

The Project Statement should include, but is not limited to, discussion of the following points:

What you propose to do

I propose to spend one semester teaching at the Instituto Superior Pedro Francisco Bonó and conducting research at the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic, for the period of September - December 2022. My initial interest in teaching at Instituto Bonó arose from a conversation with its Academic Director, Professor Pablo Mella, when we met in a conference on Dominican studies at Harvard University in 2019. I visited Prof. Mella in Santo Domingo this past summer in order to discuss the courses I could teach and the possibility of developing further collaborations between Instituto Bonó and Grand Valley State University (GVSU). This teaching commitment complements the research I plan to conduct during my Fulbright. As I was working at the AGN in Santo Domingo last summer, I found out that the archives of the Museo Nacional, the first national museum of the Dominican Republic and an important piece for my larger project on Dominican cultural memory, were held there. Very little is known about that museum, which was created in 1930 and dismantled decades later. A Fulbright Scholarship would allow me to spend time at the AGN studying those archival materials, contributing greatly to our understanding of Dominican society and culture in a book chapter on the history of the museum.

Teaching: describe what courses you propose to teach, do you plan on other teaching activities (e.g. seminars, curriculum/program development, public lectures, etc).

While preparing to apply for the Fulbright, I contacted Prof. Mella to discuss what courses I could teach at Instituto Bonó, based on my area of expertise and on the needs of the institution. Prof. Mella suggested a seminar on the reception of the novel *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, by the Dominican-American writer Junot Díaz. This would align well with the Instituto Bonó's goal of enhancing its curriculum with courses focused on the experiences of the Dominican-American community, the fifth largest Latino American group in the United States. I am excited about the idea, since Díaz's novel deals with the legacy of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo's dictatorship in Dominican society, a topic that falls squarely within my area of expertise but one I rarely get to teach at GVSU. In addition to imparting the seminar, I would give lectures on my current research to the university community.

Research: describe objectives and nature of research (qualitative vs. quantitative), the academic and professional context of the project, your relevant experience

The main objective of the research I intend to conduct during my stay in Santo Domingo is to make a contribution to our understanding of Dominican culture by writing a book chapter on the history of the Museo Nacional, the first national museum established in the Dominican Republic. This is part of a book project tentatively titled *Archive Nightmare: Memory, Inscription, and Erasure in the Dominican Republic*, of which I have already drafted three chapters. In this book, I use the term "archive" as a metaphor for all institutions dedicated to the preservation and transmission of cultural memory. The Museo Nacional, which was founded by the photographer, novelist and traveler Abigail Mejía, in 1930, shortly after the dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo

came to power, is one such institution. In tracing the origins and eventual dismantling of the museum, my project will consider the following questions: Why was the Museo Nacional created during Trujillo's dictatorship? What was the goal of the museum? How were historical artifacts acquired and displayed? What version of the past was it meant to represent, stage, and make visible? What versions did it silence, omit, or erase?

In order to answer these questions, I will examine the wealth of documents produced during Mejía's tenure as director of the Museo Nacional, held at the Archivo General de la Nación. I came across the museum's archives during a summer visit to the AGN. At that time, I was able to digitize the contents of one full box (the size of a file drawer) but I did not have time to see what was contained in two other boxes. My plan is to return to the AGN in Fall 2022 to digitize the remaining boxes and to conduct more exhaustive research. I am a native speaker of Spanish and have experience conducting research at the AGN, so reading and interpreting the sources would not be a problem. I plan to present the findings of my research at the Conference of the Latin American Studies Association or a similar venue. In addition to granting me access to the primary sources I need, the AGN invited me to give a talk on my research findings. This would be an exciting opportunity to share my work and interact with Dominican scholars, students, and members of the local community.

How you propose to do it

Teaching: What have you taught, how do you teach, your involvement in curriculum planning, thesis advising, or administrative responsibilities?

I have developed and taught a wide range of courses at undergraduate level in the last twelve years. I am a native speaker of Spanish and, with the exception of an Honors sequence on Latin American civilization and culture, all of my courses have been taught in that language. My classes challenge students to move beyond their present capabilities and use their creativity to make connections across disciplines. In most of my courses, students are encouraged to actively learn from each other as members of learning communities consisting of five to six students who take turns with different roles to analyze a text or find a solution to a problem. These roles vary according to the nature of the course and the level of the students. I typically introduce each major unit with a brief lecture, followed by problem-solving activities designed to improve students' critical-thinking and collaborative skills. I have experience supervising student independent research and have helped create many cultural opportunities for our students as the Faculty Advisor of the Spanish Club and a member of the Latin American and Latino/a Studies Program Executive Committee.

Research: How do you expect to use the experience upon your return? (Such as institutional collaboration, student and faculty exchange) How feasible is your project in terms of resources and amount of time allocated? What research facilities and resources are found in the host country? How could local political/cultural issues impact your work?

Upon my return to the United States, I will draft a chapter on the *Museo Natural* based on the research conducted at the AGN and will present my findings at the Latin American Studies Association's annual conference or a similar venue. I also plan to donate the digital files created

in my research to the Archivo General de la Nación so that other scholars can access them. I already have all the resources I need to complete my work at the AGN in Fall 2022 and I applied for a sabbatical leave to draft the chapter in Winter 2023 (Jan-May 2023, as Grand Valley terms what other institutions would designate the 'spring' semester). The AGN has granted me access to the primary sources and has offered to provide working space, computers, and internet connection. I don't foresee any political or cultural issues that could negatively impact my work. The Dominican Republic has enjoyed political stability for several decades. Although corruption remains a serious problem, people are generally free to express their views and to exercise their political choices.

Why the project is important

Teaching: What you hope to contribute and gain from the experience.

The seminar I propose to teach on the critical reception of Junot Díaz's novel, *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, will enhance the curriculum of Instituto Bonó, which has identified as a priority offering courses that reflect on the experiences of the Dominican-American community in the United States. Over two million Americans who trace their origins to the Dominican Republic call the United States their home. I am one of them. The experience of being an immigrant whose life was transformed by a college education informs my teaching. I look forward to the opportunity to share what I have learned in the United States with Dominican students. I also hope to learn what it means to be a college student in the Dominican Republic today, what has changed in the last three decades in terms of their relationship to the past, and how they express their hopes for the future.

Research: Why does it need to be done? What significance does it hold for your discipline, your development, the host country's benefit? What **benefits** the project will produce for your host, your discipline, you, and your home institution (employer)

The question of how societies remember is an important one for scholars in a variety of disciplines, including history, anthropology, cultural studies, and museum studies. It is also a question of vital importance for specialists in the history and culture of Latin America, a region still dealing with the legacy of brutal dictatorships and untold human rights violations. The fact that Dominican museums were created under the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo and the presidency of Trujillo's collaborator and political heir, Joaquín Balaguer, two rulers known for their flagrant disregard for democratic principles, raises some important questions: What is the relationship between museums and power? Whose memory is a museum meant to preserve? Whose memory does it seek to erase? Which artifacts are deemed worthy of preservation and who makes the decision? What can we learn about a society by examining how it treats the material remains of its past?

To date, no comprehensive study on the transmission of cultural memory in the Dominican Republic has been published. I hope that in helping fill that void, my research will enhance our understanding of Dominican society and culture. It will also benefit the AGN, which sees as part of its mission the dissemination of knowledge of the Dominican documentary patrimony. My

work will help advance that mission by highlighting the importance of the Museo Nacional and calling attention to the existence of its archives within the AGN. Moreover, I plan to digitize the museum's archive and donate the digital files to the AGN so that other researchers can access them.

This project will have a significant impact on my development as a specialist in Dominican studies in multiple ways:

- 1) it will provide the sources I need to complete a book chapter and increase my knowledge of the subject;
- 2) it will create opportunities for intellectual exchanges and future collaborations with Dominican historians, archivists, and literary scholars;
- 3) it will facilitate the dissemination of my ideas through lectures and publications

The benefits for my institution are also manifold. My research not only is bound to inform my teaching, but could also be of interest to colleagues in disciplines such as History, Museum Studies, and Latin American Studies. It also creates opportunities for student and faculty exchange and for institutional partnerships.

Teaching: What impact do you expect on your teaching and professional work? How do you expect to use the experience upon your return? (Such as institutional collaboration, student and faculty exchange)

I expect that teaching and conducting research in the Dominican Republic will lead to the creation of new curriculum materials. I might be able, for example, to incorporate a module on Junot Díaz's novel into my SPA 495 (Cross-National Literary Movements) course. I could also use the newly acquired knowledge about museum studies to develop a course on the representation of material culture in the Hispanic Caribbean. I also look forward to the possibility of promoting educational exchanges between the students and faculty of GVSU and Instituto Bonó, including a study-abroad program in the Dominican Republic for students of Spanish.

Research: How will results be disseminated (publications, conferences, presentations, joint collaborations, exhibitions, etc.)

I plan to disseminate the results of my research in a book chapter, conferences, and lectures. The chapter will be part of a book titled *Archive Nightmare: Memory, Inscription, and Erasure in the Dominican Republic*. I will also present a paper at the Latin American Studies Association Conference or similar venue. Finally, the Archivo General de la Nación has invited me to give a talk on the topic of my research at the institution.

Additional considerations:

Teaching/Research: Address teaching/research ratio as indicated in the award description; if the award description does not specify the ratio, speak to the teaching/research components equally using the above guidelines.

I propose to dedicate 75% of my time to conducting research and 25% to teaching.

Country Selection (up to 3,000 characters)

Why have you selected this country (countries)? What experiences have prepared you to undertake your project in this country (countries)? Please describe your prior experiences in the host country/countries (if any).

My choice of country is deeply rooted in my personal experience. Born and raised in the Dominican Republic, I migrated to the United States in the late 1980s and have since become a U.S. citizen. While in graduate school, my professors encouraged me to write my doctoral dissertation on Dominican literature and culture and virtually all of the scholarly work I have done since focuses on the intellectual history of my native country. I am grateful to both the Dominican Republic and the United States for the experiences that have shaped my life and I feel a moral obligation to foster understanding between the peoples of both countries.

Since joining the GVSU faculty in 2009, I have taught a wide range of Spanish language, civilization, and culture courses for undergraduate students. I established a faculty-led program in the DR and travelled there with students in 2013, 2015, and 2017. For six weeks, the students and I lived with Dominican families. The program was also aimed at increasing students' cultural understanding through community-learning projects.

I have served as a cultural ambassador both in my capacity as a member of the Executive Committee of GVSU Latin American and Latino/a Studies Program (LAS) and as co-chair of the Grand Rapids Latin American Film Festival (GRLAFF). As a member of LAS, I have created opportunities for students to experience Latin American and Latinx cultures through workshops, lectures, and performances. The list of guest speakers I have invited includes prominent Dominican and Dominican-Americans, such as Dedé Mirabal (until recently, the only surviving member of the Mirabal sisters), poet Frank Báez, hip-hop artist Hache ST, sociologist Ginetta Candelario, and poet and performer Josefina Baez. The GRLAFF is a free-event organized by five higher-education institutions of West Michigan to celebrate diversity through the art of film. Since I joined the organizing committee, the film festival has featured 47 award-winning films and invited 10 Latin American and Latino filmmakers to interact with the audience, including the Dominican director Nelson Carlo de los Santos Arias.

For the last twelve years, I have pursued research projects focused on Dominican literature and culture. I have edited a collection of essays on the presence of popular music in Dominican narrative and published a book on a group of intellectuals who worked at the service of the dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. I have also authored ten peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on Dominican cultural production. In 2014, I began working on a book-length manuscript, tentatively titled *Archive Nightmare: Memory, Inscription, and Erasure in the Dominican Republic*, which examines the construction of cultural memory in the Dominican

Republic. I have already completed three chapters of this project and submitted a book prospectus to two academic publishers. Both publishers expressed interest in considering the manuscript for publication.

Career Trajectory (up to 2,000 characters)

What is the trajectory you have followed, and what are your plans for the future? How does this Fulbright award fit into your career path and future goals? This is separate from the facts presented elsewhere in the application and may address your personal history, background, development and the opportunities to which you have, or have not been exposed.

Since receiving my PhD in 2009, my career has followed a teacher-scholar trajectory. As a teacher, I have endeavored to enhance my students' worldview and to equip them with the skills they need to become independent learners. My strong commitment to high-quality undergraduate education has been recognized by the students, faculty, and staff at GVSU. I was named the 2011-2012 Professor of the Year by GVSU Education Support Program and received the 2013 Student Award for Faculty Excellence, presented by the Student Senate to faculty who strive to shape their students' lives, professions, and society.

The trajectory of my scholarship closely mirrors my teaching career. I see research as an essential part of my identity, something I do out of an insatiable desire to acquire new knowledge and to partake in the learning process with others. The topics I bring to the classroom, the kinds of questions I pose, whatever excitement I instill in my students is informed by my research. My scholarly work has won me recognition both in the United States and the Dominican Republic. In 2015, I received an Early Career Scholar Award, presented at GVSU to scholars who demonstrate mastery in their field and show significant potential for continued success. My book *La poética del trujillismo: Épica y romance en el discurso de "la Era"* won the Pedro Henríquez Ureña Annual Essay Award, a competitive prize awarded by the Dominican Ministry of Culture for the best book-length essay published in 2016-2017.

My plans for the future are to further establish my reputation as a teacher-scholar and to continue to be an advocate for greater understanding across cultural boundaries. In making it possible for me to spend six months teaching and conducting research in Santo Domingo, a Fulbright would help me deepen my expertise in Dominican society and culture, create new relationships with Dominican students and scholars, and secure an academic publisher for my book project.

Cultural Preparation (up to 2,000 characters)

What challenges do you expect to face as a foreign national in the host country? How will you adapt, address, or manage them? Provide examples of your familiarity with the culture, your ability to be adaptable, culturally sensitive, collegial, and how you may serve as a cultural ambassador for the U.S.

As a Latino American who was born and raised in the Dominican Republic, and as a professor who has dedicated his entire career to studying the cultural production of the Dominican

Republic, I am very familiar with the culture. I have visited the country regularly over the years and have led three study abroad programs there. Those visits provided plenty of occasions to reconnect with my roots, eat delicious Dominican food, and enjoy Dominicans' proverbial hospitality. For over a decade, I have served as a cultural ambassador for the Dominican Republic in the U.S. I now look forward to the opportunity of serving as a cultural ambassador for the U.S. in my native country. I believe I can achieve that by sharing part of what I have learned about American society from my experience as an immigrant whose first job in the U.S. was pumping gas at a gas station in New Jersey during the coldest winter in 125 years and who was offered the amazing opportunity to become a college professor. More importantly, I will represent the United States in a positive light by treating everyone I come across with kindness and respect, regardless of their ethnicity, their gender, or their social status.

Teaching Preparation (only required if your award activity includes teaching) (up to 2,000 characters)

*How you will make your teaching relevant to the culture(s) and language(s) of the host country?
How will you adapt your materials and pedagogy to a different teaching environment in which your students' first language may not be English?*

The topic of the class I plan to teach will be relevant to Dominican students. I expect most students to have some level of familiarity with the cultural and historical background of Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, whose characters shift between the Dominican Republic of the 1950s and the United States of the early 21st century. I would draw from my knowledge of Dominican history and from my own life experience to contextualize the story of characters haunted by the memory of the past as they struggle to rebuild their lives in another country.

Since I am a Spanish professor, Spanish is the language of instruction for most of the courses I teach at GVSU. Therefore, I won't have to adapt to using a language different from the one I use in class every day. That said, I expect the teaching environment to be different in a Dominican classroom and I am open to adapting my teaching style or the assigned materials to accommodate students' needs. One interesting fact about the course I am proposing to teach is that Junot Díaz's novel was originally written in English, which means that we will have to read it in translation. However, there are no translations into Spanish for many of the critical essays written about his work. The fact that most of the students may not be able to read in English means that I would have to limit assigned literary criticism to those published in Spanish and supplement the course with lectures about the English reception of the novel.