

Department of Spanish

Departamento de español

Honors and Awards
Spring 2025
¡Felicidades a todos!



2024-25 Department of Spanish Honors and Awards



The Department of Spanish is pleased to offer awards and scholarships each spring to recognize the excellence and dedication of our undergraduate majors in Spanish. We congratulate the following students and recent graduates for their achievements and thank the generous donors who make these awards possible.

2024-25 Department of Spanish Honors and Awards



This year, the Department of Spanish is awarding a total of \$102,850 in awards and scholarships to 61 of our best and most deserving students. It represents a **53.6% increase** in relation to last year!

Adhering to our donors' wishes, the vast majority of these awards and scholarships go to students participating in **study-abroad programs**. And nobody knows how to run excellent, efficient and successful programs like the Department of Spanish. In fact, many of our students are able to study abroad for a lower cost than studying on campus.

Graduate Teaching Effectiveness Award

(Presenter: Prof. Germán Zárate-Sández)

The Graduate Teaching Effectiveness Award is given yearly to a graduate teaching assistant who is a consummate pedagogue and who excels in the craft of teaching. The recipient is not only the top choice of our Director of the Spanish Language Program, Dr. Germán Zárate-Sández, but the teacher rewarded with the highest student evaluations.

The recipient of the 2025 Graduate Teaching Effectiveness Award in Spanish is **Alex Agbabian**.



Alex Agbabian

I am honored to receive this award. It's the result of countless hours of support, guidance, and encouragement from many. To Germán, you've been an exceptional mentor and teacher to model after. Thank you for all your hard work in making us instructors feel supported and encouraging our creativity. To my classmates...¡sois los mejores! I learned something from each one of you in my teaching journey here. To my professors—Kristina, Benjamín, Antonio, Rob, y las dos Mercedes—you've introduced me to new ways of thinking. And thank you to my partner Josh, whose patience, reassurance, and love have kept me going through long days...ahora, ¡a Santander!

Graduate Research and Creative Scholar Award

(Presenter: Prof. Patricia Montilla)

The Graduate Research and Creative Scholar Award is given yearly to a graduate student who excels in research. The recipient of this award is someone with high intellect, an excellent ability to read critically, and a notable writer. The recipient of this award is the top choice of graduate faculty and the Director of Graduate Studies, Dr. Patricia Montilla. In this case, the decision was unanimous!

The recipient of the 2025 Graduate Research and Creative Scholar Award in Spanish is **Francisco ‘Paco’ Rivera Vega**.



Paco Rivera Vega

I would like to thank all members of the Spanish Department for the constant support and advice they have provided me throughout these two years as an instructor and a graduate student.

My gratitude goes to all donors, without their altruistic support this experience would never have been possible.

A special shout-out to Dr. Pablo Pastrana for his words of encouragement, all his counsel and guidance.

I am planning to work for one year in the USA; at the same time, I will be looking for a PhD program to apply to.

Muchas gracias también a todos mis profesores, compañeros, amigos y a mi esposa por su apoyo incondicional.

Michael Braun Award

(Presenter: Prof. Patricia Montilla)

The **Michael Braun Award** was established in memory of Michael Braun, who was an alumnus of our program who returned to become a beloved professor and mentor to students interested in becoming Spanish teachers. Since his untimely death in 2018, the department makes this award in his honor to celebrate his passion for the Spanish language and his dedication to training the next generation of equally passionate Spanish teachers.



The recipients of the 2025 Michael Braun Award are: **Layla Doyle** and **Lilian Powers**.

Layla Doyle



The Spanish Department at WMU has forever changed my life. The endless opportunities, support systems, and encouragement from fellow peers and staff is something I will carry with me through the rest of my future endeavors. I would like to give a special shout-out to Mariola Perez de la Cruz for heavily pushing me to consider the study abroad trip to Santander, Spain in 2023: an experience that entirely shaped who I am in this moment. Thank you to the family of Michael Braun for awarding me this scholarship and generously contributing to the department for many years. I owe my love for Spanish to WMU and will always cherish the memories I've made.



Lillian Powers

I would like to express a special thank you to the WMU Spanish Department for the incredible support and encouragement they have provided me throughout my time here. Particularly professors Vann, Pérez de la Cruz, and Montilla. Without them, and the help of scholarship donors (particularly the Braun family), I would have never taken my love of Spanish all the way to Santander last summer during my study abroad (where this photo was taken)! I plan to finish my dual-bachelor in Spanish and Political Science-Public Law and attend law school, hopefully becoming an attorney providing legal services for clients who speak English or Spanish!

Carolyn Harris Award

(Presenter: Prof. Patricia Montilla)

The **Carolyn Harris Award** was established by the faculty in memory of Dr. Carolyn Harris, who was a professor and undergraduate advisor in the Department of Spanish from 1985 to 2014. Each year we give the award to an undergraduate student who embodies some of Carolyn's outstanding qualities: generous, kind, service-oriented, pleasant, and passionate about what they do.



The recipient of the 2025 Carolyn Harris Award is: **Sara Bussey**.

Sara Bussey

iHola amig@s!

I am a third-year student majoring in Spanish, chemistry, and biomedical sciences. I have been a student in the Spanish department since high school and I cannot thank the Spanish Department enough for the opportunities it has provided, like allowing me to study abroad in Santander and helping me develop my love of linguistics. Special thanks to Dr. Vann for teaching my first Spanish linguistics class and helping me decide to come to WMU as a freshman! Also, thank you to all the donors and faculty members for supporting the students in the Spanish Department. We appreciate you!



Michael Millar Scholarship

(Presenter: Prof. Pablo Pastrana-Pérez)

Michael Millar was a faculty member in the Department of Spanish between 2002 and 2023. To those of us who knew him, Mike was the life of the party. He was a specialist in Latin America, the founder of our service-learning course, a passionate advisor, and the first director of our Costa Rica study-abroad program. We remember his passion for teaching, his fierce advocacy for students' rights, and his unique sense of humor. The **Professor Michael Millar Scholarship** has been established by his family, his friends, and faculty in his memory.



The recipients of the inaugural 2025 Michael Millar Scholarship are: **Ben Edlefson** and **Frankie Willis**.





Benjamin A. Edlefson

I would like to give special mention to... well, every professor I've had who has helped me reach this point. But I think Dr. Perez has been invaluable; she has been my professor for a few different semesters, and her door is almost always open to any student who may have a question. She's got a lot of experience and the influence to match, and I am certain my peers would agree to that. Furthermore, I'd like to add a helpful tidbit for scholars who are on the same path. If you think of Spanish not just as coursework, but as a gateway to new travel or employment opportunities, or you take an interest in the culture of Spanish-speaking countries, the language will be a passion as well as a field of study!

Frankie Willis



I am so incredibly grateful to be the recipient of the Professor Michael Millar Scholarship! This award means so much to me as a Spanish major at WMU and reminds me of my accomplishments. In the next semester I have the wonderful opportunity of studying abroad in Spain, a place I have always wanted to visit. I want to thank the department for this generous award, muchas gracias!

Mathilde Steckelberg Award

(Presenter: Prof. Lindsay Jeffers)

The Mathilde Steckelberg Award was established by her upon her retirement from our department. She taught Latin at WMU from 1927 to 1961, and was chair of the Department of Modern and Classical Languages, which included Spanish, from 1944 until she retired. She established a scholarship to recognize outstanding achievement by students majoring in the languages available at WMU at that time, directing that students would be selected for their performance and potential in the language.

The recipients of the 2025 Mathilde Steckelberg Award are: **Rory Campbell** and **Landon Palmer**.



Rory Campbell



I am a senior double majoring in Exercise Science and Spanish. After graduating this summer, I plan to continue my education pursuing a PhD in Occupational Therapy. My ultimate goal is to utilize my Spanish proficiency to ensure all patients receive the care they deserve regardless of what language they speak and create a sense of community.

Mil gracias a todos los del Departamento de Español que me ayudan y apoyan cada año. Sin ustedes y, en particular, sin el viaje a Santander, nunca habría tenido la confianza necesaria para estudiar español como mi otra especialidad. Les echaré de menos.

Landon Ellis Palmer



¡Saludos desde Costa Rica!

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the Steckelberg family and the Spanish Department for making my international studies in Costa Rica possible.

También quiero agradecer a los y las docentes que me inspiraron con su pasión y conocimientos, motivándome a estudiar español y servir a sus hablantes: Vanessa Sussman, Cecilia Sebastiani, el Dr. Michael Millar, la Dra. Lindsay Jeffers y el Dr. Pablo Pastrana. Sin ellos, nunca habría llegado hasta aquí y llevo sus enseñanzas conmigo cada día.

Suzanne M. Wheatley Scholarship

(Presenter: Prof. Mariola Pérez de la Cruz)

The Suzanne M. Wheatley Award is made each year to honor the memory of Suzanne M. Wheatley, who attended WMU from 1985 to 1988 and passed away before completing her studies. It is given to undergraduate students who embody some of Suzie's remarkable qualities, such as her love for the Spanish language and Hispanic cultures, as well as her zest for life.

The recipients of the first group of 2025 Suzanne M. Wheatley Scholarship, selected by faculty in the department, are: **Marta Baughman, Arián Blasco, Jacob Clevenger, Charlie DeGraves, Hope McHugh, Emma Olson, Teddy Richards, Anayeli Rosales and Naomi Washington.**



Marta Baughman



Muchísimas gracias a todos los que me han apoyado en mis estudios, y especialmente a la Profesora Pérez de la Cruz. Conocí a mucha gente fantástica el semestre pasado en Burgos, España. Mi familia de acogida, mis profesores del estudio, los estudiantes de mi grupo, y Profesora Pérez de la Cruz contribuyeron mucho a esa experiencia inolvidable. Recomiendo que cada estudiante de Español estudie en un país hispanohablante. Es una oportunidad perfecta para practicar Español, pero también se puede conocer a mucha gente fascinante y vivir en una cultura diferente. Eso es el consejo mejor que puedo dar.



Arián Blasco

Thank you to the Spanish faculty and the donors for all their generosity. I am very grateful for the opportunity to receive support towards furthering my studies. I value all the experiences I have had with the Spanish department, not only in class but also while studying abroad. One piece of advice for future Spanish students is that anything can be achieved with determination. I would also like to thank Pablo Pastrana and Mercedes Tasende for all their attention and support this year. I have learned a lot during my time at WMU, and I am happy to be able to continue my education in the Hispanic Studies M.A. program.



Jacob Clevenger

I am currently studying biomedical sciences and Spanish with a minor in chemistry and will graduate later in April. Next fall, I will start pharmacy school at the University of Michigan and will work towards a PharmD for four years. After that, I will most likely go on to residency since I am currently interested in clinical pharmacy in the hospital. I have really enjoyed my time in the Spanish department at WMU and want to thank all the wonderful professors for leading engaging classes and going the extra mile to guide students. I was able to travel to Spain with the department last summer and it was an amazing opportunity to see the world and experience a different way of life all while practicing the language!

Charlie DeGraves



¡Manalla kankuna y buenas a todos!
Estoy muy agradecido por haber recibido esta beca. Tales premios me ayudan a realizar mis metas personales y profesionales, así que les agradezco mucho a los de la familia Wheatley. En el futuro, pienso seguir estudiando con una maestría en estudios indígenas, evaluación de programas, y/o alternativas al desarrollo. Se realizarán estos estudios en Ecuador, México, Costa Rica, o España. A todos que aún no habéis empezado vuestra especialidad de español: aprovechad todas las oportunidades que son ofrecidas por el departamento. Un semestre al extranjero os ayuda más que cualquier curso acá en Kalamazoo.

Hope McHugh



A heartfelt thank you to the generous donors who support all the Spanish students. This award given in honor of Suzanne M. Wheatley, not only recognizes a love for the Spanish language and culture but also a passion for life. I am deeply grateful for this scholarship and for the continuous support of my professors, especially Professor Benjamin Torres, who has always been in my corner.

I am graduating in the fall and look forward to using my sales degree alongside my Spanish skills to make a meaningful impact in the business world

My advice to other Spanish students is to study abroad no matter what! You have the opportunity now so take it with no regrets!

Emma Olson



I am honored to be presented with this scholarship! It means a lot to me that my hard work is recognized by my professors.

I have had a wonderful time in the Spanish program here, and it has opened up many new opportunities for jobs that I never thought that I would have!

I had an incredible time in Santander last summer, and I wouldn't have been able to do it without support and encouragement from the faculty, especially Profesora Mariola Pérez de la Cruz.

Thank you to the Wheatley family for your generous donation!

Teddy Richards

¡Muchas gracias de todo corazón! ☺

Quiero expresar mi sincero agradecimiento a los donantes por su generosidad y apoyo. Sin su ayuda, no habría podido estudiar en el extranjero el verano pasado. Esta oportunidad me cambió para siempre, y regresé siendo una mejor versión de mí mismo, una de la que estoy orgulloso. Además, quiero dar un reconocimiento especial a Paco Rivera Vega por ser un excelente mentor y líder para los estudiantes de español en Santander, España. El año que viene comenzaré el programa de Máster en Contabilidad en verano, empezaré a prepararme para los exámenes de CPA participaré este verano en otro estudio en el extranjero en Irlanda.

Mi consejo para futuros estudiantes de español: Pues, cuando alguien les diga que estudiar en el extranjero vale la pena, ¡créanlo!



Anayeli Rosales



Thank you to the Spanish Department for selecting me as a recipient of the Suzanne M. Wheatley Scholarship! I also want to thank the Wheatley family; I am truly honored to be recognized for embodying qualities reminiscent of Suzanne M. Wheatley. A special thank you to Dr. Isea and Dr. Vann for their support and for making my final two undergrad Spanish courses at WMU so memorable. This Spring, I will graduate with a Bachelor's in Social Work and a minor in Spanish, and I look forward to pursuing my career as a migrant specialist.



Naomi Washington

Thank you for the unwavering support from the WMU Spanish Department.

This award encourages me in my pursuit of contributing meaningfully to communities in need of representation and support.

Marilyn L. & George T. Eddington Scholarship

(Presenter: Prof. Lindsay Jeffers)

The Marilyn L. & George T. Eddington Scholarship is intended to support support the study abroad experience of prospective teachers of Spanish prior to beginning their student teaching assignments.

The recipients of the 2025 Marilyn L. & George T. Eddington Scholarship are: **Ralie DeCator, Madeline Radeback, and Julia Young.**

Raylie DeCator

As an English and Spanish education major, I'm proud to accept the **Marilyn L. & George T. Eddington Scholarship** as it will allow me to focus on my education and acquiring the classroom contact hours needed for my degree. Receiving this award is a true honor, and I am immensely thankful for the recognition of my hard work and dedication to the field of education. This award is a testament to the unwavering support that I have received throughout my journey. I extend my gratitude to the **Eddington family** as their generosity made this award possible, and to the **Department of Spanish**, whose awards provided the opportunity for me to study abroad in Burgos, Spain last fall. ¡Muchas gracias a todos!



Madeline Radebach



I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Mercedes Tubino-Blanco for introducing me to this program. I am also incredibly thankful for the Spanish Department faculty for selecting me to receive the Marilyn L. & George T. Eddington Scholarship, and to Mrs. Denison for awarding me the Mary Badgley Study Abroad Scholarship. After Quito, I plan to continue my studies in Spanish and Elementary Education. My goal is to teach in a diverse school that prioritizes immersion programs. To future Spanish majors and minors is to stick to it and ask for help when needed! This skill is invaluable in many ways.

Julia Young



I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Eddington Family and the Spanish Department. I am truly honored to receive this scholarship—your generosity is sincerely appreciated.

Continuing my education in Spanish has been one of the most rewarding parts of my college experience, and I am excited to keep learning and growing in the field. Some of my best opportunities, friendships, and memories have come from WMU's Spanish program, and I look forward to building on these experiences.

Thank you for your support and for making a difference in students' lives!

Presidential Scholar and Robert and Barbara Felkel Cervantes Prize

(Presenter: Prof. Emeritus Robert Felkel)

The Presidential Scholar Award represents the highest academic honor at WMU that a department bestows on an undergraduate student.

Thanks to the generosity of our retired colleague, Professor emeritus Robert Felkel and his lovely wife, Magistra Barbara Felkel, we award the **Robert and Barbara Felkel Cervantes Prize** each year to our Presidential Scholar.

The WMU Department of Spanish Presidential Scholar for 2024-2025 and recipient of the 2025 Robert and Barbara Felkel Cervantes Prize is **Nic Buccilli**.





Nic Buccilli (they/ella)

Muchas gracias a Dra. Tasende por todo su apoyo, al Dr. Isea, cuya clase era un desafío muy provechoso, y al Dr. Vann por continuar a animarme en su jubilación (¡felicidades!).

Durante mi tiempo restante aquí, continuaré mi trabajo voluntario con la comunidad inmigrante en El Concilio. Siempre es un privilegio escuchar las historias (y las bromas) de los alumnos.

Después de graduarme, un puesto ideal para mí sería algo multidisciplinario que combinara mi conocimiento de español, mis habilidades mecánicas y mi pasión para aviación en un ambiente multilingüe y multinacional.

Honorary Speaker and 2024-25 Alumni Achievement Award recipient in Spanish



A native of Portage, MI, Phillip Eskander was an honors student at WMU between 2007 and 2011. He graduated with a dual degree in Spanish and Biomedical Sciences and minors in Arabic and Chemistry. Phillip went straight into medical school at MSU, from which he graduated as a Doctor of Osteopathy (D.O.) in 2015. He is now a Board-Certified Internal Medicine physician practicing in Southwest Michigan. As an internist, or Internal Medicine specialist, Dr. Eskander specializes in diagnosing and treating illnesses, diseases, and health problems.

Musical Interlude



Violin I: Guanqun Li (junior)

Violin II: Shawn Xiao (2nd yr graduate student)

Viola: Ulzhan Ydyryssova (1st yr graduate student)

Cello: Raphael Marañon (2nd yr graduate student)

- *La Cumparsita*, by Gerardo Matos Rodríguez
- *Tico Tico*, by Zequinha de Abreu
- *Over the Rainbow*, by Harold Arlen
- *Isn't She Lovely*, by Stevie Wonder
- *I Wish You Love*, by Laufey

President's Award for Study Abroad

(Presenter: Prof. Antonio Isea)

This year's recipients of the Department of Spanish President's Award for Study Abroad are:

Marta Favela and Kiona Powers, for their participation in the study-abroad program in Burgos, Spain (Fall 2025)

¡Enhorabuena y que disfruten de la experiencia!

Marta Favela



Majoring in Spanish isn't always easy, but immersing yourself whether through TV, movies, or daily practice can make a big difference. If you get the chance, study abroad to improve your fluency and experience the culture firsthand. It takes time to get comfortable with the language, so don't get frustrated, just keep going.

Kiona Powers



I am so grateful to the donors and to the Spanish Department for this scholarship. Thank you so much for this opportunity to study abroad in Burgos, Spain this fall! I am looking forward to immersing myself in the language and culture. I will be graduating the semester after I return with a degree in Spanish and Environmental Sustainability Studies.

I would like to give a special thank you to Professor Lindsay Jeffers, who has been with me since I was a freshman in high school taking classes at WMU; thank you for all of your help over the years and all of the opportunities you have shared with me. To future Spanish majors: knowing a second language will get you more places than you could imagine!

President's Scholarship for Study Abroad

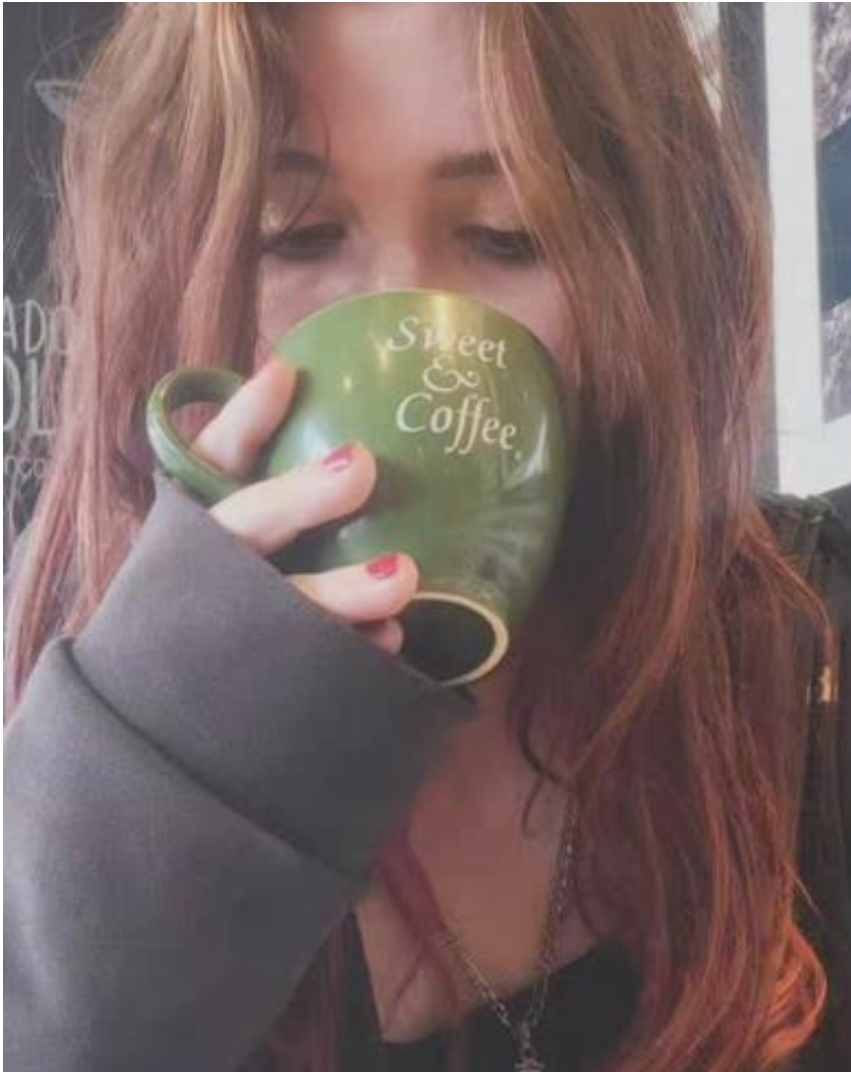
(Presenter: Prof. Antonio Isea)

This year's recipients of the Department of Spanish President's Scholarship for Study Abroad are:

- Rebecca Atwell, for Santander, Spain, Summer II 2025
- Cierra Creager, for Burgos, Spain, Fall 2025
- Stephany Rincón, for Burgos, Spain, Fall 2025
- Simon Wilke, for Burgos, Spain, Fall 2025

¡Felicitaciones y buen viaje!

Rebecca Atwell



I'm incredibly grateful to receive the President's Scholarship for Study Abroad, which is helping make my dream of studying in Spain come true. This opportunity means so much to me because it will allow me to improve my Spanish, experience a new culture, and learn in ways that go beyond the classroom. Studying abroad is something that is very important to do, and I know this experience will help me grow both as a student and as a person. A huge thank you to the generous donors and the amazing faculty who have made this possible, I truly appreciate your support!

Cierra Creager



I appreciate this generous gift and will use it well. Thank you to Profesora Mariola Pérez de la Cruz for pushing me to study abroad. She gave me the confidence to take this step, and I am grateful she did.

I know that studying abroad will enhance my Spanish proficiency. I hope to use this valuable skill in my future career to help give equal opportunities to those who don't speak English.

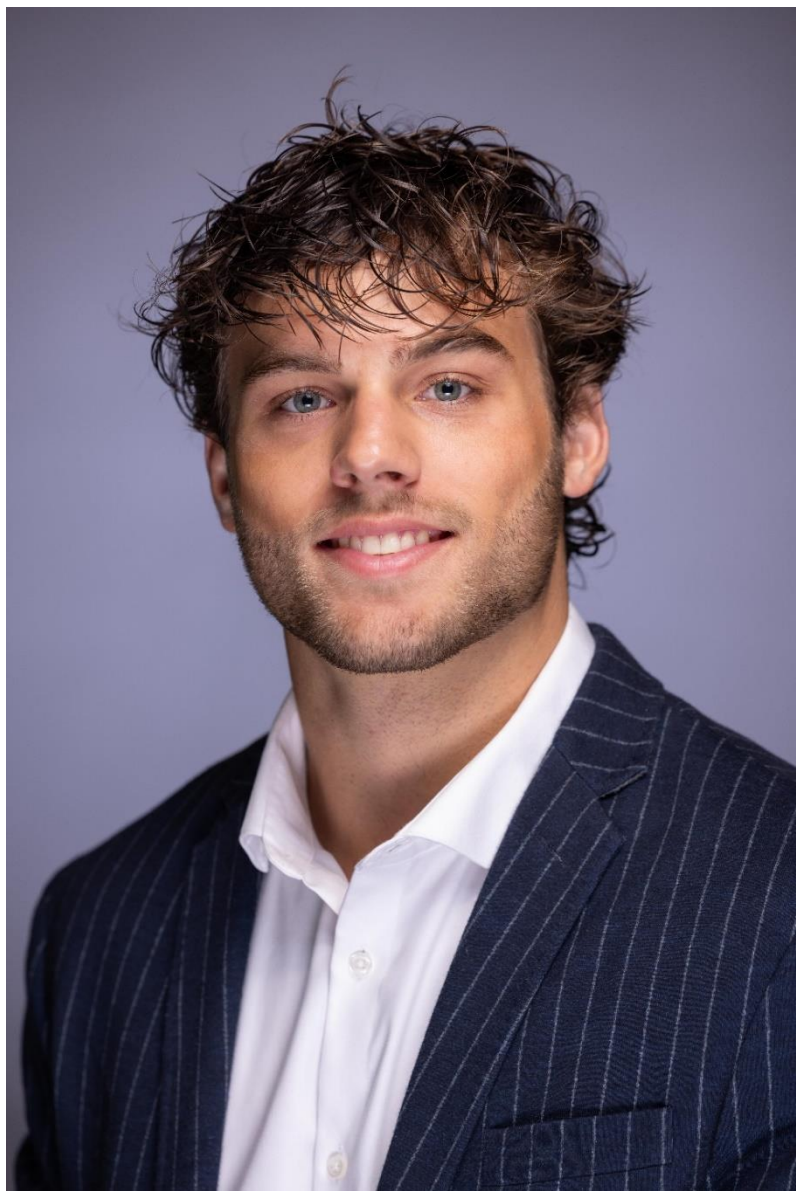
My advice to future Spanish majors would be to go for it! Studying abroad seems intimidating, but it's a great experience and an opportunity to take your Spanish to the next level.

Stephany Labrador Rincón

Como alguien que emigró de México con una pasión por ayudar a otros, quiero combinar mis estudios en Psicología y Español para ejercer en el área de la psicología clínica y apoyar a la comunidad hispanohablante a la cual pertenezco.

Estudiar español es más que aprender un idioma; es abrir puertas a nuevas culturas y conexiones.





Michael Simon Wilke

Estoy profundamente agradecido por esta beca y las oportunidades que brinda. ¡Gracias a los donantes y todos los profesores que he tenido. Sin todos ustedes yo no estaría donde estoy hoy. ¡Emocionado por Burgos 2025!

My future plans are to become a Certified Public Accountant and utilize my Spanish in my career. I aim to provide accounting services to individuals and businesses, particularly those who face language barriers. By bridging this gap, I hope to empower Spanish-speaking communities with the financial knowledge and resources they need to succeed.

For anyone wanting to learn Spanish, take the opportunity to study abroad! It's the best way to immerse yourself in the language and culture, and you'll never regret the experience.

Antonia H. Rostami Award

(Presenter: Prof. Germán Zárate Sánde)

The Antonia H. Rostami Award celebrates the life and work of Antonia H. Rostami, who was born in Mexico and lived in Portage, Michigan for many years, where she was a Spanish teacher. This award recognizes the initiative to study abroad, with preference given to future teachers of Spanish.

The recipients of the 2025 Antonia H. Rostami Award are:

- Olivia Anderson, for Burgos, Fall 2023
- Molly Dixon, for Heredia, Costa Rica, Spring 2024
- Gen Escobedo, for Burgos, Spain, Fall 2025
- Sara Lambrecht, for Quito, Ecuador, Summer I, and Burgos, Spain, Fall 2025
- Ramona Meszaros, for Santander, Spain, Summer II 2025
- Flor Romero, for Santander, Spain, Summer II 2025



Olivia Kay Anderson

Thank you for all the support in furthering my education. I really could not have done it all without the support of the generous donors and faculty at WMU. I am especially grateful to Dr. Lindsay Jeffers as she has supported me throughout my time at WMU. She is such a wonderful teacher and person, and I have the utmost respect for her.

After this semester, I will be completing the MATSE program in the College of Education to be certified to teach both Spanish and English at the Secondary level. For those future Spanish majors all I have to say is to fully embrace the language and jump all in, take the opportunity to do a study abroad, and listen to all the Spanish that you can.



Molly Dixon

Muchísimas gracias al Dr. Jeffrey Rostami y a la Dra. Antonia Rostami por esta beca. Su amabilidad es reconocida.

El Departamento de Español tiene un lugar especial en mi corazón, y mis estudios han fomentado tanto mi crecimiento personal como profesional. Quiero agradecer al Dr. Pablo Pastrana-Pérez, la Dra. Mercedes Tasende, la Dra. Kristina Wirtz y el Dr. Benjamín Torres por su apoyo y dedicación.

A los futuros estudiantes de español en WMU, les recomiendo que dediquen su tiempo a lo que les apasione, establezcan conexiones con sus profesores y compañeros de clase, y aprovechen cualquier oportunidad para viajar y practicar su español.



Gen Escobedo

Thank you to Dr. Jeffrey Rostami for his generous donation. This scholarship helps me so that I can continue in my career path to be a secondary education Spanish teacher. I am excited to continue my studies here at Western Michigan!



Sara R. Lambrecht

I would like to extend a special thank you to the donors of the Antonia H. Rostami Scholarship in Spanish and the wonderful professors and teaching assistants of the Spanish Department here at WMU. I am elated to have the opportunity of participating in two study abroad programs through the Spanish Department in the coming Summer I in Quito, Ecuador, and Fall 2025 semester, in Burgos, Spain. It is with your support, guidance and excellence in Spanish education that students, such as myself, are passionate and eager to learn and experience world language and cultures.

Ramona Isabel Mészáros



¡Hola a todos! This is my first year at WMU, and I would like to extend my gratitude to all of the members of the Spanish Department who have supported me in my transition to Western. I have made so many great connections and am so hopeful for what this study abroad experience will bring.

I am double majoring in Psychology and Spanish to become an occupational therapist. The ability to communicate with others in Spanish will allow me to offer care to a broader population.

Additionally, thank you to everyone who supports Spanish language students here at WMU, this wouldn't be possible without your hard work.

Flor Romero



I want to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude to all of the generous donors who support our community. Your kindness and generosity truly make a difference, and your contributions help create opportunities for growth, learning, and success. You are helping to shape the future, and I'm so thankful for your commitment to education.

Suzanne M. Wheatley Scholarship

(Presenter: Prof. Mariola Pérez de la Cruz)

The Suzanne M. Wheatley Award is made each year to honor the memory of Suzanne M. Wheatley, who attended WMU from 1985 to 1988 and passed away before completing her studies. It is given to undergraduate students who embody some of Suzie's remarkable qualities, such as her love for the Spanish language and Hispanic cultures, as well as her zest for life.

The recipients of the second group of 2025 Suzanne M. Wheatley Scholarship, selected by application, are: **Stephanie Barboza, Alyisa Eberhard, Tiffany Kiefer, Avery McConnell, Ryan Radawski, Grant Reinhart, Dennis Rodas, and Justin Varda.**





Stephanie Barboza

I would like to deeply thank the family of Suzanne M. Wheatley for their generosity in providing this scholarship in honor of their daughter. I am truly honored to have been selected for this award, which will help me further my Spanish studies.

I also want to thank my father, who has supported me throughout my college journey, and my professors, Tasende and Pérez de la Cruz, who have encouraged me to pursue my career in Spanish—even when, just two years ago, I couldn't even write in the language.

Upon completing my studies in Spanish and Biomedical Sciences in 2026, my goal is to support the Hispanic community by breaking down language barriers in the healthcare system.



Alysa Eberhard

Thank you to the donors of this scholarship, and all others who have supported me through my Spanish career thus far. All previous and current Spanish professors have helped give me confidence in my Spanish abilities, while encouraging me to explore more areas. With this in mind, I am excited to use this award toward my plan to study abroad this Summer II 2025 semester. While staying with a host family in Santander, Spain, I hope to travel to surrounding countries, such as Portugal and Italy, to further my knowledge of the world around us.

Tiffany Kiefer



I want to thank all the donors who support students at Western Michigan University. Your contributions make a significant impact by providing opportunities like study abroad programs.

This summer, I'll be studying in Quito, Ecuador, and I appreciate the role your generosity plays in making experiences like this possible for many students including myself.

Thank you so much for your support!

Avery McConnell



I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Wheatley family for their generous scholarship. With this award, I will be able to continue my Spanish studies in Quito, Ecuador this summer. I cannot wait to further my understanding of the language and immerse myself in the culture I have admired. Thank you for the support in my academic journey, I am deeply honored to be a recipient.

To my fellow Spanish students, take every opportunity that you can. Even if it's outside your comfort zone, you will appreciate your bravery later.



Ryan Radawski

I'm grateful to the donors and professors who have given me incredible opportunities. Shout out to Mariola. Your support has played a significant role in my journey, and I am grateful for the chance to further my studies in Spanish. The scholarship I have received from the Wheatley family is an important step for me, and I look forward to making the most of it. My future plans include completing my undergraduate degree with a double major in Accounting and Spanish, followed by pursuing a master's degree.



Grant P. Reinhart

I want to give a special thanks to the Wheatley family for their amazing generosity. With this scholarship, I will be able to study abroad in Quito, Ecuador, this summer, exploring the biodiversity of the Bellavista Cloud Forest and the Galápagos Islands, while embracing the culture of the Otavalo. I can not thank you enough!

Me gustaría agradecer a mi profesora Pérez de la Cruz por inspirarme a estudiar en el extranjero y ayudarme a hacerlo.

Future Spanish majors: don't think that a study abroad experience is out of your reach! There are opportunities for scholarships that will make these experiences possible for you. There are wonderful people that will help you accomplish your goals; you just need to make the effort to apply!

Dennis Rodas



Justin Varda

I'm incredibly grateful to Profesora Mariola Pérez de la Cruz for her guidance, unwavering support, and to the Wheatley family for their generous scholarship, helping me pursue my passion for Spanish.

Looking ahead, I would like to pursue an MBA, potentially focusing on nonprofit organizations.

To future Spanish majors: Learning a language is a marathon, not a sprint. Anyone can master it with patience and perseverance.

Ruth Kirby Scholarship

(Presenter: Prof. Mercedes Tasende)

Ruth Y. Kirby was a life long educator who taught French and Latin for many years in both the Portage and Kalamazoo Public School systems before joining the faculty in the College of Education at Western Michigan in 1945. For the 23 years of teaching that followed, Professor Kirby served as an inspiration to her classes and colleagues alike. Her mastery of languages was second only to her unwavering dedication to her students. Because of her very generous bequest in 1990, Ruth Kirby's devotion to our students continues today by supporting them in their studies on campus and abroad.

The recipients of the 2025 Ruth Kirby Scholarship are: **Maya Alvarez, Esmeralda Cabrera, Kristofer Fedje, Lexus Lawlor, and Lucas Niemchick.**



Maya Alvarez



Thank you to the Kirby Family for the scholarship! I am very excited to use the award to fully immerse myself in the experience of living in Spain. I also want to thank Profesora Tasende for supporting my learning and preparing me to live in Spain this summer!

As for my future plans, I'm aiming to graduate with degrees in both Electrical Engineering and Spanish and to pursue a career in Controls Systems.

For prospective Spanish majors, my advice is to read many books in Spanish and to take advantage of study-abroad opportunities!



Esmeralda Cabrera Salvador

I'm a first-generation student. Currently I'm a 3rd year undergrad student double majoring in Biomedical Sciences and Spanish. I am planning to study abroad in Santander this summer!

In the future I want to continue my studies In a medical field! I plan on attending PA school.

My advice to Spanish majors is to work hard and take advantage of study abroad opportunities.

Thank you to the donors who made this study abroad trip possible for me.

Kristofer Fedje

I am honored to be recognized as a Ruth Y. Kirby scholarship recipient this year. I want to thank Dr. Robert Vann for encouraging me to pursue the Advanced Graduate Degree Program in Spanish to learn more about the language and culture which will better support my Registered Student Organization, Latino Pilots Association--WMU Chapter. After graduating I hope to instruct the next generation of airline flight crews while continuing to support DEI initiatives and be an ally to underrepresented communities in the aviation industry.



Lexus Lawlor



I am so grateful to have received this generous award from the Kirby family! I am also thankful for every Spanish professor I have had in the last four years, as they have inspired me to push myself and accomplish more than I ever thought possible. Thanks to them, I plan on starting my master's degree in Hispanic Studies here at WMU next fall. My advice for other Spanish majors is to study abroad! WMU has outstanding scholarship opportunities that make studying abroad more accessible. I studied abroad in Costa Rica in Spring 2024; it was a life-changing experience that strengthened my knowledge and improved my confidence in my Spanish-speaking skills.



Lucas Niemchick

I'd like to express my sincerest gratitude to the Kirby family for their generosity to myself and the Spanish department at WMU. To have gone through this program has been a great privilege and I hope to continue my studies post graduation, as I pursue a master's degree in Hispanic Studies. I am most excited to broaden my perspective this summer as I study abroad in Santander, Spain. As well, I would like to thank Dr. Robert Vann for providing me the inspiration and motivation to improve as a student and to pursue a graduate level degree.

¡No puedo esperar para explorar mi future como estudiante de español!

Spanish Advancement Scholarship

(Presenter: Prof. Mercedes Tubino-Blanco)

This is one of our newest awards. It was established through the generosity of Dr. Irma López, a longtime Professor and Chair of Spanish who is now the Dean of the Lee Honors College, and recognizes the promise of a Spanish major or minor with a scholarship to support their continued studies at Western Michigan University.

The scholarship winners for the 2025 academic year are: **Abigail Bell, Shane Donovan, Adelle Gauthier, Cali Grissen, Fiona Hagan, Dhani James, Noah Lenaghan, Abigail Lopez, and Adi Parreno**



Abby Bell



¡Hola! Soy un estudiante de tercer año que estudia español y bioquímica. Estoy deseando viajar a Quito este verano para estudiar en el extranjero. Esta beca me ayudará a costear el viaje. ¡Muchas gracias al departamento de español y especialmente a la Dra. López!

Shane Donovan



I started learning Spanish in high school but stopped after 2 years, and continued in my first year of college.

The Spanish department at WMU is one of the most welcoming and kind groups of people I have ever been a part of.

I want to thank the donors for graciously awarding me this scholarship.

I also want to give a shout out to one of the first people in the Spanish department I met, and an amazing teacher and friend, Erin Mortimer.

This summer I will be travelling to Santander Spain to study at Universidad de Cantabria. I plan to be using my knowledge of Spanish in my future career as a psychiatrist.



Adelle Celeste Gauthier

First off, I want to thank the donors of this award. I am immensely grateful to receive this award towards my education. I want to thank all my Spanish professors, but one in particular: Profesora Mercedes Tasende.

I had just transferred from GVSU, and she was my first professor at WMU. I had almost given up on learning Spanish because I struggled at GVSU, but Profesora Tasende gave me a reason to not give up. She taught the material in a way that was easy to understand and made class a supportive environment so learning could occur.

I plan to continue studying Spanish and attend a study abroad semester. Beyond college, I plan to use my Spanish in my career as a teacher in a bilingual class or possibly teach overseas.

My advice to Spanish majors would be don't give up. It can get difficult and confusing, but I promise it will click. Learning a new language is a way to connect, love and understand so many more people.

Cali Grissen



Thank you very much to Dr. Irma López for your generosity and investment into my education. I am honored and grateful to be selected as a recipient of the Spanish Advancement Scholarship. I plan on going to Quito, Ecuador this summer to immerse myself in the Spanish language and culture. I look forward to improving my fluency of Spanish, and growing relationships with the people I meet in Ecuador. I hope to be able to someday speak with Spanish speakers with complete fluidity.

Fiona Hagan



Hi, my name is Fiona Hagan, this scholarship will help fund my study abroad trip to Quito, Ecuador this summer! Thank you to all the donors that make this possible! I also want to thank Mariola Perez de la Cruz, who has inspired me and has allowed my appreciation for the Spanish language to grow.

I am majoring in Nursing and minoring in Spanish. My dream is to, hopefully, one day become fluent so that I can translate for my Spanish-speaking patients. This is an area of Nursing that I feel very passionate about, and by going to Quito this summer, I am getting one step closer to this dream! Thank you again for helping me to have this opportunity.

Dhani James



I am honored to receive this scholarship, and beyond grateful to the donors that made this possible! I have been learning Spanish since preschool, and my love and skills of this language grow everyday in WMU's program. Aside from my major, I am also considering a Spanish Master's and a teaching certificate. For anyone looking to major in the future, know that you are capable, and never be afraid to reach out to your professors. Western is here to support you!



Noah Lenaghan

My next step with the Spanish language will be to study abroad in Ecuador. The experience of living with a local family, attending the Universidad San Francisco de Quito, and experiencing the local customs and environment will allow me to create a connection to the language that can hardly be had by other means.

I want to express my upmost gratitude to Dr. Irma López, Professor of Spanish and Dean of the Lee Honors College, who supports students like me make their dreams of studying abroad a reality.

Abigail Lopez



Thank you so much Dr. Lopez for your generous donation which has allowed me to participate in the Quito, Ecuador study abroad program next semester! Thank you to Dr. Mercedes Tubino-Blanco for being an amazing professor and being the faculty leader for this trip! I am very excited to study abroad during Summer I in Ecuador and to continue working on my Spanish. After this trip, I will work strenuously to finish out my last year at WMU strong!



Adi Parreno

I would like to thank the donors who contribute to this scholarship and make experiences like these possible for students like me. I had decided to tag along so last minute, that I was not able to apply for a scholarship then, but I am extremely grateful that I have this opportunity now. I would not trade the time that I had in Ecuador for anything else. I was completely immersed in the culture, the Spanish language, and had such a welcoming host family, as well as getting to visit the Galapagos Islands with one of my dear friends who was also part of the study abroad group.

I also would like to thank the late Professor Millar. I took his SPAN 1010 class in the Fall of 2022, and it ignited my passion for learning Spanish and changed the trajectory of my college career. I would not have declared Spanish as my minor if it were not for him.

Travel Study Award

(Presenter: Prof. Lindsay Jeffers)

The Travel Study Award from the Department of Spanish was established to help students to study abroad. It is also meant to help them defray the cost of airfare and personal expenses while studying abroad.

These are the students receiving a 2025 Travel Study Award in Spanish: Alayna St.Clair, Landon Palmer, Maya Thomas, and Hally Warner.

Alayna St. Clair



First, I would like to thank the gracious donors for providing and awarding this scholarship to our program. I am very honored to be receiving this generous award. I also want to thank my Spanish professors, Mariola Pérez de la Cruz, Benjamín Torres, and Antonio Isea. I cannot express how appreciative I am for all your guidance, compassion, and exceptional teaching methods. You all have aided in my Spanish improvement and expanded my knowledge on multiple topics. Because of this considerate donation and spectacular professors, I will be able to use my skills this summer in Santander, Spain!

Landon Ellis Palmer



¡Saludos desde Costa Rica!

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the Steckelberg family and the Spanish Department for making my international studies in Costa Rica possible.

También quiero agradecer a los y las docentes que me inspiraron con su pasión y conocimientos, motivándome a estudiar español y servir a sus hablantes: Vanessa Sussman, Cecilia Sebastiani, el Dr. Michael Millar, la Dra. Lindsay Jeffers y el Dr. Pablo Pastrana. Sin ellos, nunca habría llegado hasta aquí, y llevo sus enseñanzas conmigo cada día.

Maya Thomas



Halli Warner

My future plans include traveling to Spain this summer, and when I return, I plan on taking more Spanish classes toward my major.

I am very thankful to have received funding for my Spanish studies. I would also like to thank Mariola Perez de la Cruz and Benjamin Torres for helping me throughout my learning.

My advice for future Spanish majors would be to keep going! The more you learn the more you grow :)

Recognition of Department Service-Learners and Volunteers

(Presenter: Prof. Lindsay Jeffers)

We honor all of our students participating in Service learning opportunities in our community schools, hospitals, legal offices, immigrant services, and administrative posts.

Olivia Anderson, Marissa Boutwell, Maxwell Connor, Jillian Hawley, and Kylo Scheffers

Phi Beta Kappa

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**(Presenter: Prof. Kristina Wirtz,
Theta of Michigan Chapter Secretary)**



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THANK YOU!!!

We would like to thank all our volunteers. Special thanks to **our graduate teaching assistants**, who have helped with the computer projection, and the many logistical tasks before, during and after this ceremony.

And our heart-felt gratitude to an essential person in our department, who is always willing to lend a hand and does it with grace and generosity, our Administrative Assistant, **Mrs. Colleen Sante.**

*¡Enhorabuena y
nuestros mejores
deseos para todos!*

**Congratulations,
students!**

*Si te gradúas este semestre, que todo
te vaya super bien. Sigue en contacto.*