ELON UNIVERSITY'S
WORLD LANGUAGES & CULTURES
Fall 2021 Newsletter
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The Chinese Club here at Elon is always looking for new ways to connect with students and expand cultural knowledge. Advised by Dr. Binnan Gao and led by club president Caroline French, the Chinese Club achieved this goal through two successful events: Board Game Night and Baozi Night. French stated that the events hosted by the Chinese Club are not only a fun way to meet new people, but they are also valuable experiences that can “help shape a language learner’s knowledge past the classroom... which provides the student with a more holistic view of the language and culture.”

Board Game Night took place in early October, and it attracted students at every level of the Chinese language, including those who had yet to begin learning. The games highlighted at the event include Chinese Checkers, Go, and Mahjong. Caroline French, a junior at Elon and president of the Chinese Club, stated that the club’s advisor, Dr. Binnan Gao, “helped to pick the games that would provide the best cultural experience.”
The Chinese Club hosted Baozi Night in mid-November, inviting any and all students interested in learning how to make traditional Chinese Baozi. Dr. Binnan Gao and the executive board of the club bought plenty of ingredients, including 4lbs of flour, knowing full well that college students are very attracted to events involving free food. Little did they know that the dough they had prepared beforehand would be used up in under an hour!

Baozi (包子), also known as bao, is type of filled bun that is found in many Chinese cuisines and has numerous variations. Baozi is often steamed and contains a meat or vegetable-based filling.

Baozi Night was an incredibly successful event, attracting over 50 guests in total and managing to feed each one of them, with no leftovers to spare. Ashley Stanbro, treasurer of the Chinese Club, stated that Baozi Night “was a great way to get everybody together in a fun and safe environment where we were able to make and eat some yummy baozi.”

By Holly Cardoza
Imagine this: you are a citizen of Rome around 200BC and you and all of your friends are spending the night dancing and singing together, drinking wine, and playing games. This is a traditional Bacchanalia, which the Classics Club brought to Elon this semester, minus the wine of course!

The Classics Club is a new club on campus with the goal of introducing ancient and classical traditions in a fun and engaging way with students. The club held a Bacchanalia and Poetry Slam this semester with sparkling grape juice, and an abundance of poetry from ancient Latin verses to beatnik poems and modern rap verses.

The club President, Ava Crawford, is a student of Classical Studies and says “Classical Studies is interesting because it’s so interdisciplinary – you can learn about art, politics, history, drama, and so much more by studying Classics”. She decided to start the club because while the group of students studying this topic is small, they are all very passionate for the subject and wanted to share ancient traditions and knowledge in a fun way.
WINTER WONDERLAND

By Brendan Antrosiglio
The second annual Winter Wonderland took place on November 30th and was met with an exceptional turnout! This year the event took place in the academic village and was joined by the German Club, Italian Club, Arabic Club, Hebrew Club, Classics Club, French Club, Caribbean Students Association, EMPRESS, Anime and Japanese Studies Club, and the Polyglot LLC.

Winter Wonderland coincided with Luminaries, resulting in a beautiful atmosphere enjoyed by not only students but also their families and the surrounding Elon community. Along the candlelit pathways, Elon clubs had set up tables with games, food, and entertainment. The various musical singing groups at Elon also used the stage area to perform throughout the event.

One could grab some authentic German chocolates at the German Club table, listen to Elon’s Smooth Progressions all male a cappella group, eat some Latkes with the Hebrew club, and finish the night decorating a gingerbread house with the Classics club. There were dozens of groups that made an appearance and had activities set up, and there was simply so much to do and see. Winter Wonderland was an amazing experience; thank you to everyone who helped this event happen!
If you had the chance to time travel, would you take the opportunity? If you attended the Sicilian Folk Music Performance by Michela Musolino and Larry Vellani on September 30th 2021, you would have felt like you took a voyage through time. In honor of Italian Heritage Month, the Elon Italian Studies program organized this performance.

It was an excellent performance that featured engaging songs of joy and sadness. From Musolino’s website we learn that “Music can express the soul of people and give an historical snapshot of the daily life, emotions, and motivations for the behavior of a culture.” The performance brought life to Sicily’s history. Larry Vellani, a former Elon instructor, was also featured on guitar and vocals during the performance.

Musolino painted the historical context by not only giving context to situations like political uprising or famine, but we were also able to empathize with the emotions that Sicilians felt during the time. Musolino encouraged audience participation in a call and answer chant; the interactive song allowed the audience to sing along in Italian! During this performance, we were able to actively learn about Sicilian history and culture.
Musolino has had a love for Sicilian culture and music from a young age. Born in America but visiting Italy with family, she kept her love for the country’s history alive by engaging in family traditions. As an adult, she realized her calling and went on a journey of rediscovering the culture. Musolino feels that music “is a way to connect with people” and to connect with those who came before us.

This performance at Elon was inspired by recounts of what life was like in Sicily. Musolino uses music as a means of understanding how history influences life today. Her favorite part of performing for schools is inspiring students to start researching music and culture. She aims to light the spark of passion in others, as she was inspired by performances as a little girl. Musolino “love[s] to uplift and inspire people.”

These traditional folk songs were not just a music performance, but a storytelling experience. The Sicilian Folk Music Performance was a treasure, un tesoro (Italian), un trisuro (Sicilian). Check out Musolino’s website to learn more: https://www.michelamusolino.com
Throughout the Fall 2021 semester, the Department of World Languages and Cultures hosted a series of films that highlight various social and political issues, as well as important thematic trends in the movies’ respective culture and/or country; these include everything from immigration to human rights issues to gender and sexuality. The films were offered on both in-person and virtual platforms, although the in-person platforms offered a richer experience as discussions over the films were able to take place. The films were shown in their original languages with English subtitles, which allows students from all educational backgrounds to attend.

The movies highlighted in the movie series included a Hispanic Film Series of "On This Side of the World (A Este Lado Del Mundo)", "On The Roof (El Techo)", "The Journey of Monalisa", "My Name is Gennet (Mi Nombre es Gennet)", and "Guie’Dani’s Navel (El Ombligo de Gui’Dani)". Additionally, the Italian film “Nuovomondo” and French film “The Intouchables” were featured. These movies not only represent inter-disciplinary and inter-cultural collaboration, but have also allowed students such as myself to learn about issues and themes in various cultures that would otherwise go unnoticed. A personal favorite from the series was “My Name is Gennet (Mi Nombre es Gennet)”, which follows the life of Gennet Corcuera. Gennet’s life is truly inspiring, as this movie highlights the hardships she faced as a deaf-blind girl in Ethiopia. After being supported and taken in by Carmen Corcuera, Gennet was eventually able to take control of her strengths and circumstances to become the first deaf-blind woman to obtain a college degree in Europe, which made the film both inspiring and empowering.

Exposure to a variety of cultures is key to a well-rounded education, which this series offers. Having this be a film series was also a fantastic way to attract students, as lectures can sometimes appear to be less appealing; movies such as the ones in this series are captivating and allow students to simultaneously self-reflect and be entertained.

Thank you to the WLC, Global Neighborhood, Global Education Center, Latin American Studies Program, Sigma Delta Pi, Peace and Conflict Studies, International and Global Studies, CREDE and El Centro, and Poverty and Social Justice Studies, for partnering and allowing these wonderful films to be showcased.
The Department of World Languages and Cultures hosted a series of in-person and online conferences on ecological and political justice in Latin America during the 2021 fall semester. The conferences were organized by WLC Faculty Dr. Juan Leal-Ugalde and Dr. Federico Pous. The events, which ended on Nov. 9, explored contemporary environmental issues and the representation of the politics of expropriation. They fostered a space for the Elon community to explore eco-political and historical justice from a multidisciplinary perspective focusing on the cases of Guatemala, Colombia and Argentina. The conferences strengthened critical reflection and intercultural competence by approaching the question of political justice and ecological problems concerning historical contexts in the region and Latin American communities nowadays. The events were complemented by an art exhibition open at the Carlton Commons.

The first conference took place on Oct. 5 and was given by the Fulbright Visiting Scholar from Universidad del Valle and Clemson University, Dr. Irene Vélez-Torres. It was titled “Context and transdisciplinary collaborations to build meaningful knowledge on Mercury pollution in AGM, Colombia.” The talk shared the outcomes of a five-year project, in which a team of researchers has joined efforts with Afro-Colombian miners from north Cauca to assess mercury contamination and generate knowledge that can be appropriated by inhabitants and traditional mining communities. The event offered a unique opportunity to Elon students to approach current environmental issues in Latin America and fostered their motivation to further explore projects based on the link between the academy and community work.
Finally, the series of conferences ended on Nov. 9 with a talk by North Carolina State University professor, Dr. Greg Dawes. Dawes presented “The Persistence of the Nightmare: Argentine Narrative of the 21st Century.” The conference approached the authoritarian regime of Argentina during the years known as the “Dirty War” (1976-1983). Dawes critically reflected on the conditions of political justice concerning literary productions that played a crucial role in representing the contexts of extreme repression by an authoritarian military government. The talk approached the work of Leopoldo Brizuela and other renowned Argentinean writers, highlighting the relevance of maintaining a historical memory of human rights violations.

These events strengthened relationship between departments, programs, and interdisciplinary minors across Elon campus. More importantly, these events gave students the opportunity to delve deep into ecological and political justice issues currently and historically faced in Latin America.
This Fall semester, Spanish professors Juan Leal Ugalde and Federico Pous held an event about the unheard voices in Colombia. The event started with a presentation from Dr. Irene Vélez-Torres who is a Fulbright Visiting Scholar. Her research looks at the use of mercury in Artisanal Gold Mining in Colombia and the negative effects it is having on the people who live there. She talked about her research of going into the communities to study the mercury levels in the fish to determine the effect it had on the community. Her research found that the community had high levels of mercury and without regulations on gold mining things would not get better. Artisanal gold mining provides jobs for the community but their practices have negative health effects. Dr. Irene Vélez-Torres had to work with the armed groups that control the area of her research and show that they were there to help and inform the community. Her research has been instrumental in helping prove that there needs to be stricter regulations on the use of mercury in gold mining and help marginalized communities.
After the presentation, guests were able to view the new art exhibit in Carlton Commons named “The Faces of Colombia: The Invisible Community” by Donna Slade. The 12 photos are copies of the colored-pencil portraits that look like photographs. The exhibit shows the faces and current problems of the Afro-Colombian and indigenous people in Colombia. The pieces allow viewers to learn more about the individual people in the photos and the struggles they face.

Many Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities are displaced off their lands that have gold and oil, with their voices being ignored. We are so grateful for the knowledge that these wonderful and moving photos offer; thank you!

Images from the "Faces of Colombia" Exhibition
I attended an Italian section event on October 28, 2021 called “Amici dell'Italia” (Friends of Italy). There was a wonderful turnout for this fascinating presentation. The event was hosted by Dr. Brandon Essary and he invited Dr. Maureen Vandermaas-Peeler and her husband Russ to present on their time spent abroad in Florence, Italy in 2014, when Dr. Vandermaas-Peeler was serving as Elon's faculty-in-residence at the Accademia Europea di Firenze. Dr. Vandermaas-Peeler came to Elon in 1995. Nearly 20 years later, she and her husband had the opportunity to go to Florence. A wonderful quote from the presentation was, after going to Florence, “You’ll never have one home anymore”. This really highlights the impact of teaching and studying abroad and how truly life changing it can be.

Russ began the presentation by showing stunning pictures of various areas of Florence. He explained Florence’s deep history, and he loved taking pictures to highlight its history and beauty. His images depicted lots of art, architecture, and statues. A fun fact Russ noted was how Michelangelo and Galileo are buried in a neighborhood church in Florence. He highlighted this as these two are extremely notable figures, and yet they are buried in a common area of the city. Russ also emphasized how being abroad for four months is much better than being abroad for four days. They really got the opportunity to deeply explore the city. He stated how creating this new home in Florence helped them search for hole-in-the-wall places and the importance of finding new things and meeting Italians. While showing various pictures, Russ explained the importance of both museum art and street art.
Dr. Maureen Vandermaas-Peeler began by explaining how they worked with the Elon's school of record, the Accademia Europea di Firenze (AEF) while abroad. The people at AEF made a huge impact on their experience, and she could not emphasize enough how much she loves this program. They held various events that brought the community together, including the students. She made a point to talk about Enrico who, at the time, worked at AEF. She loves his pedagogy and has collaborated with him at international conferences. He gave students the skills they needed to explore the city and practice Italian in daily life there. For example, he taught linguistics and information about markets, and then he encouraged students to actually go to these markets and interact with the Italians working there. For another such event, they went to a chocolate festival after learning certain vocabulary and had to interact with Italians.

Dr. Vandermaas-Peeler explained as well that a great part of being abroad was the study tours. She stated, “The classroom surrounds you” during these trips. The things one learns abroad can connect to any field or discipline. For example, she researches childhood development, and their visit to Reggio Emilia in Italy directly related to her interests. Being abroad also opens doors to new opportunities. After returning to the US, she was inspired to do research on the impact of study abroad.
This virtual study abroad panel was designed for students to ask questions to those who have previously traveled abroad or are currently abroad as part of a French program. The panelists were Kaitlin Theall, Ivy Montague, and Julia Madden. Kaitlin Theall began the panel discussing her study abroad trip to Morocco as part of a multicultural human rights program. She explained that she took Arabic while in Morocco after having taken French in high school, and both languages were very useful. She spoke French to people who lived there because nearly everyone she met in Morocco spoke French, including her host family. She explained how it is a great place to visit even if one is not interested in studying abroad there. Kaitlin was an honors fellow, and she said that while studying abroad she still managed to fulfill all her requirements as part of this program. She was a double major in political science and religious studies, but study abroad programs definitely work well with advanced studies and core class requirements.

Ivy Montague spoke next, and she was actively abroad as part of the Reims program in the fall of 2021. She explained that this program is very structured which she appreciates as it is very similar to Elon, but in France. Ivy had to find her own housing for this program, so she located her own apartment. In this program, there is a possibility to take some classes in English rather than in French. One of her favorite things is how she was able to meet people from all over the world. The Reims program does not have planned excursions as a group, but they do offer different clubs. Ivy said that it is a good idea to not plan too many things as it is wonderful to go out and experience the culture. She has loved figuring out the French routine.
Julia Madden was the final student to talk about her experiences abroad. Julia graduated from Elon in 2021 and went abroad to Paris in the spring of 2020, right when COVID hit. Unfortunately, Julia was only in Paris for two months before she got sent home. She explained how the Paris program is a very structured program with built in group excursions. Her cohort was 20-30 people, and most were not Elon students. Julia took two classes in English while the rest were in French. As part of this program, one can choose whether they want to participate in a home stay or in dorms. The dorms had a great location which was right near Notre Dame, whereas the home stays varied from Paris to outside of the city in a more suburban setting. Julia chose to do the home stay to understand the day to day life of a French family. When choosing the home stay, the students fill out a housing questionnaire before being matched with a family in order to mark down certain preferences. Julia learned how to take public transportation to her classes which gave her a lot of confidence navigating the city. She did not participate in an internship, but she knows that they were offered to students wishing to obtain one. She also explained that the Paris program ends in mid May, so if one wanted, they could set up an internship to continue into the summer. Julia loved her program directors and felt as if they were a great support system during her time in Paris.

Some overall advice from each of the students who studied abroad were that it is going to look like everyone abroad is having the time of their lives, and it can be hard to be on the other side of the world. Sometimes it’s not as easy as it looks, and it is very important to talk about it. **Going abroad is a lot harder than you think it may be, but it is also fantastic.** They all stated they would not trade the experience for anything.
Professor Avraham-Katz, who tells his students to simply call him Boaz, started working at Elon in 2015 only teaching one or two classes. Last year he was given the position of Jewish educator at the Elon Hillel, allowing him to create and teach new classes, and allowing him to engage even more with the Jewish community on campus.

Boaz has created multiple new classes centered around the Jewish studies minor, which have become very popular courses that foster creativity and cultural exploration. One of such classes is Falafel Nation, which forms connections between food and culture and how food has been used to create a narrative in Israel. This class delves into the history of food culture and gives students the opportunity to make and try their own Jewish foods.

Since crafting these courses Boaz has noted something interesting: many of his students do not speak Hebrew and have not ever had any experience with Israel. His classes are bringing in new students who are eager to expand their cultural competence and learn about a new culture. This expansion of cultural learning on campus is something that Boaz and his students are very excited about.

One of Boaz’s goals is to teach his students to open their minds and to question the topics that they are learning about. By diving into the history and culture of Israel and relating it to major themes such as globalization, Boaz says his students can become global citizens. His classes use Israel as a case study to analyze aspects of this and culture across the globe. Boaz and his students are looking forward to more new and creative classes in the future, and further expanding the Hebrew culture at Elon.
Learning a new language is a valuable skill no matter the circumstances. While many students opt for some of the more widely-taught languages, students like Lauren Singles and Jeremiah "J" Thorne have chosen a different path, which has opened a door to many valuable opportunities and experiences. As juniors here at Elon, Lauren and J have been studying Arabic for at least two years now, and both are also involved in ROTC programs. Despite these similarities, Lauren and J chose to study Arabic for different reasons. J, an avid language learner, decided to study Arabic because he “wanted to explore a language outside of the latin alphabet, not only for the challenge but as something [he] could be proud of.” Lauren, on the other hand, has family ties to the language. She grew up hearing stories about her grandmother from Morocco, and this cultural connection ended up being “the biggest factor in deciding to learn Arabic.”

Since deciding to study Arabic, Lauren and J have seen a wealth of opportunities emerge for both their current studies and their future careers. Arabic is considered a “critical language” by the United States military and many government agencies. Because of this, ROTC cadets have the ability to increase their monthly stipend if they show that they are studying a critical language, and there are many opportunities that encourage them to further their study of the language.

This past summer, Lauren Singles had the opportunity to participate in Project GO, an ROTC-only program that pays for cadets to learn a critical language either abroad or at a U.S. university. Lauren spent the summer of 2021 at the Virginia Military Institute studying Arabic with fellow cadets. She credits her interest in Arabic for receiving this scholarship, saying that “had I not been interested in Arabic or languages in general, this would definitely have been something I would have passed up — but I’m so glad that I didn’t.”

Lauren stated that “learning a critical language is important because that means there are not many native speakers of these languages that are joining the Armed Forces.” Both Lauren and J agree that there is value in studying both more popular and less popular languages. However, Lauren added that “being proficient in less-common languages makes you a better asset” to the Armed Forces.

On top of their language study, Lauren and J both emphasize the importance of learning about and understanding different cultures. J noted that those in the military cannot “choose where [they] go but [they] can choose, as officers, how [they] go about missions to achieve what [they] are there for,” and cultural knowledge plays an incredibly important role in that. He added that he hopes his study of Arabic and his future career in the military will not only “better [him] as an officer, but also as an open minded person who can think critically in the broad world we live in.”

Whether a student chooses to study a “popular” language here at Elon, such as Spanish, or a less commonly taught language such as Arabic, there is no doubt that they will gain valuable knowledge and enjoy a rewarding experience. Lauren encourages people to not be intimidated by a less popular language such as Arabic, stating that “Arabic is not as difficult as it seems, it is just different than what English speakers are used to.” It is important to remember that learning less popular languages has the potential to open doors to valuable opportunities and rewarding experiences that differ from other languages.
This fall, I was fortunate enough to spend my semester abroad in Copenhagen, Denmark, where I took classes through the DIS program (Danish Institute in Scandinavia). I lived in a Learning Living Community focused on the outdoors, which allowed me to engage in outdoor activities with residents of Copenhagen and learn about the ways in which people interact with nature while living in the city. While Copenhagen is a city, it is one of the most sustainable cities in the world. Biking is a huge part of the culture and is a major means of transportation. Renting a bike for the semester helped me feel a part of the community, and most days I would ride alongside the early morning commuters into the city.

All of my courses integrated aspects of Danish culture into the material, and they were taught by professors from Copenhagen. My positive psychology course was especially interesting because Denmark has been repeatedly ranked as one of the “most happiest countries” in the world. Studying positive psychology in Denmark gave me the opportunity to experience elements of Danish culture and lifestyle that contribute to the country’s high level of well-being. For example, “Hygge” is a concept in Denmark used to describe feelings of coziness, comfort, and warmth, usually accompanied by good friends, food, and drink. We would often engage in hygge activities together as a class by sharing warm beverages together, and on one occasion we walked around the city and talked to locals about the importance of hygge in their lives. From what I observed and experienced, the Danish community strongly emphasizes the importance of building personal connections and savoring life’s small joys.

Living in Copenhagen allowed me to engage with the local community and experience elements of Danish culture. It has been interesting to have these experiences and make comparisons with the lifestyle I am familiar with in the United States. While I am looking forward to returning to Elon to finish my undergrad, I will definitely miss walking the cobblestone streets of Copenhagen and spending time with the friends I have made while abroad.
Taylor graduated with a double major in French and International/Global Studies and a minor in Political Science. In 2015, she studied abroad in Paris and had an amazing experience, which is the reason why she decided to return. Taylor’s experience abroad allowed her to see that she could live abroad in France and that she could pursue a master’s degree there. Taylor is grateful for the mentors she met at Elon and advocates for getting to know your professors. Professors Adamson, Burns, Choplin, and Glasco encouraged her to pursue the French major and learn the advanced skills that gave her confidence when she moved to France.

Alumni Spotlight: Taylor Kelly ’16
By: Aniyah Adams

In the WLC department, we love to showcase our alumni and their amazing accomplishments. An Elon alumna who has really embraced her love for French language and culture is Taylor Kelly. Since graduating in 2016, she has immersed herself in French culture by moving to Paris following graduation!
Alumni Spotlight:
Taylor Kelly '16

By: Aniyah Adams

Following her time at Elon, Taylor pursued masters degrees from the American Graduate School in Paris in International Relations and Université Paris-Saclay in International Law. She likes to challenge herself and wanted to use the years after college to build a foundation. After Elon, Taylor was ready to start her next adventure. Moving to France was very exciting for her! Taylor's French language skills have blossomed through her interactions with others in France. She experienced culture shocks, but to sum up moving abroad it was “very challenging but in the end definitely worth it.” Taylor recommends studying abroad because because it gives you a better perspective of other cultures.

So, you want to move abroad? Here is some of Taylor’s advice.

- Network on LinkedIn and reach out to others.
- Be open to being a student abroad and internship opportunities that may become job opportunities.
- Research in advance and visit before you commit to moving.
- Interact with locals and make an effort to get immersed into the culture.

Taylor, thank you for sharing your experience. The WLC is proud of you and we are looking forward to seeing your future accomplishments!