

Alt Spring Break 2007: Oaxaca

By Paula Straile-Costa

Once again we worked with *Enlaces comunitarios* (Community Links), a service-learning, volunteer, and educational organization, based on holistic cultural values, ecological integrity, individual and community relationships, transparent governance and fair business practices. This year nine students traveled to Cholula, México, located just outside of Puebla, the city where the historic Cinco de Mayo battle took place ousting the French in 1862. We walked the corridors and climbed to the summit of the world's largest pyramid (2nd century) where the Spaniards constructed the ancient Church of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios in 1594. This is the site of one of the bloodiest battles of the conquest recorded, blood was said to run like rivers through the streets. The Spaniards, aided by the Tlaxcala Indians, defeated the formidable Cholula Indians then under Aztec influence. Like several Latin American cities, there are 365 churches in Cholula, a fact explained by contrasting legends: one that the Spaniards built them in attempts to Christianize the over 400 indigenous worship centers, the other that it was an act of expiation for so much life lost. We also visited a syncretic church, The Immaculate Conception of Santa Maria of Tontantzintla, built and decorated entirely by hand by indigenous converts in a unique Mexican baroque style.

Communities of Tlaxcalancingo, Puebla and San Isidro Tilantongo, Oaxaca

This year's work projects involved working with cacti, or *nopales*, outside Cholula and building and preparing

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This issue of *AIS Occurrences* was produced and edited by Prof. Lisa Cassidy and Prof. Jeremy M. Teigen.

AIS Faculty Updates

Faculty Research and Pedagogy Events

Dr. **Mónica Peláez** will be presenting a paper on "The Sentimental Trend in Periodicals and Poe's Poetry" at the American Literature Association's annual conference, which will be held in Boston in May 2007. The paper will form part of the panel "Poe and Periodical Culture," sponsored by the Poe Studies Association. Peláez will also be chairing and presenting on the panel "Reflections on Reader Response" at the New Jersey College English Association's spring conference in March, where she will present on "Poe's Effacement of the Female Muse." At the NJCEA conference she will also participate in a Roundtable Discussion on Entering the Academic Profession.

On March 21, Dr. **Niza Fabre** was selected as honoree in the 1st annual luncheon honoring Great Women at Ramapo College. The Beta Kappa Sigma Black and Latina Sorority Inc. granted her an "Award of Excellence for Support and Dedication to the Ramapo College Community." She is very proud to be recognized as Black Latina.

Fabre presented "La superstición en la obra afro-ecuatoriana de Adalberto Ortiz" ("Superstition: in the Afro-Ecuadorian Works of Adalberto Ortiz") at the Southern Arkansas University, 15th Annual Afro-Hispanic Literature and Culture Conference in Quito, Ecuador, January 8-12, 2007. She also chaired the panel "Desfictionalizing Ecuadorian History and National Identity" at the same conference.

Manuel Díaz, a literary critic, reviewed **Fabre's** article, "La mujer en el Descubrimiento, en Las Pícaras Indias (1992), la participación de la mujer en la trayectoria del Nuevo Mundo, tiene la profundidad académica de las tesis de grado."

(Women's participation in the trajectory of the New World has the academic quality of a doctoral thesis) in the *El Nuevo Herald* Newspaper, which is published daily in Spanish, on Sunday, January 14, 2007.

Fabre also presented a paper, "The Oneiric and the Supernatural in Dreaming in Cuban by Christina Garcia," at the Annual Convention of the Popular Culture Association, Boston, MA, on April 4-8. She also chaired a session on African American Culture III: Literary and Culture Identities: People of Color and the Supernatural.

In February, Dr. **Rosetta D'Angelo** read her poetry at Clemson University, department of Women's Studies. She also presented a scholarly paper entitled "Recollections: Italian -American Women's Poetry." She also attended a

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ground for greenhouses in the Mixteca highlands of Oaxaca. After our first eight hours of backbreaking work moving and chopping cacti, machetes blistering our palms, our hands and clothes covered with sharp spines, we were told that we would have earned just over four dollars, enough to buy a bag of family's groceries for a day, but not eat in a restaurant. We were all humbled by our inadequacies in the Mixteca Alta. We huffed and puffed in the thin air as we scaled up and down a mountainside with bags of natural fertilizer we harvested from the goat pens. The green houses were distant from the farms because they had to be near water cisterns. We reviewed our efforts at breaking ground with pick axes with humiliation alongside local women who tore up there plots in a quarter the time and made ours look like a child's work. Each of us gained an immense respect for how difficult life is here; words cannot really convey these realities. We also felt something of what community is and can be, a way of living almost totally lost in our culture. While we want to feel good about our contribution, we know that we are really the ones helped and not the other way around. I marvel at how foreign it seemed to observe people working together in such an egalitarian, friendly, and non-judgmental spirit. How liberating it was to work not as an isolated individual in a competitive world, to lie down our ego-ridden critical selves and our banter and just do something together. Leaving our cell phones, televisions and computers behind also gave us time to be together and have fun together. I feel I know more about these students after a week than I will those I have in class all semester.



We also worked with an organization in Tlaxcalancingo, Puebla called the *Calpulli de los Niños*, an after school education program that teaches children and their families about the value of their indigenous roots and how to live in accordance with them. We learned about *Calpullis*, pre-Hispanic neighborhoods, and their specific physical and social structures that this organization works to preserve. One major threat to their way of life is redistribution of their lands. The Spaniards showed their appreciation for the Tlaxcala's military support by giving them the entire incredibly fertile, rich valley. Thus, these lands have belonged to the Indians for centuries. In recent years, developers have encroached on these lands by using coercive and unethical methods. One example is a million dollar high-rise built on land bought for a pittance from a man who now must show an I.D. to enter the building where he works in maintenance. The local *campesinos*, tenant farmers, must constantly

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AIS Clubs & Organizations

Students and Faculty Events

AIS Colloquium Activities

- On February 2 Assistant Professor Dr. **Erick Castellanos** (AIS) presented his anthropological research "Mapping Immigrants as Foreign Bodies in Italy: Corrupting Spaces or Healing Locales?" in a lecture co-sponsored by the Italian club and the AIS Colloquium Committee.
- Assistant Professor of History Dr. **Katina Manko** presented her lecture on "Mary Kay Ash and Evangelical Feminism" on April 4. The event was co-sponsored by Feminists United.
- Finally, the invited speaker for the AIS Colloquium Committee's spring 2007 is Michael Reiss. Mr. Reiss is a four-time Emmy winning writer and producer for the television series *The Simpsons*. *Time* magazine called *The Simpsons* "the greatest TV show of the twentieth century." Reiss will share behind-the-scenes stories and commentary about the show. This event is co-sponsored by the Berrie Center and Ramapo Student Activities. Please invite your classes to this lively event on Wednesday April 11 at 4:30 pm in H-Wing Auditorium.

Culture Club Activities

- On February 1, there was an African Exhibit table for display, during the African Ancestry Month opening banquet. The Banquet was organized by the African Ancestry Month Committee.
- Assistant Professor of Environmental Science Dr. **Eric Wiener** (IAS) presented "Ecological Culture in an Amazonian Region of Peru" on February 26.
- "The Most Contaminated Place on Earth: A Look at Russia's Environmental Legacy" will be presented on April 9.
- Assistant Professor of African American History Dr. **Davis Lewis Coleman** (SSHS) "Making Democracy: The Challenge of Post-Apartheid South Africa" on April 26.
- On April 16 the Culture Club will hold its end of the semester party.

Italian Club

- On February 2 Assistant Professor of International Studies Dr. **Erick Castellanos** (AIS) presented his anthropological research on "Mapping Immigrants as Foreign Bodies in Italy: Corrupting Spaces or Healing Locales?" in a lecture co-sponsored by the Italian club and the AIS Colloquium Committee.

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Student News:

Two history majors, **Daniel London** and **Daniel DeMartino**, have had research papers accepted for presentation at the Mid-Atlantic Phi Alpha Theta conference, held March 17 at Susquehanna University in Pennsylvania. Phi Alpha Theta is the international honor society in history. **London's** paper, "Reflection and Transcendence: Scott Joplin and Turn of the Century American Culture," was originally written for Prof. Carter Meyer in America in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era (HIST 217). **Daniel DeMartino's** paper, "Jim Thorpe: All American, Native American," was written for **Prof. Meyer** in the History Seminar (HIST 410). **London** has also been named a 2007 Gilder Lehrman History Scholar. He was one of only 15 from colleges and universities across the nation chosen for this prestigious award. He will spend five weeks this summer in residence at Columbia University, meeting with eminent historians, visiting archives, and working on a research project focusing on early African American abolitionists.

Tamara Cáceres, who received a BA with a concentration in Spanish Language Studies from Ramapo in 2006, has been accepted into the graduate program in Spanish at Middlebury College, one of the top schools for languages in the nation. A former EOF student, **Cáceres**, along with her brother, was the first in her family to go to college. **Cáceres** plans to teach Spanish at the college level. Her former teachers at Ramapo have no doubt that she will accomplish her dreams.

Senior **Michelle Jodon** won a nine-week summer fellowship at Historic Deerfield in Massachusetts, a very competitive program in museum studies and New England material culture. Senior **Megan Knowlton** earned the Outstanding Scholarship by New Jersey Women and Gender Studies Consortium for a paper on Abigail Adams for Prof. Mustafa, one of only three for all of New Jersey.

- On February 28 at 6pm in SC 219 the renowned photographer and artist Anita Sanseverino showed her photographs of Carnevale in Venice, giving a lecture on its historical importance.
- We are planning an architectural tour of Little Italy in April, as well as a lecture on Cinema by Ingrid Bergman Rossellini, co-sponsored by Italian Club and the Ramapo Ethics Society.

Philosophy Club

- The Philosophy Club, along with Student Activities Platinum Series, sponsored a three part film series with book discussion. To prepare for the campus appearance of *The Simpsons* writer Michael Reiss on April 11, students watched episodes of the beloved television cartoon (1/30, 2/27, 3/20). After viewing the episodes philosophy club members discussed *The Simpsons and Philosophy: The D'oh! Of Homer*, a popular philosophy anthology dedicated to the show published by Open Court Press (Irwin, Conard, Skoble, editors).



Using Self-Teaching in the Classroom

by Lisa Cassidy

This semester I have radically revised all of my courses to be "self-taught." The self-teaching learning strategy has really transformed how we spend valuable class time. "Self-teaching" is a variation on group work, where groups remain together the whole semester to "teach" lessons each class meeting.

The entire self-teaching process takes about fifty minutes. At the very start of each class meeting I assign each group a lesson topic from our text. For example, in Existentialism class I might assign one group the topic of "the Will to Power" in *Beyond Good and Evil* passage 259, while another group studies a page on Nietzsche's "Übermensch." Each group is responsible for formulating a lesson plan, writing it on the board, and teaching it to the entire class. (The professor brings the chalk!)

The lesson plans must include one original sentence that perfectly summarizes the philosopher's position and a

notation of key quotations that justify or explain this summary sentence. The lesson plans also feature fun stick figure illustrations, an original criticism, and a quiz question. Every member of the group must take a turn speaking when teaching the lesson before the whole class.

After all four groups present their lessons I randomly select one group's quiz question, and this quiz is administered to the entire class. The quizzes are not designed to be difficult because they come at the conclusion of the lessons.

One improvement I have noticed in my classes is that students are comfortable digging into very difficult texts. I am constantly "wowed" with the excellent quality of the in-class work, and the attention to detail students have attained with difficult texts is really impressive. A downside is we do sometimes run out of time for a general discussion because the self-taught lessons have taken too much class time. Nevertheless my unscientific midterm course surveys showed that most students felt they got more out of the self-teaching course than they do out of traditional lecture-style courses, and I plan to continue to use self-teaching strategies next fall.

defend their land from politicians who want to exploit it. The Calpulli of Tlaxcalancingo is a success story; many families there have overcome incredible odds to maintain their communal way of life. Yet, hundreds of similar communities have been destroyed throughout México, due to government supported global corporate practices that drive local produce values down such that the traditional bartering and local market systems collapse sending people to *maquilas*, sweat shops, or over the border. In San Isidrio Tilantongo, Oaxaca, for instance, only 15 families remained, made up of principally women, children and the elderly, dispersed over vast mountain ranges. Yet, there another hopeful story is that of CEDICAM, a Mexican NGO that works to help campesinos recover the wisdom of their traditional communal lifestyle in harmony with the environment. The work of these depleted communities in terms of reforestation, seed conservation, organic farming, gender politics, and fair trade resistance to globalization is staggering.



The final highlight of the excursion was a *Temescal*, a sweat lodge, where we underwent a two-hour rigorous and healing journey together. It was the perfect culminating activity allowing us to learn about and take part in ancient spiritual practices. As we passed the pipe, we had the opportunity to express our thoughts and feelings about what we experienced and our gratitude to our hosts and to each other. We acknowledged our interdependence with one another, the Earth and all the creatures that inhabit it. One student remarked, "I've never been so dirty and felt so clean." Just before we emerged out of the symbolic womb of Mother Earth, covered in sweat, mud and tears, our guide reminded us that the ceremony would bind us together, even across our abysmal borders. She asked us to take the warmth we received home with us to the United States. This is why I am writing to you, I hope you feel it in your heart.

ON A PERSONAL NOTE

Adjunct Professor of Spanish **Sandra Martin** writes: During the too short winter break I was in Spain for two weeks after Christmas. In Madrid my husband and I were invited for a four course New Year's Day dinner at the home of last year's AIS Fulbright professor from Spain, **Encarni González**. After the meal she showed us a video of the holiday dinner we had given for the Fulbrights at our home last December in New Jersey. From Madrid we went to Málaga to visit friends and several exhibitions held in celebration of the 125th anniversary of Picasso's birth in that city. Especially interesting was the one showing African masks along with photographs of women, which inspired Picasso's first cubist painting, *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, along with many preliminary sketches in which he tried unsuccessfully to find the right arrangement for the figures. I was also able to view two wonderful exhibitions on Roman art and ruins in Málaga in order to gather more material for my current course on Hispanic art.

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conference sponsored by Regione Campania (Italy) on Globalization and new Regional initiative for Italians living in the U.S. and Canada (Italian Cultural Institute, New York).

In March, **D'Angelo** participated in an invited panel called Showcase Italian: Pedagogical Approaches to Italian Language, Italian Studies, and the Italian American Studies. It will take place at Rutgers University and is sponsored by The Higher Education Committee of the State of New Jersey Italian And Italian American Heritage Commission.

In May, **D'Angelo** will attend the American Association for Italian Studies conference at Colorado College. She will chair a session, "Contemporary Italian American Writers," and she will chair and present at a round table discussion, "The Present and Future of Italian American Studies in Higher Education."

Dr. **Susan Hangen** presented a paper, "Transforming Identities in Nepal: From Caste to Indigeneity and Race," at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in Boston, MA, March 22-25, 2007. The paper is part of a panel on "Caste and other ascriptive identities in South Asia," organized by Sumit Guha, Department of History, Rutgers University.

Dr. **Paula Straile-Costa's** article, "Myth and Ritual in 'The Hungry Woman; A Mexican Media'" Cherríe Moraga's Xicana-Indígena Translation of the 'Medea'" will be published in *Media: Mutations & Permutations of a Myth*, published by Oxford and edited by H. Bartel and A. Simon.

Straile-Costa will also attend the NEH seminar "Brazilian Literature and Culture: From the Baroque to Modernism," for six weeks at the University of São Paulo-Universidade Estadual de Campinas.

Dr. **Jeremy Teigen's** research on congressional elections and the effects of military service will be included as a chapter in a forthcoming Palgrave volume entitled *Inside Defense*, edited by D. Reveron and J. Stiehm.