UConn dentist seeks to promote oral health for Latinos

By Kristina Goodnough

As one of the few Hispanic dentists in Connecticut – indeed, in the country – Dr. Sarita Arteaga relishes her role as president of the Hispanic Dental Association.

“I’m kind of a pioneer,” says Arteaga, assistant clinical professor in the Department of Oral Rehabilitation, Biomaterials, and Skeletal Development. “Our organization is young, established less than 20 years ago, and I feel like I’m helping build the collaborations and partnerships that support our mission to improve oral health for the Hispanic community. I can see how much we are growing, and I feel my opinions and my work will affect how we move forward.”

Elected president in July, Arteaga will serve for 18 months, as the organization changes the appointment from a fiscal year to a calendar year term. She runs board meetings and oversees committees for the group, which has 2,500 members – including dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants – and 31 student chapters (with four more in the works). She also attends national and regional meetings with other dentists, legislators, and government officials to discuss important oral health care issues and suggest strategies for improvement.

The group focuses on improving access to care and recruiting more Latinos into dentistry. “We know people are more likely to go to a provider they feel comfortable with, yet Latinos and African-Americans make up less than 10 percent of the country’s practicing dentists,” she says.

Other roadblocks facing the Latino community are lack of access to treatment because of transportation problems, dentists’ reluctance to accept Medicaid, and language and cultural issues, such as lack of knowledge about the importance of daily dental care.

Arteaga says the Association is developing a cultural competency curriculum for dental students and practitioners, including a Spanish class for use in the dental office. It is also preparing training materials for

Blumenthal suing for cost of law library repairs

By Michael Kirk

Attorney General Richard Blumenthal announced Feb. 14 that his office is suing contractors, architects, suppliers, and others who built or helped build the library at the UConn School of Law in Hartford for construction, design, and other flaws. The flaws resulted in pervasive water leaks and cracked exterior walls.

The action seeks more than $15 million – the estimated cost of repairs – plus damages and other costs.

“The law library building is really a story of a dream diminished,” says University President Michael J. Hogan. “What was supposed to be a signature piece of architecture – incorporated into a structure that was to be a ‘landmark’ building lasting at least 100 years. We estimated 100 years, this structure required massive construction, design, and other flaws. The flaws were so fundamental and far-reaching that the building’s exterior must be rebuilt and its moisture protection system replaced. Contractors at every stage – design, construction, installation, inspection – incorporated or ignored obvious flaws, bringing damage to our project.”

Construction of the $23 million law library, located on the school’s Elizabeth Street campus, started in 1994, before the UConn 2000 program began. The project was managed by the State Department of Public Works and completed in 1996. The five-story, 125,000 square foot structure was opened on Jan. 31, 1996, however. The leaks worsened over the years, damaging books and interior finishes and forcing relocation of books. Cracks appeared in the building’s façade, necessitating placement of a chain

see Law library repairs page 6

Dr. Sarita Arteaga, an assistant clinical professor of oral rehabilitation, biomaterials, and skeletal development, is president of the Hispanic Dental Association. The Association seeks to improve access to dental care for Latinos and recruit more Latinos to the profession of dentistry.

Inside

3 Antidepressants study
5 Pollutant research
8 Bilingual education

Arteaga says the Association is developing a cultural competency curriculum for dental students and practitioners, including a Spanish class for use in the dental office. It is also preparing training materials for
Day-long conference on gardening set for March 14

Kitchen gardens, organic lawn care, and gardening in deer country are among the topics to be discussed during an all-day garden conference, to be held Friday, March 14 in the Rome Ballroom on the Storrs campus.

Keynote speaker Rick Darke, a noted garden designer, photographer, lecturer, and author of gardening books on sustainable design and ornamental grasses, will discuss “Liveable Landscapes for a Changing Environment.”

Additional speakers include: Jennifer Bartley, a landscape architect, author, and illustrator, who will speak on “Designing the New Kitchen Garden,” based on her new book;

Kerry Mender, a garden consultant, designer, writer, and teacher. Her talk is titled “Don’t be a Deadhead! Surefire Maintenance Shortcuts for Showcase Gardens;”

Ellen Zachos, lecturer, author, and proprietor of Acme Plant Staff

in New York City, will talk about “Gardening in Deer Country;” and

Scott Reil, certified Connecticut nurseryman and corporate trainer for SafeLawn and Landscapes LLC, will discuss “Organic Lawn and Garden Care.”

Early registration is $80 per person ($90 if postmarked after March 7 or paid at the door), and includes an information packet with session summaries, parking, lunch, snacks, and beverages, opportunities to purchase selected autographed books, and a wide array of gardening books.

The conference is sponsored by the Department of Plant Science and the Cooperative Extension System.

Contact: Richard McAvoy at 860-486-0627 or richard.mcavoy@uconn.edu.

For more information, go to www.hort.uconn.edu/2008garden.

Katrina disaster topic of Law School talk

Carol Anderson, the 2008 Day Yorke Visiting Scholar, will give a talk at the law school titled, “When the Levees Broke: The Un-Civil Rights Movement in America.” The event will take place on Tuesday, March 5, at 11 a.m. in Starr Hall.

Anderson will discuss how the human catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina was not the result of an accident, but was instead the product of decades of deliberate public policy decisions made in the international realm.

Anderson is an associate professor of history at the University of Missouri. Her research and teaching focus on U.S. international relations and public policy, especially concerning human rights and African-Americans.

She has received fellowships and grants from prestigious institutions such as the Ford Foundation and the National Humanities Center.

Most recently, Professor Anderson completed a fellowship at Harvard University’s Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History.

Publication notice

The Advance will not be published on March 10, owing to spring break. The next issue will be published on March 17. Enjoy the break!

Julias Elias, former dean, dies at 82

BY SHERRY FISHER

Julius Elias, a former dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, died Feb. 25. He was 82.

A resident of Storrs, Elias came to UConn in 1974 as dean of liberal arts and sciences and as a member of the philosophy department. He served as dean until he was appointed interim vice president for academic affairs in 1986, where he served for two years. He retired in 1992.

“Julius was very knowledgeable and we enjoyed having him with us,” he says. “We’ll miss him.”

Karl Hakmiller, professor emeritus of psychology, describes Elias as a “cultured gentleman with a first-rate intellect.”

Elias was born in London. In the years after World War II, he was chief of the voluntary agencies liaison division of the International Refugee Organization, where he helped Jewish orphans and other victims of the Holocaust.

He came to the United States and studied philosophy at Columbia University, where he earned his bachelor’s degree in 1955, an A.M. degree in 1958, and a Ph.D. in 1963.

His first teaching position was as a lecturer at the City College of New York in 1960, where he became a professor in 1972.

While he was dean, Elias taught regularly and earned high student ratings, in both the philosophy and music departments. He taught courses in philosophy of literature, aesthetics, and ethics, and published scholarly articles. He also taught graduate seminars in opera, and published scholarly articles and operatic libretto translations.

He was an editor of the Journal of the History of Ideas for 12 years. He was also an opera aficionado. His friends and colleagues talk about his vast collection of opera tapes and DVDs, with multiple copies of a given opera performed by different singers. He translated about a dozen opera libretti for Columbia Records and other companies; gave graduate seminars in the music department on the major composers; and published articles on operas.

After he retired, he continued to teach opera at UConn and at the University of Hartford, and took groups to New York and to Europe and Australia to study opera.

Elias was predeceased by his wife, Wilma. He is survived by his son Anthony, his daughter-in-law Ellen, three grandchildren, a brother and a sister, and a long-time friend and colleague, Patricia Cremins.

Dental care continued from page 1

members who want to sponsor cultural awareness classes or other programs to reduce some of the roadblocks Latinos face in getting care.

“We want to be able provide speakers and materials to help our members and others improve care for Hispanics,” she says.

Arteaga first learned about dentistry in grade school, when she helped her mother, a single parent raising two daughters in the South Bronx, study for a degree in dental hygiene.

“TThat sparked my interest,” she recalls.

After graduating from New York University with a bachelor’s degree in biology, Arteaga earned a D.M.D. at UConn’s School of Dental Medicine and did a general practice residency at Bronx Municipal/Albert Einstein Hospitals. Returning to Connecticut in the early 1990s, she worked as an associate at several private practices, and began teaching operative dentistry and prosthodontics in 1995.

She joined the Hispanic Dental Association in 1997, becoming treasurer, vice president, president-elect and now, president. She also serves as advisor to the student chapter in the School of Dental Medicine, a role she plans to continue when her term as president is over.

Says Arteaga, “We want students to understand the need for our mission before they go out into the community and start providing treatment.”

>Photo of FROM Diana D'Aniello
Research concludes many not helped by antidepressants

BY CINDY WEISS & BETH KRANE

A study conducted by UConn psychology researchers and others has found that several commonly prescribed antidepressants provide little benefit for most people with depression.

The study was published Feb. 26 in the online journal PLoS Medicine.

It analyzed a large amount of data from 500 completed clinical trials submitted to the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from 1987 to 1999. The dataset, which included study results not before made public, was obtained from the FDA through a Freedom of Information Act request.

The analysis of the data from trials of four popular new-generation antidepressant drugs was conducted by two researchers from UConn’s Center for Health, Intervention, and Prevention (CHIP), post-doctoral researcher Tania Huedo-Medina, and Blair Johnson, a professor of social psychology. The study was led by Irving Kirsch, a psychology professor at Britain’s University of Hull, who is a professor emeritus of clinical psychology at UConn. He retired in 2003.

The study relied on meta-analysis, which pools data from independent studies.

Before antidepressants – the most commonly prescribed class of drugs in the United States in 2006 – are approved for licensing by the FDA, they must undergo clinical trials. These compare their ability to alleviate depression with the placebo effect, which is the advantage of taking the drug when a placebo, rather than the drugs or in the original studies knew who was receiving the drug and who the placebo.

Clinically significant improvement appeared only in studies of very highly depressed patients. For studies involving people with less severe depression, the advantage of taking the drug was modest, and did not approach clinical significance, says Johnson.

Indeed, many people in the trials still exhibited high levels of depression even after taking the drugs.

One strength of the investigation was its use of complete data sets, including results that the drugs’ manufacturers did not publish.

The clinical trials analyzed involved four selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs): the drugs fluoxetine (Prozac), venlafaxine (Effexor), nefazodone (Serzone), and paroxetine (Paxil), which have been widely prescribed in the U.S. The trials lasted from four to eight weeks and included 5,133 adult patients, of whom 3,292 were randomly chosen for medication and 1,841 received placebo.

Two drugs that were originally included in the study – citalopram (Celexa) and sertraline (Zoloft) – were ultimately excluded because the researchers were not able to obtain complete data sets.

The study showed that those who took the antidepressants did get a bit better. But those who took the dummy pills also got better – a phenomenon known as the placebo effect.

The placebo effect in the trials was exceptionally large, the authors found. On average, it was about 80 percent as large as the impact of the drugs. For comparison, in trials of pain medication, the average placebo effect is about 50 percent as large as the effect of taking the genuine drug.

In the study, only samples of the most severely depressed patients showed clinically significant improvement on a scale that measures the severity of depression. The authors found this improvement seemed to come about because these patients did not respond as well as less depressed patients to a placebo, rather than because they responded better to the drug.

“We find that the overall effect of new-generation antidepressant medications is below recommend performance of criteria for clinical significance,” the paper states.

“Given the large placebo effect we observed in our study, it would make sense for clinicians to exhaust other treatment options for depression before prescribing medication for all but the most severely depressed patients,” Johnson says.

“Taking any medication, wheth- er a real drug or not, provides a trigger for improvement, an expectancy of improvement,” he adds.

Kirsch’s previous research, much of it conducted at UConn, already had cast doubt on the effectiveness of new-generation antidepressants.

The focus of this study was to de- termine whether patients’ baseline severity of depression, as measured by professionals, affected their response to medication.

Kirsch tapped his fellow com- panion Johnson, who specializes in studying social influence, to par- ticipate in his latest study because of his expertise in meta-analysis.

Johnson, a principal investiga- tor with the Center for Health, Intervention, and Prevention and a member of its executive commit- tee, has published 25 such studies in his 20-year career, and has numerous publications centering on the methods involved in meta- analysis, including software. His Synthesis of HIV/AIDS Research Project, funded with $5 million in grants from the National Institutes of Health over the past decade, has directly supported 10 meta analy- ses in the areas of HIV preven- tion, HIV risk behavior, and HIV medication adherence.

Huedo-Medina, who works with Johnson, is a post-doctoral researcher who focuses on quanti- tative methods, especially meta- analysis. She already has particip- ated in four large-scale research synthesis projects.

The psychology department at UConn was recently ranked fifth in the nation in the National Science Foundation listing of the top institutions for psychology research, both in federal research expenditures and total research expenditures for 2006.

New contracts lower cost of electricity at several UConn campuses

BY RICHARD VIELLEUX

By using an innovative way to secure electricity, UConn is saving more than $9 million in energy costs.

The savings will be achieved through two new 20-month contracts that resulted from a purchasing mechanism known as a reverse auction. The auction was conducted late last year in con- junction with the state’s Office of Policy and Management (OPM).

One of the contracts will pro- vide electricity to the Depot and regional campuses and the School of Law for approximately $735,000 less than the University would have expected to pay during that period.

The UConn Health Center, which uses considerably more electricity than the regional cam- pus, will fare even better: it has secured a contract with through June 2009 that will save the facility nearly $2.5 million annually.

Additionally, the Health Center’s current seven-month con- tract, which was bid individually before the OPM-sponsored reverse auction, will have saved nearly $1 million when it expires in March.

Twelve percent of the Health Center’s energy will come from renewable sources.

“We’re very proud of our par- ticipation in the renewable energy program and our record of holding down energy costs,” says Daniel Penney, associate vice president of facilities management at the Health Center.

Penney says the Health Center used about 75 million kilowatt hours of electricity per year when it opened in the mid-1970s with 1.4 million square feet of space.

Today, the Health Center encom- passes 2.1 million-square feet and in 2006-07, used about 79 million kilowatt hours.

“That speaks directly to what we’ve done, not only to offset costs, but what we’ve done to increase efficiency and decrease consump- tion,” Penney says.

Storrs-based officials already procure contracts for the delivery of natural gas, the fuel needed to run the co-generation plant for the main campus. The plant is operat- ing at approximately 85 percent ca- pacity and is saving the University several million dollars annually, primarily by reusing heat gener- ated by four turbines to provide electricity on the Storrs campus.

The electricity auction was con- ducted last September by World Energy, a firm hired by the state to run the auction for any interested executive, judicial, or higher edu- cation unit in Connecticut.

The auction was designed to evaluate potential energy cost sav- ings by comparing the auction bids against World Energy’s projected current energy costs, and the future cost estimates provided by the University’s energy advisor, Energy New England.

The state also wanted to determine what contract lengths would be offered and how much renewable energy would be involved.

Ultimately, the pricing was favorable, and several choices were available in both contract length and the amount of renewable en- ergy each offer provided. UConn officials chose the longest term available – 20 months running through June 2009 – and the offer that included the largest amount of power derived from the use of wind, solar, and geothermal meth- ods. The new contracts require that 20 percent of the campuses’ energy needs be provided from renewable sources such as these.

Thomas Callahan, associate vice president for operations, says it is advantageous to lock in prices when future cost directions are volatile and uncertain.

Without a disciplined approach to securing expected future energy requirements, he says, “the Uni- versity is exposed to significant unbudgeted energy expenses that negatively impact the resources available for other priorities.”
Gift in memory of dental professor will support student scholarships

**By John Spinauer**

A $100,000 gift from the widow of one of the first faculty members at the School of Dental Medicine will carry on his legacy by supporting student scholarships. Barbara Levine has made the endowed gift in memory of her late husband, Philip, a professor emeritus of oral biology who died in August 2006. It will support academically outstanding second- and third-year dental students with demonstrated financial need.

Dr. Levine was a decorated paratrooper and dental surgeon in World War II, as well as a practicing dentist and professor in the Boston area after the war. He was recruited to Farmington in 1967 to become a professor of dental medicine.

"Dean [Lewis] Fox knew Phil professionally, and at a conference said to him, ‘You should come to Connecticut to see what we’re planning.’ Once Phil saw the plans for the Health Center, things moved quickly, and within three months, we had moved from Massachusetts to Connecticut and never regretted our decision," says Mrs. Levine.

The first class of students entered in 1968. Dr. Levine served as associate dean for student affairs, and later as acting dean. He retired in 1982.

"He gave so much of himself to the UConn Health Center," Mrs. Levine says. "Being there at the beginning was a very positive experience for him. He enjoyed his work very much, especially interacting with students and the community"

Mrs. Levine recalls days when students came to their home in West Hartford to meet with her husband, and also the long hours spent by Dr. Levine building relationships with dentists in the local community.

"Encouraging women to enter the field was a priority for him. He actively sought to increase female enrollment through recruiting videos for prospective students, highlighting the advantages of the field for women at the time.

When the first class was formed, there were no women in it; by the time he retired, about 25 percent of the class was female. Mrs. Levine says her decision to fund scholarships with her gift felt like “the right thing to do,” in light of her husband’s dedication to dental students.

"Philip Levine's legacy of supporting students lives on today," says Dr. Monty MacNeil, dean of the School of Dental Medicine. "Mrs. Levine’s gift of scholarship support will allow us to attract and retain the next generation of dentists and researchers who have the skill to succeed but may lack the financial means to continue their education.

“We’re very appreciative of what this means to the future of our entire field,” MacNeil adds, “and it’s especially meaningful coming in memory of someone who was here from the very beginning.”

To support the School of Dental Medicine, please contact Catherine Gibbons-Way at 860.679.6034.

Graduate fellowships help students develop multidisciplinary skills

**By Joan Botelli**

The environmental problems of the 21st century require solutions that bridge traditional academic disciplines, according to Michael Willig, director of the Center for Environmental Sciences and Engineering (CESE).

The Center aims to help the next generation of researchers gain the skills needed to develop such solutions by offering awards to graduate students for multidisciplinary environmental research.

The awards encourage students to apply the resources of more than one discipline to a given problem by requiring that each award recipient have two faculty mentors from different disciplines—and preferably different departments—who will collaborate in the research.

“Emerging environmental problems—such as the loss of biodiversity, environmental illnesses, and the effects of climate change—and their solutions do not fit into neat disciplinary pigeonholes,” says Willig, a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology. “To meet the challenges posed by these multidimensional environmental issues, the new generation of researchers will need state-of-the-art tools, perspectives, and capabilities to engage in collaborative, multidisciplinary work.”

The first set of awards, given in 2007, went to 25 graduate students in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the School of Engineering. Their projects involved a total of 17 departments, including such diverse fields as anthropology, chemical engineering, ecology and evolutionary biology, environmental engineering, marine sciences, and materials science.

Award recipient James Reinhardt, a doctoral student in marine sciences, investigated the spread of an invasive sea squirt that threatens the ecological health of Long Island Sound. The sea squirt can cover enormous areas of the sea floor, keeping native species from accessing their food and habitats.

Reinhardt worked with mentors Robert Whitlatch, professor of marine sciences, and Montgomery Shaw, distinguished professor of chemical engineering. Besides applying methods of marine sciences to conduct microscopic analyses, Reinhardt used techniques and equipment from materials science to measure changes in a colony’s tensile strength—the ability to stretch without breaking.

Reinhardt says, “The award forced me to step outside the usual boundaries, to think in an interdisciplinary way.” As a marine sciences student, he had never taken an engineering course, but the award helped him build beneficial relationships with researchers in engineering and gain access to new knowledge and resources, such as high-tech engineering equipment.

Whitlatch, one of Reinhardt’s mentors, is enthusiastic about the benefits for students and faculty alike. “The beauty of this program is that it brings together individuals of different backgrounds and interests,” he says.

Reinhardt’s project not only generated useful information about the material properties of the invasive sea squirt, but also opened avenues for future interactions between researchers in marine sciences and materials science, Whitlatch adds.

J. Pablo Arroyo, a doctoral student in ecology and evolutionary biology, is combining the disciplines of ecology, forestry, and remote sensing to study the effects of logging on tropical rainforests.

Arroyo, who says his work tries to focus on multidisciplinary approaches whenever possible, worked with mentors Robin Chazdon, professor of ecology and evolutionary biology, and Daniel Civco, professor of natural resources management and engineering. He says the CESE award enable him to analyze data from the field and from satellite and aircraft sources. Some of his research will be published as a chapter in a forthcoming book on multidisciplinary approaches to remote sensing.

Thanks to the CESE awards, students have applied multidisciplinary approaches to the investigation of a host of pressing environmental issues, including alternative energy sources, pollution prevention, biodiversity, climate change, genetic engineering, and sustainability.

Besides conducting research, award recipients participate in a multidisciplinary graduate colloquium, write a short summary of the project for the public, and produce a final report or poster that summarizes their accomplishments and future directions. The research summaries are available at www.cece.uconn.edu.

CESE expects to offer another 20 to 25 awards in 2008. The awards are open to graduate students throughout the University to engage in collaborative and interdisciplinary research during the summer. The new awards will be announced by March 15.
disorder was a way of coping with
ultimately they are about far more
get out of hand.
They begin as a coping mechanism
ders are not primarily about food.
suffered from an eating disorder.
lieved that at some point they had
lege campuses found that nearly
in UConn's Student Union Theatre.
they make around the country on
involving binge eating and purging.
resulting from bulimia, a disorder
"They are of world-wide concern. "
broken down easily, " Vlahos says.
in the environment and are not
compounds used in such products
Vlahos' seagoing research
between the ocean and atmo
how carbon dioxide is exchanged
sampling wind and water in an ef
rapher, is part of a UConn team
on earth.
in an expedition in the Southern
knowledge of how pollutants trav
Sweden to Barrow, Alaska, across
fuels creates carbon dioxide, and as
as it accumulates in the atmos
phere, land, and continental shelf.
life changes in many ways by shifting
global balances.”
For example, increased carbon
in the atmosphere also adds to
levels in the sea, affecting the
pH level and many organisms that
depend on pH stability.
Computer modeling had predicted the presence of various
perfluorinated compounds and their concentration in
air, water, fish, and mammals, but Vlahos and her
team were the first scien
tists to actually go to the Arctic to
take measurements and validate these models.
She said, “It’s no surprise that
Connecticut, with its population density,
is a hot spot for these pol
lutants but when they show up in
remote areas, that raises all sorts of
questions.”
Toxins in remote areas are like
“canaries in the mine,” Vlahos says,
providing early evidence of environmental
threats.
Toxic chemicals accumulate in
fish and are passed directly to
humans who eat them, she says,
citing the recent concerns about
high levels of mercury in
blue fin tuna and other fish.
All species
humans included – also pass
viruses to their young, she adds
and some toxins have been shown to
affect reproductive rates.
To evaluate air samples, the air
sciences department used very
fine filters and materials that the
pollutants stick to, while keep
ing careful track of where the air
samples were taken.
match up with wind patterns to try
to determine where the pollutants
originated.
"The DOC sampling involves
filtering water and then subjecting
the tiny compounds to mass spec
troscopy. The goal is to understand
how materials gathered from vari
ous water conditions change at the
molecular level.
Vlahos, an environmental
both personally and professionally,
says she is encouraged by “clever
engineering” that has led to the
development of pesticides that de
grade in the atmosphere far faster
than the now-banned DDT.
"Green engineering," she said,
can design manufactured mate
rials, such as polymers used in
plastic bags, with the environment
in mind. "Light-sensitive poly
mers, for example, will break down
far faster in the environment than
some of the polymers being used to
today," she says.
On the Southern Ocean expedi
tion, which began in late February
and runs until April 12, the UCo
n participants include Vlahos;
assistant professor Heidi Dierson
of UConn’s Coastal Ocean Labora
tory for Optics and Remote Sens
ing; Leonora O’Connor and James
Edison, a marine meteorologist who
investigates how the atmo
sphere and ocean interact.
After completing a doctoral candidate in marine sciences, will also be on board the RV
Bown.
For the duration of the cruise, he will make various conference talks with colleagues at Columbia University’s Lamont-Doherty
Earth Observatory and the Na
tional Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration (NOAA).
The expedition, sponsored by
NOAA and NASA, includes dozens
of scientists, each investigating
its own projects. The ship leaves
from Chile and will be in open ocean
the entire time, in contrast to the
arctic voyage. On that trip, the scien
tists were fortunate to see such
wildlife as polar bears and whales
in their natural habitat.
Vlahos says the only likely Southern Ocean
escorts will be albatrosses and other
long-distance flyers.
Vlahos has high hopes for the expedition and its results. "The data that Heidi, Jim, and I
and our non-UConn colleagues are gathering will expand our understanding,
both on the academic and political
side," she says. "Decisions relating to climate change, chemicals in
our environment, and potential
threats to biota or our food sys
tems need that kind of data."
The leaks were pervasive, the result of substandard materials, improper installation, and design shortcomings. The leaks were primarily in the windows, walls, and parapets. Anchors securing exterior granite walls are defective, leading to cracks. Sections of the backup walls behind the façade lack steel reinforcing bars.

Fixing the defects requires removing, repairing, and re-anchoring the stone façade; removing and replacing the entire moisture protection system – insulation, waterproofing, and flashing; installing missing steel bar reinforcement in interior walls; and repairing or replacing all windows. Everyone at the law school is grateful to Attorney General Blumenthal and all the attorneys working on this important case as they seek to recover funds from those responsible accountable."

The repair work began in December 2007 and is expected to take about 18 months. The following grants were received through the Office for Sponsored Programs (OSP) in December 2007. The list represents only new proposals awarded, and excludes continuations. The list is supplied to the Advance each month by OSP.

GRANTS

The following grants were awarded through the Office for Sponsored Programs (OSP) in December 2007. The list represents only new proposals awarded, and excludes continuations. The list is supplied to the Advance each month by OSP.

Alphabetical, by Principal Investigator

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<th>Principal Investigator</th>
<th>Department</th>
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<th>Amount</th>
<th>Award Period</th>
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The list is supplied to the Advance each month by OSP.
Vocabulary study may boost learning among Spanish-speaking adolescents

BY KAREN SINGER

English language learners often have trouble improving their vocabulary, leading to reading comprehension difficulties and problems with learning in all academic content areas.

Elizabeth Howard is among a group of researchers who think that teaching native Spanish speakers about cognates—words comparable across English and Spanish because of their common Greek or Latin roots—may facilitate the process.

Howard, an assistant professor of bilingual education at the University of Missouri, says she and her sister were “boundaries that everyone had to learn and live by, whether you were in the parlor or the kitchen.”

Howard adds, since science testing was added to “No Child Left Behind” assessments in the 2007-08 school year.

Another reason for the focus on cognates is that the Spanish counterparts of academic words in English are frequently common everyday words in Spanish.

“With the idea is, if you have kids who are native Spanish speakers—particularly those who are literate in Spanish—cognates may be a real leveraging point for them, to help bootstrap their learning of academic English,” Howard says.

The study is being designed to test the effects of one cognate-based intervention, delivered in two different ways.

Both versions incorporate meaning-making activities to help students learn words in context, and structural analysis activities focusing on word parts.

Some students will learn words only in English, with no mention of cognates. Others will learn bilingualistically, studying the words in both English and Spanish with explicit references to their common roots.

The objective of both approaches is to promote the use of word learning strategies, and to stimulate an interest in words so kids can and will continue to do it on their own.

Howard says research by colleagues has already shown that learning cognates is an effective approach with upper elementary students.

What she hopes to discover among adolescents Spanish speakers is whether either of the specific interventions is effective, and if so, whether the effects vary depending on the student’s educational backgrounds and Spanish proficiency levels.

A “foreign service baby” born in Venezuela, Howard lived on three continents, and was cared for by a German nanny.

“That kind of set the course for me,” she says.

Howard majored in Spanish language and literature at the University of Maryland, then went to Costa Rica as a Peace Corps volunteer. She earned a master’s degree in educational psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, while working as a bilingual elementary teacher, and a doctorate in human development and psychology at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Before arriving at UConn in 2006, Howard spent nearly 10 years working at the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C., where she concentrated on two-way immersion programs, in which native English speakers and Spanish-speaking language are taught all subjects in both languages.

Howard and her co-investigators, including UConn colleague Betsy McCoach, are spending the first year of the study negotiating site selection, finalizing the research protocol, and developing curricular materials. Data collection will begin in the fall, and will take two years.

Howard hopes the results of her research will be used to improve instruction for English language learners and to help all teachers work with a rapidly growing population of Spanish-speaking students.

“Over 70 percent of school districts in Connecticut serve English language learners,” Howard says. “Unfortunately, while their presence is increasing, their academic performance continues to lag behind. Learning more about how to work effectively with all English language learners should be a concern for all educators in Connecticut.”

Memoir recounts Southern childhood and family differences

BY SHERRY FISHER

Margaret Gibson’s parents often referred to her as their “Connecticut Yankee daughter.” Although she was raised in Richmond, Va., Gibson moved to the Northeast after college, leaving behind Southern customs and culture she could not embrace.


Gibson and her sister grew up during the 1950s in what she calls “a southern and very traditionalist, conservative culture.”

“My sister stayed in Richmond and lived a very conventional married life and didn’t change her views about the social and political world,” Gibson says. That world was defined by racial segregation, the division of rich and poor, and a strict fundamentalist religion.

“I was coming of age during a period when real changes in society were beginning to happen, particularly in the area of integration,” she says.

When she reached her teens, Gibson became acutely aware of the differences between herself and her family. “I realized that the reasons for segregation were not valid,” she says. “The changes I went through during the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War put me over on the left. My parents didn’t understand that.”

She says she and her sister were close in age “but that was about as far as it got. We were temperamentally very different.”

When her sister had a stroke in 2000, Gibson went to Virginia to help her.

“My sister had become totally dependent,” she says.

They spent a good deal of time talking about their childhood, and became friends.

“My big discovery — it took my breath away — was that underneath all this difference, I had always loved my sister,” Gibson says.

In the opening chapter of the book, she says she and her sister became “boundaries that everyone had to learn and live by, whether you were in the parlor or the kitchen.”

Gibson says writing a memoir “helps you as much understand yourself as you are now, as it helps you understand the way you were then. It’s as if in reinventing the voice and the context and the character of who you once were, you become more able to understand who you are and the distance you’ve come.”

Gibson says writing a memoir was much harder to write than poetry in one respect: “When you write a memoir, you make a pact with the reader that you’re going to write what really happened. You may compress things, you may create a work of art, but you tell the truth.”

That wasn’t always easy, she adds: “I thought, ‘I am really going to write this brutal breakdown? Is that too private?’ But making the pact to tell the truth means that you walk around with a little bit more of yourself out there than you might like.”