

Regional

Linguist LaFond organizes space meeting

College professors are called upon to do much more than teach their classes and conduct research. Service – to their academic departments, the university, as well as to the greater community – is an important part of the role that professors play. One Southern Illinois University Edwardsville professor who has embraced service as a way of life is Larry LaFond.

LaFond, an associate professor in the department of English language and literature and associate dean in the college of arts and sciences, was born in New Brighton, Minn. He obtained his bachelor's in Greek and Hebrew at Concordia College in St. Paul, Minn., a master's in divinity from Luther-Northwestern Theological Seminary, also in St. Paul, a second master's degree in applied linguistics from Old Dominion University in Virginia and his doctorate in linguistics from the University of South Carolina. For LaFond, the connection between language and theology is very clear.

"Many people who go to study theological studies end up studying a variety of languages in the process," LaFond said. "The same was true for me. I ended up studying German and Latin and Greek and Hebrew and fell in love with that language learning and later ended up combining that love for language learning with my profession by going into linguistics."

When asked about the controversies surrounding the translation of the Bible, LaFond takes the approach of the linguist. "Translation is an art form, not a direct science," he said. "Anybody who speaks more than one language knows that it is complicated finding exactly the right kinds of words. One might think that this or that word means this in Greek and so you translate to that word in English, but frequently that kind of translation does not communicate well the original intent or original meaning of the text."

Linguistics, LaFond said, is an important field because it has to do with human communication as a whole, not just language. "We care about anything related to being



Dr. Larry LaFond

human. Language is an integral piece of our humanity and it is one that I find particularly fascinating," he said.

Facilitating communication among humans is also part of what LaFond does at SIUE. Currently he is putting the final touches on a colloquium he is organizing titled "Thinking about Space."

"One of the reasons we settled on that topic is because this year we were very excited to dedicate SIUE's new observatory," LaFond explained. "We have had professor Jeffrey Sabby involved in the construction of that. And one of the things that makes for a good colloquium in this university is if we are able to come up with a title that

can be understood in a lot of different ways. Among those who work with outer space may be thinking of space in that way. And in fact one of our keynote colloquium speakers will be longtime astronaut Story Musgrave and we are very excited to have him come to SIUE. But we are not just thinking about space as outer space, but also about inner

Aldemaro Romero College Talk

space. We are thinking about spatial relationships, about space the way a geographer might, or the way a musician might look at the spaces on a staff."

The colloquium, which will be held March 27 and 28, will include presentations from 166 individuals in areas ranging from anthropology to physics. About half of the presenters will be current SIUE students. The full colloquium schedule can be found at <http://www.siu.edu/artsandsciences/colloquia/>. All presentations are free and open to the general public.

After his work on the colloquium is completed, LaFond will be back to his studies on linguistics, this time researching the different dialects used by the people of Illinois.

"All of us speak a dialect," LaFond said. "And there are some unique characteristics about how people pronounce things in different parts of the country as we know." He has been conducting research in this area with Kristine Hildebrandt, an assistant professor in the department of English language and literature at SIUE. "One of the things we are finding has to do with a leveling of sounds in the vowel system, but most of these are not something that you would detect with the native ear," LaFond explained. "It is something we have to use computer modeling to see that the vowels are actually being produced in a slightly different way than in some other parts of Illinois. What I have been focusing on has been the kinds of word choices that people make and the kind of syntactic or grammatical structures that they use. That has been my work."

Aldemaro Romero is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.

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