

Welcome to the Genius Factory

Graduate Center Anthropology Alum wins MacArthur "Genius" Grant

The Anthropology Program at The Graduate Center now boasts three alums who are recipients of MacArthur "genius" grants. That's more than any other graduate anthropology program in the country except the University of Chicago. The CUNY program won that laurel on June 22, 1999, when Graduate Center alumnus Denny Moore was awarded a \$365,000 grant by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for his groundbreaking linguistic studies of various Amazonian indigenous populations. Moore, who received his doctorate in 1984, joins two other CUNY Anthropology alumnae, cultural anthropologist Faye Ginsburg, and biological anthropologist Pat Wright, in winning the prestigious MacArthur fellowship. The Graduate Center's late Dis-

tinguished Professor of Anthropology Eric Wolf also received a MacArthur grant.

Moore's work has focused on the description of indigenous languages in the Amazon Basin in South America, primarily in Brazil, where some 130 different lingual groups exist. Despite this rich diversity of tongues, there were few formal studies of Brazil's native Amazonian languages prior to Moore's work, which began in 1975 when he undertook to study the previously undescribed Tupian language spoken by the Gavião Indians of Rondonia Province, Brazil. In studying the Gavião, Moore quickly realized theirs was a tonal language – a significant and unexpected discovery – and one typologically different from most known languages in the world. Moore's further inquiry revealed that the Tupian was one of a larger family of languages with similar characteristics, many of which were in the process of disappearing or being replaced by Portuguese. Despite bouts of malaria, hepatitis, and other serious illnesses, Moore remained in Brazil for two and a half years to complete his field work. Moore's dissertation was innovative and masterful – providing the first modern syntax of a Brazilian language.

Facing financial uncertainty and further illness, Moore nonetheless returned to South America in 1986. His goal was to encourage the study of indigenous languages in Brazil and to attract students committed to the task. Within six years, he had established an Amazonian linguistics program at the Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi in Belem, Brazil, linking it to a number of Brazilian universities. Moore began training students, many themselves of Indian descent, to discover and describe different indigenous languages. Of these students, many have gone on to study at leading universities in the United States and Europe. Moore remains head of the Amazonian linguistics program at the Museu Goeldi in Brazil.

Pat Wright, one of the two other Anthropology alums who received MacArthur grants, discovered a new species of lemur and established a national park for conservation on the island nation of Madagascar, while simultaneously coordinating a program of rural development and health for the people living around the park. She is now a professor at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Faye Ginsburg, the other recipient, carried out research on abortion and women activists on both sides of the issue in Fargo, North Dakota. Her aim was to clarify the reasons women choose one side of the debate versus the other. In addition to producing several documentaries, Ginsburg established the Program in Culture and Media at New York University where she now teaches.



THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL
AND
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PH.D. PROGRAM IN ANTHROPOLOGY

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

JULY 1, 1999

MEMORANDUM

TO: DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN ANTHROPOLOGY FACULTY AND STUDENTS

FROM: LOUISE D. LENNIHAN, EXECUTIVE OFFICER *LPL*

RE: DENNY MOORE BECOMES THIRD CUNY ANTHROPOLOGY GRADUATE TO WIN A
MACARTHUR FOUNDATION "GENIUS" AWARD!

CUNY ANTHROPOLOGY NOW SURPASSES HARVARD, PRINCETON, YALE AND
COLUMBIA ANTHROPOLOGY, AND COMES IN SECOND AFTER CHICAGO FOR
NUMBER OF MACARTHURS PRODUCED!

I am pleased to inform you that on June 22, 1999, the John
D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation awarded Denny Moore a
\$365,000 grant in recognition of his efforts to preserve the
languages and cultures of endangered indigenous groups in the
Brazilian Amazon. Hearty congratulations go to Denny, an
anthropological linguist, who joins two other CUNY Anthropology
alumnae, cultural anthropologist Faye Ginsburg and biological
anthropologist Pat Wright, in winning the prestigious MacArthur.
Our late Distinguished Professor Eric Wolf also received a
MacArthur fellowship.

Twenty-three anthropologists have won MacArthur awards
between 1981, when they were first given and 1999. Four have
gone to Chicago graduates, three to CUNY; two to Columbia (one of
these to Eric Wolf); two to Harvard; and one each to graduates of
of Princeton, Yale, Pennsylvania, Johns Hopkins, Cornell,
Vanderbilt, Michigan, Indiana, Florida, Teachers College-Columbia
University, UC-San Diego, and Minnesota respectively.

CUNY Anthropology is the only department in a public
university to produce multiple winners. It bests seven Ivy League
departments, as well as the important departments at Michigan
(1) and UC-Berkeley (0). CUNY Anthropology's record would be a
remarkable feat for any department, public or Ivy League. To
achieve it with our extremely limited financial resources is
unfathomable. I am thrilled the MacArthur Foundation has
recognized another of our former students, once again confirming
the program's strengths and priorities. That our MacArthur
winners come from three different sub-fields indicates the
program's strength and the success of our four-field approach.

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY CENTER
IS THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK'S DOCTORATE-GRANTING INSTITUTION, WHICH OPERATES IN CONSORTIUM WITH ALL THE CUNY CAMPUSES.

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE
BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE
BROOKLYN COLLEGE
THE CITY COLLEGE

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
MEDICAL SCHOOL
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
SCHOOL OF LAW AT QUEENS COLLEGE
THE COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND
EUGENIO MARIA DE HOSTOS
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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JOHN JAY COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE
KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE
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(AFFILIATED)
NEW YORK CITY TECHNICAL COLLEGE
QUEENS COLLEGE
QUEENSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE
YORK COLLEGE

Denny Moore received his PhD in Anthropology from the Graduate Center in 1984, where he wrote his dissertation under the supervision of Professor Sally McLendon. Since 1986, he has been at the Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi, Belem, Brazil, first on a research fellowship and now as head of the Amazonian linguistics program. A modest, funny, idealistic, exceptionally creative and smart person, he has transformed the study of the indigenous languages in Brazil with enormous success and at great personal sacrifice.

Denny first went to Brazil in 1975 to study the previously undescribed Tupian language spoken by the Gavião Indians of Rondonia Province. Within 24 hours he realized it was a tonal language, an astounding, totally unexpected discovery. Within a few weeks he realized that it was typologically of great importance, being quite unlike most languages then known in the world. He subsequently discovered that it was one of a large family of languages, with similar characteristics, most of which had never been described by trained linguists. All were (and are) being replaced by Portuguese, and thus in danger of disappearing. Serious illness, including repeated attacks of malaria, hepatitis, sprue, and lung fungi, plagued his two and one half years of field work and his subsequent years of analysis and writing of his dissertation, during which he also taught as a CUNY adjunct to support himself. Despite these adversities, his dissertation was an innovative, masterly, description of the syntax of an Amazonian language -- the first modern syntax of a Brazilian language.

The native languages of South America were the least known in the world when Denny began his research in 1975. Of the approximately 170 languages spoken in Brazil alone, 130 were spoken in the Amazon region. Nevertheless, only seven had reasonably accurate published grammars, Denny's study of Gavião being the eighth.

With the support of the prominent Brazilian linguist Ayrton Rodrigues, Denny returned to Brazil in 1986 with a Brazilian research grant Rodrigues had secured for him. Without regard to his own professional career, never secure of funds, and often quite ill, Denny set out to attract Brazilian students to the study of the indigenous languages of their country, and developed programs to train them in modern linguistics.

Within six years Denny had established an Amazonian linguistics program at the Museu Goeldi, with links to various Brazilian universities, and had identified and trained ten talented Brazilian students, each of whom was describing a different indigenous language under Denny's supervision and support, while he himself worked on two other languages. Most of the students were themselves of Indian descent. Three were already sufficiently talented and advanced in 1992 to be admitted to first rank graduate U.S. programs. Two years later, six were in graduate programs in the U.S., while still others were

pursuing advanced degrees in Paris and Brasilia. Over twenty indigenous Amazonian languages were now being extensively studied. This meant Denny was constantly applying for grants and raising funds to acquire computers, tape recorders, video cameras, tapes, and other field work equipment, and to build a research library. He accomplished all this despite ongoing bouts with various tropical diseases, while never having the funds to purchase U.S. health insurance (which he will now have as part of his MacArthur award).

Denny's has made outstanding scholarly contributions to the integration of linguistics with other anthropological fields, including archaeology, ethnobiology, and social anthropology. He has provided significant insights into the human history in Amazonia by linking etymological and historical studies with archaeological and ethnohistoric data. His scholarship includes seminal, pioneering articles on the languages of Brazil and their typological characteristics, which have important implications for linguistic theory. His work on the reconstruction of earlier stages of these languages, and native systems of classification in ethnobotany have equally important implications for Amazonian prehistory. His publications have raised the level of scholarly discourse about the indigenous languages in Brazil and made important contributions to Amazonian history and prehistory. With typical generosity, they are often co-authored with a student.

Professor Sally McLendon, who kindly provided many of the above details, suggests that Denny typifies so many of our students. Like him, they are tough and tenacious in the face of adversity; they are extremely independent, neither use to, nor requiring a strong institutional framework within which to carry out their work; they undertake original and creative research on a shoe-string; and they are committed to research whose impact reaches beyond the academy.

Not only did MacArthur winner Pat Wright discover a new species of lemur, she took on the daunting task of establishing a national park in Madagascar for primate conservation, while coordinating a program of rural development and health for the people living around the park. Our other MacArthur winner, Faye Ginsburg, carried out difficult research on abortion and women activists on both sides of the conflict in Fargo, North Dakota, in order to understand what divides women activists in the struggle and debate surrounding abortion in the U.S. Producing several documentaries, Faye founded the Program in Culture and Media and has established a fellowship program for indigenous media makers at NYU. The fact that Pat is now a professor at SUNY-Stony Brook and Faye at NYU underscores another attribute of CUNY anthropology - we provide our sister institutions in the New York area with some of their most distinguished faculty!

To all our faculty, students, and alumnae/i whose daily struggle and commitment sustains our excellent Program, I salute you for this and much more!

cc: Dr. Frances Degen Horowitz
Dr. William P. Kelly, Provost
Dr. Linda Edwards, Acting Associate Provost
Ms. Nanette Shaw, Assist. Vice President for Public Affairs