

Remembering Dr. Flore Zéphir*

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OUR ALARA family mourns the untimely loss of one its most stalwart members, Dr. Flore Zéphir, who died on December 15, 2017 from complications following heart surgery in Columbia, Missouri.

Professor Flore Zéphir, a native of Jérémie, Haiti, was born on January 11, 1958 and later came to the United States in 1975. She attended Hunter College of the City University of New York, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in French and Education in 1980. The following year she went to Indiana University-Bloomington, and earned two Master of Arts degrees in 1983, and a Ph.D. in French Linguistics in 1990.

Professor Zéphir had been teaching at the University of Missouri-Columbia (MU) since 1988 in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. She was a professor of French and coordinator of the Master's program in foreign language teaching, and a faculty fellow in the Division of Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity. She served as department chair in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures from fall 2008 to summer 2014, and director of the Afro-Romance Institute from August 2008 to December 2016; she also chaired the Linguistics area program from fall 2004 to summer 2007. She was the recipient of several awards at MU. In 1995, she received a Kemper award for excellence in teaching; in 2003, an award for excellence in advising; and in 2004, a Faculty-Alumni award.

Professor Zéphir taught French language classes at all levels, as well as courses in foreign language teaching methodologies, French linguistics, bilingualism and multiculturalism, and minority and Creole languages. Her research interests included foreign language education, bilingual education, Creole studies, sociolinguistics, and ethnic and immigrant studies with a focus on the Haitian diaspora in the United States. She was a regular presenter at various foreign language teaching conferences, as well as linguistics meetings. The many graduate students whom she advised during her career knew her to be generous with her time and unfailingly dedicated to their academic and personal success. Professor Zéphir often found herself providing guidance to students who were not her own, which she did happily. She knew that students from across the university sought out her good counsel and warm, but straight forward, demeanor when they needed reliable advice from a well-respected and

trusted source. She knew she filled that role for many and she enjoyed it, despite the long hours and seemingly endless conversations that role asked of her.

Given her expertise in the areas of bilingual, multicultural, and foreign language education, as well as immigrant studies, Professor Zéphir was a well sought-after speaker, invited to conduct workshops and give presentations on these topics. For example, in the summer of 2001, she taught a segment on French creoles, as part of a National Endowment for the Humanities' Summer Institute on the African Diaspora held at MU. More recently, she was invited to the University of Florida-Gainesville (2011), Vanderbilt University (2012), Harvard University (2013), the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology (2014), and Northwestern University (2015). Professor Zéphir had been a familiar and beloved presence at ALARA conferences since our organization's inception more than 20 years ago. Many of us have fond memories of seeing her delight in fulfilling a wide range of roles at our biennial meetings—from paper presenter, to panel moderator, to enthusiastic beach coordinator.

Her numerous articles and review essays have appeared in the *French Review*, *Foreign Language Annals*, *Modern Language Journal*, *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Journal of Haitian Studies*, *Afro-Hispanic Review*, *PALARA*, and *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review*, among other professional journals. Her first book, *Haitian Immigrants in Black America: A Sociological and Sociolinguistic Portrait* was published in 1996 by Bergin and Garvey; her second, *Trends in Ethnic Identification Among Second-Generation Haitian Immigrants in New York City*, was released in summer 2001 also by Bergin and Garvey; and her third, *The Haitian Americans*, was published in August 2004 by Greenwood Press as part of its New Americans series. She served as book review editor for the *Journal of Haitian Studies* from August 2003 to May 2013. She also worked on projects dealing with the transformation of the Haitian diaspora as a result of the January 2010 earthquake.

In addition to receiving scholarly attention, Professor Zéphir's work on Haitian immigrants in the United States has generated a great deal of interest from the media. For example, in 2002, a reporter from the Washington Post

conducted a phone interview with her. Excerpts of that interview appeared in an article, “A Diverse—and Divided—Black Community,” published in the Sunday, February 24, 2002 issue of that paper. Subsequently, she was quoted in an article titled “Black America Transformed: Immigration Reshapes a Once-Monolithic Community,” published in the *International Herald Tribune* in Paris (Monday, February 25, 2002). She has also been featured in the diasporic newspaper, the *Haitian Times*, which published a review of her book on the second-generation Haitian immigrants (January 1-7, 2003 issue, p.2). Additionally, she appeared on a number of radio programs, including *Perspectives Haitiennes*, and the Caribbean segment of *Voice of America*. She also contributed a monthly column to the *Boston Haitian Reporter*

from April 2004 through March 2005. Professor Zéphir was on research leave during academic year 2014-2015. At the time of her passing she was teaching full-time, developing new courses, advising graduate students in French linguistics, and serving on important University committees, including the MU Faculty Council on University Policy. She was fiercely devoted to her colleagues’ individual success and to increasing the scholarly visibility of MU’s Romance Languages & Literatures Department and of our own organization, ALARA. More importantly, rather than curry favor with those at the top, she routinely went to battle for the most vulnerable, and when the sorrow passes, if it ever does, it is this trait, her unshakeable decency and humanity, that will endure.

ENDNOTES

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<https://romancelanguages.missouri.edu/people/z%C3%A9phir>. It has been modified by Sheridan Wigginton.