PRESS RELEASE

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Performing a Herculean Feat:

*With support from around the world, a small but vibrant Program in Modern Greek Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is set to expand*

Major financial gifts and renewed commitments of $420,000 will allow the Program in Modern Greek Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to offer more culture courses, develop a new academic minor and online courses, and increase international visibility and impact to improve cross-cultural understanding between the U.S. and Greece.

The additional support comes at an exciting time for the program, which has doubled student enrollments during this academic year alone and has been growing quickly in size and visibility since its establishment in 2008. In recognition of this achievement, strong endorsements for the program have come from prestigious scholars and university administrators from around the world.

Supporters of the program include the Hellenic Studies Support Network of Chicago, which pledged $180,000 over three years; the Onassis Foundation, based in Greece, which has committed $60,000 over three years; and the Houston Family Foundation, which has committed $60,000 over three years. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois has renewed its support of the program by committing $120,000 over three years for language instruction.

Additionally, the program is now included in the Onassis Foundation (USA) University Seminars Program, under which eminent scholars from the U.S. and abroad are sponsored by the Foundation to
offer lectures, seminars and courses on a broad range of topics related to Hellenic civilization at selected university campuses in North and South America.

“The program is extremely grateful to our supporters whose generosity allows us to continue our mission to disseminate Hellenic education and culture on campus, in Illinois, and beyond,” said Dr. Stefanos Katsikas, director of the Program in Modern Greek Studies. “We will also keep developing cross-cultural connections with Hellenism that transform the lives of our students.”

The new support allows the program to move toward its goal of obtaining a major endowment to establish a Center for Hellenic Studies, which, if realized, would be the first such center in the Midwest. In conjunction with a new center, the program could offer new study abroad opportunities along with a new major and graduate program in Modern Greek Studies. The center would also serve as a resource for citizens of Greece, Cyprus and the U.S. to share expertise and improve cross-cultural understanding.

The recent gifts and commitments add to already robust activities by the Program in Modern Greek Studies. It offers courses in Modern Greek language at all levels, and collaborates with departments across campus to provide students with over 40 courses annually on the language and culture of Hellenism.

The program has also been active in outreach, having hosted more than 85 events both on and off campus since 2008, including conferences, lectures, musical performances, film screenings and two Greek Film Festivals in Champaign, Ill., as well as a study abroad course to Cyprus that offered undergraduate students a rare opportunity to visit cultural and historic monuments, to meet state officials and to be interviewed by national television and radio stations.

“The Houston Family Foundation is very pleased to provide financial support to the new Greek program in addition to our ongoing scholarship program,” said Dennis Houston, a 1974 graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (B.S., chemical engineering) and former chairman and president of ExxonMobil Sales and Supply LLC. “We are excited about the potential for the new Program in Modern Greek Studies at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. The new program will provide valuable education and experiences to many students as they study Hellenism. Every business woman and man should ‘Become Greek Educated’ by understanding Greek culture and what it teaches.”

Anthony Papadimitriou, president of the Onassis Foundation, noted, “The Program in Modern Greek Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has already contributed significantly in the study of Hellenism. This admirable effort and proven performance reflects exactly the Onassis Foundation’s ambition and clear mission: to bring forward and highlight Hellenic culture, as a globally relevant and always contemporary reference point. Our contribution aims at amplifying further the caliber of the Program, so that Greek cultural wealth reaches a wider audience, and even more impactfully. This is more important during the current period, when Greece faces unparalleled challenges and its culture needs to become its strongest ambassador abroad.”

As Professor Anastasia Giannakidou from the Department of Linguistics at The University of Chicago remarked, “Though young (founded in 2008), the Program in Modern Greek Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has established itself as a dynamic and thriving center for the study of the Greek language, history, and culture in the Midwest. It boasts a highly acclaimed and active faculty consisting of historians, linguists, classicists, political scientists, and anthropologists dedicated to the research of contemporary and diachronic Greece. It sets an example to all of us how much one can accomplish with enthusiasm and sustained effort. Under the leadership of Professor Katsikas, the Modern
Greek Studies program has created a shining intellectual community, an ambassador of Hellenism in the United States and in the world at such critical times.”

More details about the Program for Modern Greek Studies can be found on its new website at www.moderngreek.illinois.edu.

**A few words about the Onassis Foundation:**

The mission of the Foundation is to support, organize and run activities in the areas of culture, education and social solidarity. Established in 1975, the Foundation has achieved the following:

- Support of Hellenic Studies in numerous Academic Institutions all over the world
- More than 6,500 scholarships, granted to Greeks and non-Greeks
- Support of various Greek educational institutions, ranging from Universities to public elementary schools, especially in underprivileged areas, including also Special Education Schools
- Support of the Lindau Nobel Laureate Meetings
- Urban renovation projects (e.g. Re-Think Athens)
- Organization of the annual Onassis Science Lectures Series in Crete, a highly-respected global scientific conference
- Digitization of the Foundation’s Hellenic Library, providing access for students/academics to invaluable books and manuscripts
  - Establishment of the Onassis Cardiac Surgery Center in Athens
- Various sponsorships, mainly behind educational, cultural and social causes, in an effort to counter-balance the effects of the severe crisis in Greece

In 1999 the affiliate Onassis Foundation (USA) Inc. was established in New York City in order to disseminate Hellenic civilization and culture throughout North and South America, and Canada.

The Onassis Cultural Centre in Athens, Greece, was inaugurated in December 2010, with the mission of promoting modern cultural expression, supporting new Greek artists and investing behind education and lifelong learning.