Along with my work on the imaginary Germanies of Franco-Canadian cultures, I have a broader interest in contemporary French-language and German-language fictional texts that foreground cross-cultural issues. One of my current research projects focuses on the representations of cross-cultural encounters. Of special interest is communicative dysfunctionality, or the misunderstandings that arise from such situations in graphic novels and comics published in Québec, France, and Germany. I have been focusing on the cartoonists Yasmine and Djibril Phan-Morissette, Nacha Vollenweider, and Paula Bulling, as their works strive to empower expatriates, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. These cartoonists spotlight the cross-cultural competences of such populations, often in daily conversations with characters presented as citizens of Canada or Germany. Applying cross-cultural communication theories, especially those of Volker Hinnenkamp, Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, and Bernd Müller-Jacquier, I examine how the cartoon authors organize and develop conversations between citizen and non-citizen characters. This project is especially important to me because very few large-scale works by literary scholars, at least in the German-, English-, and French-speaking worlds, have examined comics as a medium for representing cross-cultural encounters. Furthermore, while recent studies of comics have relied on concepts such as “multiculturalism,” or “transnationalism,” I prefer to rely on concepts such as “intercultural dialogue,” or “cross-cultural communication,” which immediately signal a research focus on circumscribed exchanges between characters from different cultural backgrounds.

In the particular Québécois context, much more attention has been given to how film or television series represent—or fail to represent—cultural diversity. At St. Francis Xavier, I would be eager to integrate data science techniques into my research on Quebecois comics and graphic novels; this would allow me to accurately identify diversity and cross-cultural relations in these works using quantitative and qualitative methods. I am also very interested in expanding this project to encompass comics from other francophone literatures in Canada. Such a Digital Humanities project would appeal to undergraduate students, including those studying a foreign language, and I would love to involve interested students as research assistants. I deeply believe in the merits of comics for foreign language instruction, and I would be delighted to offer a course on comics within your French program; I noticed that no course on comics is currently offered. A course I designed in 2018, “De la bande dessinée au roman graphique. Interculturalité et ethnicité,” would meet any requirements you have for a 300- or 400- level course in French. This course is closely related to my research, since it examines graphic narratives with a strong focus on intercultural relations. It not only draws on theories of cross-cultural communication, but also introduces students to the scholarly study of comics—for example, how to study the construction of space and rhythm in comics, the use of colors, and the relations between text and image. One of the many comics we study in this course is *Pyongyang. A Journey in North Korea.* This is a black-and-white graphic novel published in 2004 by the Québécois author Guy Delisle relating the author’s own stay in Pyongyang when he was sent there by a French animation studio to work as an overseas supervisor at the Scientific and Educational Film Studio of Korea. The comic describes his experiences at the studio as well as his adventures outside the studio when traveling in the country. The page I have included here depicting a cross-cultural misunderstanding between Guy and his North Korean guide takes place at the studio. Guy is at work but decides to put some music on—Acid Jazz. His guide, thinking that jazz could have a bad influence on his coworkers, repeatedly comes to Guy’s office to close the door without explaining why he does so. But since Guy is feeling warm that day, he repeatedly gets up from his chair to reopen the door and, as one can guess, becomes increasingly irritated by his guide’s behavior. The guide finally explains, in a speech bubble at the end of the page, why he is acting this way. This is, of course, an interesting way to portray Guy’s encounter with the North Korean regime’s denigration of many foreign musical genres. Beyond this, the passage is noteworthy for relying on the resources of the comic medium. In my course, we study Delisle’s use of these resources to depict cross-cultural misunderstanding, asking questions such as: why does only one speech bubble refer to the conversation between Guy and his guide while the whole page uses narratory blocks? Or what might explain the author’s choice to not visually represent some of the characters’ movements that are explicitly presented in the narratory blocks, creating a contradiction between text and image? These are only two of the questions that I would ask, and I hope that they have also sparked your interest in diving into the world of intercultural comics. Thank you for your attention.