

## 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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**Contact:** Maryjane Briant  
News and Media Relations Director  
Galloway, N.J. 08205  
Maryjane.Briant@stockton.edu  
(609) 652-4593  
[www.stockton.edu/media](http://www.stockton.edu/media)

**Galloway, N.J.** - Kristin Jacobson, associate professor of Literature at Stockton University, this summer has been teaching American literature to students at Aristotle University, one of the 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 global education, which is needed because our culture doesn't exist in isolation."

Jacobson, the first Stockton faculty member to participate in an ongoing exchange program 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 the 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 claim about Greek culture," by discussing the poem "Helen," by Hilda Doolittle, a writer of the early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 Roman forum and the White Tower, "an icon of the city on the waterfront dating to when Thessaloniki was a walled city occupied by the Turks," she said.

She credited Rapatzikou and David Roessel, professor of Greek Languages and Literature, with initiating the exchange program, and thanked Deans Lisa Honaker of the School of Arts & Humanities and Rob Gregg of the School of General Studies for their support. "The hospitality of Aristotle University was amazing and the faculty and students were open and welcoming," she added.

"Greek culture is an important node in thinking about globalization and global learning," which helps prepare Stockton students to be citizens of the world, Jacobson said.

The university's commitment to working with institutions in Greece and to Hellenic Studies includes some extraordinary resources, such as the Dean C. and Zoe S. Pappas Center for Hellenic Studies and the Constantelos Hellenic Collection and Reading Room, a statewide repository for the New Jersey Greek-American Oral History Project. The Rev. Demetrios J. Constantelos, a retired priest and Stockton professor who is an expert in the field of Byzantine (medieval Greek) history, donated his collection of 3,000 rare and important works to the university.

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Two major funds also have been established to enable students and faculty to study and work in the field. The late trustee, Dean Pappas and his wife, Zoe, committed \$250,000 in 2015 to establish a Greek Art and Architecture Fund to provide students with new learning experiences. In July 2016, Atlantic City businessman George C. Georges pledged \$100,000 to establish the Constantine George Georges and Sophia C. Georges Endowed Professorship of Greek Art and Architecture, in honor of his late parents.

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