Alongside my work on the imaginary Germanies of Franco-Canadian cultures, I am broadly interested 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, especially 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 cartoonists Yasmine and Djibril Phan-Morissette, Nacha Vollenweider, and Paula Bulling because of the way they their works empower expatriates, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers by illuminating their cross-cultural competences, often in daily conversations with characters presented as citizens of Canada or Germany. I employ cross-cultural communication theories, especially those of Volker Hinnenkamp, Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, and Bernd Müller-Jacquier, to examine how the authors organize and develop conversations between characters who are citizens and those who are not. I am particularly committed to such a project because few large-scale works by literary scholars, at least in the German-, English-, and French-speaking worlds, have reflected on comics as a medium to represent cross-cultural encounters. Furthermore, recent studies of comics have relied on concepts such as “multiculturalism,” or “transnationalism”; in contrast, I prefer to rely on concepts such as “intercultural dialogue,” or “cross-cultural communication,” which immediately point to 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 portray diversity and cross-cultural relations using quantitative and qualitative methods. I am also very interested in expanding this project to encompass comics from other francophone literatures in Canada. I feel that such a Digital Humanities project would appeal to undergraduate students, including those studying a foreign language, which is I why 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 highly 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 relation 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 that details the author’s own stay in Pyongyang when he was sent by a French animation studio to work there 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 takes place at the studio and depicts a cross-cultural misunderstanding between Guy and his North Korean guide. 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 stands 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 reflect on 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.