

## Departments & Programs

- < Asian American Studies
- < Central American Studies
- < Chicana/o Studies
- < English
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- < Liberal Studies & Humanities Interdisciplinary Program
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- American Indian Studies
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College of Humanities  
Newsletter  
Fall/Winter 2015-16

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# The College of Humanities Newsletter

*From the desk of Humanities Dean Elizabeth A. Say*



Elizabeth A. Say, Ph.D.  
CSUN Alum 1981

As we move into the Spring 2016 semester, I am happy to share some of the many accomplishments of our faculty, staff, and students. This newsletter will introduce you to three outstanding students from the English department whose academic achievements have earned them recognition. Nazanin Kenyjad, an M.A. student in English literature, and Eric Kufs, an M.A. student in English rhetoric and composition, have been selected to receive Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral scholarships to support their goals of pursuing Ph.D. degrees. Alvaro Castillo is an undergraduate in English/creative writing who was selected to represent CSUN at the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities conference. I know you will enjoy reading about their experiences and their plans for the future. This edition also provides an introduction to Día de los Muertos, annually observed by CSUN's Chicana/o Studies department, now in collaboration with the Oviatt Library and the student organization MEChA. Diverse cultures

represented at CSUN were further celebrated with a December tai chi event sponsored by the China Institute and led by professor and tai chi master Lulu Smith. Finally, we are delighted to announce a College collaboration with an educational foundation to support teacher preparation. This scholarship program will support students who minor in Armenian studies while preparing to be elementary school teachers. Also in support of our Armenian studies program, CSUN has signed a friendship MOU with the American University of Armenia. College development director Suren Seropian has been instrumental in bringing both of these initiatives to fruition.

**CSUN** CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY NORTHRIDGE

**2016 COMMENCEMENT & HONORS CONVOCATION**

<p><b>FRIDAY, MAY 20</b></p> <p>8:00 AM <b>HONORS CONVOCATION</b> Recognizing outstanding graduating students.</p> <p>6:00 PM <b>MIKE CURB COLLEGE OF ARTS, MEDIA, &amp; COMMUNICATION</b></p>	<p><b>SUNDAY, MAY 22</b></p> <p>8:00 AM <b>DAVID NAZARIAN COLLEGE OF BUSINESS &amp; ECONOMICS</b></p> <p>6:00 PM <b>COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING &amp; COMPUTER SCIENCE</b> <b>COLLEGE OF SCIENCE &amp; MATHEMATICS</b></p>
<p><b>SATURDAY, MAY 21</b></p> <p>8:00 AM <b>MICHAEL D. EISNER COLLEGE OF EDUCATION</b></p> <p><b>COLLEGE OF SOCIAL &amp; BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES I</b> Anthropology, Geography and Psychology</p> <p>6:00 PM <b>COLLEGE OF SOCIAL &amp; BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES II</b> Africana Studies, History, Political Science, Public Administration, Social Work, Sociology, and Urban Studies &amp; Planning</p>	<p><b>MONDAY, MAY 23</b></p> <p>8:00 AM <b>COLLEGE OF HEALTH &amp; HUMAN DEVELOPMENT I</b> Child &amp; Adolescent Development, Health Sciences, Kinesiology, Nursing, Physical Therapy, and Recreation &amp; Tourism Management</p> <p>6:00 PM <b>COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES</b> <b>COLLEGE OF HEALTH &amp; HUMAN DEVELOPMENT II</b> Communication Disorders, Environmental &amp; Occupational Health, Family &amp; Consumer Sciences</p>

*All Ceremonies will take place on the Oviatt Library Lawn*

**GRADFEST** [WWW.CSUN.EDU/COMMENCEMENT/GRADFEST](http://WWW.CSUN.EDU/COMMENCEMENT/GRADFEST) (4 April 8-11 PM / Walk, March 22 & 23, March 27)

**HONORS CONVOCATION** [WWW.CSUN.EDU/COMMENCEMENT/HONORS](http://WWW.CSUN.EDU/COMMENCEMENT/HONORS)

**COMMENCEMENT INFORMATION:** [WWW.CSUN.EDU/COMMENCEMENT](http://WWW.CSUN.EDU/COMMENCEMENT)

## 2016 Commencement

Commencement is a meaningful time for students and their families as it is the culminating event in the college experience. To ease potential logistical stressors, please consult the Commencement website for ticketing information, suggested arrival times, parking recommendations, and other pertinent information.

Honors Convocation will take place on Friday, May 20, at 8 a.m. on the Oviatt Library lawn.

The College of Humanities will hold a joint commencement ceremony with the College of Health and Human Development on Monday, May 23. The ceremony will begin at 6 p.m. on the Oviatt Library lawn.

## 2015-16 Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral scholarship recipients

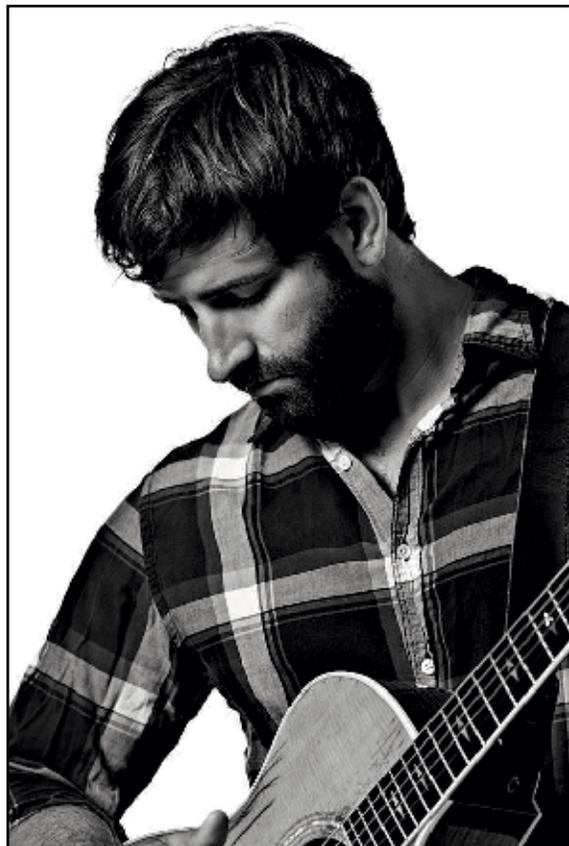
*Submitted by Paul Hankins*

CSUN's College of Humanities is proud to announce Nazanin Kenyejad and Eric Kufs as recipients of the prestigious 2015-16 Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral scholarship. The scholarship was founded by Casanova in 1989 as a way to allow historically underrepresented students more access to doctoral-level study, as well as diversify and broaden the potential pool of California State University faculty. The scholarship places a special emphasis on increasing the number of CSU students who enter a doctoral program at a University of California institution.

Nazanin Kenyejad, currently working to earn a master's degree in English literature, says she was shocked to have received her award letter, because she felt her specific area of research, the rise and progression of the strong female character in the early novels of the 18th century, wasn't very trendy. In addition to traditional research materials, she also employs digital humanities tools to gather and analyze her data for her area of study. She credits several CSUN faculty members—Drs. Danielle Spratt, Michael Bryson, Scott Kleinman, and Nathaniel Mills—for guiding her area of study as well as refining her research, improving her writing skills, and creating a viable plan to pursue her Ph.D. She intends to follow their example of scholarship as she continues her academic career.



*Photo courtesy of Nazanin Kenyejad*



*Photo courtesy of Eric Kufs*

Kenyejad credits her parents for being inspirational, as they have always been advocates of higher education and supported her decision to pursue graduate study. Her mother, a voracious reader, instilled in Kenyejad a love of literature and gave her access to her full library at a very early age. Going forward, Kenyejad has prioritized working with renowned scholars in her field. She will be applying to several schools in the UC system as well as a few private schools in Southern California offering programs that will further advance her area of research.

Eric Kufs, who is working on a master's degree in English rhetoric and composition, feels that receiving the scholarship validates his persistence in his work as a graduate student. After attending Hofstra University in New York for three years, he left school to focus on a music career in Los Angeles with his folk/pop band from high school. They found some success touring the world and writing and recording with bands like They Might Be Giants and Indigo Girls, and after recording five studio albums as the main songwriter with his group, Kufs recorded a solo album. He supported himself for a few years by performing on the streets of Los Angeles when not on tour, but after 15 years, feeling burned out in the music business, he returned to college by attending CSUN.

Here, he found a renewed interest in literature and discovered pop culture theory and the study of composition pedagogy. During his time at CSUN, he has also been teaching freshman writing classes as a teaching assistant. Kufs says songwriting and singing remain a primary passion, but he has been enjoying teaching composition and

**Casanova continued on next page**

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developing new strategies to help students develop their academic writing and he wants to continue that trajectory.

Kufs's family didn't particularly emphasize academics when he was growing up. While his mother did push him to get high marks and go to college, his father wanted him to be a star athlete and eventually work in civil service. He didn't pursue his high school interests in wrestling and lacrosse in college, but he did pursue the interest he had developed in music. For academic influences, he credits members of CSUN faculty—Drs. Steven Wexler and Irene Clark—as well as his former professor Jack Solomon and social theorist David Harvey. To advance his academic career, Kufs is currently looking at a number of UC campuses, such as Santa Barbara and Irvine, and has contacted Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Both Kufs and Kenyejad are excellent examples of what's possible with students who are not only passionate about their goals, but take full advantage of the resources available at CSUN to help accomplish them. We could not ask for finer campus representatives and we congratulate them on their achievements.

**Representing Humanities at HACU—thanks for the Miamories!**

*Submitted by Alvaro Castillo*

I was driving into the Van Nuys Flyaway to catch my 4 a.m. bus to LAX, nervous about the flight to come, only to find a cat with fur as dark as obsidian ominously positioned in the parking space I had eyes on. Its eyes were glowing like two little full moons and they stared at me, recognizing my nervousness. According to learned superstition, a black cat crossing one's path is indicative of ill luck. The appearance of this shadowy feline intensified my uneasiness about my flight from Los Angeles to Miami.

The last time I was on a plane I was newly arrived to the world, 4 or 5 months young, from what my parents recall. Thus, my trip to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities' (HACU) conference was an opportunity that raised both concern and delight. HACU's conference allowed me to get on a plane—this was the delight. The only concern I had, like any inexperienced flyer, was the take-off, the dreaded moment of departure.

Everyone has their own way of describing a plane's take-off. Some compare it to riding a roller coaster, others focus on the push of gravity against their bodies that grows greater as the speed increases. After a dozen or so take-off anecdotes I felt prepared, my anxiety converting into courage as the plane gained momentum. Nonetheless, despite my preparation I was not at all ready to see the ocean and its vastness beneath the morning sky. At 7:58 a.m., the flight captain informed us that take-off was successful and that within four hours we would arrive Miami.

HACU was established in 1986 with 18 founding institutions. Today, HACU represents over 470 colleges and universities in the United States, Puerto Rico, and Spain who are committed to the representation and success of Hispanic students in higher education. CSUN, a certified Hispanic Serving Institution, is a proud member of HACU and continually makes efforts to highlight the capabilities and intelligence of its students. Each year CSUN sends a cohort of students representing different colleges across campus. The College of Humanities sponsored two student representatives this



*Miami sunset. Photo courtesy of Alvaro Castillo.*

# The College of Humanities Newsletter

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year, and I was honored to be one. Students nominated to attend the HACU conference embody the characteristics of dedication and passion the organization seeks to nurture.

This year HACU held its annual conference at the Fontainebleau hotel in Miami's South Beach. While the location of the conference was beyond beautiful, its appeal was heightened by those in attendance. I became acquainted with ambitious, caring, and capable individuals from colleges and universities in Arizona, California, Colorado, Texas, Massachusetts, New York, and Florida. There's no doubt that this body of students was brought together by hard work and a relentless drive for success.

It was also clear that these students seek success not only for themselves; HACU's student attendees understood the importance of the representation and success of Hispanic students in higher education. I felt an enormous amount of pride in representing CSUN and the College of Humanities at this conference, and I was equally proud to see colleges and universities around the country striving to ensure the success and representation of other Hispanic-Latino students pursuing higher education.

The conference lasted three days, and every morning the workshops began at 9 sharp. It was difficult going to bed at a reasonable time. The hotel was impeccable, and the beach, just a five-minute walk away, had no curfew hours; one could enjoy the waves and the stars into the early hours of the morning. Thankfully, HACU provided coffee and coffee and more coffee each day, making it possible to get the most from every workshop and panel presentation.

Workshops and presentations were designed to inform students about internship and employment opportunities during and after their careers in higher education. There was a breadth of federal and private agencies in attendance. As an English major, I had feared that there might be few opportunities tailored to my educational and career goals. However, I was delighted to see that every major had opportunities available. This exemplifies HACU's efforts to promote the presence of Hispanic-Latino students in as many fields as possible.



A new favorite—arroz con pollo. Photo courtesy of Alvaro Castillo.

time passes. When I first saw that shadowy feline with moon-like eyes at the Flyaway I considered it to be an ill omen, an oracle foreshadowing the quality of my trip. However, in retrospect perhaps this shadowy visitor was the exact opposite. Perhaps its appearance was an omen, but if it was, it certainly wasn't an ill one.



At the Fontainebleau. Photo courtesy of Alvaro Castillo.

Alas, as all good things, my time in Miami came to a close. I had to say goodbye to many great people, to the enchanting view of Collins Avenue from my hotel room, and of course, to the sweet summery waters of South Beach. The opportunity to attend this year's HACU conference taught me many things. It broadened my academic and professional aspirations. Moreover, this opportunity taught me things about myself that I had yet to learn. I learned that I enjoy travelling, that the classic Cuban dish *arroz con pollo* is on my list of top-10 favorite foods, and that flying, despite my initial anxiety, is something I enjoy.

The unfortunate thing about learned superstitions is that their meanings are left relatively unchanged as

## What is the Day of the Dead?

Submitted by Dr. Xóchitl M. Flores-Marcial

Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) is a solemn but festive celebration observed in Mexico and several other countries throughout Latin America. The celebrations for Día de los Muertos have their roots in pre-Columbian and Christian traditions associated with ancestor worship and harvest time. Día de los Muertos and Halloween coincide because the Christian calendar, like the Mesoamerican calendar, mark important life cycles with special feasts and festivals. Both of these calendars consider solar as well as lunar trajectories. As such, harvest time is celebrated in both civilizations around the same time. However, Día de los Muertos takes on very particular forms because of its pre-Columbian and Catholic antecedents. This article will focus its attention on the way people celebrate Día de los Muertos in Oaxaca, a southern state in Mexico; the festivities have many variations regionally.

During the first two days of November, families pay homage to their loved ones in spiritual rituals of remembrance. Celebrations include solemn vigils around altars in private homes and at the cemetery, and public gatherings in festive parades for the entire family. People say that the spirits make their journey from *Mictlan* (the Nahuatl word for the underworld) to the living world in the darkness of night, which is why candles and *cempasuchil* flowers mark the path that the spirits are said to follow on their way to visit their families. Because the spirits are said to arrive in people's homes November 1, the altars should be ready on October 31. The first day of November is dedicated to *angelitos*, the angel spirits of loved ones who died as children. On this day, food is served in small dishes, and candied fruit, colorful candles, and toys for the young spirits adorn the altar. November 2 is All Souls Day and belongs to all spirits, young and old. Beginning at the break of dawn and throughout the day, families are kept busy tending to the altar, for their ancestors have traveled long and far and are likely hungry, thirsty, and looking forward to the feast in their honor.

During the rest of November 2, families visit each other's homes carrying reed baskets with offerings for the altars such as *pan de muerto* (bread decorated for this celebration), tortillas, fruit, and bars of homemade chocolate. Hosts prepare mole, tamales, and other special dishes, which they present to their guests and also place on the altars. Towards the end of the day in many Oaxacan communities, families come out to celebrate in public. Guised dancers join *comparsas* (parades accompanied by music) where the costumed participants attempt to distract bad spirits with mirrors, rattles, and pranks. Happiness and laughter close the day in celebration of the ancestors who make their way back to *Mictlan*, until the following year's celebrations in their honor.

The Department of Chicana/o Studies at CSUN has celebrated Día de los Muertos for over 30 years. The events have grown over the years from a small celebration hosted by a few faculty members in one of the classrooms in Jerome Richfield Hall, to a campus-wide effort that is attended by the extended CSUN family. Currently, events take place at the Chicana/o House Cultural Center and are organized by several members of the campus community. This year, Día de los Muertos events were planned through collaborative efforts by the student-led organization MEChA (*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan*), faculty in the Department of Chicana/o Studies, and Oviatt librarians, who included event programming as part of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Library Association. Día de los Muertos on the CSUN campus is a festive and solemn celebration that builds community by bringing together people from diverse academic, geographic, and cultural backgrounds to enjoy lectures, food, and exhibits made possible by dedicated members of this campus.



Students attending: "Words About Día de los Muertos: Indigenous Perspective," in Ferman Presentation Room, Oviatt Library. Photo courtesy of Jennie Quinonez-Skinner.

## CSUN students and community explore martial arts with Dr. Lulu Smith

Submitted by Liyuan Li

Dr. Lulu Smith, an instructor of Chinese language at CSUN—and a Yang-style tai chi master who has been practicing for 26 years—discussed and demonstrated the classic martial art on November 24 in a presentation sponsored by the CSUN China Institute and by the College of Humanities, with support from a Department of Education grant. Her presentation informed the audience about the origin of tai chi, its physical and mental benefits, and different styles that are practiced. After providing this context, Smith and her team enthusiastically performed movements and forms for the audience.

Tai chi in Chinese literally means the primal state of the universe. It's based on slow, continuous, and gentle movements of the entire body; at the same time, practitioners aim for a calm and centered state of mind. Smith says you can think of tai chi as “three ‘s’ leads to three ‘s,’” meaning that slow, smooth, and soft movements lead to strength, suppleness, and stamina. As a result, Smith says, tai chi is a type of kung-fu for self-defense, while also contributing to healthier respiratory, muscular, and cardiovascular systems, helping to relieve stress and bring positive energy. Moreover, unlike some strenuous exercise, tai chi won't cause injury because it involves no violent movement.

After a brief introduction, Smith demonstrated tai chi moves. She began with a group exercise with three other practitioners, then Smith performed solo with tai chi swords and a kung-fu fan. Her performances were beautiful. She was as dexterous as a bird, and her sword or fan became an extension of her body. She wielded the fan with sly movements such that it opened with a sharp and powerful sound that resonated throughout the large room.

The audience was invited to learn a move at the end of the performance. They rose to their feet and followed along with Smith's step-by-step demonstration, finding that tai chi is definitely not as easy as she makes it look. Nevertheless, part of its allure is that it can be practiced at all levels with no special equipment. Just begin and progress at your own pace. If you want to feel younger and more energetic, do tai chi! If you want to lose weight and reduce stress, do tai chi! If you want to find a peaceful and interesting exercise, do tai chi!



*Dr. Smith posing with her tai chi team prior to the presentation.  
Photo courtesy Dr. Weimin Sun.*



*Tai chi presentation in the USU Grand Salon, November 24.  
Photo courtesy Dr. Weimin Sun.*

## College of Humanities advancement updates

*Submitted by Suren Seropian*

The Fall 2015 semester saw great strides made in creating a closer and more productive relationship between the Armenian Studies program and the Armenian community of greater Los Angeles. Indeed, the relationship building bridged the expanse between Northridge and Yerevan, the capital of Armenia.

The fall opened with the significant announcement that the Armenian Studies program was awarded a \$250,000 grant from the TF Educational Foundation, the family foundation established by philanthropist Jerry Turpanjian. The funds will provide scholarships for students who have both enrolled in CSUN's Integrated Teacher Education Program (ITEP) and declared a minor in Armenian Studies. This program, the first of its kind in the United States, will be launched in Fall 2016 and will prepare teachers versed in teaching Armenian language and culture in both private and public schools. As the population of the Armenian community continues to grow in Los Angeles, Glendale, Pasadena, and other nearby cities, the number of students of Armenian heritage increases in respective school districts. Anticipating this need, Dr. Vahram Shemmashian, the director of the Armenian Studies program, has partnered with Dr. Ranita Chatterjee, the director of the Liberal Studies Program, which houses ITEP, to create this one-of-a-kind approach to filling the need for such teachers. As many as 10% of the more than 41,000 students enrolled at CSUN are students of Armenian descent. Additionally, there are more than 125 full- and part-time Armenian faculty and staff on campus.



*Photo by Lee Choo.*



***CSUN President Dianne F. Harrison (left) signs a memorandum of understanding with AUA President Armen Der Kiureghian.***  
*Photo by Lee Choo.*

On a more global scale, the College of Humanities hosted a reception to celebrate the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the American University of Armenia (AUA), which will encourage and enable the faculty and students of both institutions to develop joint teaching and research programs at their respective universities. Dean Say served as the emcee and introduced President Dianne Harrison and the president of AUA, Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian. They each spoke of the many collaborative opportunities that this agreement will foster. Faculty member Dianne Philibosian, who is coordinating this project, traveled to Yerevan, Armenia, within weeks of the signing of the MOU to meet with the faculty and staff of the American University of Armenia to begin developing a process by which the project can move forward.

Our college is truly a diverse one and it is my immense pleasure to work with so many communities who understand and value the education and experiences that our students gain during their time at CSUN. If you would like to make, or continue to make, an impact on the lives of our students and faculty, please do contact me at (818) 677-7135, or at [suren.seropian@csun.edu](mailto:suren.seropian@csun.edu). When was the last time you were on campus? Come, let's take a tour and have lunch. There is so much to share with you!



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***The Mission of the College of Humanities is to create a community of learners who...***

**Explore and value the diversities of cultures, thought, perspectives, literatures and languages of humanity;**

**Critically reflect on and analyze multiple dimensions of human identity and experience;**

**Contribute to scholarship and creative production and innovation, and**

**Act as responsible global citizens committed to principles of freedom, equality, justice and participatory democracy.**

**Visit us on the web at: <http://www.csun.edu/humanities/>**