”Culture from the beginning and language to the end”—this motto truly exemplifies the philosophy that drives the Department of French and Italian Languages and Literatures at the University of Pittsburgh. Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences. The department offers students a balanced combination of courses uniquely designed to strengthen oral and written language skills and to introduce students to the study of French and Italian literatures and cultures.

”Ultimately, the goal of the department is to provide students with meaningful connections to the world through French and Italian languages and cultures,” explains department chair Lina Insana. “While we continue to refine language skills throughout the academic careers of students, we introduce them to the cultural context of the language from the outset. Through courses in literature, film, and theater, students see the integration of culture and language that offers them a different way of seeing and interpreting the world.”

Languages connect students to the world in many different ways. Some students who major in Italian come to the program having a strong desire to delve deeper into the traditions and history of their family. Other students have an interest in art history or music, and the Italian major complements their interest. As French is a global language, students studying it often have a strong desire to work in francophone countries such as Haiti and many parts of Africa. Because of the nature of the programs, many of the majors pair the programs with other disciplines such as neuroscience, anthropology, biology, political science, linguistics, psychology, film studies, music, religious studies, history, communication, and business.

The vast majority of the department’s classes are taught completely in the target language, including beginning language classes. This full immersion into the language allows both programs to focus on communication of the language for maximum use in the classroom. One of the main goals in the French and Italian language programs is to guide students in the development of their skills through communicative acts of reading, writing, and creating discourse around texts of all types.

Learning the language does not occur only in the classroom setting. “There is a fluidity between the classroom and outside-of-class activities,” says Insana. “To immerse students in the full francophone experience, for instance, our faculty in the French program take students on outings to experience the local flavor and culture of French restaurants and the opera.” Students also are encouraged to take advantage of the extracurricular activities organized by the department. The “tavola italiana,” Italian conversation hour and the “table du conversation” French conversation hour provide students with the opportunity to apply their skills in an informal setting with faculty and peers.

Internships are an integral part of the curriculum and include positions in cultural organizations, translation companies, and high school language departments. Studying a language definitely provides a competitive edge when students are vying for internships or job opportunities, says Insana. “We were thrilled when one of our students received an extraordinary internship offer at Dolce & Gabbana, the luxury fashion house in Milan, Italy, solely because of her command of the Italian language.”

Students also are encouraged to add an international dimension to their undergraduate education by studying abroad. The department, in conjunction with the Study Abroad Office, offers four study abroad programs during the summer months and one during the academic year. While most of these programs provide full immersion into the culture and language, there is one, Pitt in Rome, that is designed for beginning to intermediate Italian language students. For more information, visit www.abroad.pitt.edu.

As the department looks ahead to celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2015, Insana is excited about what the future holds for the department. “We are so fortunate to have the luxury of offering a breadth of courses with specialists on both the French and Italian side,” says Insana. “Our faculty are central to the success of this department. They are completely engaged and connected with the students, and they bring their passion, their expertise, and their love of the cultures to this program.”

For more information, visit www.frenchanditalian.pitt.edu.

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

- Each spring, the department sponsors an Italian film festival featuring seven award-winning contemporary Italian films in the original language with English subtitles.
- The French and Italian clubs are open to all students on campus interested in learning more about the French and Italian culture and language.
- The department shares its expertise with the community through the University’s College in High School program, while students apply their language skills through internships with local high school teachers of French and Italian, the Alliance Française de Pittsburgh, and the Italian American Collection at the Senator John Hinz History Center.
Passion for Language
Transforms Classroom Experience

Whether he is introducing freshman students to the French language and culture or discussing best practices in writing business plans with seniors, Brett Wells’ passion for teaching and love of the French language are profound. His excitement resonates with his students, who enthusiastically become actively engaged in the learning process. Wells, a senior lecturer in the Department of French and Italian Languages and Literatures, is director of undergraduate studies in French and the major and study abroad advisor in French.

Wells’ initial interest in language study came from his mother, who taught high school Spanish. Curious to know what his mother was saying to her Spanish-speaking colleagues and friends, Wells signed up for Spanish classes. Later, as an undergraduate music major at Drake University, Wells enrolled in a French class to fulfill a major requirement. “As I studied French, I learned more about the history of English as well as how French has transformed the English vocabulary,” says Wells. “I have been amazed at how much I continually learn about my own language when studying French and other languages.”

After receiving his master’s and doctoral degrees in French from Stanford University, Wells continued his research in terminology, francophone sociolinguistics, and applied linguistics. Currently, he is investigating how vocabulary size correlates to language proficiency in students and how students go about learning and acquiring word-formation rules. Wells hopes to use his research findings to develop teaching approaches that will make the learning of vocabulary easier and more efficient for his students.

Wells, who has been at the University of Pittsburgh since 2006, teaches five courses a year: Elementary and Intermediate French, Written French, and Business French. He specifically designs his classes to be interactive, striking a fine balance between teacher-led and student-driven learning. “Students learn more and learn faster when their internal motivation can be tapped,” says Wells. “My syllabi focus on the material but also allow room for flexibility to adapt to the particular motivations and learning styles of the students. The experiences of my students are great points of departure for fashioning the class so [that] it is relevant and meaningful for them.”

A 2013 recipient of the Chancellor’s Distinguished Teaching Award, Wells continually looks at ways to update and refresh his classes. “As a curious person, I enjoy learning as a part of teaching. I am constantly learning to teach better and teaching [how] to learn more efficiently and enjoyably. Teaching is a way to share what I have learned, what I am learning, and even what I am trying and hoping to learn with others,” explains Wells. “My students are an absolute joy to teach. Their curiosity keeps me ever more curious and forces me to stay a step ahead of them so they can learn French in their generation’s context and I can continue to improve my teaching.”

As a departmental advisor, Wells often fields questions from students and parents about the validity of studying a foreign language. “I constantly tell my students that their interest in language is most timely in an ever-more-globalized world,” says Wells. “There are more and more opportunities to use French professionally as the emerging African nations develop their economies. In the near future, demand for French-speaking professionals in business and industry will skyrocket.” He also encourages parents to support their students when they show an interest in combining a foreign language with another major. Wells explains, “The knowledge of a second and even third language will make your student much more competitive globally because the majority of the world’s population is multilingual.”

Summer Sessions
Registration Continues

Summer sessions at the University of Pittsburgh provide an exciting opportunity for students to catch up on needed credits, stay on track to graduate in four years, or get ahead of schedule for the fall term. Summer sessions classes are designed to help students reach their educational goals no matter where they are in their academic career.

During the summer, students can complete general education or specialized requirements, finish core and prerequisite courses, or enroll in popular courses and labs that fill quickly during the academic year. Summer sessions also provide opportunities to explore subjects in a major without the pressure of a full class load. Flexible scheduling allows students to take classes during the summer months without forgoing summer jobs, internships, or family vacations.

The Department of French and Italian Languages and Literatures offers a variety of classes during the summer for students wanting to complete their language requirement as well as majors looking for more specialized courses. Classes include Elementary French 1 and 2 and Elementary Italian 1 and 2.

For more information on specific course offerings in all disciplines, please visit www.courses.as.pitt.edu.
As a little girl, Marialexia Alfano vividly remembers traveling to Italy with her family and being fascinated by the extraordinary beauty of the country. Some of her favorite childhood memories revolve around being fully immersed in the language and culture of her parents’ birthplace. This love of culture, spirit of travel, and global awareness have remained with her throughout her life and were the impetus for her majoring in both Italian language and literature and biological sciences in the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences.

This native New Yorker and first-generation Italian American was initially drawn to the University of Pittsburgh because of the energy and spirit of adventure she felt on the sprawling campus. She quickly placed into her first language course, Italian III, and was welcomed with open arms by the Department of French and Italian Languages and Literatures. “The atmosphere in this department is just incredible. We are all one big family where everyone knows your name and you just have a real sense of belonging,” says Alfano. “When I began the Italian program, Dr. [Dennis] Looney, in particular, was so encouraging to me. He believed in my potential and gave me the confidence to pursue Italian as a major.”

Delving deeper into the Italian culture was at the top of Alfano’s list. One of her favorite classes, Italian Novella, gave her the opportunity to explore the lives of the Italian people and to learn more about what influenced their lives through literature from the 12th century to the present day.

The most challenging and yet rewarding course for Alfano came in an Italian theater workshop class, in which the final assignment was to write and perform a theatrical script completely in Italian. Alfano recounts her initial feelings about this assignment: “At first, this project was scary and completely daunting. However, working together in this creative process allowed all of us to express ourselves through the language and really change our way of thinking about the Italian culture. The final product was a script and performance that was amazing and so personally rewarding.”

Alfano encourages all Italian majors, as well as anyone interested in the language and culture, to get involved and join the Italian Club. A former president and social coordinator of the club, Alfano expanded the group’s annual Cheese Night into a combined event with the French Club, now called Cheese Night Carnevale and Mardi Gras. Alfano also participated on the intercollegiate snowboarding team, volunteered as a student ambassador for the Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force, and assisted in research in the Graduate School of Public Health.

She encourages students to think outside the box and broaden their horizons when looking to incorporate a foreign language into their studies. “College is what you make of it, and it is not always about finding a career path but, instead, letting it find you,” says Alfano when asked about her career plans. “Speaking another language fluently may open up many opportunities to me, particularly in the public health professions. Ultimately, the study of another language and culture provides another perspective beyond my own and will be extremely helpful no matter what profession I may enter.”
Bellet Awards Presented

The University of Pittsburgh Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences has named Charles E. Jones, lecturer and advisor in the Department of Geology and Planetary Science, and Rick Relyea, professor in the Department of Biological Sciences and director of the Pymatuning Laboratory of Ecology, winners of the 2014 Tina and David Bellet Teaching Excellence Awards. The Bellet Award recipients were honored at a dinner on March 26 in the ballroom of Pitt’s University Club.

The Bellet Awards were established in 1998 and endowed in 2008 with a $1.5 million gift from Dietrich School alumnus David Bellet (BA ’67) and his wife, Tina, to recognize extraordinary achievement and innovation in undergraduate teaching in the Dietrich School.

A committee appointed by the Dietrich School associate dean for undergraduate studies evaluates teaching skills based on student and peer evaluations, student testimonials, and dossiers submitted by the nominees. Full-time faculty members who have taught in the Dietrich School during the previous three years are eligible. Each award recipient receives a cash prize of $5,000.

For more information about the Bellet Awards, visit www.as.pitt.edu/teaching/bellet.