

A Report on the Webinar
“Bridging the University and High School Systems
Through World Languages and Cultures”

On Sat. Feb. 23 1-4PM EST the Inserra Chair in Italian and Italian American Studies in collaboration with the Italian Program (MLL Dept.) and the support of the MSUNER at Montclair State University hosted an online workshop to learn about a summer Italian intensive course for high school students on a university campus, Italian for Spanish speakers classes, and programs focused on Translation. These are some of the new projects launched in Italian Studies in the past five years both on the East and West Coasts to better equip students for an interconnected culturally diverse world, as they cross the bridge from high school to university.

Offered through a Zoom meeting, this workshop included presenters from Montclair State University, California State University Long Beach, and NJ public high schools to illustrate how bridges are built starting from these exchanges, and leveraging HS certificates and exams that grant college credit.

A brief summary of each presentation highlights the innovative nature of these new initiatives. Teresa Fiore (Montclair State University) opened the webinar with an overview of the challenges facing not only the teaching of Italian but also the teaching of languages in general and the need for synergy between high schools and universities. Her remarks focused on rethinking the content and mode of delivery in courses aimed at teaching world languages and cultures. Although the webinar primarily addressed Italian, the point was repeatedly made that all languages are implicated when forging new curricular and professional pathways using languages. Indeed, the curricular and the professional were continually intertwined in webinar discussions.

Supervisor of World Languages & ESL Frank Sedita (Montclair Public Schools K-12) offered an administrative perspective of the need for assessment in high school language teaching and the importance of teaching to ACTFL standards. Accountability in language acquisition not only provides students with concrete proof of their growing abilities over the course of language study but it also offers future employers tangible proof of language competency. When students possess a measurable skill set, they are poised to perform in professional or higher education environments where language is a necessary tool.

Patti Grunther (Watchung Hills Regional HS) introduced the summer program for intensive Italian study now in its third year at Montclair State University. She discussed the goals of the program which offers high school students the means to improve their spoken, written, and reading comprehension skills through intensive engagement with authentic materials, site visits, and multiple teaching

faculty. The summer program constitutes a new mode of content delivery that complements and enhances yearlong language study in high schools, especially at the critical pre-AP moment. The program emphasizes AP content through a series of participatory group activities that prepare students for many facets of the exam. The summer program also exposes students to life on a college campus where they may continue their study of Italian language and culture at higher levels. The course is a valuable example of how high school and college language programs can be effectively bridged.

Multilingual teaching and the synergies of language families were at the forefront of the presentation given by Diego Cortés Velásquez and Manuel Romero (Cal State Long Beach). Drawing on years of research and teaching on multilingualism, in particular, through the strategy known as Intercomprehension (a form of plurilingual communication across languages of the same family) for which California State University Long Beach has become a point of reference via a 2011-14 NEH grant, the speakers outlined the importance of recognizing the multilingual competencies of our students who increasingly come to educational settings with more than one language in their linguistic repertoire. These students benefit from new approaches that employ all of the languages they know to acquire new ones. The difference in perspective between the communicative approach and Intercomprehension and other multilingual methodologies was touched upon and identified as an area that requires a more detailed and in-depth discussion over the coming years. It was noted by the speakers and those who commented on their presentation, including Barbara Spinelli (Columbia University), that this fertile new ground for language acquisition holds great promise and is worthy of further treatment in future meetings.

The last two presentations in the webinar by Clorinda Donato (Cal State Long Beach) and Marisa Trubiano (Montclair State University) addressed Translation Studies as a growing, multifaceted field that offers professional opportunities in translation, interpretation, dubbing, subtitling, and localization. Clorinda Donato spoke of a new Minor in Translation Studies at CSULB that will give multilingual students the background in translation as a skill, mode of thinking, and communicative and pedagogical strategy that is interdisciplinary by definition. Marisa Trubiano's presentation illustrated the Italian Translation Project at Montclair State University, which has entailed the introduction of new courses (with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the development of special projects in collaborations with archives and museums in New York, and paid internships in Italy for opera surtitling. The main focus of the presentation was on the possibilities opened by audiovisual translation (titling for film and theater), a growing field where language study is applied in concrete ways.

In closing, all of the speakers entertained the many questions and comments offered by those in attendance. Judging from the interest in topics presented in

this webinar, it is clear that language educators seek new ways of thinking about their profession and the evolution of its methodologies, contents, tools, and applications in lieu of focusing on the pervasive rhetoric of crisis, which risks paralyzing efforts for change and taking visibility away from innovative projects.

At a time in which the study of world languages is being redesigned to respond to the changing needs of the student population and the job market, developing closer relationships between the university and high school systems is a very fruitful terrain to expand the internationalization of the curriculum, as well as increase enrollment, the number of majors/minors, and levels of language and culture competence.

Useful Links:

For more information about the Webinar see: tinyurl.com/BridgeHSUni (the PP of the workshop is available in the section Resources) and flyer attached.

Translation project: <https://www.montclair.edu/inserra-chair/opportunities-for-students/the-italian-translation-curriculum-and-internship-project/>

Summer Course:

<https://www.montclair.edu/inserra-chair/opportunities-for-students/summer-course/2019-summer-italian-intensive-course-for-college-credit/>

The Clorinda Donato Center for Global Romance Languages and Translation Studies: <http://www.csulb.edu/clorinda-donato-center>

Clorinda Donato (Graziadio Endowed Chair in Italian Studies and Director, Clorinda Donato Center for Global Romance Languages and Translation Studies, California State University, Long Beach)

Teresa Fiore (Inserra Endowed Chair in Italian and Italian American Studies, Montclair State University)

Manuel Romero (Program Coordinator of The George L. Graziadio Center for Italian Studies and Associate Director, The Clorinda Donato Center for Global Romance Languages and Translation Studies, California State University Long Beach)