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UAH Humanities Center, 2006

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UAH

Humanities Center

The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Fall 2006

UAH

The University of
Alabama in Huntsville

An Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institution

On the cover: "Red Umbrellas" by Jose Betancourt,
UAH Art Department

Humanities Center @ UAH

Sixteen years ago, a group of faculty members from the humanities departments of the College of Liberal Arts decided to seek funds to establish a Center designed to promote humanistic inquiry both within the university and in the wider Huntsville community. Toward that end, a challenge grant was secured from the National Endowment for the Humanities. This grant acted (as it was intended to do) as a focus for the attraction of other funds, both state and private, and within three or four years, the foundation of the current Humanities Center Endowment was laid. In the years since, the original monies (invested and monitored through the UA system's combined endowment fund) have grown and with some later donations form the Center's current endowment. That endowment is divided into three distinct funds the annual incomes from which support the Center's activities. The first of these funds is the Humanities Center Endowment. The earnings from this fund are used annually to support professional travel undertaken by faculty members working in the humanities and related fields, a program of mini-grants designed to support faculty research in the humanities, as well as general public programming in the humanities. The income from the second fund, the Visiting Eminent Scholar Endowment, is used to support visits to the UAH campus by outstanding scholars in the humanities. While here, these scholars are typically attached to one of the humanities departments in the College, teaching one or two courses, sharing their research with colleagues at UAH, and presenting lectures on their work to the general public. Until recently, scholars invited under the aegis of this program all visited for a full semester. Four years ago, we initiated a new program that uses some of the income from this fund to invite eminent scholars for short-term (usually week-long) visits as well. The third fund is the Humanities Center Salmon Library Endowment. The annual income from this fund is used to develop the humanities collections at the Salmon Library based on proposals submitted by UAH faculty members.

In addition to the activities supported by our endowment funds, the Center continues to seek external funding for other programs designed to enhance the study of the humanities at UAH. Several major grants have been secured in recent years making possible new opportunities for students throughout the university. Given restrictions on the use of endowment and grant funding, the Center depends for all operating expenses on the continuing support of the office of the Vice President for Research without which none of the activities mentioned above would be possible.

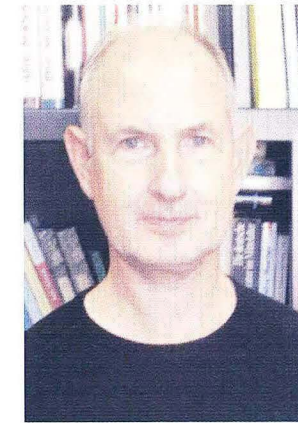
The Humanities Today: Some Personal Reflections

The great German cultural critic Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) believed that it is the task of the historian not to analyze bygone times in a disinterested way but "inscribe" certain important but endangered moments of the past in our own present in order to "rescue" them from oblivion, marginalization, or discrimination. As someone who teaches German language, literature, and culture at UAH, I have always thought that this idea is something that ought to be applied to our understanding of the Humanities in general.

Our postmodern times are characterized by strange contradictions and paradoxes: capitalist consumer society offers ever-new commodities to the affluent among us yet promotes fleeting trends and fashions that often leave out the less fortunate; globalization has rapidly opened up new geopolitical borders for commerce, research, and cultural alliances but is continually confronted with the divisive catastrophes of war, terrorism, epidemic diseases, and large-scale poverty; new digital media technologies foster free communication among ever growing numbers of internet users around the globe but are often criticized for leading to information overdrive, the endless recycling of prefabricated images, and starkly reduced opportunities for experiencing the real world authentically.

In this complex situation, summarized all too briefly here, I believe that the Humanities—art criticism, history, language and literary studies, musicology, philosophy, and other related disciplines—are more important today than ever before. They do not necessarily solve the world's problems or make us better people, but they do provide unique frameworks, categories, and methods for reflecting critically on what the world past and present can possibly mean to us at a time when many of us lose faith in religion, the ideal of unfettered technological progress, or other such overarching "grand narratives." At any given moment of our rapidly accelerating history, the Humanities prevent great human achievements as well as terrible human failures from being forgotten, manipulated, or marginalized by dominant trends, official ideologies, and political hegemonies. The Humanities have a keen interest in preserving what is beautiful and significant among works of art, philosophical analyses, musical compositions, and literary texts, but they also critically

interrogate established traditions, blindly accepted values, and conventionalized ways of thinking. Respecting legitimate cultural legacies whenever possible, the Humanities must also, whenever necessary, brush the past against the grain of its official representation (as Benjamin would put it), so as to allow truth to shine forward through the jungle of myths, prejudices, and distorted images surrounding us. Eschewing simplistic answers, this quest always includes the self-critical re-examination of its own possibilities and limitations.



Rolf Goebel

In this way, the Humanities promote pluralistic perspectives without, hopefully, lapsing into facile relativism or solipsistic self-indulgence. To pursue this task, we need to maintain what's called the autonomy of the Humanities, that is, their indispensable freedom from undue political pressures, economic constraints, or religious dogmas. This, however, does not mean that Humanistic knowledge is independent from other disciplines, such as the natural and social sciences, the law, medicine, engineering, etc. On the contrary, the rapid growth of internet-mediated knowledge and the diversity of our globalizing world increasingly demand interdisciplinary collaboration more urgently than ever before. Indeed, the Humanities continually seek to cut across geographic borders, academic fields, and mental boundaries, not in order to foster some sort of illusory universalism or homogenous world culture but to investigate the productive interplay of differences and commonalities among various peoples, histories, and territories. Thus, the Humanities are inherently dialogic in striving for mutual understanding while respecting productive disagreements and controversies. These dialogues, however, can never be satisfied with intellectual inquiry for its own sake alone. Important as self-sufficient pursuits of the intellect clearly are for the free production of new knowledge, they must always relate directly to the specific interests and needs, hopes and fears of the here and now. Put differently, the ultimate justification for practicing the Humanities is the self-reflexive interrogation of our own cultural situation in the mirror of texts, artifacts, and signs that may disappear into the voids of the past if we don't inscribe them into the very core of our endangered existence today.

Dr. Rolf J. Goebel, Professor of German, has taught German language and culture at UAH since 1982.

He holds degrees from Brown University (M.A. in English, 1977), the University of Kiel (*Staatsexamen* in German and English, 1979), and the University of Maryland (Ph.D. in German Literature, 1982). In addition to numerous articles and conference papers, he has published three books: *Kritik und Revision: Kafkas Rezeption mythologischer, biblischer und historischer Traditionen* (Critique and Revision: Kafka's Reception of Mythological, Biblical, and Historical Traditions, 1986), *Constructing China: Kafka's Orientalist Discourse* (1997), and *Benjamin heute: Großstadtdiskurs, Postkolonialität und Flânerie zwischen den Kulturen* (Benjamin Today: Urban Discourse, Postcoloniality, and Flânerie between Cultures, 2001). His essay "Berlin's Architectural Citations: Reconstruction, Simulation, and the Problem of Historical Authenticity" won the 2004 William Riley Parker Prize for an outstanding article published in PMLA during the preceding academic year.

Public Programs

Each year, the Center sponsors (in whole or part) public programs that enrich an understanding of the humanities. Here are some of the programs we were pleased to help bring to campus this year.



Archaeology Series

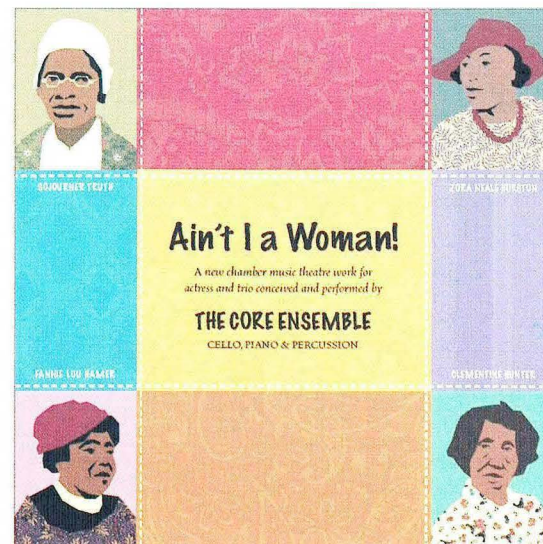
The Archaeological Institute of America presented seven speakers lecturing on topics as diverse as Route 66 and the archaeology of Buddhism in Nepal. In September, Dr. Bill Saturno, who recently discovered the Maya site of San Bartolo, lectured on murals that are far older than any previously known. He discussed the insights they give us into Maya creation mythology, their earliest writing, and the origins of kings. The UAH audience was among the first public groups to hear this information prior to its publication in *National Geographic*. Other topics included multi-culturalism in Medieval Spain, a Roman map of the world, the study of ancient Turkey, and worship of the hero Hercules on Cyprus.

History Forum

Historic preservation has become a central concern for many communities throughout the United States. History Forum 2005 encouraged the UAH and north Alabama communities to explore the many intriguing issues raised by historic preservation. Why should communities seek to preserve historic buildings in the first place? How do economic revitalization initiatives and heritage tourism influence preservation efforts? Dr. Michael Cassidy presented a discussion of how historic Route 66, in revealing key aspects of American social and cultural history, has become a focus of national preservation efforts. The second speaker, Professor Christopher Hendricks of Armstrong Atlantic State University, considered dilemmas encountered in preservation efforts in Savannah, Georgia. The final presentation featured a panel discussion led by local experts on regional preservation efforts in north Alabama.

The Core Ensemble

New York City's CORE ENSEMBLE returned to UAH to present another of their splendid Chamber Music Theatre works. This year's piece, "Ain't I A Woman," featured actress Liz Mikel accompanied by an original score arranged for cello, piano, and percussion. Mikel played four African American women, ex-slave and abolitionist Sojourner Truth, novelist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, folk artist Fannie Lou Hamer.



WELSH TABLE TALK

Chosen as Gift by U.S. Department of State



In last year's newsletter, we reported the publication of *Welsh Table Talk*, a collection of poems by Visiting Eminent Scholar Kelly Cherry and etchings by UAH Professor of Art Michael Crouse. Designed and hand-bound by the Book Arts Conservatory of Washington DC, the poems and etchings of the chapbook are hand-printed on specially designed paper by the printer of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. The book is bound in Italian calfskin, and presented in a calfskin covered box which also includes a portfolio of frameable prints by Crouse.

The Book Arts Conservatory frequently creates boxes the State Department and the White House use to package state gifts, and when representatives of the Secretary of State came to John Paul Greenawalt (Managing Director of Book Arts) last fall to order such a box, they saw a copy of *Welsh Table Talk* in the Book Arts display room. They decided on the spot that it would make the perfect gift to be presented by Secretary of State Rice to British Foreign Minister Jack Straw. Dr. Rice presented the book to Mr. Straw on their visit to Alabama last November, and Greenawalt was quoted in *The Huntsville Times* shortly thereafter as having said "the book was greatly appreciated by both Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Straw as a fine example of UAH academic prowess and American artistic sensibility."

Publication of this elegant edition was made possible through the generous support of UAH donor Mrs. Julian Davidson together with some funding from the Center. Copies of the limited edition are still available and are offered as gifts to College of Liberal Arts supporters who donate \$500 or more to the College of Liberal Arts Dean's Excellence Fund. Interested donors may contact either the Dean's Office (256-824-6200) or the Humanities Center (256-824-6583) for further information.

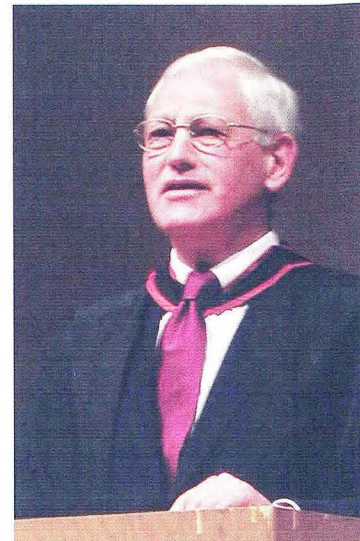


Parker and Virginia Griffith, left and center, admire the limited edition art book, "Welsh Table Talk," with Brian Martine, director of the University of Alabama in Huntsville Humanities Center, at a party held Dec. 9 at the Griffith home. The chapbook was published by the UAH College of Liberal Arts and was illustrated by UAH artist Michael Crouse.

Visiting Scholars

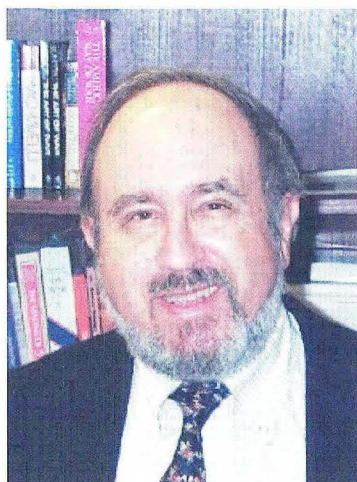
Eminent Scholar Edward Ingram

Professor Edward Ingram returned in the fall semester of 2005 as Professor of History and Visiting Eminent Scholar in the Humanities. A leading expert on British Imperialism, he first visited our campus in 2001 as a short-term scholar lecturing to students and public audiences. Impressed by his comprehensive grasp of British imperial history as well as his ability to communicate historical ideas to diverse audiences, the History Department and the Humanities Center invited him to return to UAH as an Eminent Visiting Scholar for the spring semester of 2003. His third visit to our campus was equally as successful as his first two. His lively and provocative style made him a hit once again with public audiences and his course on Imperial Britain was highly prized by UAH students. Currently a resident of New Zealand with both Canadian and British citizenship, Professor Ingram is a graduate of Oxford University and the London School of Economics. He is the editor (and founder) of *The International History Review* and Professor of Imperial History Emeritus, Simon Fraser University. He has authored a trilogy on British geopolitics, grand strategy, and empire-building in India and the Middle East in the early nineteenth century: *Commitment to Empire: Prophecies of the Great Game in Asia, 1797-1800, Britain's Persian Connection, 1798-1828, and The Beginning of the the Great Game in Asia, 1828-1834* and also three titles *The British Empire as a World Power, Empire-Building and Empire-Builders, and In Defense of British India: Great Britain in the Middle East, 1774-1842.*



Professor Edward Ingram

Classics Week 2006



Professor Arthur Eckstein

The Humanities Center funded UAH's Society for Ancient Languages so that it could host another in its series of eminent guest scholars for its Classics Week in early April. **Professor Arthur Eckstein** from the University of Maryland came to campus to deliver three memorable lectures. As Huntsvillians will remember, April 7 was indeed memorable as the day the University was closed because of tornadoes raging through the Tennessee Valley. Undaunted by mere anger of the gods, the Society shifted the site of Professor Eckstein's evening lecture to the Bevil Center, which did not close. No sooner had he begun to speak than the sirens went off, and the Center staff herded the group into the storm shelter. Again undaunted, Professor Eckstein continued his lecture to some thirty listeners now sitting on the floor in a darkened hallway. "I shall always remember the University of Alabama Huntsville", said the eminent ancient historian, "as the institution where students risked their lives to hear me talk about the ancient world."



John Severn, Associate Professor of History and Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies traveled to Southampton, England to participate in the Wellington Congress of 2006 hosted by the University of Southampton. His paper, "The Burden of Family: Wellington and His Brothers," drew upon the research for his book, *The Duke of Wellington and His Brothers: An Intimate Family History*, forthcoming from the University of Oklahoma Press in December of this year. Dr. Severn received a grant to help defray some of the unusual expenses for the reproduction of images involved in the publication of this volume and a travel grant in support of his participation in the congress.

Sheri M. Shuck-Hall, Assistant Professor of History, traveled to Florida to examine documents held in the *Archivo General de Indias* at the P.K. Yongle Library of Florida History at the University of Florida. She planned to seek an answer to the question of why the Alabamas and Coushattas, two distinct peoples, fled from their ancestral homelands of western Alabama and central Tennessee respectively, and why these remnant peoples chose to coalesce and create an alliance with each other by 1686. Dr. Shuck-Hall intends to add her answers to these questions to a larger manuscript, *Journey to the West: The Alabama and Coushatta Indians, 1500-present*, currently under contract at the University of Oklahoma Press.



Library Grants

The Humanities Center awarded nine library enhancement grants during the 2005-2006 academic year.

Diana Bell, English:
materials from a series entitled
Studies in Writing and Rhetoric.

Philip Boucher, History:
The Repertorium Columbian, thirteen volumes
of Italian and Spanish primary documents translated
into English about Columbus and his world.

Mitch Berbrier, Sociology:
The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements.

Nancy Finley, Women's Studies:
print materials for research on women in
several disciplines, including history, literature,
communications, sociology and political science.

Lillian Joyce, Art & Art History:
materials on non-western art to supplement
a new survey class.

Jerry Mebane, English:
materials on the topic of Literature,
Religion, and Warfare.

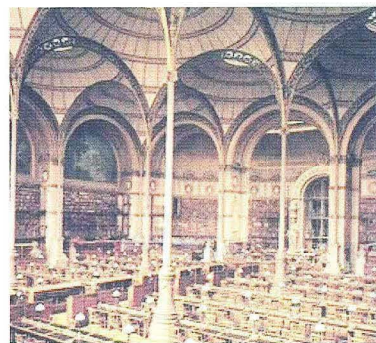
David Neff, English:
the new standard edition of
Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Poetical Works.

Sheri Marie Shuck-Hall, History:
materials concerning the process of collecting
and preserving historical data to supplement
a new class on public history.

Stephen Szilagyi, English:
materials on world literature from the ancient
to the pre-early modern periods.

Faculty Grants

Monica L. Dillihunt, Assistant Professor of Education, was funded for travel to conduct personal interviews with a number of scholars in psychology and education included as central figures in her book manuscript, *Connecting the Legacies: Profiles of African American Psychologists in Education*. The purpose of this volume is to illustrate the lives, interests, and scholarly work of African Americans in these fields, notable among them, Prof. A. Wade Boykin of Howard University who is pictured here. Dr. Dillihunt hopes that when complete, "*Connecting the Legacies* will allow students in psychology and education to forge a critical understanding of the research carried out by individuals who have not typically enjoyed a systematic incorporation of their work in the larger mainstream psychological and educational discourse genres."



Kwaku Gyasi, Associate Professor of French Language and Literature, traveled to France to pursue his study of "le francais petit negre," a metonymic term which refers to the variety of "ungrammatical" French spoken during the colonial period by the indigenous colonized people of French Africa. Dr. Gyasi is interested to "interrogate this term and what it signifies in the socio-historical construction of identity through the examination of a body of works that use or make use of the expression 'petit negre'." He conducted his research chiefly at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris and the Conseil National de Recherche Scientifique in Bordeaux, two institutions which together house much of the research on Francophone literature.

Lillian Joyce, Associate Professor of Art History, traveled to Rome to continue her research on gender and women in the ancient Roman period. While working with the collections of the American Academy at Rome and taking advantage of Rome's many museum collections, she prepared two papers for publication, "Ariadne Transformed in Pompeii's House of Fabius Rufus," and "Amazons, Roma, and the Revealed Breast," the second of which will also provide some foundational research for a book-length manuscript tentatively entitled *The Breast Revealed*.



Richard Marcus, Assistant Professor of Political Science traveled to Israel in the summer of 2006 to continue his investigations of water scarcity and possible solutions to what he considers a looming disaster in many parts of the world. Once a primarily technical concern, the disastrous consequences of inefficient and shortsighted decision-making have made the question of water scarcity one of wide political, historical, and ethical significance. Dr. Marcus focused his research this year on problems experienced by moshav farmers and Bedouin communities in the northern Negev desert.

Author Dorothy Allison visits campus



Proclaimed "one of the finest writers of her generation" by the Boston Globe and "simply stunning" by the New York Times Book Review, Allison was born in Greenville, South Carolina and makes her home in Northern California.

Bastard Out of Carolina, her first novel, was one of five finalists for the 1992 National Book Award. It went on to win both the Ferro Grumley and Bay Area Book Reviewers Awards for fiction. The novel has appeared in translation in French, German, Greek, Spanish, Norse,

Chinese and Italian. A movie version of *Bastard Out of Carolina* directed by Angelica Huston premiered on Showtime in 1996. Allison's second novel, the critically acclaimed *Cavedweller* (Dutton, 1998), was a New York Times Best seller. It is currently being adapted for the stage by Kate Ryna. She is also the author of many shorter works of fiction and non-fiction. In collaboration with the Women's Studies Program, the Center sponsored a campus lecture, reading, and book-signing by Dorothy Allison in April 2006. While on campus, Allison also shared her expertise with UAH faculty and students in an informal workshop at the Union Grove Gallery.



Playwright Charles Busch helps initiate Theatre Program

The Center was pleased to sponsor the November 2005 campus visit of Charles Busch, well-known actor, playwright, and screenwriter. Mr. Busch's play *Red Scare on Sunset* was one of the first productions of UAH's burgeoning theatre program led by Mr. David Harwell, Assistant Professor of Communication Arts.

A hilarious spoof of 1950's Hollywood, the play was warmly received by audiences at UAH as was Mr. Busch's lecture. While on campus prior to the production, Mr. Busch also conducted a master class for the cast of *Red Scare*, helping to prepare them for their performances at UAH as well as for their trip to New York City where they performed at the Borough of Manhattan Community College.

CHARLES BUSCH!

Actor, playwright, novelist, screenwriter,
Star of the film *Die Mommie Die* and
Author of Broadway's *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*

Tuesday, Nov. 8th
6:00 pm
Chan Auditorium
UAH Campus

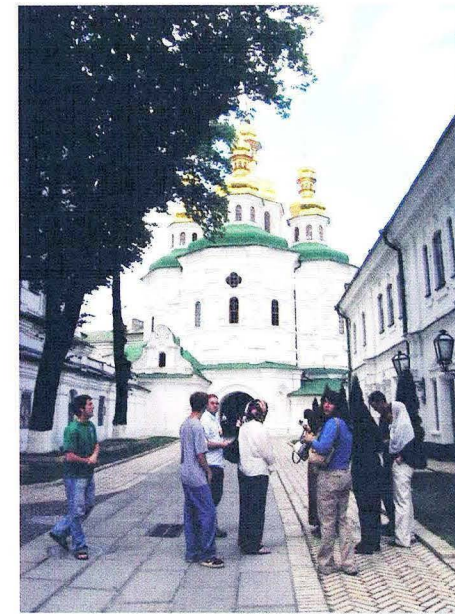
Author of . . .

Brought to you by the UAH
Humanities Center and by
UAH Theatre.

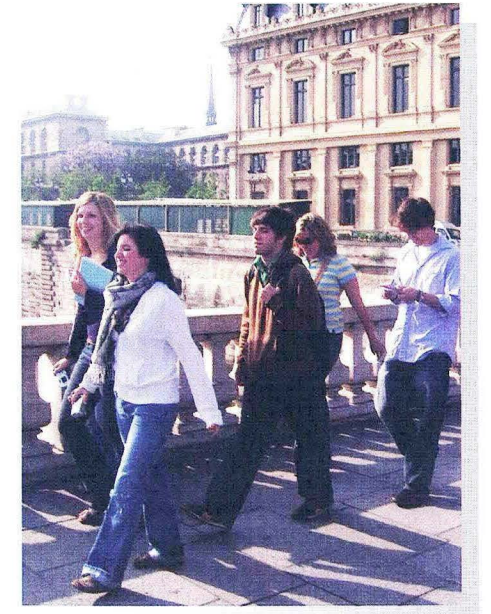


Global Studies Study Abroad Develops Rapidly

The Global Studies Cognate, funded through grants secured from the Department of Education by Professor Johanna Shields, Executive Director for Special Projects at the Center, and Dr. Kathy Hawk, Global Studies Director and Chair of Political Science, sponsored nine courses in the summer of 2006. UAH students enriched their educations with travel to Rome, London, Paris, Guanajuato, Mexico, Russia, Ukraine, Berlin, and Cortona, Italy. The courses offered were spread throughout university curricula, opening new doors of experience for students majoring in a wide variety of disciplines. Student response to these opportunities continues to be overwhelmingly positive. For more information, contact Dr. Kathy Hawk (824-2315) or Dr. David Johnson (824-6288).



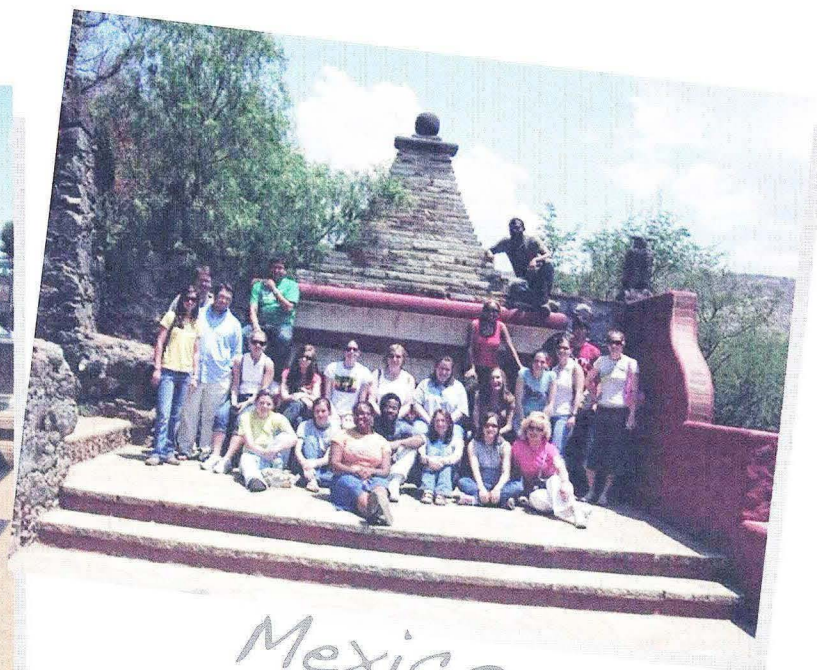
Kiev



Paris



Berlin



Mexico