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From Classroom to Conference

April 29, 2016

This April, several French majors and minors from Georgia Southern journeyed down the road to Savannah to share their research at the Annual Southeast Coastal Conference of Languages and Literatures. Among them were Honors Program students Brady Gwynn (English and French '19) and Maria Amiel (French and international studies '17), both of whom took regular classroom assignments to the next level.

Gwynn's presentation, "The Louisiana Accent," began as an assignment for Dr. Virginie Ems-Bléneau's Grammar and Phonetics course.

"We had to write a final paper on all the different accents we studied, with emphasis on one we found interesting," said Gwynn. "I used that paper as a starting point and transformed it into my conference presentation."

Out of the many languages her class studied, Gwynn found herself captivated by the long, unique history of Creole French, an isolated language restricted to Louisiana. Her research explored the Southern state's colonial past: What initially was a French colony became a Spanish colony, then was acquired by the French again before the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 led to its eventual statehood. In spite of all these shifts in Louisiana's identity, the state stayed true to its French roots.

"No matter who owned Louisiana, French was always the most commonly spoken language," said Gwynn.

In spite of her nervousness, Gwynn delivered a successful presentation. In fact, one of Gwynn's audience members came specifically to hear her research because she was from Louisiana, and her mother-in-law was Creole.

"It was really cool to talk to someone from the area, who had firsthand knowledge on the subject," said Gwynn. "I learned from her that Creole French hasn't actually evolved since the 16th century, due to the remoteness of the area where it's spoken."

Maria Amiel's project focused on the French language in a much different capacity. Rather than look at how French has influenced language development in other regions, Amiel researched how French prose has affected literature, an undertaking that began in Dr. Olga Amarie's Perspectives in Literature II class. Amiel studied Roland Barthes' *Death of the Author*, and made this theoretical work the basis of her poster presentation, titled "The Author's Purpose."

"He essentially says that we should look at texts on their own, that the author is separated from his work," said Amiel. "I also used the literary theory of Maurice Blanchot, another writer we talked about in class, to look at a sample of French literature and explore how we understand the author's role in his or her own work."

After sharing her research with other conference attendees, Amiel had the chance to speak with several professors and presenters, including the keynote speaker of the conference, who gave her feedback on the presentation.

"Overall, I thought the conference was a really great way for us French students to take what we've been learning in the classroom and share it with others," Amiel said.

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Head-Scratching Research

April 29, 2016

Head lice—the mere mention of these pesky creatures is often enough to make anyone cringe or scratch a phantom itch on their scalp, but for Matthew Anderson ('17 mathematics), lice have given him an itch for research.

Working alongside Dr. Marina Eremeeva, Anderson has investigated new approaches to the treatment of human head louse infestations, and his hard work was recently awarded with the 2016 ASM Undergraduate Research Fellowship (URF) Program Award by the Education Board of the American Society for Microbiology (ASM).

This award provides a stipend for guided research during the summer and pays his travel expenses to attend the 2017 ASM Research Capstone Institute. Additionally, he will present his research at the ASM Microbe Meeting in New Orleans.

Anderson was introduced to this project this past September when he changed his major to mathematics and developed an interest in bioinformatics and molecular biology.

"I'm really interested in biostatistics and bioinformatics and its uses in answering questions about public health or biological sciences," said Anderson. "I feel the mathematics major is giving me excellent quantitative skills that will help me with my future goals in biostatistics and bioinformatics.

By joining this ongoing project, Anderson has the opportunity to work with both biology and matters concerning public health. Their research focuses on understanding the role endosymbionts have in lice. This can help identify new treatments for lice, which are becoming increasingly difficult to eradicate, primarily through detecting an endosymbiont called *Wolbachia*. Endosymbionts are bacteria that live inside other cells and provide benefits to their hosts, such as synthesizing nutrients to provide the cell with nourishment, so creating an antibiotic to kill them could help treat difficult cases of lice.

"Already-existing studies suggest *Wolbachia* should be present in lice," said Anderson. "Our goal is to identify it and understand the metabolic role it provides to lice. Just knowing it's there can provide useful insight into the treatment and evolution of lice in general."

Anderson's role in this project began this January, and he is excited to see where it goes in the future.

He said, "It's an honor to get to work with Dr. Eremeeva. She's got so much knowledge on microbiology—it's amazing, really. She has been very supportive, and I am lucky to have this opportunity. I can't wait for people to see our work at the symposium next spring."

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