

When Puppets Do the Talking



Spanish professor Elizabeth Ubiergo sits with the puppets she helped create during her 2014 sabbatical project.

On Tuesday, May 12, at 4:00 p.m. in the Ellis Dunn Community Room (Gaiser Hall room 213), the Teaching and Learning Center hosts “Bilingual Puppetry: A project-based learning exploration,” the 2014 spring quarter installment of Clark College’s Faculty Speaker Series. Professor Elizabeth Ubiergo will present her sabbatical research on the use of puppetry and other forms of art and literature to enhance learning world languages.

Ubiergo’s research was prompted by realizing that her young daughter spoke better Spanish when talking with a toy than when talking with real human beings. She began wondering if this same technique could help her students at Clark, who often seemed to forget their Spanish language skills as soon

as they had to use them in front of other people.

“There is a lot of research going on right now regarding performance-based language learning,” says Ubiergo. “I thought, maybe if my students had something to hide behind, like a large puppet, they could relax and get more from the experience.”

Ubiergo used her sabbatical to learn performance-based teaching techniques, build a series of large puppets based on classic works of Spanish literature, and create bilingual scripts for short plays to be performed with the puppets. After her sabbatical, she worked with students to perform the plays at the college’s annual Día del Niño/Latino Festival and in the classroom. They will also perform at the Portland Puppet Museum during the 2015 summer quarter.

While Ubiergo’s work is focused on the teaching of Spanish, her presentation will provide insight and advice to any teacher interested in exploring performance- and play-based teaching techniques.

About Elizabeth Ubiergo

Spanish professor Elizabeth Ubiergo has earned a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Arts degree in Spanish language and literature from the University of Oregon. She also attended Universidad de Valladolid, Spain, and the Universidad Católica in Quito, Ecuador. Ubiergo has previous work experience with the University of Portland, Portland Community College, Chapman & Silva Translation Services, Universidad Católica–Ecuador, University of Oregon, and Clark College. She began teaching at Clark in 1994 and received tenure in 2008.

At Clark College, Ubiergo serves as co-advisor of the Spanish Club. She is the founder of Clark’s study abroad program in Valladolid, Spain, and this year began co-leading Clark students in a newly designed, two-week course of study in Mexico. She is the founder of the Mesa Redonda, a series of

Spanish-language roundtable discussion groups which have been held at Clark for 13 years. She also served on Clark's Financial Aid Committee, International Education Committee, and Latino Celebration Month Planning Committee. In addition, for more than a decade Ubiergo has served as an Advance Placement (AP) exam reader for the AP test in Spanish.

Ubiergo says her teaching philosophy emphasizes the importance of play in the learning process. "I tell my students that language learning should be fun and creative, not competitive and stressful," she says. "Basically, students learn by speaking and making mistakes in authentic situations."

About the Faculty Speaker Series

The Clark College Faculty Speaker Series showcases recent experiences that have enriched both the life and teaching of a Clark faculty member. Faculty members share their developmental experiences with the college community—and members of the community at large—while addressing some of today's most intriguing issues.

Established by Clark College with support from the Clark College Foundation, the series honors individual faculty members and celebrates academic excellence.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

Photo Album: Fun for the Whole Familia

Not even an accidental fire alarm could stop the festivities at this year's Día del Niño/Día del Libro celebration, held in

Gaiser Student Center on May 9. Approximately 225 guests enjoyed the evening-long celebration of Latino culture and literature, which included a bilingual puppet show performed by Clark Spanish language students, dance performances by Olincalli Ballet Folklórico, free food from Panadería Cinco de Mayo, and hands-on activities for children. Oswald the Penguin was on hand to greet children and pose for pictures—even when the party moved outdoors temporarily after an inquisitive toddler managed to pull a fire alarm. The celebration quickly moved back inside to continue the festivities, which are held each year around April 30, the date of Mexico’s Día del Niño (“Day of the Child”) and the American Library Association’s Día del Libro (“Day of the Book”).

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Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

A Spanish Lesson with Strings Attached



Professor Betsy Ubiergo takes a moment from putting the finishing touches on some of the puppets she helped create at the Olde World Puppet Theatre studios during her sabbatical.

In a strange way, Spanish professor Betsy Ubiergo has the cruelty of children to thank for inspiring her sabbatical project, which will be unveiled at Clark College's Día del Niño/Día del Libro festival, held May 9 in Gaiser Student Center.

Ubiergo and her Spanish-born husband are raising their daughter, Mar, to be bilingual in both English and Spanish. But Mar began refusing to speak Spanish at home after classmates at her elementary school told her she was "too blonde to speak Spanish."

"She'd come home from school and say, 'Mom, I can't speak Spanish,'" Ubiergo recalled. "But then she'd grab a doll and make the doll speak in Spanish. She'd relax once it wasn't her on the spot. The doll would speak *great* Spanish."

Ubiergo began wondering if this same technique could be used to help her students at Clark, who often seemed to forget their language skills as soon as they had to use them in front of other people. “There’s a lot of research going on right now regarding performance-based language learning,” said Ubiergo. “I thought, maybe if my students had something to hide behind, they could relax and get more from the experience.”



Steven Overton and Martin Richmond of the Olde World Puppet Theatre Studios said they designed the puppets to be both easy for students to use and respectful of the source material’s cultural aesthetics.

Ubiergo applied for and received a two-quarter sabbatical to spend creating a series of large puppets based on works of Spanish literature, as well as the training to be able to help her students use them. To help craft the puppets, she turned to Steve Overton and Marty Richmond of Portland’s Olde World Puppet Theatre Studios, who spent hundreds of hours working to design, craft, and coordinate the 33 puppets.

“We just really loved what Betsy was doing,” said Overton. “It’s promoting literacy, and language, and the classics. We were really happy to be part of it.”

The puppets are based on three different children's stories, each by a major figure in Spanish-language literature: *El Elefante y Su Secreto* (*The Elephant and his Secret*) by Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral; *Platero y Yo*, by Spanish poet and writer Juan Ramón Jiménez; and *Jaco* by André Dahan, a French writer and illustrator whose children's books have been translated into numerous languages. Ubiergo has created scripts from each story; students in her spring quarter Spanish 123 class are currently learning the plays and will be performing them at Clark's annual Día del Nino/Día del Libro festival, an evening celebration of Latino culture that always includes food, music, dance and a host of other family-friendly activities.



Jaco the Bird is the star of one of the bilingual puppet skits created by Spanish professor Betsy Ubiergo.

"It will be nice because everyone can get something different from this," said Ubiergo. "For my students, they'll have a chance to learn Spanish in a new and non-threatening way, and

to interact with native Spanish speakers. For the children there who speak Spanish, this may introduce them to some important examples of Spanish-language literature that they may not have been familiar with—and because they'll be able to help my students out if they forget a word, it validates their experiences as Spanish speakers. And for English-speaking children, the plays are bilingual, and the puppets make it engaging even when they don't recognize the language."

Ubiergo added that since the puppets were part of her sabbatical project, they are now Clark College property and will be available for future productions and lessons. In fact, she made sure to request that Overton and Richmond make the puppets easy to disassemble and pack for traveling, because she already has plans to use them in a service learning project during the college's next study abroad trip to Mexico during Spring Break 2015.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

As the World Turned



Spanish instructor Felipe Montoya, *third from left*, with members of the Spanish Club at the International Students Exhibit.

Clark College hosted a wide range of public events—including films, music, speakers, and panel discussions—during its observance of International Education Week, November 18-21. This year's theme was "The Language of Learning: Creating a Sense of Place."

International Education Week (IEW) is a joint initiative of the U.S. Departments of State and Education to highlight the importance of international education and cultural exchange. This is the fifth year that Clark has participated in IEW. According to committee member and International Student Recruitment & Outreach Manager Jody Shulnak, planning the week of activities took more than three months, and the committee is already looking forward to next year, possibly building on the success of this year's International Photography Contest by working with the Archer Gallery to create an international

art exhibit. “Stay tuned!” she said. “IEW gets bigger and better each year.”

Some highlights from this year’s IEW:



Ismet Prcic talks about writing his novel *Shards*.

Columbia Writers Series

The college hosted a reading on November 18 by two highly respected writers as part of its Columbia Writers Series. Ismet Prcic and Zachary Schomburg, winners of the 2013 Oregon Book Awards for Fiction and Poetry, respectively, read from their work and discussed their writing processes. Prcic, who teaches Drama at Clark, described how writing his novel, *Shards*, served as a way to process his experiences growing up in war-torn Bosnia. The book—Prcic’s first—is semi-autobiographical (the central character is named “Ismet Prcic”) and told through a fractured composite of diary entries, recollections, and speculative imaginings of what might have been.



Former student Marisa Petry, left, introduced Spanish professor Erika Nava at the fall 2013 installment of Clark's Faculty Speaker Series.

Faculty Speaker Series

On November 19, Spanish professor Erika Nava gave the fall presentation of Clark's Faculty Speaker Series. Nava spoke about her experiences building online classes to teach Spanish. She acknowledged that many people are skeptical that languages can be taught online—including students. Indeed, she was introduced by a former student, Marisa Petry, who said she was concerned about getting enough support in an online environment. Instead, Petry found that Nava's use of tools like embedded video and Skype allowed her to learn Spanish just as well as she would have in a face-to-face classroom. "Even today, I use it at the bedside," said Petry, who is now working as a nurse. "And because of her course, I had the confidence to take other online courses."

Nava said that she herself initially resisted the idea of teaching Spanish online. "My initial reaction was like many people's: 'No way, I'm not going to do that. How will I have the personal connection with students?'"

However, she found herself reconsidering that attitude after her first few years teaching at Clark. "I saw that I had a lot

of nontraditional students in my classes who were working full-time jobs and were coming in late to class, really struggling to be there,” she said.

Nava showed some of the ways she makes her online classes feel more interactive and personal. Where many online modules include written instructions, she instead inserts video of herself speaking the instructions “so I can be more present in the class.” She has also connected to students while taking live video in Mexico, providing them with a sort of virtual study-abroad opportunity. Using technology in innovative and thoughtful ways like this, she said, can keep that personal connection between students and instructor strong, even in an online environment.

See video of Erika Nava discussing her approach to online learning.



German professor Julian Nelson, *right*, translates the German children’s poem his student is reading.

International Read-In

On November 20, poetry filled the air of PUB 161 as students

and staff read favorite pieces in different tongues. Sociology professor Carlos Castro read “Pueblo Tropical” by Nicaraguan poet Salomón de la Selva. English professor Jill Darley-Vanis read “La Beauté” from Charles Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and provided a handout showing the dramatic variations between three English translations of the poem. Student Joy Robertson-Maciel, meanwhile, read a prose passage in Portuguese from Brazilian writer Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis.

The prize for most gruesome readings, however, had to go to the students in Professor Julian Nelson’s German classes, who read from classic German children’s poems. One passage, from the classic collection *Der Struwwelpeter*, told the tale of a naughty child who sucks his thumbs—until a tailor chops them off. Another told the tale of a friendship between a cat and a dog, which ends with one of them getting shot. “There are no happy endings in German, sorry,” said Nelson with a laugh.



Saudi students Majed Alhumaidani, Saleh Almaki, and Faisal Aljubaylah talk about their country and culture.

Saudi Student Panel

Also on November 20, three international students from Saudi Arabia spoke about their country, its culture, and their experiences living in the United States. It was clear that

life for a young person in America is very different from that of a young person in Saudi Arabia. For one thing, it's lonelier; all three students spoke wistfully about their closely knit families and about the comfort of having lots of relatives living together. "When I was home, all my day was scheduled to be about my family," said Saleh Almaki, the eldest of 11 children by his father's two wives. "But here, every day is scheduled to be about myself."

The students, all three of whom are Muslim, also expressed hope that they could help dispel American misconceptions about Islam. Faisal Aljubaylah said he wanted Americans to understand that "the first letter of Islam is 'learn'—not just 'learn about Islam,' but 'learn about other cultures and religions.'"



Students provided music during the International Student Exhibition.

International Student Exhibition

On November 21, students gathered in Gaiser Student Center to enjoy art and music with an international flair. Many students from instructor Felipe Montoya's Spanish classes wore skeletal Day of the Dead face paint as they stood before the traditional Day of the Dead altars they'd created as extra-credit projects. In Mexico, these altars often honor deceased relatives—here, students created altars to celebrities passed.

One was devoted to Michael Jackson, complete with framed fingerless glove; another, honoring Elvis Presley, included a guitar.



Christian Fairchild and Amanda Murphy show off their Day of the Dead altar to Pancho Villa.

Students Amanda Murphy and Christian Fairchild sat next their altar honoring the spirit of Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa. “We were going to go with a painter, but one student in our group is blind and wanted something she could enjoy, too,” explained Murphy, who is co-enrolled at Clark and at Portland State University. “We settled on a revolutionary. That’s a theme everyone can get behind: rebellion and revolution. We can all identify with that.”

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley. Erika Nava Photo: Clark College/Hannah Erickson

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