

News from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures
Fall/Winter 2010

Yoga Breathing Calms Students' Test-Taking Fears

Many students view test taking as an anxiety-ridden activity, but Spanish instructor Liliana Sciarrotta is taking steps in her classes to change this attitude.

"I saw so much stress before tests, and I thought, 'what can I do to help them?'" Sciarrotta said.

Sciarrotta has been a yoga instructor for four years and has found the breathing techniques of the practice to be beneficial in her own life.

"It's something I do when I need balance in every situation," Sciarrotta said, "It's useful in any situation where you have to come back to your peaceful center."

Sciarrotta said that her personal experience with yoga was what convinced her she needed to teach the breathing practice to her students.

"Yoga is not just in the yoga room, yoga is actually a lifestyle," Sciarrotta said. "When I can relax I can perform better and don't have thoughts and fears interfering."

Erin Burnett, a junior Spanish 110 student, has also brought the test-taking ritual into other areas of her life.

"After we breathe I feel much more calm and able to focus," Burnett said. "I have applied this technique I've learned in other areas of my life when



Liliana Sciarrotta leads Spanish students in breathing exercises before their final exam of fall semester. Many students were initially skeptical of the practice but have come to appreciate the benefits.

I am feeling stressed or overwhelmed. It always helps me feel more centered and clearheaded."

Students were wary of the exercise at first, but are now very enthusiastic about it.

"I had some resistance at first, they thought I was weird," Sciarrotta said. "But now I ask them if they want to breathe and they say 'yes, yes, yes!'"

Another student who has noticed a difference is junior Brittany Casanova. Casanova said she is naturally anxiety prone but learning Sciarrotta's techniques in her Spanish 204 class has helped her stay calm.

"Lili's breathing techniques give me something to focus on besides my anxiety," Casanova said. "During the exercise, I am only focused on my breathing, which helps me relax for the exam."

According to Sciarrotta, students' anxious behaviors before exams hurt their chances at success.

"Your breathing is very shallow when you're stressed, and air doesn't go to your brain, so you can't think or connect or relax," Sciarrotta said. "That's what I'm trying to break down: the fear and the anxiety before the test."

On exam days Sciarrotta gives students the test and then guides them through the breathing exercises in both English and Spanish. Sciarrotta said the noticeable change is why students now want to do the exercises before every exam.

"They like it, they can see the difference too and can feel the change in themselves and in their stress," Sciarrotta said. "When they are not so stressed, they are open to give and get knowledge." ❧

Teacher Turns Student at UWO

English teacher Dianne Graf has an interesting story about how she came to study fairy tales at UW Oshkosh.

As a high school English teacher, Graf started using fairy tales in her classroom and was surprised at the connection students made to them.

"What I found to be so interesting with my students was that fairy tales were an incredibly useful tool for literacy," Graf said. "It was amazing to me that they were becoming so enthusiastic. The English curriculum became so much more meaningful to them."

Graf graduated with a bachelor of science in English and a minor in human development from UW Green Bay in 1994, and then earned her masters in English at UWO in 2008. It was while studying fairy tales for her M.A. thesis that she became interested in the German language.

"German fascinated me because I wanted to read [the fairy tales] in the original language," Graf said.

Graf said the transition from graduate student to her second undergraduate career was an easy one, largely because of the support from members of the German program.

"I met people in the German [program] who were so supportive of me coming back to earn another degree," Graf said. "And then I had opportunities to study abroad."

"The opportunities I've had for continuing my academic pursuit have been fostered by the professors," Graf said. "The professors here are dedicated to language and language learning and giving every student the opportunity to immerse themselves in language, whether it's in the classroom or study abroad."

Graf spent the summer of 2010 in

Kassel, Germany, where she was able to experience the home of fairy tale recorders the Grimm Brothers as well as connect with other fairy tale scholars at Kassel University.

By combining her English background with her new German skills, Graf was able to catch the attention of newsletter publisher Hildegard Von Campe.

"I've been working on poetry that is born out of my fairy tale studies," Graf said. "One of the poems I wrote [that summer] was published and translated into German."

Von Campe met Graf while giving a seminar through the study abroad program about plants in fairy tales. She offered to publish Graf's poem "Dornröschen's Dream" in "Briefe aus dem Garten der Märchen" or "Letters From the Garden of Fairy Tales." ❧

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Checking in with Alumni: Taylor Cazella

When Taylor Cazella came to UW Oshkosh in the fall of 2005, he didn't fully intend to stay for long.

"I had always thought I would stay for a semester or two and then transfer out to a different university once I declared a major," Cazella said. "But it never happened. Inevitably, one particular class or interesting professor would compel me to stick around a little longer, and by the time I was a junior I had developed a strong working relationship with my teachers."

The Kaukauna native said he originally chose UWO for its location but stayed because of the faculty.

"At a lot of universities you'll find very talented professors, academics with a long record of published works and a mountain of other accolades,"

Cazella said. "But I think the sort of faculty you'll find at UWO are more than just scholars, they take an active role in the careers and lives of their students."

Cazella credits this teaching style to part of his success in graduating with a degree in Religious Studies and a minor in Japanese Language and Culture in December 2009.

"Had I not received that sort of direct support and encouragement from my entire department I likely would have dropped out of school or switched to a major I hated," Cazella said. "But thanks to the effort that my Professors put into my education I was able to pursue a path that continues to make me happy."

After Cazella's graduation from UWO

he enrolled in the Japanese Studies masters program at the University of Michigan.

"After grad school I intend to go to Japan with one of the teaching exchange programs for a year," Cazella said. "After that, I'm either going to apply to PhD programs or I'm going to try to find a job related to my degree."

Cazella encourages students to make the most of their time on campus and make connections with faculty and fellow classmates.

"Everyone should be a member of their department's club, and if their department doesn't have a club, they should make an effort to create one," Cazella said. "Great things are hardly ever accomplished alone." ❧

10 Questions with...Lea Cicchiello

Getting to know the Department of Foreign Languages & Literatures' newest French instructor

1. Where did you grow up?

I am from Villeneuve le Roi, in the southeast suburbs of Paris. Both my parents are from the south of Italy though, and apart from my immediate family, all my relatives live in Italy.

2. Where did you attend university?

I studied English (specializing in North American Literature) and then French as a Foreign Language at La Sorbonne Nouvelle University, in Paris. I also graduated with an M.A. in French, specializing in Literature, from UW Milwaukee.

3. How long have you been teaching?

My first teaching experience was with the Red Cross in 2001, teaching French in France to immigrants from all over the world, and I haven't stopped ever since. I have taught English to kids and teenagers in France, and French to people of various ages in France, England and now the United States.

4. What is your favorite part of teaching?

I love creating a spark, seeing the look change on a student's face when they understand something, or realize how much they're able to say in the foreign language, even in the first semester of studying. I love sharing the culture I grew up in and comparing everyday differences with my students' experience, going past the language and linking it to real people living in that language somewhere in the world.



5. What is your favorite thing about Oshkosh?

I live in Ripon, WI, so Oshkosh seems like a big town! I like its downtown, with cafés, music stores, the library, and restaurants. My favorites are Piora's and the new Gardina's. As a commuter, I love driving past South Park and see it change with the seasons.

6. If you weren't teaching, what would you be doing?

I'd probably be translating. I love languages!

7. What teachers have you had who inspired you?

I clearly remember my first history teacher in middle school being over enthusiastic about pharaohs and pyramids. It inspired me to see her teach with so much passion, and I remember thinking that I'd like to find something I'd be passionate about, and share it like she did.

8. What is your favorite thing to do in your spare time?

Kayaking! I grew up going to summer camp every summer in Ardèche in France, and learned to kayak there, and kayaked every summer from age seven to 13! I have enjoyed exploring the Mécane River near Princeton, WI. It helps me relax, I enjoy the beauties of nature and it is so quiet out on the river! But I don't mind being interrupted by a crane taking flight, or a deer sprinting away!

9. What is your favorite French music artist? Favorite French song?

I like many different genres, but I like Vanessa Paradis for pop and Noir Désir for rock. Lately one of my favorite songs is "Un gaou à Oran" by 113 and Magic System. It mixes rhythms from Rap, Raï and R&B, with lyrics in French, Arabic and Dioula (from the Ivory Coast). It reminds me of the mix of cultures and languages that was around growing up in the suburb of Paris with many immigrants from many different countries. And it makes me want to dance!

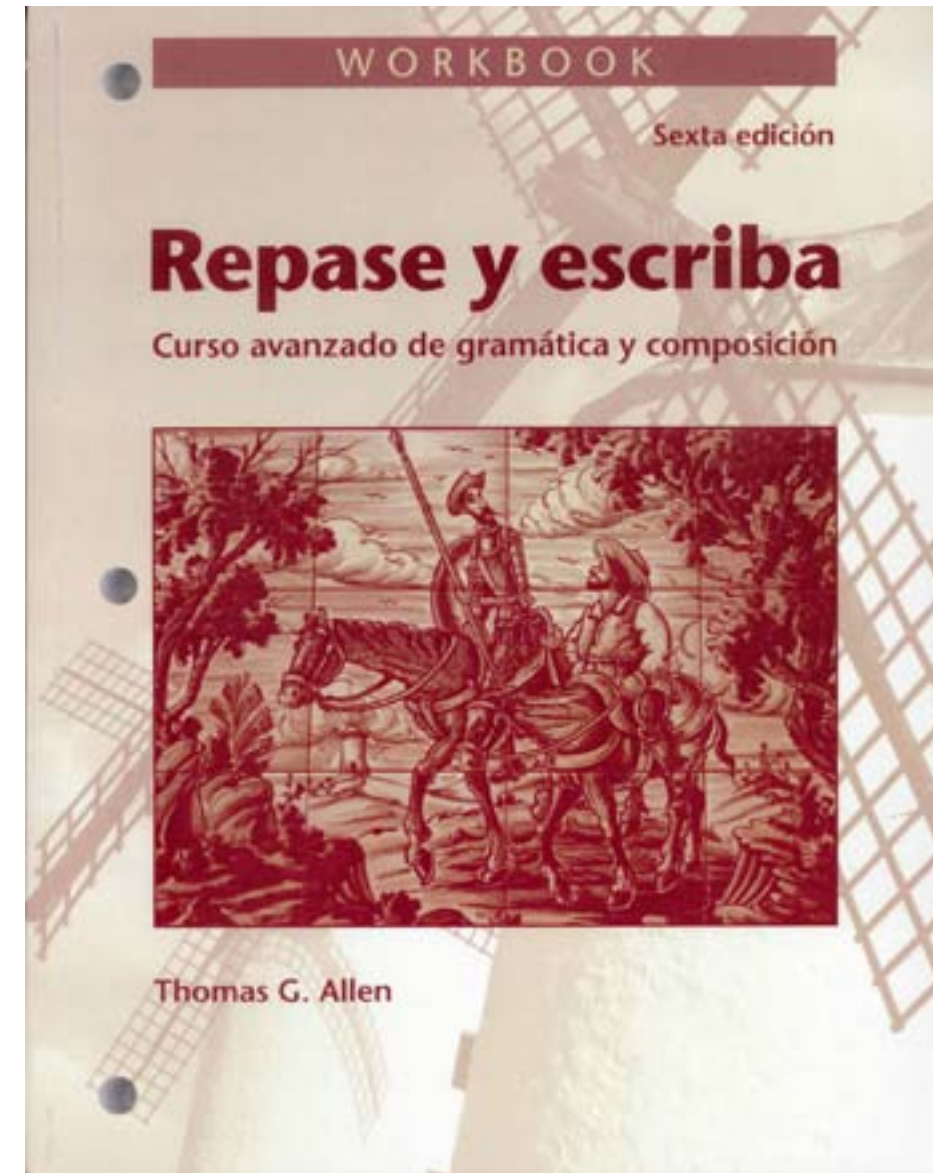
10. What is your favorite French film?

There are many, and it is hard to choose, but I think I really like "Un hussard sur le toit" (A Horseman on the Roof) from 1995, directed by Jean-Paul Rappeneau. I love Juliette Binoche! The landscapes of Provence are beautiful, and the relationship between the young Italian officer and the French lady (set in 1832 amidst the cholera epidemic) is rather intriguing.



Spotlight:

Thomas Allen, Repase y Escribe



Released Nov. 1, 2010 and authored by UW Oshkosh Spanish instructor Thomas Allen, this workbook companion is now in its sixth edition.

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"I never expected to get my poem printed," Graf said. "It's been incredible."

After her planned graduation in May 2011 with a degree in German, Graf hopes to continue to write and publish poetry and continue to work with literacy and fairy tales.

"It's just a matter of finding the niche for what I can do," Graf said. "The doors are opening because of my language studies, to meet other people who are involved in fairy tales."

Graf said that the opportunities she's had can serve as inspiration for other non-traditional students.

"It's never too late to learn a foreign language," Graf said. "Don't think that you can't do it, because you can."



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