The College of Humanities Newsletter

Message from Humanities Dean
Elizabeth A. Say

At the start of the 2009/10 Academic Year we face a very different reality than we did a year ago. The past year brought times of hope. The election of the first African American United States President seemed to confirm the promise contained in the College of Humanities Mission Statement: that we value the diversity of the human condition. At the same time, the meltdown of the global economy continues to reverberate through all sectors of the country. Once-giant industries that seemed to be the backbone of American manufacturing have collapsed or are near collapse. Wall Street's glory days are a thing of the past. The seemingly never-ending growth of the housing bubble has burst and along with it, for many, the dreams home ownership represents. Here in California, the budget has never looked so bleak. Faculty, staff, and administrators have all been furloughed, enrollments have been capped for this year, and CSUN is taking no new students in the Spring 2010 semester. Is all this discouraging? Yes. Is it hopeless? Absolutely not.

I was reminded that there is always cause for hope by the two speakers at this year's Freshman Convocation. There we heard 2009 CSUN Outstanding Graduating Senior, Antonio Mendez, tell the story of his road from despair to a very bright future. Mendez's father died when he was a CSUN sophomore and, in his words, “I was shocked. I was scared and I was heartbroken.” But he found his way out of his pain, due in part to some “world class people” he encountered at CSUN. He graduated last year with a degree in Construction Management Technology. We also heard from Steve Lopez, author of this year's “Freshman Common Reading” selection, The Soloist. The book, which was released as a movie this year, chronicles the relationship between Lopez and Nathaniel Ayers, a schizophrenic violinist he meets on the streets of Los Angeles. Through his relationship with Ayers, Lopez came to a deeper understanding of himself. “I think there is a longing in all of us to make a connection” said Lopez. “To find your muse, to reach beyond your own existence and maybe help somebody.” He concluded his remarks by encouraging the freshman class to take advantage of the educational opportunity that CSUN provides.

Inside this issue of the College of Humanities Newsletter, I think you will find several stories that speak of our hope in the future. This year the American Indian Studies Program has moved to our College and a new Program Coordinator from the College has assumed leadership. The Chicana/o Studies Department will celebrate its 40th anniversary, reflecting on the accomplishments of the past and looking forward to the promise of the future. We have welcomed new members to
our faculty colleagues: Dr. Mustafa Ruzgar has joined the Religious Studies department and Dr. Michael Neubauer has left Mathematics to head up the Liberal Studies Program. Two stories in this issue speak of the importance of external support in furthering the mission of the College. Michael “Micky” Ross was a benevolent friend to the Jewish Studies Program for 17 years; his generosity will be missed. We are also pleased to share the news that Oprah’s Angel Network has recognized the important work being done by the Literacy Scholars for the Future of Los Angeles initiative in Liberal Studies. So, despite the sometimes bleak news, we welcome you to another hopeful year in the College of Humanities!

Congratulations to the 2009 CSUN Staff Service awardees from The College of Humanities

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New academic year marks new beginnings for the American Indian Studies Program

The American Indian Studies Program has a new home and a new coordinator. In July, the program moved from the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences to the College of Humanities, and Scott Andrews was appointed the new coordinator. He is an associate professor of English and he is starting his fourth year as the associate chair of the English Department.

"I want to thank Dr. Karren Baird-Olson for all the hard work and devotion she has given to the American Indian Studies Program and to the American Indian Student Association," Dr. Andrews said. Dr. Baird-Olson, an associate professor with a joint appointment in Sociology and American Indian Studies, had been the coordinator since her arrival at CSUN in 2000. Dr. Baird-Olson is of Wyandot descent and married into the Nakota Nation of the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Reservation in Montana. "She has been a big-hearted warrior her whole life – in her fight for American Indian civil rights and in her mentoring of CSUN’s native students."

During her time as coordinator, American Indian Student Association (AISA) won awards for its programming and events, and the CSUN annual powwow was revived. In 2006, she won the Advisor of the Year Award from the Associated Students. "I hope AISA can win more awards, and the American Indian Studies Program will continue raising awareness of the rich history and cultures of the native nations in California and the United States," Dr. Andrews said.

Dr. Andrews has been a faculty advisor for AISA and has served on the advisory board for the program since his arrival at CSUN in 2000. In 2008, he received the Don Dorsey Award for Excellence in Mentoring in 2008. He is an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, and he has published reviews, essays, poems, and fiction. His latest publication is a prose poem titled "I (Thunderheart) N.Y.," which will be included in an upcoming issue of Sentence: A Journal of Prose Poetics devoted to American Indian authors.

"I think the American Indian Studies Program can thrive in the College of Humanities, where it already has many friends among the students and faculty," he said. "Provost Harry Hellenbrand and Dean Elizabeth Say have been wonderful in making the transition smooth and in making me, as a new coordinator in the college, feel welcome and valued. They also have remained focused on making the transition as smooth as possible for the students."

The move has been physical as well as organizational. The offices for AIS and AISA had been located for several years on the first floor of Sierra Hall. American Indian Studies is now housed in the Office of Interdisciplinary Programs (Sierra Hall 194), and the American Indian Student Association is moving to the Chicano House Annex, where it will share office and meeting space with the Central American Student Association and Chicana/o Studies student groups.

Over the summer, the AIS advisory board met to revise its mission statement. The new mission state is: "To promote an understanding of American Indian history, cultures, and tribal sovereignty with a focus on Southern California tribes, urban American Indians, and other indigenous peoples in a global context."
Congratulations to the following College of Humanities faculty for their years of service.

Faculty Completing 25 Years of Service
- Richard Battaglia, English Department
- Jody Myers, Religious Studies Department
- Eva Margarita Nieto, Chicana/o Studies Department
- Richard Rodewald, Philosophy Department
- Sharon Smartt, English Department

Faculty Completing 30 Years of Service
- Mary Pardo, Chicana/o Studies Department
New faces around the college this semester—more or less!

Michael Neubauer, Professor of Mathematics, is the new Program Coordinator for the Liberal Studies Program.

Michael received his Ph.D. from USC in 1989. Since coming to CSUN in 1995, he has served as President of the Faculty Senate (2001-2004) and is currently the Co-Chair with Dean Elizabeth Say of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation process.

For the past seven years Michael has been the director of CSUN's Developmental Mathematics Program. The program prepares some 60% of CSUN's incoming freshman class each year for the rigors of college level mathematics courses. Many of the mathematical issues students bring to CSUN reach back to the elementary school curriculum. A major part of his responsibilities in his new role will be to help future elementary school teachers improve their ability to help their students become proficient in mathematics. “We at CSUN need to do our part in breaking the cycle of students coming to CSUN underprepared to do college level work in mathematics,” Dr. Neubauer says.

He is also working with Dr. Ivor Weiner, Department of Special Education, to establish a Numeracy Center as part of the Teaching, Learning and Counseling Consortium in the College of Education which will serve students from the community.

We are pleased to announce that Professor Mustafa Ruzgar has accepted a position in the department of Religious Studies as an Assistant Professor.

Professor Ruzgar has been teaching in the department as a full time lecturer since Fall 2007. We hope he continues to enjoy a rewarding career as a member of the CSUN faculty and we are very happy he has chosen the College of Humanities as his home.

Mustafa was born in Turkey in 1974. He attended high school, where he received both a secular and religious education. He chose to study theology at Uludag University. There he received an intensive education in Islam, both in classical and modern subjects. After college, he was hired by the Islamic Research Center in Istanbul, perhaps the most prestigious research institute in the Middle East, as a researcher candidate.

Concurrently he started a Master`s degree at Dokuz Eylul University. During these years, he had no idea that he would end up in the United States. Then an opportunity arose. He applied for and received a scholarship opportunity provided by the Ministry of National Education to send students overseas for graduate education. He attended Claremont Graduate University, studying philosophy of religion and theology and receiving an M.A. in 2002, and Ph.D. in 2008. His research interests mainly consist of process thought, religious pluralism, inter-religious dialogue, Islamic religious pluralism, and the relationship between process thought and Islam.
Political events have accelerated a world-wide interest in the religion of Islam and Muslim people’s culture. In order to keep pace with this global interest, college students need to become familiarized with this religion. Dr. Ruzgar believes that dialogue is the most effective tool to overcome cross-cultural misconceptions, and will encourage this dialogue in his role as advisor to the Muslim Student Association as well as the Interreligious Student Association.
Sheena Malhotra, department chair, program coordinator and globe trotting researcher.

It is a sunny day in LA. You call 1 800 FLOWERS to order a bouquet of flowers for Mother’s Day. Your call is answered by a customer service agent named “Nancy,” with whom you chat about your order, the latest Lakers win and the chances of rain that afternoon. You hang up the phone after a pleasant interchange, and your flowers are delivered to your mother the next day. What you often do not realize is that the agent who picked up your call in not around the block at your local florist, or even in some centralized center in the U.S., but rather in a suburb of New Delhi, India. Nancy Smith, alias Naintara Bhandari, lives in a time zone half way around the globe, has an American accent and spends her night hours pretending to be an American ... after which she goes home every morning to her traditional Indian family in New Delhi and transitions back into being Naintara again.

Dr. Sheena Malhotra has spent years researching the implications of this everyday “migration of the mind” for call center agents as they make over 160 calls a night, and metamorphose from bright, eager Indian college graduates into disembodied, oddly-accented, Westernized voices journeying between two cultures and continents night after night. Agents are asked to memorize popular American songs, and will often reference Hollywood film stars when asked who they would most like to be. A bizarre performance of global hybridity comes through in their chorusing lines to a hip hop song, using the tempo and rhythm of the music as a guide to “neutralize” their accents. They learn to mouth scripts that prepare them for any questions the customer may ask, using phrases and accents designed to keep the U.S. customer comfortable in the illusion that they are “American” agents. A feeling of isolation seeps through on the sodium-lit streets of Bangalore as they arrive and leave in the company van each night, working through the hours when the rest of India sleeps. Over time, the world they inhabit becomes an increasingly disconnected one, even as their main relationships are with other call center workers and their customers in the U.S.

Dr. Malhotra wears many hats in the college. She is currently serving as the department chair for Gender and Women’s Studies and as the program coordinator for Queer Studies. Moreover, this will be her fourth year running the College of Humanities International Film Festival with co-founder, Dr. Beatriz Cortez of the Central American Studies Program. The theme for this year’s festival is Race, Privilege and Exclusions. The festival will take place on Monday, November 2nd from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. in the Armer Screening Room, Manzanita Hall, and is free and open to the public.

The Angel Network invests in the College’s innovative literacy program.

The Liberal Studies Program’s relatively new initiative, Literacy Scholars for the Future of Los Angeles (LSLA) moves into its third cohort this year, joined by an exciting reading partner! Oprah’s Angel Network (a global public charity that evolved as a result of an appeal made on “The Oprah Winfrey Show”) has agreed to fully support scholarships for the Literacy Scholars for the 2009-2010 academic year. LSLA trains our nation’s future teachers on how best to teach reading and writing to at-risk children.

The program takes students who are planning to be elementary school or special education teachers and exposes them to a unique and powerful mix of theoretical and applied experiences. This three-course, full year experience provides CSUN students with a special opportunity to understand literacy from several important angles.
These future teachers work—supervised by University faculty and K-12 faculty—with early readers while they are learning the latest research on early literacy and language acquisition. The first semester experience features team-taught classes with Dr. Sharon Klein of the English Department and the Linguistic/TESL Program and Dr. Sue Sears of the Special Education Department.

In their second semester the scholars learn from and work with families in second language communities in the San Fernando Valley. Dr. Rosa Furumoto of the Chicano Studies Department leads the scholars in this journey, which finds them working with families. These family literacy experiences allow them to experience literacy issues in a more disadvantaged socioeconomic context and to build on the depth of knowledge from the first term. This approach has proved to be invaluable, one recent LSLA student remarked, “Participation in LSLA provides the rare opportunity to learn theory while applying it in a real-life setting. How these techniques come into play in a classroom has a greater impact than any textbook.”

Questions regarding LSLA should be directed to Elizabeth Adams at elizabeth.adams@csun.edu.
Achievements worth mentioning...

College of Humanities faculty, Professors Irene Clark of English, Enrique de la Cruz of Asian American Studies and Peter Garcia of Chicana/o Studies recently received prestigious Fulbright Awards. Professor Clark spent eight weeks at Queen Mary University, London in Fall 2007 and will serve as a Fulbright Senior Specialist for a five year term ending in 2011. Professor de la Cruz taught an advanced research methods seminar for graduate students at Leyte Normal University, in Tacloban City, Leyte Province, Philippines. Professor Garcia traveled 50 miles south of the U.S./Mexico border to study the musical pilgrimage associated with the Fiesta de San Francisco, celebrated in Magadalena de Kino.

Our Jewish Studies Program remains active and engaged in seeking outside community partnerships. Recent successes include a $10,000 grant from the "1939" Club to sponsor the spring 2009 graduate Jewish Studies course "The Holocaust and Genocide for Educators". Additionally Jewish Studies received a $13,000 gift from the Zimmer Foundation in support of Service Learning in the Jewish Community.

The College of Humanities received $35,000 from Oprah’s Angel Network in support of its LSLA Fund (Literacy Scholars for the future of Los Angeles) for academic year 2009-2010. The fund provides stipends to encourage aspiring teachers to enroll in a specialized concentration which educates them in literacy training techniques for at-risk early readers.

The College of Humanities is part of the CSU Strategic Language Initiative designed to provide intensive training in critical languages. Currently the SLI supports five courses of language study, including Korean (CSULA), Chinese (CSULB), Arabic (CSUSB), Farsi (CSUF), and Russian at CSU Northridge. Supported by a federal earmark, CSUN students participate in an 8-week summer residential program, followed by a year of ongoing language instruction in their field of study, and concluding with 6 weeks at the Russian State University for the Humanities.

Our Peer Mentor Program classes are attaining first time freshmen retention rates of more than 90% — surpassing the university’s retention rate of 78% — owing to the commitment of the peer mentors assigned to these classes. Peer mentors are juniors and seniors who attend all class sessions with students and are trained to help students with three basic problems: attendance, time management, and use of campus resources. The College of Humanities Peer Mentor Project began in 2006 and focuses on increasing retention in freshman and sophomore courses.

Nayereh Tohidi, one of the eight faculty members selected for the California State University, Northridge Research Fellows for the 2009–10 academic year. Nayereh Tohidi (Gender and Women’s Studies) will study the women’s movement under the Islamist regime in Iran and its role in the process of democratization and secularization of the Iranian society.

Michael Ross, generous supporter of the Jewish Studies Program at CSUN, dies but will not be forgotten.

Michael “Mickey” Ross will be known to American cultural history as the writer of "All in the Family," a popular sitcom that revolutionized TV in the 1970s by humorously but realistically depicting the prejudices and
social practices of the day. He also wrote and produced “The Jeffersons,” which focused on an upper middle-class African-American family, and “Three’s Company,” a farcical depiction of three roommates that spoofed American sexual mores.

But at CSUN, Mickey Ross will be remembered as the Jewish Studies Program’s generous supporter. In 1992, when Mickey heard of the drastic cuts that imperiled the fledgling Jewish Studies Program, he stepped forward with financial assistance. For the next two years, his gifts paid the salaries of part-time instructors who were teaching vital courses. When that financial crisis was over, Mickey continued to provide assistance that was used for guest speakers, student scholarships, pedagogical tools such as maps and slides, and library resources. Having secure funding allowed the Jewish Studies Program to develop new courses and reach out to the community.

Mickey was a gracious, witty, and intelligent man. Born in 1919 in New York City, he grew up in a Yiddish-speaking household that he once said was permeated by “the essence of Yiddishkeit” – the Jewish way of life. Mickey was not a religious man, but he had a strong sense of ethical values. He was proud of Jewish culture and was especially fond of Yiddish literature. He endowed UCLA and NYU with professorships in Yiddish language and literature. Mickey was quite informed about politics and community needs, and he gave generously to friends and to SOVA, the food pantry of the Los Angeles Jewish community. He and his wife Irene were devoted to their pet cats and had many loyal friends from diverse backgrounds.

The Jewish Studies Program at CSUN was blessed by Mickey’s generosity and respect. As the beneficiary of low-cost public higher education himself, he knew how important it is for the promotion of cultural sensitivity, creativity, and the economic health of society.
ALUMNI CORNER

“What my humanities courses contributed to who I am and what I am doing with my life.”

Six years after I graduated from CSUN, and I still maintain my love and connection to the CSUN community. I graduated from CSUN in Spring 2002 with a Bachelor of Arts in Women’s Studies and Political Science. I acknowledge my alma mater, and notably the College of Humanities for providing a solid foundation for me to pursue higher education, and for paving the way toward a bright career path full of diverse opportunities. With the support of my mentors and professors, I’m currently an Attorney/Manager for a large financial institution, and remain active as a pro bono Attorney at Neighborhood Legal Services. I stay in close contact with our CSUN community to identify current students who I can mentor.

When I enrolled at CSUN, my Dad encouraged me to major in a practical field which was versatile no matter the geographical location where I would reside- I declared a Child Development major, at his direction, thinking that I’d become a teacher. My initial instinct was to major in English, as I loved reading different types of literature, and was passionate about writing. When I was in elementary school, I knew that I wanted to provide a voice to disadvantaged communities, and eventually become an attorney. However, once I entered college, becoming an attorney seemed like such as far-fetched dream, puzzling as to how I would get there, and as a woman, if I could achieve this goal.

During the Spring of 1999, my freshman year in college, I met Dean Say, then a Professor of Women’s Studies. During my Introduction to Women’s Studies course, my life was totally transformed. For the first time I studied experiences of women from an economic, social and political perspective. From this experience, I picked Women’s Studies as a major and found my voice, built my confidence, started my own support network, formed the courage to pursue higher education and ultimately travel the road to being an attorney.

The Women’s Studies Department was the first venue that taught me the importance of building social and professional networks which would eventually turn into my social and professional community today. Dean Say encouraged me to seek community funds and networks to support my dreams. As a Women’s Studies major, I learned to think critically, to fully develop my writing skills, and communicate a precise message with no limitations and within certain boundaries as well. Courses which I took in the College of Humanities, including Race, Racism, and Critical Thinking, taught me the essential skills needed for my future.

My awareness was opened to issues affecting women, including in the economy, globally and sexually by taking several courses including Women as Agents of Change and Women and Globalization. I’m a globally aware person, what my colleagues label a “humanitarian.” The skills that I was fortunate to receive and retain from the College of Humanities are instinctive, and a part of my everyday life, whether at meetings with large financial institutions, or meetings with community members seeking political asylum. CSUN taught me to have compassion for people from all walks of life.
My college professors and mentors include Professor Breny Mendoza, Professor Sheena Malhotra, Professor Marta Lopez-Garza, Professor Teresa Williams-Leon, Professor Jane Bayes, Professor Sylvia Snowiss, Dean Elizabeth Say, and the late Elizabeth Drexelius. They are important figures who shaped my life ethics and professional career. I look forward to participating in CSUN campus wide events where I can contribute back to the community which opened so many unimaginable doors.

Submitted by Ritzel Ngo Supervisor/Attorney for the Federal Reserve Bank of Los Angeles

The content expressed in this article are the sole views of Ritzel Ngo, and are not in any form associated with the Federal Reserve Bank.
Department of Chicana/o Studies 40th Year Anniversary

The Department of Chicana/o Studies at California State University Northridge (CSUN) is celebrating its 40th year anniversary. Chicana/o Studies was a product of 1960s political activism, social movements, and radical challenges to the academic status quo. In April 1969, two new CSUN departments were approved: Mexican-American Studies (which later became Chicana/o Studies) and Afro-American Studies later re-named Pan-African Studies. Fall 1969 marked the first regular semester that the Chicana/o Studies department offered courses at CSUN (then San Fernando Valley State College). The courses were critical, innovative, interdisciplinary and dedicated to community service and empowerment.

CSUN Chicana/o Studies is the largest Chicana/o Studies department in the nation and currently has 23 full time professors, 42 part time professors, 3 teaching assistants, and 1 graduate assistant. With over 160 class sections and nearly 5000 students taking courses in the fall 2009 semester, the department offers a Major, a Double-Major, a Minor, and a Masters. The department continues to struggle for the community, social justice, and the fulfillment of academic excellence for students, especially during this current economic crisis.

Our 40th year celebrations began this fall with the showing of “Unrest...Founding of the Cal State Northridge Chicana/o Studies Department.” Featuring historic footage and interviews with some of the department’s founders, the film offers significant insights on the struggle to establish Chicana/o Studies departments in higher education and shows the dedication and perseverance of Chicana/o students, faculty, staff and community members in the process. Future celebrations are planned throughout the year (visit our CSUN Chicana/o Studies website http://www.csun.edu/chicanostudies/).
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.

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