a full-time high school teacher at Dumbarton Middle School and is also eager to teach post-secondary ESL classes. She has been teaching summer ESL at JHU since 2007 and this academic year, she also accepted our offer to teach ESL during the academic year. Her course is entitled: Academic and Professional Writing targeted for graduate students and JHU staff and faculty. It is going well, and we all appreciate her enthusiasm and willingness in teaching a course during late hours. I hope this course will continue to be offered for the long term.

3. Seminar Room

Thanks to Zvi and Julia (who agreed to share an office), we will turn Room 160E into a seminar room. Room 160E can be used for small meetings, classes, independent study, and so on. It is still under construction, but will be ready for use starting in early November. The room will be equipped with a conference table, six chairs, one desktop computer, a projector (with the white wall used-

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as the screen), a whiteboard, and a stand / podium for the computer. Please note that this room can accommodate only 6 people, including the instructor. This policy will be strictly observed. Also, chairs cannot be removed from the room, and you should not bring in more chairs to squeeze in more people, either. If you have fewer than 5 people in your meeting / class, you can use the room, and it can be booked throughout the term. Your office key will be used to enter the room. An online calendar will be ready soon, and anyone can see the scheduling and booking arrangements for the room. When it is ready, you will be notified by e-mail, and I encourage you to go online and see if the room can be of use to you.

4. Upcoming Workshop

Our 17th Workshop is scheduled for January, Thursday 24th and Friday 25th 2013, right before the spring term begins. The format for the workshop will be the same as the last one (August 2012), but the topic of your presentation should be “HIGH CULTURE.” In this workshop, you will present how to introduce high culture in your upper level courses, taking examples from media, politics, philosophy, and so on. You can also use the topic you selected for “low culture” and demonstrate to us how you deal with, for example the Zodiac, as an element of high culture. Details will be sent near the end of November, 2012.

5. Increasing enrollment for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean

This year, we saw increased enrollment for 1st-year Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, and Korean. Chinese and Japanese now have approximately 20 more students than last year, bringing current enrollment to 62 and 46, respectively. Korean also had many students on the wait list for 1st-year Korean, and there are currently 20 students, which exceeds the cap of 16. As we know, enrollment can go up and down from year to year, but it is at a good sign for programs when the numbers go up, and a large enrollment in the beginning level is ideal.


We set the date for the holiday get-together as Monday, December 10th, 2012 from 11 A.M. to 2. P.M. It will be customary to schedule this annual event on the Monday of the reading period in December. (Similarly, the annual Business Meeting will take place on the day of the Open House, usually the last Friday in August before the new academic year.) That way, we can anticipate the schedule for these events in advance in long-term planning.

7. Study Abroad Scholarship for CLE students Announced for Spring Term 2013!

The Center for Language Education will fund students going to study abroad after taking at least one year (two semesters) of a language at CLE. The scholarship is $1,000 per student and will be awarded based on strong recommendations by our language instructors. There is always someone we would like to send for studies abroad to deepen their language studies, so I am very happy that CLE will now help support those students for the trip overseas. The recommendation form will be available shortly and sent to you by e-mail. The deadline for the spring term scholarship is Friday, November 30th, 2012, followed by a faculty meeting to make selections. Let’s hope that many students are motivated to keep learning a language and get excited about the study abroad opportunity.

Looking forward to exciting times ahead, I hope you can join the CLE team in the spirit of professional family that joins our academic unit at JHU. As our ties grow closer and programs grow stronger, I look forward to seeing everyone grow stronger in placing CLE squarely on the world map among the best places for language education!
Studying abroad was one of the things I always knew I wanted to do while in college. When else in life would I get the chance to go abroad, immerse myself in a language, surrounded by people my own age, without having to worry about finding a job or lodging on my own? Everything was so perfectly set up, all I had left to do was pick a place, start learning the language, and get the courage to make the move across the globe.

My sophomore year I decided I wanted to learn Japanese. My timing ended up being impeccable because they had just that year renovated the program, switching over to the Genki textbooks and emphasizing conversation with 3 out of the 5 hours a week dedicated purely to Japanese conversation. I continued my Japanese studies in the fall of junior year and in the spring, set off for Nagoya, Japan.

When I arrived at Nanzan University, I thought I would be placed in level 300, the equivalent of 2nd year at Hopkins. Although I had already completed half of level 300 during the fall semester, I never thought I would be able to skip ahead into level 400 having yet to complete the second half of 300. However, to my surprise, I was placed into 400 and by putting in just a little extra time to catch up, I found that 400 was the perfect level for me. Although it started off slightly challenging, living with a host family, joining a dance club and making a whole ton of new Japanese friends set me on a fast track of Japanese learning. Before I knew it, I was going out to eat with friends, chatting until the restaurant closed, all in Japanese. I enjoyed myself so much I didn’t want to leave and ended up participating in Nanzan University’s Summer Japanese Program as well.

Back at Hopkins as a senior, I am now taking fourth year Japanese, a class I never thought I would be able to take since I only began my Japanese studies as a sophomore. I couldn’t be more pleased with my experience abroad. However, I also know that I would not have been able to improve my Japanese to the extent that I did had I not been so well prepared through my classes at Hopkins. The groundwork was set in Baltimore and the magic happened in Japan. I will always be grateful for the support of my many sensei and I hope that those who read this article will find courage in my words to take that extra step and study abroad.
There is a Chinese idiom that says teaching improves both teacher and student. Thus, it goes without saying that teaching in a variety of settings and circumstances makes way for a more enriching experience for both parties. For Lu Li, this has proven to be an undeniable truth.

Lu Li’s passion for languages has stretched across two continents to encompass students from all manner of backgrounds and proficiency levels. After earning her Masters in Chinese Linguistics at Nanjing University, she went on to teach everywhere from Nanjing, Beijing, the University of Michigan, and the Monterey Institute of International Studies for their intensive Chinese language program. It was during her Master’s program that she gained her first exposure to the Johns Hopkins name. Looking back, the Johns Hopkins University-Nanjing University Center actually provided a physical fore-shadowing of her eventual transition to a teaching position at the Center for Language Education years later.

No matter where she has been, she notes that culture has been key not only to her personal passion for language learning but to her classroom as well. The inclusion of culture in her courses creates a lively atmosphere that students find irresistible. While the study of topics like food and manners always peaks interest, it’s their application to real-life situations that Lu Li finds most beneficial. Finding her seated amongst a group of students at a local Chinese restaurant where they can speak the language with the waiters is not an uncommon sight. This sort of practice is invaluable, putting the students at ease with the language. All levels of her Chinese classes gain this unique kind of exposure to the language through practical exercises. She even created class blogs so her students had another outlet for communicating in Chinese outside of the classroom.

In the classroom, she says her emphasis largely revolves around using her methods and style to motivate students to speak the language in a natural manner. When students struggle to choose which vocabulary word fits a situation best or can’t tell the difference between two words, Lu Li will find a way to put it in context so they will remember how to use the language correctly. She says, “That is how I make use of real-life situations to encourage a holistic understanding of the target language. At the same time, I always try my best to use simple Chinese in explaining complicated Chinese grammar, and reinforce students’ understanding through different forms of exercises.”

With the combination of her teaching methods, colleagues who are as energetic as they were when they first entered the field, and our center director Dr. Johnson’s attentiveness towards improving the program, Lu Li says the resulting Chinese program is strong and well-rounded. She finds the mixture is a recipe for a motivational atmosphere, saying, “My students are probably the most diligent students I ever seen, which makes my teaching more enjoyable.” Like the Chinese idiom she referenced in her interview, everything comes full circle and both teacher and student benefit from a positive classroom experience.

Lu Li’s interests outside of the classroom are as well-rounded as the Chinese program itself. She loves art, film, photography, reading, travel, and has contributed her editing and writing to various magazines and textbooks. Besides teaching, she hopes the future holds writing books about either life or teaching.
“No one knows us in this Sahara, neither the palm tree nor the she-camel.” As Professor Khalil Taharawi read out this melancholy verse of Nizār Qabānī’s Muwaṭanūn dīnāmā Waṭan (Citizens without a Homeland) to our fourth year Arabic class, I realized the poet’s words capture a defining conflict for my generation—a generation privileged with access to a global social network that too often has only made us more cognizant of our alienation from the experiences of other citizens of our world. It was my desire to overcome that sense of alienation and to immerse myself in the realities of the Arab world that first inspired my study of Arabic. Several years later, as a PhD student at Johns Hopkins University’s History Department studying the medieval Islamic Mediterranean, I have witnessed how Arabic study can not only mitigate this sense of alienation, but also open the door to understanding this region’s history, and thereby to come to a deeper appreciation of its present.

I can remember the first time my passion for Arabic was spurred: I sat in a class on Jews and Arabs in the early medieval period. The teacher was discussing Ḥudūd, extra-Quranic Biblical narratives that have entered the Islamic legal or theological discourse. He talked about the story of the Golden Calf, and its variant manifestations in the Jewish and Islamic theological traditions. As he described the mutual influences of the Jewish and Islamic narratives, he would write words on the board in Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic, emphasizing the similarities between their respective sharashim or juthār, Hebrew and Arabic respectively for “(verbal) roots”. The professor argued that these similarities in root letters and in the various narratives were indicative of medieval cross-cultural exchange. There was something exceptionally captivating about being able to observe this cultural exchange that occurred over a millennium ago in the context of language study.

In the course of my subsequent Arabic study I have vivid memories of moments when I felt my increasing ability to communicate in the language had begun to break down my sense of alienation from this foreign world: talking about conceptions of prophethood in Abrahamic religions with my good friend and devout Muslim roommate Muḥammed in the Moroccan town of Ifrane; conversing with taxi drivers in Tangier about the new Moroccan constitution and its effect on women in their society; befriending one of the last Jewish youths in the city of Fez, Dāwūd, the descendant of a community that a mere half-century before numbered in the tens of thousands. Dāwūd tutored me in flawless classical Arabic and I in turn tutored him in Hebrew and English.

There were also moments that challenged my romantic conception of language as a champion of cultural exchange: a student at my Moroccan university brought a 9/11 conspiracy video to class in response to an assignment asking students to bring in something personally meaningful to them; an otherwise pleasant exchange with a young Moroccan girl in which she told me she could not spend the night at a Jew’s house, because the Jew would murder her in her sleep; the refusal of Dāwūd, the Fezi Jewish youth, to let his Moroccan acquaintances and professors know of his Jewish heritage, out of fear of persecution. I presumptuously argued that his fear was misplaced, citing my experiences with the Maimouna student group at my Moroccan university, which is dedicated to studying the country’s Jewish past. But I came to understand that the realities of Dāwūd’s experiences were different than my own.

I returned to history to gain as much objective distance as possible from these tumultuous modern realities, continuing my Arabic studies and applying my language skills to medieval texts. I read ḥadīth and law manuals, chronicles of the early Islamic conquests and a medieval work on the mer-

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its of al-Quds, Jerusalem. I continued to develop my own area of research interest, personal letters from Jews living in the medieval Islamic world, which capture some of the realities of their daily lives in that era. Arabic has allowed me access to these worlds, yielding its insights on the development of life in the region. It has allowed me to befriend Arabic-speaking Muslims, Jews and Christians from Morocco to Iraq. It has demonstrated the fragility of the relations bonding the alienated citizens of a globalized world, while never submitting to the cynicism that this alienation cannot be overcome.

In my Arabic class at Hopkins we read poetry and news, study biographies of Arab luminaries, and discuss analyses of Islamism. This eclectic subject matter allows us to engage with some of the breadth of the culture of this elusive “other”—the resident of the Arab world that sits only a mouse click away.

“We run like dogs every night,” wrote Qabānī, “searching from Eden to Tangier for a blanket to cover us.” That blanket, that sense of triumph over alienation, is elusive. Studying Arabic in the context of the modern Middle East sets us down the path. It gives us the tools to find our way, if we only choose to use them.

SUMMER IELP SUCCESS

BY SALLY ANDERSON

In July and August, the Summer Intensive English Language Program welcomed 50 students, participating from 11 different countries, to Homewood Campus. This year’s program was led by the energetic efforts of Barbara Gulick, David McNeal, Christy Waddail, Julia Yarmolinskaya, and newcomer Yvonne Cranmer. They taught courses in Listening and Speaking, Reading and Writing, Accent Reduction, American Culture through Film, and TOEFL preparation.

Students actively sought out opportunities to put their English skills to the test outside of the classroom as well. Each week at lunch conversations, we were entertained with stories of memories they had made in Philadelphia, New York City, Washington D.C., and especially Baltimore. Many also took part in organized events like the ESL picnic, baseball game, and harbor sailing.

As the program came to a close with the certificate ceremony, the bonds the group had formed this year were made evident with hearty claps and whoops of encouragement as each student was individually praised for their achievements. The celebration was made complete with an international potluck and even some impromptu Turkish dancing!

Thank you to all our teachers, staff, and students for a memorable year! We hope to see you all again in 2013!
STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: STEPHANIE LOPEZ

BY RAQUEL CRUZ-STRATTON

Stephanie Lopez, an international studies major graduating in 2014, is an active and eclectic member of the Hopkins community who has worked in the Language Lab for two years. Stephanie’s love for linguistics is exemplified in her fluidity in two languages and proficiency in another two. She speaks English and Spanish, has taken 2 years of Russian, and is beginning to learn Italian. How does she juggle so much at once? We’re not entirely sure, but we’re glad she’s on our team!

A self-proclaimed “kid in an adult’s body,” Stephanie loves watching cartoons and reading comics, and if you’re lucky, you may even catch her and her younger sister singing a Disney song or two! That said, Stephanie is very linked into the Hopkins community. She is involved with the Hopkins Model-United Nations Conference, the Hopkins Pet and Animal Welfare Society, and still has time to help out with the Hopkins Symphony Orchestra. Needless to say, Stephanie has managed to stay active in the community on top of her studies and her job—an incredible achievement!

Stephanie’s smile and positivity are welcomed and appreciated in the lab, and her responsibility makes her an exceptional addition to the student staff. Commenting on her favorite part about working in the lab, Stephanie loves the versatility and plain fun that comes with the job. She says “for me, the job is never boring because you can do different jobs every day. One day you could be working the front desk and interacting with the patrons; the next, you could be out recording a language class and immersing yourself in a new language; and the next, you could be working in the video room editing videos and audio clips for classes. Every day brings something new!” Stephanie’s enthusiasm for her work is but another account to her excellence in the lab.

Though she has no current plans to study abroad with a Hopkins program, Stephanie has travelled far beyond the limits of North Charles St. when she visited family in Ecuador where she gathered her fair share of funny stories. She shared this one with the lab: As rice, black beans, and fried plantains are a staple in most Latin American countries, the number one special at a local McDonalds was a Big Mac with rice, black beans, and an order of fried plantains. She was both surprised and amused at the foreign adaptation of an American fast food chain.

We are glad Stephanie is with us again for another year, as she is a loved member of the Language Lab staff. She is dedicated, motivated, and a dynamic presence we hope to have around for another couple of years. Watch out for Stephanie in the lab and feel free to come to her with questions about anything—or even to have a friendly conversation in Russian!

“For me, the job is never boring because you can do different jobs every day.”
OF RUSSIAN AND JAPANESE  
BY OLYA SAMILENKO

Dear Colleagues,

One of our recent graduates, Nia Bayne, JHU ‘11, just arrived in Japan and sends her greetings to all who remember her, especially her Japanese teachers. She is extremely eager to begin her year-long assignment as an English teacher. As her Wilson Grant mentor at Hopkins, as well as her teacher in many courses, I watched Nia grow slowly but steadily from a shy Atlanta teenager into a confident global traveller. She was one of the lucky Hopkins students who underwent not one but two abroad experiences, each of which enriched her life. Her first trip to Japan to study the impact of anime on the youth culture was followed by a trip to Vladimir, Russia where she gained many insights into the national character of the Russian people. I was thrilled to hear of her decision to become a language teacher in Japan, but I was a bit disappointed that she seemed to have lost interest in Russian. Before leaving Nia surprised me by emailing me a song that she had written in Russian on the eve of a friend’s wedding, which took place in Georgia. It was a tribute to eternal friendship. “No,” said Nia, “But I couldn’t express my feelings in any other way.” My heart soared at these words. It dawned on me that in Nia’s simple declaration lay the kernel of everything that language learning represents. Each language contains a plethora of words, phrases, and even nuances that cannot be replicated in translation, yet which capture the essence of a particular culture.

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