World-renowned Environmental Scientist Joins Ranks of MSU Faculty

He is an anthropologist, a world-renowned researcher of the Brazilian Amazon for 30 years, a member of the National Academy of Sciences, and a frequently published author and collaborator with other well-known researchers such as MSU’s own Jianguo “Jack” Liu. And now, he is officially part of the Michigan State University family.

Dr. Emilio Moran is a Visiting Hannah Professor in the Department of Geography within the College of Social Science, but to pin him to one particular area of study is a bit misleading when you consider his history. As a behaviorist, Moran realized early on that to solve complex problems, researchers needed to reach beyond the limits of their discipline and needed the right expertise. To do so he studied anthropology, geography, soil science, ecology, and agricultural economics.

There was a time when addressing environmental issues together “was a rare thing. But now, we need to build curricula and add flexibility in PhD programs without losing rigor,” he said. “There is a fear at times that broadening your approach will result in losing rigor within a single discipline, but I think you can have rigor and still have breadth.”

It was in part the breadth of disciplines at MSU that lured Moran to campus. At MSU, Moran will contribute to the new Center for Global Change Science as well as the Center for Global Change and Earth Observations. He is also a member MSU’s Center for Systems Integration and Sustainability where renowned panda expert Jack Liu is a colleague and collaborator. After years at Indiana University where he created and managed two centers similar to MSU’s environmental centers, he is enjoying what MSU has to offer.

At MSU, “there are many opportunities that I did not have before,” Moran said, “such as having an agricultural and natural resources college, engineering programs, and terrific expertise on topics such as water, soil fertility and crop productivity that touch on my research interests in land use change, agricultural productivity, and sustainability. I look forward to connecting to the research questions that matter to me, to Michigan citizens, and the world.”

He is also looking forward to teaching classes at MSU, and he enjoys creating research opportunities to include both graduate and undergraduate students in his research, providing them with one-on-one mentoring and possibly international experience. As a researcher with a long track record of addressing serious issues by crossing academic boundaries, his philosophy can be summed up with one phrase: teamwork to make things happen.

“Before, work was published in agronomy journals or sociology journals, but now we can publish in both because we are in the field together working together on jointly framed questions. I make sure that the social scientists learn to dig the soil pit and that agronomists learn to interview and ask social questions,” he explained.

“Social scientists should know what it is like to do the hard work of collecting data from every branch and every leaf of a tree. It is very hard work. But the natural scientist should also conduct interviews with people and learn how hard that can be as well. Both sides need to learn how hard it is — and how satisfying. All of us collect the data together and from that comes a tremendous amount of mutual respect.”

And respected he is. With talented colleagues spread around the world, a curious mind and an entrepreneurial spirit, Emilio Moran breathes new life into the already burgeoning area of environmental research in the College of Social Science and across MSU.

“I love what I do today even more than when I started,” he said.
Exciting things are happening in the College of Social Science at MSU! While students are learning through a variety of in- and out-of-classroom experiences, faculty are teaching and conducting research, and alumni and donors generously support the work of the College, we continue our efforts to strengthen the social, behavioral, and economic sciences at Michigan State.

We are very fortunate to have recruited Dr. Emilio Moran to our faculty recently. Dr. Moran is one of only a few anthropologists worldwide to address the complex relationship between people and environmental change. He is a member of the prestigious National Academy of Science, and we were able to recruit him because of our strong work in environment and global change. I hope you will read more about Dr. Moran in the feature story on the cover of this issue.

The College has initiated some significant refinements to the undergraduate experience, including curriculum changes that will add value to our students’ degrees with a transcriptable specialization that will complement their majors while reducing the number of credit hours and increasing flexibility for the student to explore additional academic interests.

In addition, the College is working to enhance our ability to support undergraduate students along the full continuum of their experience here, from recruitment and retention, to engagement, through graduation and placement. We call this initiative the “Five Pillars” and we are launching activities in the first two areas — recruitment and retention — this coming fall.

Finally, we have established a new program for outstanding undergraduate students called the Social Science Scholars Program. You will hear more about this program in the future, but briefly, the program will provide an advanced interdisciplinary social science learning experience for high-performing undergraduates. They will participate in a curriculum that interjects cutting-edge social science themes, methods, and research into their education, both in and out of the classroom. The Social Science Scholars Program was conceived as a value-added overlay experience that will highlight the synergies among the social, behavioral, and economic sciences and other fields, and I am very excited about the possibilities for learning best practices that will help us support all of our students.

All of these and other important enhancements are being articulated in the College’s forthcoming strategic plan. This will be the third strategic plan for the College, and we know that this five year cycle involves a process of long-term planning, implementation, and continuous feedback which provides a solid foundation for the College to make decisions and target investment.

These activities — and others — are just a few of the reasons I am so proud to be the dean of the social, behavioral, and economic sciences at Michigan State University. With the collective effort of faculty, students, alumni, and staff, we continue to make important improvements to the MSU experience for thousands of individuals every year. I thank you for your participation in the effort.

Sincerely,

Marietta L. Baba, Dean and Professor
When Dr. Jane Ranney was a student studying psychology at Michigan State in the 1960s, she observed a prevailing notion that psychology research did not require the same level of support that other sciences did. As a result, important resources were often scarce. Now, through her generosity, a fund is available to help future student researchers.

Known as the Jane E. Ranney, Ph.D. Endowed Research Enhancement Fund, her future gift will support graduate and undergraduate students conducting research in the Department of Psychology within the College of Social Science at MSU. Somewhat unique is the fact that Dr. Ranney allowed for it to provide supplemental funding for equipment and technology needs for student research projects.

“They thought that all you needed was paper and pencil, so there weren’t funds for equipment,” she said regarding those who allocated research funds to students when she studied at MSU. “You could get paper and pencil and maybe computer time, and that was it. There just weren’t funds, except through faculty grants, to do real research where you needed equipment, or animals, or things of that sort.”

The fund will not only cover equipment needs but may also apply to travel and presentation needs. Department of Psychology Chair Juli Wade agrees with Dr. Ranney and recognizes the potential for this endowed fund to create opportunities for cross-disciplinary research by students.

“This fund supports that kind of flexibility,” Dr. Wade said. “If students need, for example, to collaborate with someone in another area, they’ll have the resources where they can do that. They’ll be able to travel a little bit to learn new techniques, and hopefully bring those techniques home.”

Dr. Ranney received her bachelor’s, masters and PhD from the Department of Psychology. Her career took her to SUNY-Binghamton and North Carolina Wesleyan College where she was a member of the faculty. She then turned her time to research at Southeast Area Health Education Center where she focused on internal medicine and neonatology.

While she lives in North Carolina now, part of Dr. Ranney’s motivation to create this endowed fund is the fact that her parents owned Ranney Jewelers on Grand River Avenue. The primary clientele for the store were students, faculty and staff of MSU. “We profited from MSU,” she said, “so I think it’s only right.”

Dr. Ranney credits the Department of Psychology with providing her the foundational skills and interest on which she built a long career of teaching and research. She recognizes research as a critical component to the educational experience of students and hopes this endowment created as part of her estate plans will provide funding to supplement a comprehensive research program for future generations in the department. Dr. Wade thinks such flexible resources will have a great impact.

“I think it’s going to be terrific,” Dr. Wade said. “We have graduate and undergraduate students involved in research in a large number of areas, from basic to applied, and it’s going to be wonderful to be able to offer this type of assistance for their work.”
HRLR Develops Strong Student Leader Program

by Kyle Simon, Professional Writing Senior

The School of Human Resources and Labor Relations has cultivated an atmosphere of strong student involvement. As the HRLR student leaders can attest, this philosophy provides uncommon opportunities each year for both current and prospective students to excel in student-led activities.

“The School provides a uniquely collaborative and friendly environment, which is the kind of attitude we share with our alumni,” said Graduate Student Association (GSA) President Felisa Brown. “Whether it is hosting a conference or finding a position in a fortune 500 company, our alumni are active and approachable.”

In addition to student-run formal and online orientation, each incoming student is matched with a peer mentor to help with the onboarding process and transition into graduate life. Furthermore, the contemporary HR master’s degree programs have staff committed to recruiting new students. The recruiting efforts, both in and out of state, are managed by a student-driven initiative as a sub-committee of the GSA.

“Our students have a great respect for the leadership within this school as well as its vast alumni base,” said Nick Giacona, 2012 co-chair of the recruiting committee. “In partnership with these mentors, our student leaders have implemented initiatives that have impacted and influenced lasting changes to this graduate school.”

In the past couple of years alone, a “virtual classroom for the future” was effectively funded and renovated by students who generated donations from HRLR alumni, and the Cultural Potluck has become an anticipated annual event. Hosted by GSA Diversity and Inclusion Officer Calvin McDaniel, the potluck is a community dinner where individuals bring dishes that represent their backgrounds and hear from a speaker on diversity and inclusion issues in the workplace.

Rod Armstrong, chapter president of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) at MSU, said that his group is proud to host the annual MSU SHRM Conference, sponsored by Shell and PepsiCo. Themed Spartan Strong: Discovering New Opportunities in HR, their aim is to become the premier student-led human resources conference in the nation, bringing in some of the top names in the HR field. This entirely student-led conference provides students, faculty, alumni and HR professionals with the chance to learn, network and get involved in the MSU community.

“The School adopts a philosophy that every experience can be a learning experience; that learning is not confined to the classroom,” Giacona said in reference to all of the student-led programs and conferences in HRLR. “As budding business leaders, we are presented with opportunities to develop within the confines of our graduate education.”

This past fall, HRLR welcomed 45 recruiting companies to the program within a 6 week period. In 2012, there was 100% placement for students seeking internships and 97% for students seeking full-time positions. Such statistics speak volumes for the student involvement philosophy of HRLR.

Giacona and his fellow student leaders are certainly proud of their accomplishments. “The strength of the organizations that recruit our students demonstrates the reputation that the faculty, staff and students have earned over the years.”

The College of Social Science at Michigan State University is a community of scholars committed to creating, disseminating, and applying knowledge in the social, behavioral, and economic sciences. The MSU Social Science community includes more than 6,700 undergraduate and graduate students, 400 faculty, 170 staff members, and 90,000 alumni in four schools, eight departments, and six centers and institutes.
**CSSAA Annual Award Winners**

The College of Social Science Alumni Association announced its 2013 award winners. Dr. Sameer Hinduja was given the Outstanding Alumni Award, and Dr. Timothy Pleskac was given the Outstanding Faculty Award.

Dr. Hinduja, a professor at Florida Atlantic University, is the co-director of the university’s Cyberbullying Research Center. His interdisciplinary research is widely published in a number of peer-review academic journals, and in a mere eight years he has won two of Florida Atlantic’s highest honors, Researcher of the Year and Teacher of the Year. Further evidence of his impact is that his work has been featured in hundreds of print and online articles around the world as well as multiple national radio and television programs.

Dr. Pleskac, an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology, is known for his hands-on approach to teaching through the introduction and application of research in his psychology courses. In his undergraduate class on research methods, for example, he goes beyond simply introducing text examples and instead challenges his students to delve head-first into actual research. He, along with Dr. Hinduja, were recognized by the board as excellent representatives of the college.

“The accomplishments that Dr. Hinduja has achieved in eight years are nothing short of overwhelming, and Dr. Pleskac, through his teaching methods, creates lasting impressions on his students that they will take into the world as Michigan State graduates,” said Mike Morrow, president of the MSU College of Social Science Alumni Association Board of Directors. “We are honored that Dr. Hinduja and Dr. Pleskac have accepted our Outstanding Alumni and Teaching Awards.”
Your Pledge

I/we wish to support ______________________________ by making a gift in the amount of: $ _______________.

My/our total gift will be paid as indicated:

☐ A check payable to Michigan State University
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CARD NUMBER ____________________________ EXPIRATION DATE __________/________

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   Endowed is my first payment of: $ _______________

Send pledge reminders: (check one) ☐ Annually ☐ Quarterly ☐ Semi-annually
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☐ Annual Single Membership $45
☐ Annual Joint Membership $55
☐ Annual Single Recent Graduate Membership FREE

(More than two years of graduation)

Payment
☐ Annual Auto Renew - Dues charged to credit card annually
☐ Check enclosed - Payable to Michigan State University
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Based on Internal Revenue Service guidelines and estimated value of membership benefits, the full amount of your dues payment may be tax deductible. Consult your tax advisor.

Mail to: Social Science Development & Alumni Relations, 306 Berkey Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824-9902

Nick McLaren
mclarenn@msu.edu
toll free at 866-761-4199 or 517-355-5265

Online Community

Do you have an interest in finding people you knew while studying at MSU when is mailed to you from the university?

To do these things and more, check out the new Alumni website in the College of Social Science.

Details on the back cover of this newsletter!