



NOTES  
FROM THE  
**KENDALL  
CENTER**

# Teaching and Learning Mini-Grants support classroom innovations

by Margaret Bloch-Qazi

**G**ustavus faculty members regularly seek innovative approaches to engage students in an excellent education that is both interdisciplinary and international in perspective. John S. Kendall Center for Engaged Learning Teaching and Learning Mini-Grants, funded by endowments, enable faculty to implement new content and pedagogical approaches in their classes. Mini-grants have supported participation in workshops and the acquisition of books and software programs, which, in turn, have translated into richer and more engaging learning experiences for our students. Over the past year, 12 mini-grants have been awarded to individual faculty members and faculty teams from departments across campus, including Health and Exercise Science, Education, and Religion. Three funded projects, demonstrating exciting and novel approaches to teaching and learning, are highlighted below.

## EXPLORING AFRICAN LITERATURE AND ARTS



*Senegal is 95 percent Muslim and beautiful mosques are a frequent sight.*

**T**o develop a new course in World Literature and to enrich a course in Postcolonial Literatures, Professor of English Elizabeth Baer, Ph.D., utilized mini-grant funds to support, in part, travel to Senegal, West Africa. There, she participated in a 10-day seminar titled “Contemporary Senegal through Literature and the Arts,” learning about the indigenous people of Senegal by studying their history, colonization, literature, and films. Her goal in participating in this program was to be able “to talk knowledgeably with my students about the period and place which spawned the film or novel we are studying . . . Another way of saying this is that I could have a more authentic voice in the classroom when teaching such texts.” These experiences will help Baer introduce students to the history of Africa and the literature of several countries, and to encourage them to think about the value of narrative and story in dealing with trauma. Ultimately, she hopes to help her students develop abilities identifying patterns of oppression in government policy, laws, and discriminatory practices, and to have the courage to stand up for social justice.

Baer is excited about what this seminar will allow her to bring to her classes at Gustavus. This spring, her Introduction to World Literature students will be introduced to several African texts as



*A typical lunch or dinner in Senegal: given the coastal location of the country, fish is a diet staple.*

## EXPLORING ANCIENT HISTORY AND CULTURE

Yurie Hong, Ph.D., assistant professor of classics, used mini-grant funds to help her students in Greek History and Culture explore and communicate interconnections among historical and cultural events. She acquired timeline and mapping software, along with supporting materials, to both enhance her presentation of course content and engage students by developing assignments that encouraged more critical interaction with the course material. Students used the multi-media resources to develop group presentations in which they described a historical city's topography and analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of its geographic location as influential factors in the city's military and cultural history. Students also collaborated on putting together an online timeline that juxtaposed historical, cultural, and sociopolitical events from the beginning of the Archaic period all the way up to the death of Alexander the Great.

This approach to student engagement resulted in measurable learning gains. Hong observed that test scores on these sections of the class revealed dramatic increases in students' knowledge compared to a past iteration of this course. Not only did students display a more detailed knowledge of historical events, but they also revealed far greater awareness of the role that geography played in shaping the relationships of ancient Greek city-states across time. Additionally, students appreciated this interactive, multi-media approach to the subject matter. Noted one student, "[The online timeline] helps me study for tests and helps me visualize what we are learning; it helps SOOO much!" Another reported, "[The online timeline] is a great tool, especially when I put my event next to others."

well as a unit on Senegal with films, a PowerPoint presentation, hip hop music (which is highly politicized), a novel, and a short story. Next fall, when she teaches her course on Postcolonial Literatures, Baer's students will again learn about Senegalese culture. Her experiences in Senegal have additional benefits for Gustavus students: in November 2011, the Gustavus faculty approved a new interdisciplinary program in African studies, and Baer will be contributing to this program in various ways through the expertise gained in Senegal (and two previous trips, to South Africa and Namibia). She is grateful for the continued commitment to faculty development enabling her, and her colleagues, to gain new knowledge to keep curricula fresh and current.



*Though much of Senegal is (or aspires to be) modern in a Western sense, the visitor also sees much poverty and reliance on old modes of transportation and communication.*



*Writer Ayi Kwei Armah invited seminar participants to his studio for lectures, lunch, and a book-signing.*



*Masks for sale at a Senegalese Art Center, Sobo Bade.*

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**CHINESE LESSONS AND THE BATTLE OF THE DUMPLINGS**

To bring Chinese language and culture alive to her students, Assistant Professor of Japanese Studies Lianying Shan, Ph.D., of the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, used mini-grant support to purchase instructional multi-media and supplies for two newly-offered elementary Chinese language courses. As Shan explains, “Textbooks alone cannot provide students with sufficient information that exposes them to the target language and culture. Language instruction does not teach the textbook but with the textbook.” The integration of maps and DVDs modeling Chinese dialogue with the text helped her students develop competence in listening, speaking, writing, reading, and understanding Chinese culture.

Shan also organized two events to engage students in meaningful cultural experiences and motivate them to continue with the language: Chinese calligraphy and Chinese cooking. For the Chinese calligraphy event, Shan showed the students the “four treasures of the studio”—writing brush, ink, rice paper, and ink stones—and guided them to experience the material aspect of writing Chinese characters in the traditional way. Through practicing writing Chinese characters with a brush and in slow motion, students came to appreciate Chinese calligraphy as a form of artistic expression, meditation, and on-going self-cultivation.

For the latter event, Shan and Toshiyuki Sakuragi, Ph.D., professor of Japanese studies, went head-to-head in a cooking event called “China vs. Japan: The Battle of the Dumplings.” Each professor led their class making and sampling Chinese-style and Japanese-style dumplings, respectively. By the end of the evening, students had created, compared, and shared food from their respective class. Although Japan won this year . . . next year is another story! ■

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Top: Students in Lianying Shan’s Chinese Language and Culture class sample dumplings.

Above: Students display their calligraphy efforts.