Meet This Year's Global STRIDE Fellows

By Janie Vanpee, professor of French studies and faculty mentor for Global STRIDE Fellows, 2011-2013

This fall, Smith welcomed its fourth cohort of Global STRIDE Fellows. First-year students Marjorie Amon, Hannah Becker, Kaitlin Burns, Sara Ottomano, Gloria Lee, Annecca Smith, and Jenny Wang come to Smith with a passion for studying foreign languages and cultures and an interest in global issues and transformations.

Global STRIDE (Student Research in Departments) Fellows meet regularly with faculty mentors to discuss articles on second-language learning, cross-border travel and the challenges of intercultural exchanges, in preparation for studying abroad this coming summer. An intensive language program during the summer between their first and second year will enable them to accelerate their mastery of the foreign language they are studying and to enhance their future studies in linguistics, international relations, regional economics, Latin American studies, or international educational policy, to name some of their fields of interest.

In preparation for their experiences abroad this summer, the Fellows are interviewing the foreign exchange students in the American Studies Diploma Program, asking them for advice on how to adapt to living in another language and culture. Watch for their interviews on the Gate in the near future. Later in the year they will do research, in College Archives, on Smith’s longstanding commitments to and involvement in international education. They will post their findings on Smithipedia.

2011-12 Global STRIDE Fellows:

Annecca Smith’s experience in Germany, where she spent a gap year in Dinkelsbühl, a little town in the south of Germany, clarified for her the importance of studying a language in its own context. “Languages and/or internationalism are something I want to pursue further,” she explains. Living with a German family allowed her “to get an international perspective on not only big world events (like Osama bin Laden's death, or Egypt and the Middle East) but also daily life.” At Smith, Annecca is now refining her study of German grammar and literature, renewing with French and hoping to start Farsi spring semester through the Five-College Independent study program.

Like Annecca, Marjorie Amon also had the opportunity to spend a year abroad as a junior in high school. Her year in the Canary Islands helped perfect her knowledge of colloquial and more formal Spanish, and initiated her into the delights of teenage slang. She hopes to put her knowledge of the nuances of Spanish to use through work in the local Latino community.
English is a second language for two of this year’s Fellows.

**Jenny Wang**’s first language is Chinese, and she often travels to China to visit her grandmother in Hefei, though “I can’t understand her Chinese entirely because she speaks a dialect, and not Mandarin.” This semester, Jenny jumped into Chinese III and is learning to link sound to character as she tackles written Mandarin. She hopes to study in China this summer through the Hampshire College Summer Chinese Language Program in Hefei.

**Gloria Lee** was born in Korea and learned English as a young child. Like Jenny, she hopes that by taking Korean next semester she will be able to link written Korean to the Korean she continues to speak at home. For the moment, she is studying Spanish, pursuing her goal of becoming fluent by the time she graduates so that she can work on educational policy in Latin American countries. “I became passionate about education when I saw the amazing benefits and hope that it provided for families, communities, and nations,” she says.

**Sara Ottomano**’s family heritage is also what motivates her language study. She studied French in high school but is starting Italian this year. As she explains, “Part of my family emigrated from Italy to America in the early 1900s and I would love to reconnect with the relatives who stayed.” Sara will be seeking to accelerate her study of Italian on an intensive language program in Italy this summer in order to prepare her better for a Junior Year Abroad in Florence and for conversing with her re-discovered relatives.

**Hannah Becker** has already had the chance to study in an intensive summer program. She is well aware that her knowledge and practice of French at the Middlebury-Monterrey Language Academy two summers ago enabled her to start French at Smith at a high level. But she also has new ambitions. “My main aspiration is to learn Arabic,” she notes. “I want to learn a language with a different alphabet.” She believes that a knowledge of Arabic and French will serve her well if she decides to study international relations and politics of the Maghreb or the Middle East. That said, she also intends to advance her practice of Spanish, which she learned while volunteering in Ecuador this past summer. She hopes to study in Argentina this coming summer.

**Kaitlin Burns**, like most Global STRIDE Fellows, is multi-lingual, and studies both French and Spanish. She hopes to add Russian in the future. “My family hosted 12 year-old Ukrainian twin boys this August,” she explains. “It is possible that my parents will adopt them and it would be nice to know what they are saying when they jabber on at the dinner table and I am left without a clue of what they are talking about. Talk about experiencing language and culture first hand!”