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Donald Robotham

Robotham to Head Advanced Research Collaborative

Dr. Donald Robotham (Prof., GC, Anthropology) has agreed to serve as inaugural director of the GC's new Advanced Research Collaborative (ARC). In this capacity, explained GC Provost Chase Robinson, Robotham will work directly with GC research centers, institutes, and interdisciplinary committees to "foster connections between the research activities of CUNY faculty at the colleges and GC research programs and seminars; and provide a home for outstanding visiting scholars, postdocs, and others to collaborate with faculty and students."

As the focal point of the GC's collaborative research activities, ARC will bring to realization the third goal of the GC's 2012–16 Strategic Plan, which states: "The Graduate Center will deepen its research culture and increase its prominence as a national and international center of advanced learning and Ph.D. training by leveraging the depth and breadth of faculty excellence, the academic and cultural assets of New York City, and CUNY's scale."

Robotham is a graduate of the University of the West Indies and obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1987. A critic of the concepts of postcolonialism and postmodernism, he has worked extensively in the English-speaking Caribbean as well as among the gold miners of Ghana in West Africa, focusing on issues of development and concomitant difficulties caused by advanced capitalist globalization.

For the past three years, he has served as executive officer of the Office of Educational Opportunity and Diversity Programs (OEODP), a project that provides services to all graduate students enrolled at CUNY, but particularly those from underrepresented groups. Regarding his additional duties as ARC's inaugural director, Robotham says, "The most important thing is to build collaborative research around the interests and strengths of our GC and CUNY faculty and to exploit digital technology to the fullest to maximize the collaborative sharing of ideas and data."

Robotham, along with Robinson and Associate Provosts Louise Lennihan and Ann Henderson, welcome input, ideas, and suggestions, and encourage active participation from throughout the GC community, as they work together to establish the collaborative. For more information about it, see [http://www.gc.cuny.edu/About-the-GC/Provosts-Office/Strategic-Plan/Strategic-Planning-Council-\(1\)](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/About-the-GC/Provosts-Office/Strategic-Plan/Strategic-Planning-Council-(1)).

Faculty Lunch Hears of Future Plans and Lost Languages

"Today, for the first time in four years, I have nothing to say about the budget!" declared President William P. Kelly, who gave opening remarks at the spring luncheon for central faculty on February 7. "This gives us a chance to look forward rather than to simply scuttle about with numbers."

Kelly drew attention to the Graduate Center's "Strategic Plan," which seeks to chart a future for the institution over the next five years in response to fiscal uncertainty and decreasing investment in public higher education. Within the next few years, said the president, the Graduate Center will "focus intensely" on readying current and future doctoral students for the ever-changing "landscape of American higher education." The plans include increasing financial aid, pursuing competitive funding, and establishing an Office for Professional Development and Placement, which will provide support in preparing résumés and finding employment as well as instruction on using academic software systems, such as Blackboard and Moodle.

Among Kelly's other goals is "enhancing our research culture . . . everything from extending the transdisciplinary approach that we initiated with funding from the Mellon Foundation to investing in a variety of new faculty positions and supporting selected centers and institutes."

Following Kelly's address, Provost Chase Robinson introduced Juliette Blevins (Prof., GC, Linguistics), who served as honorary speaker at the luncheon. A world-class



Blevins addressing faculty



Juliette Blevins

phonologist, Blevins gave a brief presentation on “Endangered Languages and Linguistic Research.”

“We are living in the middle of a global language crisis,” Blevins said. Only “eight languages in the world, which [collectively] are spoken by over half of the human population,” continue to thrive, while “thousands” of minority languages are “severely endangered, and around four hundred are on the verge of extinction.” She offered other dismal facts. Since the 1990s, languages have been vanishing fast: “One language dies every two weeks . . . and fifty to ninety percent of the world’s languages will disappear this century.”

How do languages vanish and why? Aside from disease, short life expectancy, war, genocide, and natural disaster—all of which threaten languages spoken in remote corners of the world—Blevins suggests that many speakers are abandoning their cultural roots because of “attitudes” toward their language’s viability in a world dominated by the titans of language: Arabic, Bengali, English, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu.

“The bottom line,” said Blevins, “is that language loss means the loss of centuries of accumulated human knowledge . . . when a language disappears, we don’t know what history, ecological knowledge, or what scientific discoveries could be lost with it.”

But there’s hope for preserving and revitalizing waning unique languages. By promoting multilingualism in education and beyond, Blevins, joined by her colleagues and students in the GC’s Ph.D. Program in Linguistics, will continue to work with minority speakers and pioneer the field of linguistics, with the goal of preserving and studying languages on the cusp of extinction.

—Rachel Ramírez

Art History Program Adds Traditional Korean Art

Thanks to a three-year \$75,000 grant from the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS), the Ph.D. Program in Art History is now offering courses in traditional Korean art. In the spring semester Youngsook Pak, a leading authority on Korean art and a visiting professor from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, initiated the pilot course. Dr. Pak, a pioneer in teaching the history of Korean art, studied Eastern and Western art history at the universities of Heidelberg and Cologne and at Harvard and received her Ph.D. in East Asian art history from Heidelberg in 1981. In the coming semesters, the art history program will offer additional doctoral seminars not only in traditional and contemporary Korean art but also in Korean architecture and urbanism. The AKS award will also support the creation of visual resources for teaching Korean art as part of the program’s CUNY DiD project, one of the foremost online searchable databases of digital images in use in the United States.