

# e-Mosaics

## College of Arts and Science

April 2010

Vol. 1, No. 4



*e-Mosaics* is published quarterly for the College of Arts and Science at the University of Missouri.

It is distributed via e-mail, and it can also be accessed on the Arts and Science Web site at [coas.missouri.edu/publications.html](http://coas.missouri.edu/publications.html)

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Cover photo: *Yo quería escribir como Vallejo/I Wanted to Write Like Vallejo*, by Juan Luis Fernández Milián

Photo of Fine Arts Building on Page 2 taken by Melody Galen



## From the Editor

Wow! Seems like just last week that I struggled to remember to write “2010” for the beginning of a new year. Now it’s April already. Not that I’m complaining — with spring we get the greening of the trees and grass and the sounds of birds chirping outside windows. After a long, kind of odd, winter, these are all welcome changes.

One change that I’m pleased to be able to bring to you is that we’re beginning to include some multimedia in our magazine. Laura Lindsey’s article on Juanamaría Cordones-Cook’s research includes a short video and a slide show of pictures.

Now for a brief bit of techno babble (some of you may want to look away for a paragraph). I know that it is possible to embed both the video and the slide show into the PDF, but that will significantly increase the size of the file that you, our readers, have to download. For the foreseeable future, I will

simply include a link in the PDF that, when clicked, will take you to a page on the Arts and Science Web site. When I figure out how to make the file sizes smaller, but not lose the quality, then I will be able to change that.

*Okay — it’s safe for everyone to continue reading.*

I think the inclusion of video and slide shows will add a new dimension to our stories, and I hope that you enjoy the extra bells and whistles.

As always, you can reach me at [GalenM@missouri.edu](mailto:GalenM@missouri.edu) or 573-884-0120 with comments or questions.

May your breezes be warm and your pollen levels be low!

—Melody Galen

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# From the Dean



The fiscal situation at the university is still rather grim, as it is for the nation in general, but we're doing everything we can to keep our costs down and our spirits up. The good news is that even with some fairly

tight restrictions placed on all levels of spending, the college is still performing in phenomenal ways.

And we'd better, given the record enrollment that MU again is experiencing. We don't see this upward trend reversing itself anytime soon, even though most states are beginning to see the decline in high school seniors that has been predicted for over a decade. Our sustained growth is attributable, in part, to the fine recruiting staff that MU has in place, but a large part of it certainly has to

do with the superior educational product we deliver.

Two recent announcements give us something to brag about: Goldwater Scholars and Kemper Fellowships.

Three Arts and Science students have been selected for the highly competitive [Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship](#). Daniel Cook is majoring in biological sciences and chemistry, April Diebold is majoring in biological sciences and international affairs, and Bertram Drury is a chemistry major.

According to the Goldwater Excellence in Education Foundation, the goal of the scholarship is to provide a continuing source of highly qualified scientists, mathematicians, and engineers. A&S is certainly showing that our students are valuable contributors to the advancement of science.

Of five [William T. Kemper Fellowships for Excellence in Teaching](#) given annually at the university, three were awarded to faculty in A&S. Anand Prahlad, professor of English; Michael Barnes, assistant teaching professor

of classical studies; and Michael Ugarte, professor of Spanish, all received a surprise visit from Chancellor Brady Deaton and a small entourage of photographers and well wishers. Perhaps the favorite aspect of this particular award is the \$10,000 that accompanies it.

Congratulations to all of our award recipients — we're proud of you.

—Michael J. O'Brien

# Whaddaya Mean, Not Bad...For a Girl?

By Laura Lindsey

Phylshawn Johnson, a senior music major, has had an exciting year. Most musicians dream of someday performing at Lincoln Center in New York City — the world’s leading performing arts center has served as a major contributor to New York’s cultural and intellectual life for 50 years. Johnson hasn’t graduated from college yet but can say she has fulfilled that dream.

Last October, School of Music Director Rob Shay received a letter from LaFrae Sci, a drummer from New York City, requesting his assistance in excusing Johnson from class for a week. Sci wanted Johnson to take her place as a drummer in a 17-piece, all-female orchestra that was planning an 18-song tribute to Nina Simone, “The High Priestess of Soul.” The six-concert event, sponsored by the Black Rock Coalition, was a tribute to the American singer, songwriter, pianist, arranger, and civil rights activist. Simone is most associated with her performance of jazz music.

Sci and Johnson met years ago and became instant friends, mutually admiring each other’s musical abilities. In the letter to Shay, Sci said Johnson is the only person she would recommend to do the gig “because of her feel, ability to play jazz and rhythm and blues, her reading ability, and her disposition, which makes her easy and fun to work with.”

Although Johnson had never played the songs on the song list before, nor had she performed with the musicians in the or-



Phylshawn Johnson performing at Studio Stock, at Mansion Studio in Columbia, Mo., in 2009.

“Big bands are the orchestra to jazz; they are still swinging, just bigger and louder.”

chestra, she didn't hesitate to say yes to the offer.

“I practiced the recordings by myself and made hand charts to study before I traveled to New York City,” says Johnson.

Once there, she had only three rehearsals with the orchestra before their first performance, and Johnson said she felt as if she had been playing with them for years.

In fact, Johnson has been preparing to be a musician since she was six years old. She remembers always tapping on things when she was a kid, which led to her father purchasing a full drum set for her when she was nine. However, she didn't start taking “official” lessons until she came to MU.

She admits it wasn't always easy being accepted as a girl drummer.

“There is a negative stereotype against female drummers,” says Johnson. “I used to tire of people telling me that I played pretty good for a girl.”

When she first began playing the drums at church, she felt a little weird because the snare drum rested between her legs while

she was wearing a skirt. Johnson remembers that girls were pushed to play the piano, flute, or clarinet instead of drums. “Parents are scared of drums anyway,” says Johnson.

Johnson is doing her part to change opinions toward female percussionists. The past couple of years, Johnson has been involved with the Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls in Brooklyn, N.Y., which is a non-profit music and mentoring program that empowers girls through music education and activities that foster self respect, leadership skills, creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. Johnson says there are plenty of girls interested in the drums at camp, and she sees women playing percussion at the college level.

“At the camp, I tell the girls, ‘This is your opportunity; no one is going to tell you you are playing too loud here,’” says Johnson.

The camp is more than just playing music, however; it teaches the history of music, how to write songs, and how women are portrayed in the media, and it even offers a self-defense class. Johnson has her sights on bringing a similar camp to Columbia some day but realizes it is a big project and will take time and money to implement.

In addition to her special guest artist performance at the Lincoln Center, Johnson was



Johnson with The Flavors of Rock at Willie Mae Rock Camp in Brooklyn, in 2007.

handpicked by Arthur White, the director of jazz studies, to be the student performer with the Jim Widner Big Band performance at the Missouri Theatre Center for the Arts on October 16. While she says it was a great experience to play with Bobby Watson, she didn't think playing big band music was that much different than playing with the MU Concert Jazz Band.

"Big band music is the root of jazz music," says Johnson. "Swing bands got together and legitimized the sound with written music. Big bands are the orchestra to jazz; they are still swinging, just bigger and louder."

She played the drum set in a samba tune during the concert and admits she was a little intimidated by the level of talent in the Widner Band.

"Phylshawn is immensely talented, a musically thoughtful performer, and very hungry to learn and improve," says White of his reason to pick Johnson to represent the Columbia campus in the concert.

With all of these accolades, it is hard to believe that when she first came to MU, she didn't want attention. In fact, she preferred



Johnson, second from right, with the other members of the Doxies, a band she played with, in 2006: Brent Maness, Tim Lloyd, Brian Maness, and Wes Wingate.

to lie low and learn the ropes before putting herself out there.

"I was nervous coming into the school because I didn't have a lot of previous instruction," says Johnson. "The school was intimidating at first, but I hung out with Julia Gaines, and she taught me how to hold the sticks, and she made sure I knew my rudiments, scales, and chords. I credit her with filling in my musical foundation and with having the patience to deal with me."

Gaines, an assistant professor of percussion, says Johnson's success comes from a variety of things. For one, her knowledge of theory and history from her academic music courses has helped her grow as a musician.

"Phylshawn is easy to work with, musically gifted, and a giving person. All of those traits

create a positive vibe and a contagious desire to work with her. She always makes the people she performs with sound better, and I think people just really like being around her," says Gaines.

Once Johnson mastered the basic techniques and gained confidence, she auditioned for the

Concert Jazz Band and has been involved with it ever since. Johnson has three semesters remaining at MU, and she isn't sure what she will do after graduation.

"I'm already doing what I love to do — playing gigs, learning music, and teaching music," says Johnson. "Everything I know about theory and its technique, I learned from this school. It all comes from here. I wouldn't want to be any other place."

# Alumnus Credits MU Education for the Good Things in His Life

By Laura Lindsey

**E**d Williamson, MA '73, gained more than knowledge during his two years at the University of Missouri — he also found his wife. Connie Knotts, BA '73, a biological sciences student worked in the geology library when she met Williamson. Today, they feel a strong connection to MU in part because of that meeting, and they have continued to support the university over the years. In fact, they have set up three endowments — two in geological sciences and one in biological sciences — that benefit the students and faculty.

Williamson has served on the Geology Development Board since 1987 and admits it was an easy decision for him to get involved.

Connie and Ed Williamson at the Texas Bowl in Houston, in December 2009.

“The geology board is a dedicated group of individuals who want to help the department,”

says Williamson. “They feel like the good things that came to them in life are a result of their education at MU, and this is their way of giving back. I feel the same way.”

The focus of the board currently is Camp Branson in Lander, Wyo. — the longest continually active geology field camp in North America. The camp will celebrate its centennial in 2011, and the board is raising funds for repairs and renovations of its infrastructure. Because the board is able to raise funds through private donations, it lessens the strain on the university to maintain the camp, and it helps ensure that priorities at the camp are given equal billing with other needs within the department.

“Camp Branson ties the education together,” says Williamson. “College courses are focused



on one particular aspect of science, but in field geology, you see everything together. You see how the earth is made, and you see it in three dimensions. It is an 'a-ha moment' for a lot of geologists when they have that education."

Williamson feels that the camp might have died in the '80s without the support of the board. Recently, the board and the university worked together to lower out-of-state tuition as a way to boost enrollment. That change has made Camp Branson competitive nationally, and it helps to attract students to the program.

The board meets on campus twice a year, where they discover the needs of the faculty and students. At one time, the demand was for additional compensation for graduate students; MU was at the bottom of Big 12 schools because their offers were not competitive. Over three years, the board was able to establish a million-dollar endowment that augments teaching and research assistantships. At the same time this campaign was underway, the college increased teacher assistant stipends and these combined efforts made MU competitive with other universities.

Williamson says that at such times, it is the personal relationships with fellow alumni that make a difference. He credits the department's updated information on its alumni for the board's success, because board members are able to maintain communication throughout the years with graduates.

"When they asked me to be on the board, I told them I would do it, but don't expect me to ask people for money," says Williamson. "Now I do it all the time and it doesn't bother me a bit. Once I learned what the department was doing, what it needed, and how I could assist with those needs, I had no reluctance to call up a friend to ask for money to help out."

Williamson would like to encourage fellow alumni from the College of Arts and Science to stay in touch with their departments or even just call a favorite professor to make contact. Many departments have or are forming alumni boards, and Williamson urges others to get involved.

"People worry about the time commitment, but I tell them it is up to them how much time they want to spend," says Williamson. "Now is the time to help the new students who are going through the same things you went through when you were at MU."

In Memoriam

*H. Clyde Wilson*

May 6, 1926–March 30, 2010

By Melody Galen

Professor Clyde Wilson died at his home after a long illness. He had done many things in his lifetime: he was founder of the MU Department of Anthropology, Columbia City Councilman, and he even served a term as mayor. All of those paled next to his most important role in life — that of husband and father.

Clyde and his wife of 52 years, Betty, had five children together, and Betty says that he was active in all aspects of family life.

At an April 11 memorial service at Columbia's Missouri Theatre, 17 people, including his children, shared memories of him. A common theme in most remarks was that Wilson was an excellent listener.

Professor Carol Ward, of pathology and anatomical sciences, said of her colleague, "Clyde always treated me like I was as valuable as everyone else." And that was part of the ease of knowing him.

Wilson's second son, David, made a remark at the memorial that summed up his father beautifully: Clyde was a dad whose low, calm, and sonorous voice would lull you to sleep from the living room as you lay in your bedroom. And that's a nice way to be remembered.

# A Smile and a Nudge

She may deny it, but Sarah Turner is an expert at helping others do what they need to do — in life and at work

By Melody Galen

Surely, one of the most giving people on campus is Sarah Turner, administrative associate in the Department of Political Science. She came to Arts and Science from extension, and, lucky for us, she's been here nearly 16 years.

Turner manages the department's fiscal operations, tackles the problems that come along with being building coordinator, and is sort of a room mother to the poli sci population. "Can you imagine that I used to be quiet?" She inclines her head and raises an eyebrow. "I used to be quiet and very shy."

While probably not best described as "loud," doing the jobs Turner does would tend to draw one out. The faculty, staff, and students in the department have seemed to appreciate her efforts on their part; Turner feels that they became kind of protective of her in the early years. But don't make the mistake of casting her as the pushover. "Being in this position causes you to step up. If you don't, you'll get run over," she says.

Associate Professor David Webber agrees. "Sarah is, by nature, reserved and humble—and a wonderful person. She has done countless acts of kindness around the department while avoiding the credit. She has a nice laugh and appreciates the humor in things," he says with a big grin. "On the





Sarah Turner has been the administrative associate for the political science department for almost 16 years, and she still loves her job and the people with whom she works.

other hand, I wouldn't want to be on her bad side."

Turner is proud of the excellent faculty and graduate students she works with. "We work along with each other because we all have the idea that if you treat a person the way you want to be treated, then things will go a lot smoother."

### In Memory

One former graduate student touched Turner's heart. Bryan Forbis, MA '81, '03, used to come back about one Friday a month, and a group from the department would go out for lunch. "We just had the best time," she remembers. "But his wife became ill, and he had to put her in a special care facility." Her voice softens, and she gets that far-away look of memory as she talks, "He still took care of his wife; then he was in a wreck that killed him."

"Bryan was a special person, and when you know someone like that and something happens to them, you want to do whatever you can to help preserve that memory," she says. When a scholarship fund in Forbis' name was set up, Turner and another staff member had payroll deductions withdrawn to help get the fund well on its way to endowment.

She believes that this year they will finally be able to award some money out of the Bryan Forbis Scholarship Fund. "It's for the department, it's for our grad students," Turner says. "It's a small thing that a person could do, but just think — how much could we do if we all contributed just a dollar?"

### A Helping Hand

The scholarship fund certainly isn't Turner's only act of charity. Helping others is something that appears to come from the core of her very being. She was active in a group called Love INC, or Love In the Name of Christ. The organization pulls together local churches from all denominations to use their collective resources to help the community.

"Calvary Baptist Church allows Love INC to hold classes there," Turner says. "There's a young ladies' class, for unwed mothers. We encourage them to change their lifestyles and their way of thinking."

Subjects such as childbirth, budgeting, and job searches are covered in the evening classes. There is even a class for those who have an incarcerated family member or loved one. "You'd be surprised," Turner says, "at the amount of pressure that is on the remaining family members of that person who is incarcerated."

In an effort to raise attendance, dinner is provided for the young woman and any children she might have. Then, while mom is in class, the kids are cared for in the nursery.

Turner even drove her church van to pick up some of the young women and their children and bring them to classes.

Love INC also established a clothing closet for the women who go through the job search classes. They can go right across the hall and shop for free clothes to wear to an interview. There is also a “Grandma’s Closet” that distributes second-hand children’s clothing to kids who can really use it.

### A Family Mission

Turner’s husband of 36 years, Michael, is pastor of Mt. Hope Missionary Baptist Church in Columbia, and their church assembles and delivers gift baskets to the needy at Christmastime. The baskets typically contain dry goods, canned goods, and a frozen or fresh turkey. When the Turners delivered a basket to one particular house, Sarah was dismayed

when the young woman commented that if she had a pot to cook it in, she’d cook the turkey right then. As they were putting the groceries in the refrigerator, Turner noticed that there was no milk for the woman’s two-year-old son. “Where’s the milk? Do you have cereal for him?” Turner asked.

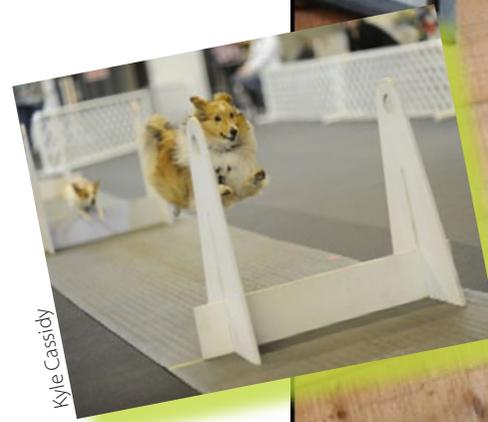
The Turners went back to their home, gathered up some extra kitchen basics and then bought a set of pots and pans and some food staples for the young family. She told her husband that that was what Christmas was all about.

“There are some people who take advantage of the situation,” Turner acknowledges, “but then you come across people who are seriously in need, and they appreciate *everything*.”

From taking care of the needs of a department to volunteering her time, money, and

compassion, Sarah Turner nurtures so many that she comes in contact with. “As a green-as-grass assistant professor, Sarah helped me get off on the right foot by listening, nudging, and providing perspective and the occasional healthy dose of good judgment and common sense,” says Jay Dow, associate professor of political science, of when he first joined the department. “She makes the office and the department a warm and inviting place and helps make me feel good about where I work. She continues to set the tone for the department. People are polite and respectful, in no small part, because Sarah helped establish a department culture of civility and good manners, and by making sure we don’t take ourselves too seriously.”

# From Fantasy to Flyball



New York Times bestselling author Margaret Weis has made her mark in the role-playing–game industry and the fantasy genre of books

By Melody Galen

English majors are often asked what they'll do with their degrees — as if an English major has a slim chance of finding gainful employment. Margaret Weis, BA '70, is one alumna who did make use of her degree.

“We had some greats in the department,” she remembers, referring to her time at MU. “Tom McAfee was there — the poet — and Donald Drummond was my adviser. It was an amazing time, the 60s, there was so much going on.”

She and her friends played bridge in the commons and drank beer in The Shack. “Actually,” she laughs, “my father drank beer in The Shack when he was at MU, which I always thought was pretty cool.”

“When I graduated with a degree in English, creative writing, my mother was convinced I wasn't going to get a job, so she found a job for me,” remembers Weis. She began her career as a proofreader at a small publishing

Top: Weis' rescued sheltie, Joey, running the flyball hurdles with a “newbie” dog playing the chase game with him. Joey is introducing the newcomer to racing.

At right: Weis with her retired agility dog, Tess, who is also a rescue dog.

Kyle Cassidy



[www.kylecassidy.com](http://www.kylecassidy.com)

## From Fantasy to Flyball

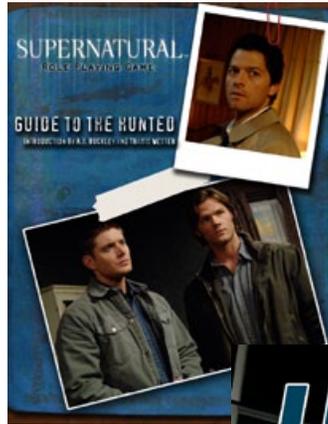
company in Independence, Mo.

Weis' childhood neighbor and friend, Anne Hayden, BA '69, recalls the two of them creating board games in chalk on the driveway and managing and stocking imaginary horse ranches. "There were definitely signs of a rich creative mind at an early age!" Hayden says.

Eventually, a company called TSR caught Weis' eye — they published *Dungeons and Dragons*. They also published a series of books called *Endless Quest*. When Weis saw an ad for a game editor, she applied. "They sent me a test to take, and I knew nothing about the game. I flunked the test, amazingly," she laughs. And she wasn't hired for the job.

### Serendipity

Weis had also been writing during that time, and the first book she sold was a biography for kids on Frank and Jessie James. The head of TSR's book company, Jean Black, happened to call Weis' agent and said she was looking for an editor. He responded that one



of his clients had just sent in an application for games editor. After pulling Weis' résumé, Black invited her to Wisconsin to interview. She got that job.

In her position as book editor, Weis was in charge of the book side of the *Dungeons and Dragons* project *Dragonlance*.

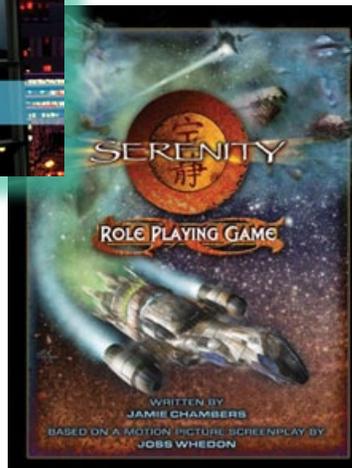
"It was the first time anyone had ever written novels to go along with a game,"

she explains.

"I got together with Tracy Hickman, who was the head of the game side of the project, and started



Some of the role-playing games published by Margaret Weis Productions.



learning about the world of *Dragonlance* and absolutely fell in love with it."

She was busy with editing duties, and she'd also written a couple of *Endless Quest* books. Her job as editor was to feed the plot line and character development to the person who had been hired to write the first *Dragonlance* books. But the material the writer turned in wasn't what they were looking for. Weis and Hickman took one weekend and wrote the first five chapters and the prologue to the first book. They presented it to the head of the book department and asked her to read it and consider letting them write the book. Black shut herself in her office, Weis recalls. "It was at least an hour, and Tracy and I were nervous wrecks. When she came back out she said, 'Wow. This is it!'"

"Weis and Hickman" was born. Because they still had their regular jobs, they had to write on nights and weekends. There are well over 100 titles in the series now, but the team wrote the first six, and they have continued to write other series together since then. "Tracy and I are writing another novel series for Tor, and I'm writing one with another author friend for Daw [Tor and Daw are publishing houses]."

### A Whole New Realm

Weis runs Margaret Weis Productions now, and she says that the company's

## From Fantasy to Flyball

main success has come from role-playing games (RPGs), but there have been a few books, too. For the uninitiated, an RPG is



Kyle Cassidy

Publisher/writer Margaret Weis has parlayed her childhood love of animals into a fun hobby for herself and her dogs.

one in which the players assume the roles of fictional characters and play through scenarios to see who comes out on top. The group of players is usually led by a game master or guide, and they often game without the aid of a printed board — someone in the group typically maps out their course on paper. The whole process relies heavily on the players' imaginations and the rules set out in the game module.

Some of the more recognizable names from which the company has produced an RPG are *Serenity*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Supernatural*, and *Leverage* — all recent television shows or movies. If you still have no idea what an RPG is, you aren't alone. In order to get the license to publish a role playing game, one must first get permission from the show's studio to use images, story concepts, etc. Weis says, "First of all the studio rep asks, what the heck is a role playing game?" After that's explained, then it's simply a matter of settling on a price to pay, and then Weis and her company can begin the process of developing a new game.

### A Competitive Streak

Weis may be queen in her slightly nerdy kingdom, but her pets have titles of their



Kyle Cassidy

A dog triggering the flyball box, which shoots out the tennis ball.

own. Ever heard of flyball? "It's very fast, very loud, and my dogs just love it!" she says.

Two of them, Joey and Dixie, are Flyball Master Champions. Tess has two titles in agility, but she's retired. Three out of four dogs with titles could make sweet little Max feel like a slacker. Never fear. Weis says he may have flunked flyball, but he has a grand time chasing a Frisbee®. That's right, buddy! Be happy with who you are.

Flyball is a canine relay competition. Four four hurdles are spaced 10 feet apart with a spring-loaded box at the end of a 51-foot lane. The first dog sprints down the lane, jumping hurdles along the way, then jumps on the spring-loaded box and (hopefully) catches the tennis ball that shoots out. He races back over the hurdles, then the next dog in the team of four begins. They do this in, say, 23 seconds.

## From Fantasy to Flyball

Weis explains that the team gets points depending on the time it runs and accuracy. If the team's combined time is 23 seconds, each dog gets 25 points, and those points count toward flyball titles. There can be six dogs on a team, but only four run at a time. There's some strategy involved, too. The height of the jumps the dogs go over is based on the height of the shortest dog on the team. Weis says it's common to have three big dogs and one little guy — Joey is what's known as the height dog for his team.

When asked how she got involved in the sport, she recalls that she was adopting a dog from a herd dog rescue. The woman who ran the rescue group asked Weis to meet her at a tournament to see a dog she thought Weis would like. "I went to the tournament, and I thought, 'I have to do this. This is just so cool!'"

"I've been training dogs in the sport for a long time," Weis acknowledges, "and I joined a team a couple years ago." Her dogs run for the BC Boomerangs flyball team. Weis and the team travel to tournaments for about eight months of the year, with a break in the winter months.

Good luck to Weis and her team. But please don't travel too long, your fans want more books.

## Arts and Science Calendar



- May 15, 1 p.m., Hearnes Center Commencement
- Sept. 11, Space Center Houston Alumni special event (check back later for complete details)
- Oct. 5, 7:30 p.m., Hulston Hall Auditorium Oral Traditions/Albert Lord lecture
- Dec. 18, 12:30 p.m., Hearnes Center Commencement
- Feb. 14–18, 2011 Arts and Science Week

Visit the [A&S Web site](#) for more information

Tammy McNeil

# Afro-Hispanic Creativity Fuels the Fire

By Laura Lindsey

Juanamaría Cordones-Cook, professor of Spanish in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, has lived in Columbia for 20 years but remains loyal to her roots from Uruguay to fuel her passion for art and literature. Her accomplishments are many — publications in numerous journals, author of best-selling books and documentaries, and a member of the Academy of Letters of Uruguay. Growing up, Cordones-Cook remembers discussing arts, politics, and history with her family, and those conversations influenced her appreciation and understanding for the written word and visual arts.

## Marginalized Voices

Her research focuses on the marginal and uncanonized voices of those who share an experience of oppression and

repression, particularly women and Afro-Hispanics. She develops her work on Afro-Hispanic literature and culture through various initiatives. Aside from her written work, Cordones-Cook has produced a series of videos she calls “living histories,” presenting leading black intellectuals from Latin American countries. To date, she has designed, produced, and directed 26 videos that call attention to Latin American artists, mainly those in Cuba. The living histories feature autobiographical narrations and reflections while providing testimony about the political, artistic, ethnic, and religious world during the stages of the 1950s Cuban revolution.

“I have concentrated on people of African descent because there is so much creativity that still needs to be recognized,” says Cordones-Cook.

Art Nouveau architecture in Old Havana.

## Afro-Hispanic Creativity



Juanamaría Cordones-Cook, at far right, with Cuban intellectuals Roberto Fernández Retamar, Nancy Morejón, and Jorge Fornés, at Casa de las Américas in Havana.

### Havana's Black Renaissance

One of these artists is Nancy Morejón, who is the intellectual leader of Havana's Black Renaissance — the first significant generation of Afro-Cuban authors and artists who came of age with the revolution. Morejón has published 35 books of poetry, eight volumes of essays, and dozens of articles. Her work interprets the revolution and its history,

and she writes about her people and Cuba's blended Afro-Hispanic heritage.

"Nancy Morejón is a subtle and original writer who artistically weaves the personal, the historic, and the mythic with issues of identity, gender, and race," says Cordones-Cook. "She reaches back to her African legacy and brings to us voices that historically had been silenced. In the process, she reflects and refracts her culture, her people, and her own identity."

Morejón is the only black woman to receive Cuba's highest literary honor, the National Award of Literature, and she was elected to the National Cuban Academy of Language. Cordones-Cook's latest endeavor is a documentary on Morejón.

In the process of filming the living histories, Cordones-Cook began to notice the creative and expressive possibilities of the documentary genre, so in 2007, along with a Havana-based filming group, she started designing, directing, and producing a series of documentaries on the Afro-Cuban intelligentsia — featuring the leader of this group, Morejón.

"The film is in the editing stages currently," says Cordones-Cook. "We need additional

funds to complete this project that is so important to the Afro-Cuban writers and artists."

Cordones-Cook is responsible for two impressive collections at the university's museums. In 2006, she founded the Nancy Morejón Special Collection of Afro-Romance Literature and Culture that is displayed at the Museum of Anthropology. This collection provides a wide array of published and unpublished materials from the Afro-Romance cultures and traditions. She has obtained valuable books and journals, including rare editions and films, and she has donated material from her own collection. The collection at the museum is named after Morejón because, of all the



The main square in a central area of Havana.

## Afro-Hispanic Creativity

Afro-Latin American writers and artists, she has visited MU the most — presenting lectures and poetry readings. In 1995, MU hosted an international conference devoted to Morejón's works and a publication housed on campus, the *Afro-Hispanic Review*, published a special edition of her work a year later.

"Morejón is the most prominent and celebrated living Latin American writer of African descent," explains Cordones-Cook on why the special collection is named after Morejón. "She is the first Afro-Cuban woman to have received a university degree and to be published and recognized with the highest honors in her own nations and overseas."

Additionally in 2007, Cordones-Cook founded the Ediciones Vigía Special Collection, which is housed at the Museum of Art and Archaeology. This collection contains artistic handcrafted books made from recycled and natural materials.

The scholarly initiatives of Cordones-Cook, including the living histories, publications, and documentaries, emphasize her vision, breadth, and interdisciplinary research. The projects add a dimension to the already solid research of the faculty in the Romance languages department.

"By broadening the scope of the writers inscribed in the literary or artistic canon,

Professor Cordones-Cook reinforces the reputation of our department as we always explore new grounds and avenues of investigation," says Flore Zéphir, chair of the department. "Very few foreign language departments in the country cover with such

depth the Afro-Hispanic experience. By focusing on black Cuba in her teaching, research, and professional service, Cordones-Cook contributes to our *uniqueness*, and our commitment to internationalize and diversify our curriculum in a tangible fashion."



**Click image for a 5-minute clip from Cordones-Cook's video "Nancy Morejón: Paisajes célebres/Nancy Morejón: Famous Landscapes." Clicking will take you to a page on the A&S Web site and will require Quick-Time to view.**



**Click image for a slide show of the Vigía books (clicking will take you to a page on the A&S Web site).**