

Teaching American Literature in Greece Shows Power of Collaborating Across Cultures

Stockton Associate Professor Kristin Jacobson Is First Faculty Member To Participate in Exchange with Aristotle University

For Immediate Release; with Jacobson photos on [flickr](#)

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www.stockton.edu/media ssociate professor of Literature at Stockton University
summer has been teaching American literature to students at Aristotle University
largest universities in Greece's public system of higher education.

"It's important to think about American culture in a global context that's the heart and soul of our graduate degree in American studies," she said. "Stockton has a commitment to international education, which is needed because our culture doesn't exist in isolation."

Jacobson, the first Stockton faculty member to participate in an ongoing exchange with Aristotle University, spent two weeks teaching undergraduate classes and meeting with graduate students and faculty. She also gave public lectures on adventure and the environment, feminist teaching methods and technology, and creative thinking and writing with a focus on American wilderness. About 80,000 students attend the university in Thessaloniki.

She gave the students "an opportunity to grapple with an American poet making a connection to Greek culture," by discussing the poem "Helen," by Hilda Doolittle, a writer of the

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Century known as "H.D."

The writer states that "All Greece hates Helen of Troy," a jumping off point for the students to discuss H.D.'s intent and "how it makes them feel."

"Is she using Greece as a way to represent a difficult idea, about patriarchal cultures and Western thinking?" Jacobson inquired.

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Students uncovered a range of interpretations for how the poem interpreted Greek and American cultures and their views on beauty, women's roles in politics, and whether or not Western thinking about these topics has changed since H.D. wrote the poem.

Jacobson's role was to begin the exchange of faculty and help to grow the program, which is intended to "find ways for our students to communicate with their students, through virtual and/or real exchanges," she said. "Students at both institutions may work on a project together via the internet," she added.

Tatiani Rapatzikou, an assistant professor in the Department of American Literature and Culture in the School of English at Aristotle University, will visit Stockton in October to give a public lecture and teach several classes, including a graduate American Studies class with Deborah Gussman, professor of American Literature.

In addition to teaching, Jacobson had the opportunity to learn more about the daily lives of Greek citizens enduring economic and societal upheaval.

"Greece is really in a crucial time with the refugee crisis, the future of the European Union, and the significant economic austerity measures they are grappling with," she said. "Taxes were raised on coffee and other daily essentials - almost everything you purchased was being taxed."

There are hiring freezes in many fields, including at universities and hospitals, she said.

"I saw protests and students participating in democracy, including student elections, which are taken so seriously that the university does not hold classes then, to enable everyone to vote."

The port city of Thessaloniki is a beautiful juxtaposition of modern infrastructure set amidst Byzantine architecture.

"There's a very modern café with an archeological dig going on by the side of the road," she said. "In trying to build the metro, they found artifacts from the ancient road, which are being researched, but which also delayed construction."

Her trip included visits to Thessaloniki's

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Two major funds also have been established to enable students and faculty to study and work in