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UNH Professor Wins Prestigious Fellowships to Research and Write in France

By [Erika Mantz](#)
UNH News Bureau

May 8, 2001

DURHAM, N.H. -- Nadine Berenguier, a University of New Hampshire associate professor of French and Italian, has received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities to continue her research on conduct books for adolescent girls in 18th century France and begin writing a book on the topic.

Berenguier was also awarded a residential fellowship from the Camargo Foundation, an American foundation headquartered in St. Paul, Minnesota, that owns a small compound in Cassis, a town on the coast of France. She will spend three months living in the community of scholars and artists.

"The fellowships give me the time I need to study these books that were designed to give young women, usually unmarried, information about what was to come in their lives," Berenguier says. "Often, the focus was on how to be a good Christian woman, but in the late 18th century, the texts became interested in more social issues like how to be a good wife and mother. I will look at why some of the books had more appeal than others and why some were considered dated so quickly."

Berenguier says the conduct books were primarily written by professional educators and parents who felt that upper class women were not taking their roles seriously enough. The texts ranged from 40 pages to four volumes, and some included instruction in geography and history. They were published into the late 19th century throughout Europe and translated into many languages.

"Conduct books were very moralistic, very predictable," Berenguier says. "A woman should obey authorities like the church, her parents and her spouse, and she shouldn't seek improvement for herself, but for her family because the good of her family has a direct relationship to the good of society at large. It's interesting, because in the books there's already a sense that the teenage years are difficult ones. I will also look at how sexuality was discussed, or not discussed. These books were walking a fine line between information and innocence."

This will be Berenguier's second book. Her first one looked at the issue of marriage as a contract and how it was dealt with in novels of the 18th century.

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