In Memoriam Elizabeth Mazzocco “She brought out the best in people”

Elizabeth Hunt Davis Mazzocco, director of the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages since 1990, died on September 24. As an administrator, professor, colleague and friend, she is remembered as seamlessly combining a multitude of laudable traits: a strong personality and a gentle spirit, innovative leadership and selfless friendship, a brilliant mind and a warm heart.

Elizabeth was born in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, on February 11, 1958, and spent much of her childhood in Commerce, Texas. She earned her bachelor’s degree in English and history at the Commerce campus of Texas A&M University and went on to earn her master’s degree and her doctorate from Bryn Mawr College.

Her academic career brought her from Bryn Mawr to the University of Pennsylvania to Mount Holyoke, where in 1989–90 she was a visiting professor of Italian. During that important year, she met her future husband, Mount Holyoke Italian Professor Angelo Mazzocco, and landed a position as visiting assistant professor of Italian at UMass Amherst. In addition, just one year after its founding, she became the director of the Five College Foreign Language Resource Center.

Under her leadership the center got a new name—the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages—and instruction was added in many less commonly studied languages, within a novel Supervised Independent Language Program through which students cultivated speaking and listening skills in partnership with native-speaking conversation partners. But it was Elizabeth’s development of the Mentored Language Program, which combines structured study guides, one-on-one tutorials with trained instructors, and small-group conversation sessions, that set the center apart, according to Amy Wordelman, associate director of the center. “We don't know of any other place that has anything quite like the mentored language program for developing comprehensive reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in less commonly studied languages,” she said.

For more than two decades, Elizabeth led staff members at the center in exploring ways technology could support instruction. “Some approaches didn’t work and were set aside, and many were reshaped along the way,” said Wordelman. “Elizabeth always wanted to experiment,” she said. “Her approach was ‘Let’s keep trying it and we’ll figure it out; keep trying and we’ll get it right.’”

Elizabeth was a master at attracting outside funding. In 24 years, she helped bring in some $4.5 million in outside funding through 21 successful grant proposals.

But Wordelman stresses that where Elizabeth excelled as an administrator and teacher was in her concern for staff members and students: “She brought out the best in people—her students, us—with her energy and her caring.” (continued on page 2)

Students present Digital Humanities projects

In April, students from each of the five campuses presented their projects at the first-ever Digital Humanities Student Symposium, which was held at Smith College. Digital Humanities Fellow Elizabeth Alexander (pictured here), of Amherst College, presented “Too Much for My Weak Frame,” a digital, multimedia essay that explored trauma and embodiment within histories of enslavement, looking at the work of Harriet Jacobs, Toni Morrison and Octavia Butler.

Photo by Nancy Palmieri.
Summer language offerings initiated

In summer 2013, the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages launched a summer intensive language program for students and other community members with opportunities for instruction in eight languages. In summer, 2014, the program featured two five-week sessions of elementary Japanese and elementary Hindi. The Japanese course was taught in person and online, making it accessible to participants who lived beyond this area. The language center plans to hold the program again in 2015. The summer intensive is part of the language center’s growing effort to expand its programming to the community beyond the five campuses.

Language portal connects students with learning opportunities

Enrollment is at near-record levels in all languages offered to Five College students. To help students who would like to take courses for study or to work or study abroad, in 2013 the consortium created the Five College Language Portal, at fivecolleges.edu/languages. The portal guides students to all opportunities for language learning—currently more than 60 languages—at the five campuses and through the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages.

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Five College Executive Director Neal Abraham knew Elizabeth not only in his role at the consortium, but also as a member of the graduate awards committee while she was getting her advanced degrees at Bryn Mawr. “We lost a dear colleague, inspiring teacher and mentor, visionary language pedagogue and admired scholar,” said Abraham. “For more than two decades Elizabeth built the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages into a national—indeed, international—leader in second-language teaching, particularly for less commonly studied languages. We will miss her deeply, but we are grateful for our memories of her warmth and the evidence of her accomplishments, the many people she touched and the strengths of the center, which we treasure as enduring legacies.”

While she directed the language center, Elizabeth’s faculty appointment in Italian at UMass evolved from visiting assistant professor to tenure-track assistant professor to tenured professor, and she became an important and beloved member of the Italian program within the Languages, Literatures and Cultures Department there. “She was a pillar of our Italian program, to which she brought leadership and pedagogical acumen,” said Chancellor Kumble Subbaswamy. “Dr. Mazzocco was a member of our Italian studies program for two decades. As a distinguished scholar of the Italian Renaissance and a dedicated teacher, she enriched the lives of colleagues and friends and inspired countless students.”

Arabic Language Initiative a Five College success story

In recent years, one of the most notable success stories within the consortium is the Arabic Language Initiative. During the last decade, it has evolved from offering mentored learning through the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages to an autonomous program of six lecturers teaching classroom-based Arabic on all five campuses. Mohamed Hassan, senior lecturer in Arabic (pictured above), directs the initiative.

“Typically, when Arabic is taught at the college level in the U.S., it’s the formal written language, which is quite different from the language most native speakers use in their everyday lives,” says Chelsea Villareal SC ’13, an alumna of the initiative who has traveled and worked throughout the Middle East, both before and after graduating. “Most university students don’t have the opportunity to learn any of the spoken dialects until they study abroad in an Arabic-speaking country. Students of the Five Colleges are given a huge advantage by having resources to learn one of the spoken dialects and practice using it with a native speaker.”

Over four years of instruction, the Arabic Language Initiative offers four-skill (reading, writing, speaking and listening) courses in Modern Standard Arabic and various dialects. The breadth of the curriculum has grown to include advanced courses that address a range of political, social, religious and literary themes. The initiative also presents cultural programming, such as an annual Five College Arabic Night, and other events and programs on each of the campuses.

Photo by Nancy Palmieri.
Learning communities strengthen math education in the region

A recent analysis by area education leaders revealed a gap in mathematics understanding for many students in the Pioneer Valley: they lack a deep understanding of algebraic reasoning, which hampers their progress in mathematics. To help address this problem, in January 2014 the Western Massachusetts Mathematics Partnership (WMMP), a project of the Five Colleges Partnership Program, launched professional learning communities (PLCs) of K–16 math educators to create instructional strategies for K–12 math classes.

“Educators participating in the PLCs learn how to help their students understand math at the deeper level required by the Common Core State Standards of Mathematics,” says Marla Solomon, Partnership Program director. “They also see how algebraic thinking progresses from kindergarten to college. By seeing what comes before and what follows the grade level they teach, they’re better able to address their students’ needs and challenges.”

During the spring, one group in Amherst and one in Easthampton met monthly to develop teaching strategies and practices that would foster students’ algebraic thinking. During the summer, WMMP hosted an institute for math educators to discuss the strategies and best practices the groups came up with. In response to high demand, the second session of PLCs, which began in September, expanded to three groups. The newest cohort meets in Westfield.

WMMP comprises faculty members from nine area colleges and universities, educators from 10 K–12 school districts and a number of education research specialists. The spring 2014 PLCs were supported by a National Science Foundation Math-Science Partnership planning grant; the fall 2014 PLCs are funded by Five Colleges and contributions from the participating school districts.

Five Colleges to build shared library annex

The Five College Consortium will soon begin construction of a 2.5-million-volume library annex that will provide shelving to supplement the capacities of the on-campus libraries. It will be the first building owned by the consortium, which leases its central offices from Amherst College.

The annex will be available to serve the needs of any of the libraries of the five campuses, but the decision to build it was motivated by space requirements identified in the libraries’ master plan for the University of Massachusetts Amherst and the projected needs of Smith College libraries during an anticipated major renovation of its Neilson Library. Explorations of possibilities for an annex began at the request of the Five College librarians and chief academic officers in 2011, and planning has continued since then.

According to Five College Executive Director Neal Abraham, the creation of an annex is the latest of many joint efforts of the consortium. “There’s a long history—dating back to 1951 with the founding of the Hampshire Interlibrary Center—of the consortium libraries pooling resources to improve services for our students and faculty members,” he said.

Primarily intended to house print materials, in most cases volumes that are rarely referenced or circulated, the annex will have climate-controlled conditions that are better for long-term preservation of print materials than are the conditions in library stacks.

The consortium is considering a site near a member campus with a goal of opening the annex in fall 2015. The proximity of the facility to the campuses means that the materials will be readily accessible; the Five College messenger will make morning and afternoon stops at the annex to retrieve items requested by library patrons.

For more information about the annex, visit fivecolleges.edu/libraries/library-annex.

Blended Learning opportunities expand

Faculty and staff members from across the Five Colleges gathered in May to develop their proposals for curricular innovations as part of the new Five College Blended Learning initiative, directed by Mount Holyoke College Professor of Latin American Studies Rogelio Miñana (pictured above) and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The initiative supports pilot projects that integrate in-person and online activities into coursework with the goal of enriching student learning.

Photo by Ben Barnhart.
Sustainability Studies awards first certificates

Last spring, four students were the first to earn the Five College Sustainability Studies certificate. Sustainability is the capacity to maintain a way of life that meets the needs of those living today without sacrificing the needs of those who will live in the future. Each of the four students, all from Hampshire College, explored these issues in classes and senior projects within the program.


Officially launched in 2012, the Sustainability Studies program is open to students at Amherst, Hampshire and Mount Holyoke colleges. Faculty members from Mount Holyoke, Amherst and Hampshire worked with Five Colleges to create the program, which incorporates more than two dozen courses and other academic offerings from all five campuses. Sustainability Studies spans disciplines to tackle topics on economy, politics, society, culture and, of course, environmental sustainability. Each year some 150 Five College students earn certificates in 15 fields ranging from African studies to queer and sexuality studies.

Five College certificate programs

- African Studies
- Asian/Pacific/American Studies
- Buddhist Studies
- Coastal and Marine Sciences
- Cognitive Neuroscience
- Culture, Health, and Science
- Ethnomusicology
- International Relations
- Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies
- Logic
- Middle Eastern Studies
- Native American and Indigenous Studies
- Queer and Sexuality Studies
- Sustainability Studies
- Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies

Hampshire’s New Roos-Rohde House

After three years of work, one of the most tangible examples of how the Five College Bridging Program helps students realize their visions recently opened for business. The project was spearheaded by Hampshire students interested in repurposing a barn into a gathering space. One facet of the work involved undergraduate students in a design studio working with UMass graduate students, professionals in architecture and the Hampshire community to design a building that would best meet students’ needs. Known simply as “Bridging,” the Five College Bridging Liberal Arts Undergraduate Programs and Graduate and Professional Programs brings together liberal arts and graduate faculty members to infuse liberal arts teaching techniques into graduate-level curricula and to introduce into liberal arts courses methods traditionally considered the province of graduate and professional programs.

Celebrating native and indigenous studies

Ojibwe scholar Howard Kimewon, an author and recent instructor at the University of Michigan, is beginning a Five College residency to explore development of language instruction in Anishinaabemowin, the Ojibwe language, during the 2014–15 academic year. He’s pictured here at a Five College Native American and Indigenous Studies program reception, at Amherst College’s Frost Library, which featured the college’s new Kim-Wait/Eisenberg Native American Literature Collection, one of the most comprehensive collections of books by Native American writers ever assembled privately.

Photo by Francis Phan UM ’18.
Folk opera celebrates African legend

From award-winning sculptures on display in the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum to the performances of the Five College West African drum ensemble, last semester there were many celebrations of African culture at the five campuses. One of the most exciting was the performance of *Queen Moremi*, an African folk opera staged and directed by Five College Associate Professor of Music Bode Omojola in late April.

“The production presented a highly engaging context for students to explore and understand salient features of African music, such as ensemble and compositional practices, the role of dance and the significance of musical storytelling,” says Omojola.

Set in the ancient city Ile-Ife, in the Yoruba region of Nigeria, the production featured music, dance and poetry to tell the story of Queen Moremi, who saved her people from being conquered by invaders from a neighboring community. The cast consisted of Omojola’s students and Nigerian performers.

“ Audience members praised students for the quality of the shows,” Omojola says, “and the students were grateful for the unique experience of staging the opera.”

Photo by Nancy Palmieri.

Five Colleges receives grant to celebrate Taiwanese arts

Thanks to a $50,000 grant to Five Colleges from the Taiwan Ministry of Culture, Chinese puppetry, music and dance are being presented in the Pioneer Valley in 2014 and 2015. The performances are part of the Spotlight Taiwan project, a multimillion-dollar initiative to share Taiwanese culture through lectures, workshops, performances and exhibitions. Central to the effort are visits by Taiwanese performers to more than 40 campuses worldwide over the next three years.

“Arts are a vehicle for understanding cultures around the globe,” says Willie L. Hill Jr., director of the Fine Arts Center at UMass. “I’m thrilled that our exemplary Asian Arts & Culture Program will highlight arts from Taiwan this season in a variety of artistic offerings for our campus, Five Colleges and western Massachusetts communities. We thank the Taiwan Ministry of Culture for the Spotlight Taiwan award.”

Described by *National Geographic* as “one of the most original outfits working in the world music arena today,” the group Sheng Dong (A Moving Sound) brought its fusion of traditional Asian and Western pop sounds to UMass in September. In March, the Tai Yuan Puppet Company will showcase the music, woodcarving, embroidery and performance techniques that make Taiwanese puppetry delightfully unique. Next fall, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, described by the Toronto *Globe and Mail* as “one of the finest dance companies in the world,” will stage *Rice*, which celebrates traditional life in rural Taiwan.

In addition to performances, each group spends time in area schools and campuses, leading master classes and other outreach programs. These events enhance celebrations of Taiwanese culture that are regularly scheduled in the region, such as an autumn-moon festival in September, “10-10” day on October 10 and dragon-boat races in June.

“We’re particularly pleased that this project will also engage members of our neighboring communities, especially K–12 students and their teachers, in explorations of world cultures,” says Neal Abraham, executive director of Five Colleges.

Along with support from the Ministry of Culture, Republic of China (Taiwan) and special patron Dr. Samuel Yin, Spotlight Taiwan events are funded by Five Colleges and the UMass Fine Arts Center. For updates about Spotlight Taiwan events, visit fivecolleges.edu/community/spotlight_taiwan.

Spreading the word about collaboration

Five Colleges Executive Director Neal Abraham leads a session at the Summer Institute for Collaboration in Higher Education, held in June at the Big Ten Conference Center in Chicago and hosted by the Committee on Institutional Cooperation.

Photo by Barbara Allen.
Dance event helps kids feel “big and awesome”

Last April, students from elementary and high schools in the Pioneer Valley learned dance from Five College faculty members and students in workshops on four campuses. The all-day event, known as Starburst, gave Five College students a firsthand opportunity to use dance to build intergenerational connections with people in the community.

“I very much believe that dance, as a nonverbal and preverbal language, is a tool for connection, creativity and social action,” says Jodi Falk, Five College visiting lecturer in dance and the community-outreach coordinator. Falk initiated the project, calling on her connections to plan and organize Starburst. “Social action to me starts with embodying ourselves in real, full and authentic ways,” she says.

Falk’s job is to create links between communities and campuses through dance. Using single-day events and multiple-day programs, she works to develop long-lasting, reciprocal relationships among all involved.

Children from schools in Springfield, Holyoke, South Hadley, Amherst and Greenfield participated in Starburst workshops with students at Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, Smith and UMass. Each workshop closed with groups performing for one another from their home campuses via Skype.

“The five campuses already have some courses and vehicles for community engagement and outreach, and I wanted to create an event that made this permeability accessible to more folks,” says Falk. “My favorite quote comes from an elementary school student: ‘I didn’t know I could be so big and so awesome!’”

Photo by Suk-Lin Zhou MHC ’14.