Diversity Statement

I have taught at very different types of institutions. Among them was the Université du Québec à Montréal, a Canadian public, French-language university founded in 1969 that has consistently distinguished itself by concretizing the ideal of democratization of and accessibility to higher education. Many of my students were first-generation Canadians who had to work several hours a week outside their academic commitments.

At the Universität des Saarlandes, I developed courses that were offered, among others, in the binational French-German Bachelor of Arts program, *Études franco-allemandes: communication et coopération transfrontalière/Deutsch-Französische Studien Grenzüberschreitende Kommunikation und Kooperation.* Each year, a select cohort of both French and German students are admitted. The German-speaking students spend the first year of study in Saarbrücken, while the French-speaking students study at the Université de Lorraine in Metz. In the second year, all students are together in Metz, and in their final year of study they pursue their coursework together in Saarbrücken. I thus had both French and German students in my courses. Moreover, I taught these same courses to a number of Erasmus students from the inter-European exchange program.

At the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, I teach in a semi-immersion language program in which my students are generally able to devote considerable time to their studies, and to language learning in particular.

I have had excellent students and have felt equally at ease in all these settings. Given the topics of my courses offered in Germany and the United States, including my course, Migrant Writing in Québec(cf. syllabus in my teaching dossier), I can generally count on several students of recent immigration background enrolling in my course(s) during any given term. The course on migrant writing allows students to reflect on the implications of being a “minority within a minority” in North America.

In German Studies as well, my teaching and research interests involve cross-cultural and human rights issues as they are depicted in narratives of migration. For example, I published an article in the November 2020 special issue of *Seminar* devoted to the social justice work of German comics and graphic literature. My essay analyzes the representations of immigrants and asylum-seekers in German-language graphic novels published in 2012 and 2017. Employing theories of cross-cultural communication (Volker Hinnenkamp and Bernd Müller-Jacquier), I examine the use of ethnic and national stereotypes by characters, and how these precisely influence how the authors organize conversations between characters who are citizens of Germany and characters who are noncitizens. My analysis reveals that the latter are more capable of working through disturbances in cross-cultural communication, *correcting* or *repairing* the stereotype, and allowing for the conversation to move forward. Thus, these works both encourage a reassessment of the alleged openness of Germany in an era of global migration and displacement, and seek to empower immigrants and asylum-seekers by illuminating their cross-cultural competence in daily conversations.

Since arriving in Michigan in 2018, I have also been able to develop, on the basis of my postdoctoral research project, several collaborations outside the academic community that are driven precisely by issues of diversity and interculturality. On the basis of my research project on the representation of the Volkswagen Beetle in German and English-language literature and culture since 1949, I reached out to MotorCities, a nonprofit corporation affiliated with the National Park Service that interprets and preserves southeast and central Michigan’s essential contribution to the development of the automotive industry. In my partnership with this organization, I help the MotorCities National Heritage Areareach out to communities whose contribution to the development of the auto industry has been essential but neglected so far.

The first project I am involved in is a collaboration on the creation and conceptualization of the Making Tracks II website, a follow-up to the already existing site, Making Tracks: The African American Experience in the Auto Industry (http://www.makingtracks.org), founded approximately ten years ago through a partnership between MotorCities, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, and the Ford Motor Company. This site presents a series of audio clips profiling African Americans who became leaders in the automotive industry. It retraces their migration journeys north to settle in Detroit, known as “Motor City,” and the many hurdles they had to overcome as black people to establish themselves in an industry they had largely helped set up. TheMaking Tracks I website currently treats material through the year 1950. With the Black Lives Matter movement in full swing, MotorCities has recently decided to develop a new website that will include the period from 1950 to the present day.

I am a full member of the MotorCities Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee, which includes members of the organization’s board of directors. The committee has identified a number of minority groups whose contribution to the development of Michigan’s auto industry has not (or not sufficiently) been considered in MotorCities’ preservation work. Since the list of groups we are approaching is rather extensive, I will mention only three examples: indigenous communities, women, and the LGBTQ+ community. I will act in the next months as MotorCities’ intermediary and will initiate dialogues with certain individuals identified as “key contacts” within these groups. Our goal with these dialogues is to better understand in what way(s) the organization can showcase their respective contributions to automotive History and thus tell more inclusive automotive histories.

The third project I am involved in is called the Southwest Detroit Auto Heritage Guide(https://www.motorcities.org/southwest-main). This online guide has just been published on the MotorCities website, and it traces a century of contribution to the automotive industry by workers, businesses, and unions in the Southwest Detroit neighborhood. Parts of the guide have yet to be written; namely, content concerning the particular contribution and links to the automotive industry of certain cultural and ethnic communities – Mexican, Polish, Irish, Maltese, and Arab-American.

I am working in very close collaboration with Ron Alpern, one of the main authors of the guide and an expert in the history of labor movements in Detroit. We aim to complete the sections of the guide relating to the contribution of cultural communities. These will be in the form of short essays, through a series of well-defined stages and by way of collaborations between the aforementioned communities and different Michigan universities. This approach will facilitate the initiation of certain members of these cultural communities (mostly young activists and groups of retirees/seniors) into archival and historical research, and enable the communities to have their say in the choice of materials that will appear in the guide. Among other duties, I am responsible for organizing the workshop that will serve as an introduction into archival and historical research for the collections of the Reuther Library at Wayne State University (a collection on labor and urban affairs), the Detroit Public Library (National Automotive History Collection), and the resource center linked to the Detroit Historical Society. I am also responsible for the recruitment and supervision of some of the undergraduate and graduate students who will take part in the project across different universities and colleges in Michigan.