

# LGBTQA Inclusiveness in the Language Classroom: Challenging Heteronormative Assumptions While Teaching and Learning a Foreign Language

Yeray Ramos Silgado



## Faculty Communities for Inclusive Teaching, 2016

### Project Overview

After concluding that many foreign language textbooks currently available on the marketplace tend to overlook gender and sexuality and are designed from a heteronormative perspective, I proposed a workshop to share possible pedagogical strategies and teaching materials to raise awareness of and respect for diverse gender and sexual orientations. The language classroom should be a welcoming and inclusive environment where we not only accommodate LGBTQA students, but also heterosexual ones who perhaps strive hard to avoid heterosexist misconceptions in society. The aim of this project is to identify and reduce homophobic biases in order to create an inclusive classroom climate that works towards the dissolution of entrenched heteronormativity

### Participants

#### FACULTY

45 people participated in the 1<sup>st</sup> workshop and 17 people participated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop, including administrators, coordinators, lecturers, and GSIs in Romance Languages and Literatures

#### STUDENTS

55 SPAN 103 students completed an anonymous questionnaire about LGBTQA representation in the language classroom



### Participant Responses

#### FACULTY in Romance Languages and Literatures:

“After the first workshop, I modified all the materials of the Catalan course I teach every semester”

“I taught Spanish this summer as part of a Study Abroad program in Santiago, and I thought that it was a very good opportunity to use the new adapted student information form”

“I usually teach elementary classes, and I have become more aware to include more diverse family structures”

“We are implementing more cultural aspects in SPAN 231, and one of the instructors has submitted a proposal to include a Miniconferencia about LGBTQ marriage in Argentina and LGBTQ rights in Costa Rica”

“Last spring semester 2016, I had a student who came to my office hours to tell me that they did not feel comfortable with the heteronormative given pronouns. Thanks to the workshop, I was able to explain to them about the limitations of neutral pronouns in Romance languages”

#### STUDENTS in Spanish 103:

In the questionnaires, students expressed their desire to:

“...use readings that include LGBTQA [voices and experiences]”

“...talk about LGBTQA people in Spanish-speaking countries”

“...[analyze] the struggles LGBTQA people face there and compare it to the struggles of American LGBTQA people”

### Artifacts

- LGBTQA Inclusive Teaching **DEMONSTRATION**
- LGBTQA Inclusive **STATEMENT** for all syllabus in Romance Languages and Literatures
- Adapted **STUDENT INFORMATION FORM** to include LGBTQA students
- **TOP 10 TIPS** to challenge heteronormativity in the language classroom
- PowerPoint **PRESENTATION** with a detailed analysis of heteronormative assumptions in foreign language textbooks in Romance Languages and Literatures
- Anonymous **STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE** about LGBTQA representation in the language classroom

### Resources

- **SPECTRUM CENTER** at U-M
- Fisher, E.S., & Komosa-Hawkins, K. (Eds.). (2013). *Creating safe and supportive learning environments: A guide for working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth and families*. New York: NY: Routledge
- Mayo, C. (2013). *LGBTQ youth and education: Policies and practices*. New York: NY: Teachers College Press
- Sadowski, M. (2016). *Safe is not enough: Better schools for LGBTQ students*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press



### Next Steps

- Initiate conversations with **PUBLISHING COMPANIES** to discuss the design of foreign language textbooks
- Organize a mandatory workshop about LGBTQA inclusive techniques for **NEW HIRED FACULTY MEMBERS** during the first orientation week in RLL
- Implement an annual seminar in ROMLANG 528 (Teaching Romance Languages) for **GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS** who teach in RLL for the first time
- Create a **CANVAS** folder to share LGBTQA inclusive materials across languages (Catalan, French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish)
- Teach an intermediate SPAN232 **TOPICS COURSE**: “*LGBTQA in the Hispanic World: Artistic and Cultural Manifestations*”