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Contact

Melissa Weber, Director of Communications
Phone: 320-589-6414, weberm@morris.umn.edu

Jenna Ray, Editor/Writer
Phone: 320-589-6068, jrray@morris.umn.edu

Genova Receives Imagine Fund Award for Research in Argentina

Summary: The project will focus on race and the national family.

(July 11, 2014)-Thomas Genova, assistant professor of Spanish, received a 2014 Imagine Fund award for research on race and the concept of the national family. Genova will spend this month in Argentina doing archival research on a 19th-century project that brought American schoolteachers to Argentina.

In the mid-1800s American writer and education reformist Mary Mann worked with Argentine ambassador Domingo Sarmiento to send American women to Argentina as teachers for the rural population. The teachers lived and taught in Argentina for more than 30 years, learning Spanish and teaching the children of immigrants.

Genova's work will be used to situate Mann's novel *Juanita*, which depicts an American governess working on a Cuban plantation. At the end of the book, the governess takes the children to the United States with her to grow up in an allegedly healthier environment than Cuba. The notion of the Cuban children in *Juanita* being sent to America to be raised and the American teachers being sent to Argentina to teach are quite similar, portraying Latin Americans as the children and Americans as their teachers and parental figures.

After coming across letters between Sarmiento and Mann, Genova became fascinated with the plans and details to send these women to Argentina. Very little has been written about this project, and Genova hopes that the research in Argentina might answer various questions about the project, including what was being taught and how the Argentine people reacted.

"Mann writes this novel, but at the same time she is involved in this project of sending American women to teach Latin American children these values, the absence of which she is bemoaning in her novel *Juanita*," says Genova.

Genova traveled to Argentina in early July. He will spend a month conducting archival research on Sarmiento's project and will present initial findings in September. Genova plans to have a book proposal by the end of the 2014-15 school year.

This project is supported by generous funding from the University of Minnesota's Imagine Fund Awards.

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