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True calling

Professor finds life's work in Spanish language, literature

By Phil Williams
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Lesley Feracho is a quiet woman with a rich heritage. Although she grew up in New York City, both her parents are from Trinidad, and she can visit relatives in such places as Antigua, Venezuela, England, Canada and the United States.

Despite her inherent modesty, easy laughter and casual manner, Feracho has gained growing acclaim as a scholar and teacher, and her first book, *Linking the Americas: Race, Hybrid Discourses and the Reformulation of Feminine Identity* will be published soon.

An only child of supportive parents, Feracho was born in Brooklyn but grew up in Queens, where her parents combined the focused work-ethic of new immigrants with deep, lasting memories of Trinidad and the islands of the Caribbean.

"They had high expectations for me, but they never tried to tell me what to do with my life," says Feracho. "They always supported me, and even when I changed my major from biology to Spanish in college, they were right there for me."

With her mother's work as a nurse and her father's job as a switching-equipment technician, the small family was busy. Early on, Feracho learned the joy of languages and a life of the mind. Her heritage and her love of scholarship braided together into a career that led her to UGA in 1997 as a faculty member in Romance languages and African-American studies.

Though she didn't make the leap into languages until her sophomore year at Cornell, she was always teaching, even as a child, when she would create imaginary classrooms filled with invisible, but individually named, students.

Trinidadians are native English speakers, but Feracho was drawn Associate professor of



With near-native ability in Spanish, fluency in Portuguese, and a reading knowledge of French, Lesley Feracho's teaching and research took off when she reached Athens. (Photo by Peter Frey)

FACTS**LESLEY FERACHO**

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to the Spanish language early, and she recalls two teachers who influenced her: Señor Madrid, a fourth-grade teacher, and Señorita Giles, from high school.

"I applied only to a few schools, but Cornell was perfect for a lot of reasons," she says. "First of all, it has a great reputation, but it was also not too far from home."

She started out as a biology major, heading toward a pre-med track, but that idea foundered quickly on the shoals of organic chemistry and other subjects that she realized "were not my calling." Instead, she let her interest in Spanish rise to the surface, and she has made its language and literature her life's work.

With near-native ability in Spanish, fluency in Portuguese, and a reading knowledge of French, Feracho's teaching and research took off when she reached Athens. Her areas of specialization include comparative studies of 20th-century Afro-Hispanic and African-American women's narratives and comparative studies of African American and Latin American feminist theory. Feracho has already begun work on a second book, which will focus on African-American women writers and works of contemporary Afro-Hispanic women writers from the 1980s until today. She loves music and mixes tapes, which she often uses in class to explain current culture in the Caribbean and the diaspora.

She has visited Trinidad often, where she has many relatives, and that island nation's rich cultural heritage will continue to lead her toward new ideas of scholarship and her place in it.

Romance languages and African-American studies

B.A., Spanish: Cornell University, 1990

M.A., Romance Languages: Duke University, 1993

Ph.D., Romance Studies: Duke University, 1997

At UGA: 6 years

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