

# Race and Social Justice Initiatives

## World Languages Center

### Faculty

The World Languages Center is composed of faculty members from all over the world (including Latin America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East). Every WLC instructor is bilingual; most are multilingual (and multicultural), speaking three or more languages. In addition, WLC faculty hail from various racial, religious, and under-represented backgrounds.

### Pedagogical Framework: Translingual and Transcultural Competence

At the core of the Northeastern language-learning experience is a focus on Translingual and Transcultural Competence, which envisions students as language actors and social agents and prepares them to become engaged global citizens.

Based in a social pedagogies approach, our underlying theoretical principles include:

- A humanistic approach to language teaching that focuses on empathy and promotes the ability to understand and value other cultures and perspectives;
- A concept of culture that is non-essentialist and non-otherist;
- Inclusivity that sees students as pluricultural and plurilingual;
- Mediation that promotes interaction across cultures and languages, overcoming obstacles and solving conflicts;
- Continuous self-reflection.

In the WLC, students investigate products and practices from other cultures in order to explore and understand diverse cultural perspectives. Students learn to interact, negotiate, and engage in dialogues with people from other cultures and to participate in a process of deep reflection that develops attitudes of openness, empathy, de-centering, and tolerance.

### Curriculum

The following units reflect a sampling of the types of themes and topics that we incorporate in our classes (across languages):

- Linguistic Variation: students explore the many registers of spoken and written communication that one finds within the target language. Students examine grammatical and lexical differences that occur due to the region, gender, age, and social class of diverse speakers, as well as the myriad contexts in which discourse is produced;
- Marginalized Groups and Social Class Disparities: students explore the perspectives of marginalized (and often misunderstood) subcommunities within the target communities. Course units lead students to understand how racism, discrimination, and the history of colonization and/or slavery contribute to various, and sometimes conflicting, narratives;
- Immigration and Identity: students focus on current debates about national identity and citizenship

that many immigrants and their descendants face today throughout the world;

- Protests and Rebellion: students identify parallels and differences between current issues, such as the BLM and the “me too” movements in the U.S. and their counterparts abroad.
- The Family: students examine civil unions and same sex-marriage, gender identity, gender roles, and changing and diverse family structures;
- Educational Systems: students investigate how prospects for advancement in society may be restricted by access to academic opportunities.

## **Authentic Materials**

We integrate authentic texts of many genres in all our classes, using a multiliteracies orientation. Several of our classes, for example in German and Spanish, enable students to work entirely with free Open Educational Resources (OER) instead of traditional textbooks, which provide access to up-to-date perspectives from members of diverse groups. For example, students study the points of view of Spanish speakers of all different races and ethnicities, including minority populations (Black speakers in the Caribbean and Equatorial Guinea, mestizo speakers in Latin America, Latinos in the U.S., etc.); French students explore the francophone world, hearing the voices and analyzing the perspectives of individuals from the Maghreb and West Africa; German students study the plight of Turkish immigrants and Syrian refugees living in German cities.

## **Connections**

We provide students with the opportunity to interact with diverse groups of native speakers through

- virtual exchanges with students enrolled in partner universities abroad;
- Boomalang and Zoom conversations with diverse members of target language communities throughout the world;
- service learning initiatives with diverse groups of community members in bilingual schools, nursing homes, etc.
- summer Dialogues of Civilization led by WLC faculty to many different countries, including Argentina, Brazil, China, France, Italy, Japan, Peru, and Spain.

## **Extra-Curricular Engagement**

WLC faculty members mentor various student groups and help organize events that focus on diversity and inclusion. For example, we

- show films (in the target language) that treat issues of diversity, inclusion, social justice, and racism, facilitating pre- and post-film discussions;
- bring scholars, musicians, and artists from diverse backgrounds to campus to give lectures/interact with students;
- provide students with a respectful space to talk about their respective cultures and backgrounds, focusing on topics that are linked with social issues and social justice initiatives.

Students who enroll in language class or who pursue a minor in a language have the opportunity to connect the linguistic and cultural topics that they explore in the WLC—which include a strong focus on diverse voices, equity, inclusion, anti-racism, and social justice—with their majors in various disciplines, including majors offered through other colleges.