

Alumni Profile

Paul Michael Johnson – Spanish & Portuguese PhD Program

Career

Please provide a brief overview of your career path since graduating from UCI.

After obtaining my Ph.D. in Spanish Literature from UCI in Spring 2014, in Fall 2014 I began as tenure-track Assistant Professor of Modern Languages at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, a position I continue to hold. I just completed a pre-sabbatical leave in Spain in order to begin my next book project.

What do you see yourself doing in five or ten years?

More of the same! Though it can be trying at times, I am happy with my profession (something I was unsure of when I began graduate school).

How do you hope to make a difference?

By reminding myself regularly of the privilege and responsibility to be a college educator, by working to be a better ally to those who face oppression, and by attempting to model the practices of critique and resistance in and outside of the classroom.

Your Time at UCI

When did you attend UCI?

2007-2014

What program were you in?

Spanish & Portuguese (Ph.D.)

Why did you choose to come to UCI?

I was impressed by the strength of the Spanish & Portuguese program and the opportunity to pursue the Critical Theory emphasis and other interdisciplinary coursework. The chance to be in sunny Southern California was also a plus!

Reflections

What made you decide to pursue a graduate degree?

I was fortunate enough to have had two former professors—one from my undergraduate and

one from my masters institution—who encouraged me to consider graduate school. I'm very glad I followed their advice!

Was there one thing or one person at UCI that really helped or made a difference in your graduate/postdoctoral career? If so, tell us about whomever or what it was?

Yes, my academic advisor and dissertation director, Luis Avilés. His gentle encouragement but honest, critical feedback helped me to grow from my first year in the program. By the time I was writing my dissertation, his mentorship and generosity had grown into a strong friendship that continues to this day.

Did you do any research while at UCI and what was it?

Yes, I was awarded a Fulbright Research Fellowship to conduct a project at the Spanish National Library and National Historical Archive in Madrid, Spain on the Inquisition and early modern representations of emotion.

Alumni Life

What advice do you have for a new graduate student?

Seek out professors and mentors who are willing to give you frank advice and feedback, and then use it to grow and improve in your writing, research skills, and other areas. Be wary of those who only seem to offer praise. Find a supportive community, whether that's in or outside your department or program, and nurture it. Take time to get away from academic obligations now and then, and have fun!

What was your biggest obstacle transitioning from life of a graduate student to your career?

I think I took for granted the availability of an intellectual community in graduate school, something that I've found is not as automatic in my career, despite being on a (small) college campus. I had to more deliberately seek out that community by participating in reading groups and taking advantage of other opportunities when they've arisen—an effort that for me has been worthwhile.

What are your hobbies/passions outside of your work/research?

Street photography, travel, playing piano, and antique tractor restoration.

How do you balance work/life?

I'm still working on that one!