

# HONORS

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY | FALL 2014

*Magazine*

## COMPETITIVE EDGE

Honors student-athletes  
excel on the field and in  
the classroom



MIDDLE  
TENNESSEE  
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## CALA Leads in Language Learning

For ten years, teens and adults have jumpstarted their understanding of new languages during the University's Center for Accelerated Language Acquisition (CALA) five-day Summer Language Institute. Many people with no experience in Spanish or French who took the 2013 placement test at MTSU tested out of one to four semesters of instruction after taking CALA sessions.

Dr. Ron Messier, professor emeritus and second director of the Honors Program, attended a CALA Spanish class this summer before a trip to Spain. "The class has been great! Even better than I had hoped. Brian [the instructor] is really a very skilled teacher," he said.

Dr. Fred Mensch, an MTSU Latin teacher, observed the new 2014 CALA Latin class and reported, "It was enjoyable and instructive. . . . [The methods] are worth trying [and] should be made available to all prospective teachers."

Dr. Ann McCullough, a professor of French at MTSU, tested into fourth-semester German after 10 days in a CALA German class.

Dr. Shelley Thomas, associate professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures and founder/director of CALA, said, "We all understand that we don't acquire a taste for coffee by looking up its qualities on the Internet nor do we acquire the skill of riding a bike by memorizing its parts. Research on language acquisition shows we acquire our second language the way we acquired our first: through direct experience and engaging contexts like stories."

CALA classes use the intensive language acquisition tools Total Physical Response (TPR) and Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS). There is direct experience with new vocabulary first, then personal

interaction and games to deepen new knowledge. Finally, there's a question/answer session about stories and language. Some beginners are able to use new vocabulary in just five days.

"We take about 200 to 300 words that students can touch, see, and act out. We don't use any words that they don't actually experience in class, so that it goes into long-term memory. We've had people take Level 1 and come back a year later for Level 2, and they say they are able to pick right back up where they left off," said Thomas.

The CALA immersion classes started with a Special Projects Grant that Thomas was awarded in 2003. Test results for that summer were published in *Fluency through TPRS/Storytelling* by Blaine Ray, inventor of TPRS. The book is now in its sixth edition, and its publisher, Contee Seely of Command Performance Language Institute Publishing, traveled to MTSU this summer to see CALA classes in action. Seely donated over \$100,000 in 2012 to

support and develop the program.

Since 2003, Thomas has been invited to coordinate classes or teacher workshops at the Tennessee Foreign Language Institute in Nashville, the University School of Nashville, O'More College of Design, the Tennessee Center for Child Welfare, and the Isha Vidya School in Coimabtoe, India. CALA has also provided volunteer



Mark Byrnes, left, dean of Liberal Arts; Meredith Kerr, development officer; and Philip Phillips, right, Honors associate dean, express their appreciation to publisher Contee Seely for his generous contribution to the Center for Accelerated Language Acquisition (CALA), founded by Shelley Thomas, center.

teachers, free materials, and workshops for the Murfreesboro Hispanic Family Center and Rutherford County and Murfreesboro City schoolteachers.

Laura Clippard, Honors fellowship coordinator, recommends CALA training for Fulbright Scholars who will teach English abroad. An example is Adam Emerson, who said, "I acquired not only an extensive French vocabulary but also an understanding of the ways in which we acquire language, best practices for ensuring my students' comprehension of important concepts, and effective classroom management techniques."

Brian Roberts and Ahmad Jeddeeni teach Spanish and Arabic CALA classes, respectively.

Roberts graduated with majors in psychology, philosophy, and Spanish from MTSU. After living and traveling in Spain and France, he earned a Master of Arts in Teaching. He learned TPR and TPRS during an internship with Dr. Thomas and was hired as the only language specialist for the Tennessee Center for Child Welfare. He continues to teach for CALA each summer.

Jeddeeni, a native of Syria, earned a degree in English literature from the University of Damascus. He came to MTSU as a graduate student with a Fulbright teaching assistantship in 2009 and taught Arabic for two semesters. He discovered TPR and TPRS in Dr. Thomas's methodology class. He has taught Arabic for CALA and as a graduate assistant in the Foreign Languages and Literatures Department.

CALA offers training in TPR/TPRS in the afternoons immediately following summer language classes.

Rutherford City Schools, Murfreesboro City Schools, and the Tennessee Foreign Language Institute have sent teachers to CALA.

Because of CALA's success, Thomas was invited to bring the program to the Honors College, and Dr. Mark Byrnes, dean of the College of Liberal Arts, invited her to give a demonstration to the college's board of directors this spring.

Thomas told the board, "We want CALA to be an example of brain-based teaching to the teaching profession and continue to evolve and improve methods and teaching skills and provide language classes for the global community."

Doug Young, board president, asked, "How can we make MTSU number one in this?"

Thomas replied, "The demand for year-round classes requires serious investors who can provide a year-round salary for a full-time assistant coordinator and a full-time teacher. This will make us number one in the nation."

The program has grown from one TPR/TPRS-trained teacher delivering one week of Spanish class to five weeks offering up to five languages, which Thomas coordinates voluntarily. Course offerings this summer were Arabic, French, Spanish, Latin, and German.

Since 2003, Thomas has written and received MTSU grants to pay teachers and a full-time employee because income from the classes is insufficient. Anyone interested in investing in CALA is encouraged to contact her.

Find details at [www.acceleratedacquisition.com](http://www.acceleratedacquisition.com) or email Dr. Thomas at [Shelley.Thomas@mtsu.edu](mailto:Shelley.Thomas@mtsu.edu). 