PROPOSAL TO LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS
UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON INTERNAL GRANTS
Marquette Faculty Fellowship Proposal

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<tr>
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<td>Rank: Associate</td>
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Title of Project: More than Translation: A Decolonial Guide to Teaching the *Popol Wuj*
Year of Project: 2015-16

Project Summary (100 words): This book lays out active teaching strategies for the notoriously difficult Maya K’iche’ *Popol Wuj*. Chapters focus on particular K’iche’ words from important episodes of this seminal indigenous text. I chart 12 translators’ widely varied attempts to translate indigenous ideas and show how the differences among translation choices open up some of the philosophical nuance in the translated text from the perspective of marginalized peoples. The charts and other teaching materials for each reading are designed to “flip the classroom:” the students actively compare and discuss differences in translations and the consequences as a lead-in to classroom activities.

Stipend ($500) Budget Justification: I am applying for $400 to cover the costs of my language consultants ($200/each for three phases of checks) as I do the last checks on the K’iche’ comparative translation charts and related narrative sections. I’ll already be in Guatemala, which makes this amount minimal for the return on investment. Since the nuance of meaning construction in ancient K’iche’ is the main motor for the decolonial aspect of this project, these language checks are essential. (However, if that expense does not meet the criteria for this stipend, I will pay these language consultants out of the main Marquette funding.)

Where will the results be published, exhibited or performed? I have sent a proposal and two sample chapters to University of Arizona Press and they have officially asked me to submit the full manuscript (see attached). I have a long-standing relationship with UAP and have met in person with them about this particular project. UAP published my last project (Marquette-funded in 2010) and are looking forward to working with me again.

What other sources of funding (internal and external) have you identified for this project? I applied for ATLAS funds from the state of Louisiana for sabbatical year but was not funded; so I am requesting Marquette funds so that I will not need to teach a course in the 2015 summer and will be able to finish this project and submit the completed manuscript to the publisher in August as scheduled.

List years and amounts of prior Loyola University faculty grants (for the last three years):
Bobet Fellowship, summer 2013, 2014: $1500

Does your research involve human subjects? ____ Yes ___X___ No. If yes, funding for this project is contingent on receiving IRB approval. If you have IRB approval prior to submitting your proposal, please attach the approval memo to your application. If you do not have IRB approval at the time of your submission, please complete the IRB protocol as soon as possible after your proposal submission.

I have submitted the Employee Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form. ___X___

I have read and understand the University’s reimbursement policy. ___X___
Narrative Description of Project:

Colleagues in several different disciplines who find themselves teaching the Maya K’iche’ *Popol Wuj* often ask me what translation I suggest they use for their classes. I tell them that there isn’t one; they need to use at least two translations so that the students can read between the translations. By comparing the translations they see how the K’iche’ ideas lie somewhere in the gaps of the English translation. This book project is designed to give these instructors—across the disciplines, who are not experts in indigenous literatures—the tools to teach an ancient indigenous American text in a decolonial way. The Marquette fellowship will allow me to finish and submit this publisher-invited book manuscript that outlines instructor-friendly approaches to teaching the oft-taught, but difficult, *Popol Wuj*. The methods are based on teaching materials I have developed for my own classes that allow me to create a student-centered classroom by using comparative translation charts the students discuss before reading the text or listening to lectures. The book provides instructors with ready-made approaches to several specific passages of the *Popol Wuj*, “the oldest book in the Americas,” and teaches strategies that will be applicable to other indigenous literatures as well. These approaches are activities, not lecture materials, which allows the teacher to “flip the classroom” and puts the students in the position of learning by doing.

The *Popol Wuj* is often included in the recently expanded canon of World Literature and survey classes in other disciplines because it was produced by what is now a marginalized culture, the Maya K’iche’ of Guatemala; as such it provides an alternative vision of the world that can open students’ eyes to diversity in a meaningful way. However, like most texts produced by indigenous peoples, the *Popol Wuj* is most often approached through an anthropological bias that superimposes Western logics on the reading process and severely limits the diversity to which students are exposed. Instructors in survey classes often struggle to identify and convey to their students the alternative logic underlying this indigenous text. They simply cannot be expected to read all of the original languages of all of the texts they teach. Thus, their ability to show the students the nuances of the alternative cultures is limited, especially in a case like the *Popol Wuj*, which was produced in a culture that developed completely independently from Western culture. Because there are no teaching guides for the *Popol Wuj* out there, these teachers end up lecturing on academic issues throughout the classes devoted to the *Popol Wuj*, which often fails to engage students as active participants in the learning process. The teaching materials in this book are designed to engage the students before they have started reading and get them to realize that they cannot just read the *Popol Wuj* through Western logic.

Over the years at Loyola I have developed different successful approaches to teaching the *Popol Wuj* in my own classes. I have found ways to apply my academic and personal background with ancient Maya texts like the *Popol Wuj* practically in the classroom. I have begun to publish them because heavy theoretical approaches find such limited, specialized audiences and rarely make it to the practical level where they can help our undergraduate students benefit from these texts. For this reason, I have been reworking my own successful classroom approaches to make them especially relevant to instructors of classes across the disciplines.

My pedagogical methodology uses comparative translation to hint at some of the philosophical issues that do not usually survive translation to Western languages. Each chapter of the book
handles one specific episode of the *Popol Wuj* and starts by comparing just one key K’iche’ word or phrase in that episode as it has been rendered in twelve different translations to English and Spanish, which reveal surprising discrepancies. In the form of a translation comparison chart, students and other readers of the *Popol Wuj* can easily see the discrepancies among the many translations and they can begin to actively speculate about the cultural and philosophical differences that might motivate the space between these choices. Then when they read the sections of the *Popol Wuj*, the students, who do not speak K’iche’, can “see” the term outside of the exact word one particular translator may have chosen. The translation chart exercise is not intended to suggest which is the “right” translation; instead it eventually reveals that the actual translation of the K’iche’ concept lies somewhere in the gaps among the choices available in English. This establishes a decolonial base for reading the passage because the translation comparisons give students a glimpse of the philosophical slippage that occurs in translation. Each chapter goes on to provide other information to help instructors manage the discussions and classroom activities, such as examples of modern K’iche’ usage, meaning-making patterns, and other etymological clues. The last section of each chapter takes the philosophical principle isolated from the passage and applies it to another Mesoamerican text either from the earlier Classic Maya period or from modern Guatemalan literature. This encourages an expansion of our knowledge of Maya literature to include the living Maya. This pedagogical approach has met an enthusiastic response from both my students and those of my colleagues in whose classes I have used it.

I have completed two chapters of this project, one of which I published for a general audience (in *The New Centennial Review: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Americas, Spring 2012* (12:2)) and which I have now converted for this book. The editor-in-chief at the University of Arizona Press has seen this chapter and another and agrees with me that this fills a pressing need. She has asked for the manuscript and the right of first refusal.

I was born in Guatemala and was raised in rural areas where indigenous ways of being are still very much alive. There are still more than a million speakers of K’iche’, the language of the *Popol Wuj*, and this Maya language serves as a reservoir for ways of thinking that do not come across in the *Popol Wuj* without specific methods to make teachers and students aware of those philosophical differences as the language of K’iche’ expresses them. I have developed this technique of comparative translation in order to use my experience to help others figure out how to read Maya literature on its own terms, rather than through Western logic.
Project Timeline:

**Phase one: Voice revisions for Chapters One and Two- before Christmas 2014**
I have finished Chapters One and Two and am now working on incorporating University of Arizona Press’ suggestions in revising these two chapters to match the voice they want for the book. I’ll finish those revisions by Christmas.

**Phase two: Finish Chapter Three and draft Chapter Four- Jan-April 2015.**
The first draft for Chapter Three has been finished but needs substantial revision. I have finished the K’iche’ translation comparison chart for Chapter Four and laid out the narrative line. In the spring I will finish these two chapters and do primary checks with my language consultants.

**Phase three: Language Collaborator Consultations- May- June 2015.**
I will spend June doing final checks on the primary translation charts with my K’iche’ language collaborators in Xela (Abraham García Hernandez) and in Chichicastenango (Estebana Chun Perez). We will also discuss revisions to the narrative that accompanies them.

**Phase four: Final revision, and book manuscript submission- July-August 2015.**
In July, I’ll revise all four chapters that have been invited for publication at University of Arizona Press. I have agreed to submit the manuscript to UAP in August 2015.