A closer look at the C.P. Cavafy Professorship and the Modern Greek Studies Program at the University of Michigan

By Theo G. Zacharatos

"Modern Greek Studies includes answers to questions of identity, modernity, continuing, hegemony, politics, diaspora, geography, ethics, and historical understanding of modern Greece in a broader setting of the Hellenic tradition which constitutes an incomparable cross-cultural field of learning and investigation."

This is the mission statement of the intensive and extensive work to which Professors Vassilios Lambropoulos and Artemis Leontis have devoted their effort at the University of Michigan, to establish and develop a center of learning of the modern Greek culture. Working together and under the umbrella of the department of classical studies of the University of Michigan, they have structured an interesting program in modern Greek as a university course from antiquity to the present. Their efforts are a model of effective collaboration between community leaders and the university.

Presently, the Department of Modern Greece has a constituency of approximately 200 students who take courses in Modern Greek at various levels, including courses on the modern Greek language, literature and culture, comparative literature, and the history of Modern Greece between antiquity to the present. Your support will enable the department to offer a bachelor's level undergraduate program and contribute to its continued growth.

The number of relevant cultural events on campus is also growing from nine in 1997 to 30 this year. Other events currently under development include a trip to Athens, Istanbul and Alexandria, following the footsteps of Cavafy or "Cavafy's World" as Dr. Lambropoulos calls it; a 12-day itinerary including a cruise between Greece and Turkey and several Greek islands.

The department and the Program in Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan, dr. Lambropoulos served with distinction as professor of Modern Greek at Ohio State University prior to his appointment in 1999 at the University of Michigan. Co-ordinator of the Program is Professor Artemis Leontis (Ph.D. Ohio State University), adjunct associate professor of Modern Greek in the Classical Studies Department of the University of Michigan, who also served in the faculty of Greek and Latin at Ohio State University prior to her appointment at the University of Michigan in 1999.

Dr. Lambropoulos emphasizes the Greek influence on the thinking of the leaders of future generations who will graduate from the University of Michigan. Actually, said Dr. Lambropoulos, the connection between the University of Michigan and Greece goes back to 1817 when it was founded by Judge Augustus Woodward, a Hellenist learned jurist who named the University using the Greek word: "Panepistimiad of Michigan" (the Greek word for University) which was later changed to "University of Michigan."

Dr. Lambropoulos and Dr. Leontis spend a considerable amount of time and energy to stage interesting cultural events on campus relevant to Modern Greece. The number of events is also growing from nine in 2000 to 19 in 2001.

Starting this year, Dr. Lambropoulos says there will be three simultaneous major exhibitions on campus dedicated to Cavafy's work. Many of his poems translated into English and original manuscripts, books and photos from the years he lived in Alexandria, Egypt, will be exhibited to showcase this significant cultural station in the history of Greece.

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Editor's note: For further information on the C.P. Cavafy Chair of the Department of Classical Studies at the University of Michigan, please contact: Professor Vassilios Lambropoulos, Ph.D., Department of Classical Studies, 2150 Angell Hall, 435 S. State St., Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1003, Tel: (734) 764-0126, Fax: (734) 763-4959, email vlambrop@umich.edu.