Greetings from the Department of Modern and Classical Languages

There is so much that happens in the spring semester. This is especially true if you happen to be part of the language department at a Christian college. Not long after we roll into the new year, students and faculty of our Chinese section celebrate the Lunar New Year in February. This year, the Spanish section is also keeping the cold months vibrant with a film festival on intercultural encounters in the Iberian world. Meanwhile, we all celebrate the promotions of several of our faculty members (page 4), as well as Dr. Jon Laansma’s inaugural lecture as the Gerald F. Hawthorne Chair in March (page 3). As the long Chicago winter drifts away, we look with anticipation to the Easter season, rejoicing in the full story of death and resurrection that defines our living hope on this campus and in the world. This issue of Everything in Common gives an overview of all of this, and we hope you enjoy this time of year in which we are reminded of all that Christ has made new.

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Culture Stock

REFLECTIONS ON LIFE, FAITH, AND CULTURE
By Boyd Allsbrook, student publicity manager of the Chinese Language and Culture Club

That Wheaton, Illinois, and the People’s Republic of China are worlds apart in every sense of the phrase can be taken as a truism. Western students at the school are at a loss to understand their Chinese counterparts’ experience of life in a country so alien to them, while Chinese students can be overwhelmed by their insertion into a culture that is often the exact opposite of home.

Wheaton’s Chinese Language and Culture Club (CLACC) hopes to bridge the gap between worlds from both sides. Comprised of American, Chinese, and Third Culture students, the cabinet’s driving force is a love for sharing and showcasing Chinese culture. The CLACC’s ongoing canon of events best suits this purpose. Various festivals, dumpling nights, Mandarin Tables, and Chinese tea parties draw attendees from all walks of life. Those who come inevitably mingle and find common ground; by the end of the night, they are all reclassified as merely “students having fun.” Chinese culture is brought to the forefront and both sides of the cultural expanse—American and Chinese—benefit from this exchange and melding. No better is this exemplified than by the CLACC’s Lunar New Year Celebration event.

Lunar New Year Celebration—also known as Chinese Spring Festival—is by far the most loved and important holiday in much of southeast Asia. It is a time to come home and to be with family. It is as strong a reminder of home to the Chinese as both Christmas and Thanksgiving are to Americans. Performances of traditional and modern Chinese songs, martial arts exhibitions, and dances have always been a staple for the CLACC’s New Year Celebration at Wheaton. Fresh dishes like Tangyuan and scallion pancakes are a welcome draw to a college population subsisting mainly on cafeteria food. Games, crafts, and Chinese decorations set a tone of joviality and freshness as partygoers bounce between activities. Unlikely conversations abound, as students from disparate walks of life meet and find one another not-so-different.

This Spring Festival Celebration is a microcosm of what God’s kingdom ought to look like: a diverse yet unified throng of celebrants, all partaking in the love and joy He has for us. It is an example of embracing difference in a community of people who are unified under the vital banner of love. It is a place set apart from the bulk of Wheaton culture, clearly and brightly understood as a joyous break from western midwinter. It is a place for Chinese students to remember where they come from and to feel remembered (this year, some even said that it felt like “home.”) It is a place for western students to encounter the vibrancy of a Chinese New Year and to foster appreciation for that culture in general. The CLACC cabinet sees it as a bridge; a space to share and learn and grow in mutual love for China’s people, customs, and soul.

Burkina Faso

Francophone Burkina Faso has been independent from France since 1960, yet it is one of the world’s poorest countries, with low levels of education and 90 percent of people relying on agriculture in the economy. Moreover, the country has experienced six coups since 1966 and its majority religions of Islam and Christianity (in that order) continue to be influenced by animist religious beliefs. According to Operation World, “Idols, charms, and secret societies have more control in Burkina Faso than in most West African countries. The occult shows its power even in some churches.” As evangelical Christians in the country continue to grow (from 10,000 in 1960 to 1.44 million in 2010), there is a “leadership crisis,” manifesting in the need for discipleship especially among new believers, and for flourishing Christian community among pastors and their families.

We pray... that the churches and missions working in the area would enter into the Muslim culture that dominates officially, and the occult culture that pervades at a grassroots level, and share the redemption to be found in Christ. We pray that hearts will change, that old idols will fall away, and that all Burkinabé peoples (not merely the “more responsive groups” that are often ministered to) would find new life in their Redeemer. We witness the real suffering experienced by a majority of this country’s citizens—from intercommunal violence and widespread lack of education, to poverty and food insecurity—and we pray on their behalf for practical deliverance from these trials. May Christ and His Kingdom generate spiritual and physical revitalization in this region of great need.

Sources Consulted:
Pray for the World, by Operation World
InterVarsity Press
news.un.org
Everything in Common

Keeping in Touch
INTERCULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES IN CHICAGOLAND
AND ACROSS THE COUNTRY

WHEATON, ILLINOIS
THE GERALD F. HAWTHORNE CHAIR INAUGURAL LECTURE

Dr. Jon C. Laansma will be delivering his inaugural lecture as the Gerald F. Hawthorne Professor of New Testament Greek and Exegesis on March 28. The title of the lecture is “‘Some have no knowledge of God.’ The Resurrection and the Knowledge of God in 1 Corinthians.”

Dr. Laansma will ponder how Paul’s discussion of the cross and resurrection in 1 Corinthians sets before us the Christian knowledge of God—Father, Son, and Spirit. This knowledge of the true God summons people of faith away from the idolatry and sexual immorality of the surrounding world, and to true missional wisdom and worship. The event is open to the public and a reception will follow immediately. Please join us!

Blanchard Hall, Room 339
Wheaton College
Wheaton, IL
wheaton.edu/calendar-of-events

ERATH, LOUISIANA
THE ACADIAN MUSEUM

The Acadian Museum preserves the history and heritage of French colonists who settled in Louisiana in the 1750s, following their Grand Expulsion from Acadia (near Québec and Maine) by the British. Descendants of these particular Acadians are known as Cajuns, and their culture defines much of Louisiana’s distinctive beauty. According to the museum, “Cajun/Creole culture, along with the native American culture, are the only cultures that wholly developed in North America.” The largest exhibit “contains artifacts and themed exhibits depicting the Acadians’ settlement on the prairies, marshes, and bayous of Vermilion Parish.” Next door, Le Café du Musée attracts French-speaking locals, hosts Cajun music “jam sessions,” and offers free Cajun suppers every Monday night! The museum is free of charge and open weekday afternoons or by appointment.

203 South Broadway
Erath, LA
acadianmuseum.com

Everyday Imports
SURPRISING ORIGINS OF COMMONPLACE PRODUCTS
AND SAYINGS

EASTER EGG (a hard-boiled egg that is dyed and often decorated as part of the Easter celebration) It’s a given that Easter eggs are meant to symbolize fertility and new life generally, and resurrection and the empty tomb, from a Christian standpoint. But where does this practice of decorating what normally passes as a breakfast food come from? There is evidence of egg decoration, as a secular custom, to be found in ancient Africa and Crete, associated primarily with death, rebirth, and kingship. The early Christians (most likely of Mesopotamia), however, were the first to stain eggs red, juxtaposing a familiar cultural symbol with a reminder of the sacrificial blood of Jesus. In Eastern Christianity, one legend goes that Mary Magdalene brought a basket of eggs to share with the other women mourning at Christ’s tomb; when she came upon her risen Lord, the eggs suddenly turned bright red. Eventually, the Christian Church officially adopted this practice as part of the Roman Ritual. In the modern west, of course, it is now more common to fill a basket with a Technicolor array of plastic or chocolate eggs—or (if one has the means) a jeweled Fabergé egg with ornate scenes depicted inside. In any case, the message that life can spring forth even from an empty shell persists through this most enduring of traditions.
Recent Faculty Publications & Scholarship

Stephanie Gates, Ph.D.
"El huésped que me estorba: Conflicting Perceptions of Motherhood in Rosario Castellanos’s Oficio de tinieblas" is forthcoming in the journal Hispanofía.

Jon C. Laansma, Ph.D.

Alexander Loney, Ph.D.

What Are You Reading (Or Watching) Lately?

GRANT HENLEY, PH.D.
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF GERMAN AND DEPARTMENT CHAIR

I’m currently reading Dutch theologian Hans Boersma’s book titled Heavenly Participation. Using the metaphor of a tapestry that has become frayed and is in need of repair, Boersma explores the relationship of Platonic and Nominalist philosophy to both the Catholic and Reformation understanding of a sacramental ontology, in particular with respect to the interpretation of Scripture, the doctrine of the Eucharist, and ecclesiology. Moreover, he traces how these understandings affected the departure of both theological traditions from the Great Tradition of the medieval Church. Boersma then proposes a way forward to “reweave” the disparate theological strands of the Western Church.

A former pastor in the Reformed tradition, Dr. Boersma taught at Trinity Western University and Regent College, and has recently accepted a faculty position at Nashotah House, an Anglican seminary in Wisconsin. Reading Boersma has been a fascinating trek so far. Though Boersma examines a wide array of theological and philosophical issues, his writing style is lucid and accessible. Highly recommended!

ALEC RITTGERS
GERMAN STUDIES MAJOR
THE MURDERERS ARE AMONG US, directed by Wolfgang Staudte.

This semester, I have the opportunity to take Dr. Clint Shaffer’s class Country Behind the Curtain—GDR (German Democratic Republic), where we explore life in East Germany. In order to understand attitudes of Germans prior to the formation of the GDR, our class watched Wolfgang Staudte’s The Murderers Are Among Us (1946). The film follows Susanna Wallner, a Jew who returned from a concentration camp; Dr. Hans Martens, a former Nazi doctor scarred by his experiences in the war; and Captain Ferdinand Brückner, a former Nazi captain who made profits after the war by selling cooking pots made from old helmets. Hans learns that his old captain, Brückner, is still living, and plots to kill him as revenge for the innocent lives he took. However, over the course of the film, Susanna and Hans develop a romantic relationship. She helps him cope with his demons (presumably PTSD), and shows him that human beings do not have the right to judge and take a man’s life; that lies solely in the hands of God.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR FACULTY, VISIT
wheaton.edu/languages
Department Chapel Recap

Led by the Spanish section on November 28, 2018. The following is condensed from the talk given by Gerardo Corpeño, Ph.D. student in Systematic Theology.

What happened at Pentecost reminds us of the story of Babel, in which humans used their linguistic unity to unleash their pride, attempting to build a tower so high that it would reach heaven. In response, God produced a multiplicity of tongues that led to confusion. At Pentecost, God produced a multiplicity of tongues, too, but this led to mutual understanding. According to theologian Justo González, in order for the multitude to understand the disciples, the Holy Spirit had two options: to make everyone understand Aramaic (the language spoken by the disciples), or to make each person understand in his or her own tongue. Significantly, the Spirit chose the latter.

The lesson here is that Pentecost is the miracle of mutual understanding, not for the sake of uniformity but for the sake of diversity.

In light of both this passage and my own experience as a non-English speaking student from Latin America, I want to share three lessons that can be helpful when learning to speak another language. Let me be clear: my only credentials are that I am so bad at learning languages that it seems that if the Holy Spirit had given by Gerardo Corpeño, Ph.D. student in Systematic Theology.

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Listen. Like most of us, I like to speak rather than listen. However, to survive my Ph.D. studies [at Wheaton College], I had to learn to listen carefully to my teachers and colleagues. During this process, I realized that listening is a scarce skill not only in academia but also in the church, in politics, and in life.

Recently I was reading an interview with a sociologist who made a distinction between two type of thinkers: an abstract thinker and a speaking thinker. To explain the difference he said: “The abstract thinker knows his truth in advance; he thinks and speaks only for himself, while the speaking thinker cannot foresee anything and must wait for the word of the other. He speaks to someone who has not only ears but also [a] mouth.” After reading this, I thought that this not only applies to sociology, but also to theology and all academic disciplines. It made me think that in our polarized world, the most important difference is not between liberals and conservatives, or between left and right, but simply between people who know how to listen and those who don’t. Between those who want to engage in a genuine dialogue with the other, and those who prefer to preserve a perpetual monologue with themselves.

Learn. Good listeners truly want to learn. But learning can be a humbling experience. When you learn a new language you are constantly making mistakes, getting corrected, and misunderstanding/being misunderstood by others. Hopefully through this process, God is making me more humble.

“Humble” is a key word, because if you really want to learn not only a language, but the culture, the customs, the heart, and sensibilities of the people of any country, you need to listen to the vulnerable, the poor, the voiceless. Wherever you go, don’t go only to the big places, but go also to the small places; don’t listen only to the winners of history but listen carefully to the unheard voices of the forgotten.

In order to really listen and really learn from people from other countries we need Love. Love is not only my final word, it is the final Word! Love is also maybe the ultimate test for anyone learning a new language. According to Willie Jennings in his commentary of Acts: “Some people learn a language out of gut-wrenching determination born of necessity. Most, however, who enter a lifetime of fluency, do so because at some point they learn to love it... The language sounds beautiful to them. And if that love is complete... they come to love the people... God speaks people, fluently. And God... wants [His] disciples to speak people fluently too.”

One of the things that I admire about jazz musicians that they are great listeners. In an interview, I recently heard jazz musician Herbie Hancock share this wonderful anecdote:

“In a middle of a concert with Miles Davis, I played this chord that was so wrong. I thought that I just destroyed everything. Miles took a breath and he played some notes. And somehow, he made my chord right... It took me years to figure out what actually happened. Here’s what happened. I judged what I had played... Miles just accepted it as something new that happened. And he did what any jazz musician should always try to do, and that is try to make anything that happens into something of value.”

I think that what God did at Pentecost was something similar but even greater: God didn’t judge our mistakes in communication or try to fix them. God played His notes and miraculously our “misunderstandings” became a mutual understanding and our miscommunication became full communication. We must listen to that Wind of the Spirit that also leads us to listen, to learn, and to love each other despite our differences.