

ISSUE 4 · APRIL 2022

RLL IN THE CLASSROOM

Featuring RLL instructors, teaching resources,
and other events of interest

Welcome to RLL in the Classroom! This is the April edition of our new monthly newsletter, designed to highlight the great teaching going on around RLL, share ideas and resources, spark discussion, and build community around teaching in the department.

We hope you enjoy!

Juan Arias and Luca Politi
Bok Pedagogy Fellows in RLL



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Spotlight of the Month:
Caio Esteves de Souza

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for TAs & TFs

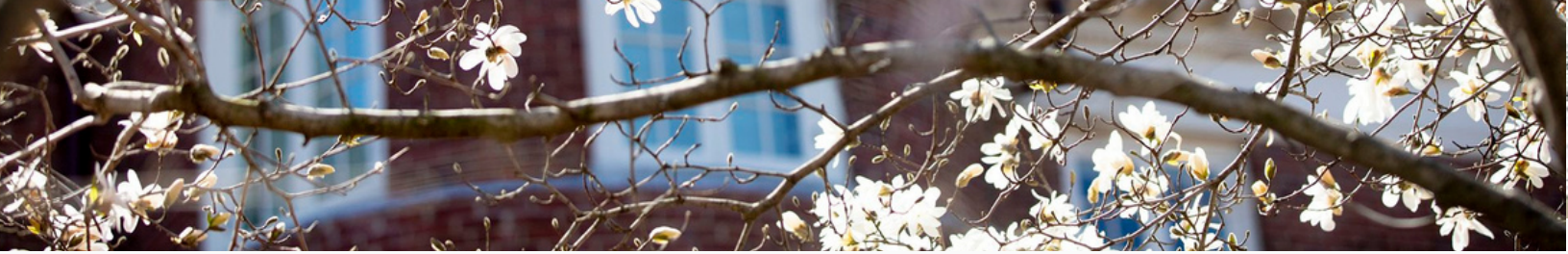
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Spotlight of the month

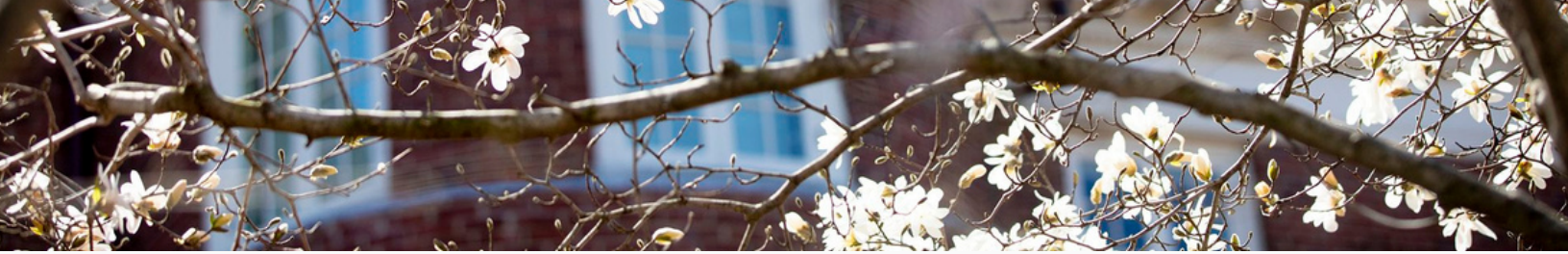
CAIO ESTEVES DE SOUZA

For this month's spotlight, we interviewed Caio Esteves De Souza, a third year graduate student and Teaching Fellow in the Portuguese section. Caio reflects on teaching beginning and upper-level Portuguese this year, including the benefits of working with popular culture to help engage students and spark debate. Having previously taught at the university level in Brazil, Caio discusses what he thinks the two traditions can learn from each other, and how his experiences teaching at Harvard have shaped his teaching philosophy in new ways.



Caio wrote down his responses to our questions. We hope that by reading the interview, you can find inspiration for your own experiences "in the classroom."

"It's not a matter of emancipating our students, but merely of acknowledging an emancipation that is already there, and letting them enact it in the classroom"



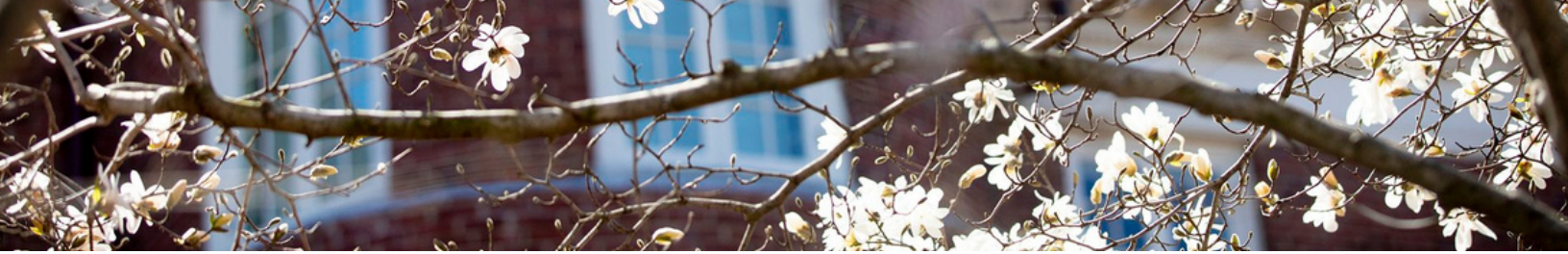
Caio, we normally let our guests start by introducing themselves. How would you describe yourself to the audience of our newsletter? What are you working on this year?

This has been quite a busy year for me, actually. I am a G3 in the Portuguese section of RLL, which means that I am teaching at our Language Program for the first time while simultaneously preparing for my General Exams. Last semester, I taught my first course at Harvard, Portuguese 10, for absolute beginners, and now I am teaching Portuguese 30, which is an upper-level class, for students who have been studying Portuguese for about four semesters. As far as my research goes, I am now narrowing down my corpus and it looks like my final project will be dealing with writings from the 15th and 16th centuries that discuss the European maritime expansion written in all the major Romance languages, but naturally more focused on the Portuguese side of things.



Although this is your first year as a TF at Harvard and as a language instructor in the US, you have some teaching experience from before starting this PhD program. Could you elaborate on this?

Sure. I am originally from Brazil, where I did my undergraduate and graduate education from 2011 until 2018. During that time, at the Universidade de São Paulo, I had the chance to work as a TA of Brazilian literature for one semester (supervised by Professor Yudith Rosenbaum), and of Spanish literature for two semesters (supervised by Professor Maria Augusta da Costa Vieira). The experience I got from working with them was outstanding and I will take that with me for the rest of my life.

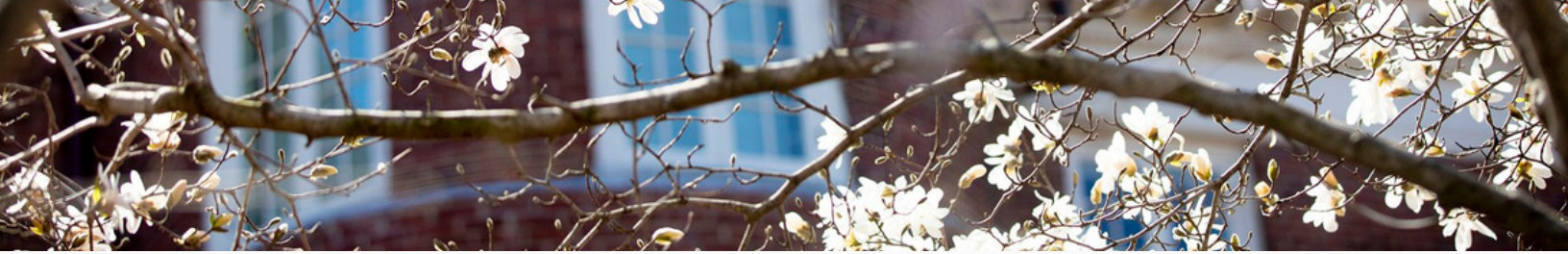


While working with undergraduate students back home, I realized that there was a lack of opportunities for them to read medieval and early-modern texts in our curriculum, so I created and led a reading group formed entirely by first-year undergraduate students with the sole purpose of reading texts written between the 14th and the 18th centuries. The group had about 50 students, and they had full autonomy on choosing the texts we were going to read, which allowed us to closely read plays from Shakespeare, prose from Cervantes, passages of Dante's Commedia, the Russian Chronicles of Novgorod, some narratives of chivalry, and many other texts. I have always believed in giving students as much autonomy as possible to explore their intellectual path without overloading them with an excessive number of assignments, while still providing them with some structure to help them develop their own thoughts and achieve their objectives – and that group was an amazing laboratory for that.



We'd like to get a high-level overview of the courses for which you teach. Let's start with Portuguese 10 (Beginning Portuguese I: From Cambridge to Copacabana), which you taught in the fall. What did the class do? How did it go?

Portuguese 10 is the most elementary level of Portuguese, intended to introduce the language from the very beginning. I had an amazing group of students with me on that journey – many of whom are now enrolled in Portuguese 11, which makes me very happy. I told my students on the first day of classes that, while the course has a lot of specific objectives well explained in our syllabus, I would consider our journey to have been successful if, by the end of the semester, they were able to have a short but genuine conversation with a native speaker in Portuguese. We had a lot of fun working with several elements of the Lusophone popular culture, ranging from music to memes, dad jokes, traditional Brazilian snacks – we were even lucky enough to be able to spend one of our classes at the Memorial Church's kitchen preparing some pão de queijo (cheese breads) and brigadeiro (a chocolate dessert). When the weather allowed, we would also take the class outside and learn about the vocabulary for campus life while walking around campus. I think it's fair to say that we had a good time last semester, and I was very happy with the progress my students made.



Now you are teaching upper-level Portuguese: ‘Lusophone Culture in Bits and Pieces’. Same questions: what is the class doing, and how is it going?

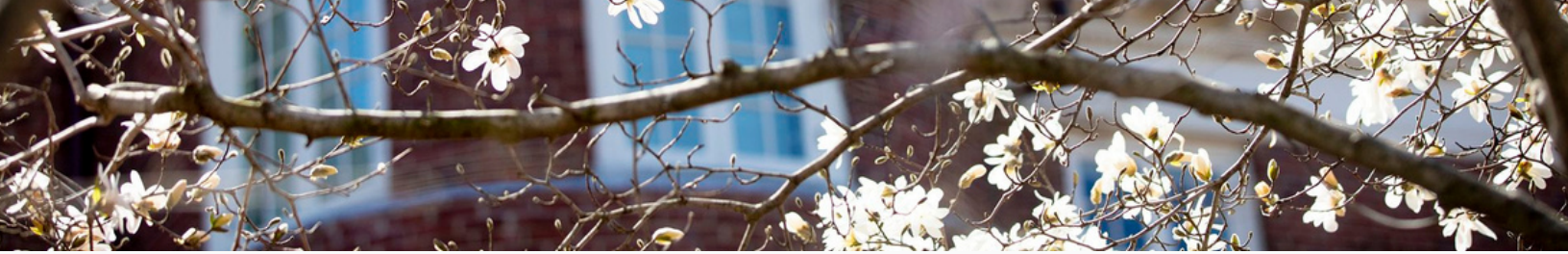
Portuguese 30 has a very different feel than Portuguese 10 for several reasons. First and more importantly, my students are already fully capable of having deep and long conversations in Portuguese, so my job is to help them perfect their already great speaking and writing skills. The fact that it is a much smaller class makes it easier to focus on each student’s individual needs, which is always a positive thing. The syllabus is built around a discussion on radionovelas, telenovelas and feuilleton novels. My students have already read short stories for this class and are now reading a novel, which we discuss weekly, while studying some more specific grammar points. Their final project involves creating their own photonovela/telenovela and presenting it to the class on the last day. So far, I would say we are all having fun with the class, and I can already see progress in their language skills

What are some of the advantages of working with these popular forms of media (memes, telenovelas) in Portuguese 10 and 30?

In Portuguese 10, I would say that the main advantage of working with popular culture is to help students find some non-verbal support to express themselves. Speaking a new language for the first time is quite intimidating, and doing that in a university environment can be very challenging. So having that visual support of a meme that they already know, or a song to which they can relate felt like a game-changer for me to get them engaged and speaking in our class. Apart from that, they create a more meaningful bond with the Lusophone culture, and learning Portuguese isn’t just an intellectual challenge but also something that they start looking forward to for personal reasons.



A popular meme based on an album cover of Brazilian singer-songwriter and composer Chico Buarque



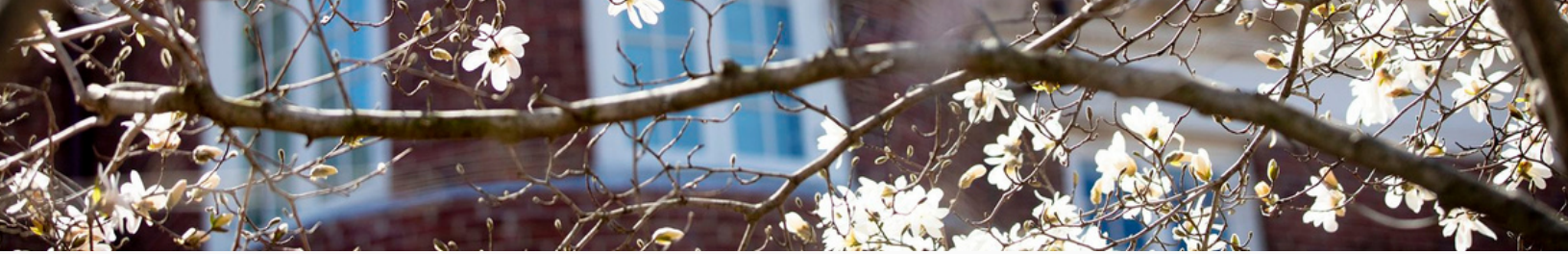
In Portuguese 30, on the other hand, our students are already very comfortable speaking in Portuguese, and already have a strong bond to the language and culture. So those forms of popular culture like the telenovela and the folhetim are useful resources for discussing some deep social issues in Lusophone societies. We have used those materials to debate issues that range from the enslavement of African people in Brazil during the 19th century to the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s. Now, as we read a novel that served as the inspiration for several telenovelas during the past decades, we are debating the social role of marriage in 19th century society, the role played by women back then and nowadays in the Lusophone countries, and many other topics of that kind.



A popular meme based on a character from the telenovela Senhora do Destino.

A number of TFs and TAs in RLL have also taught in a romance language speaking country. Having worked in both environments, what differences do you see between how university teaching is practiced and perceived in the US versus Brazil?

University teaching in Brazil consists almost entirely in lecturing, while teaching in the US is very much student-centered and cares a great deal about making students engage with the class. If, from that perspective, university classes in Brazil can be perceived as more rigid and with less room for students who want to take an active role in their learning process, there is still another aspect to be considered: the workload of the courses. Classes in Brazil will usually have quite a few pages of readings per week, but the number of graded assignments is considerably smaller than in the US. This gives university students in Brazil a much more active control over their time outside of the classroom, and an increased sense of responsibility over their own learning progress once they leave the classroom.



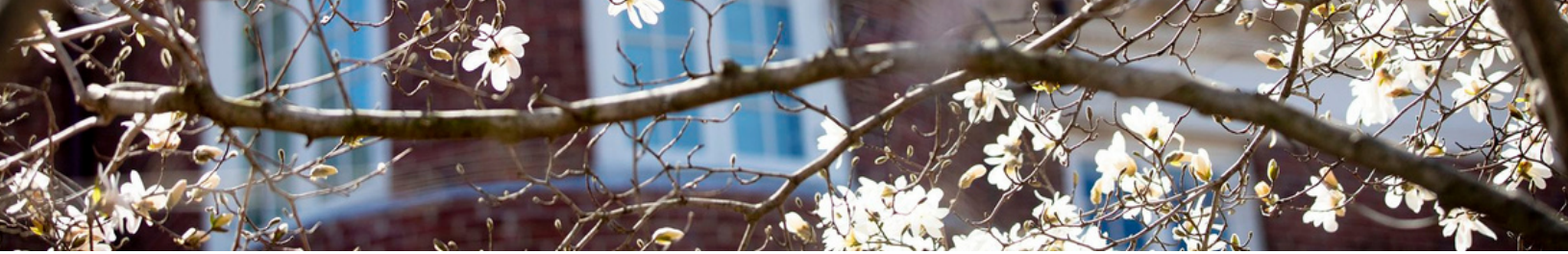
What do the two traditions have to learn from each other?

As I mentioned before, I am always in favor of students having autonomy over their learning process and, in a bigger picture, their lives – so I will always be inclined to favor anything that allows more fluidity to accommodate their goals while also offering a structure to assure they reach them. I believe the Brazilian model would benefit from creating spaces where students can play a more active role in the discussion of their readings and explore further their own ideas – and, in my experience with the reading group I mentioned above, students would actually look forward to it. The US model, on the other hand, could certainly learn a thing or two about trusting students to take an active role on their own learning outside of the classroom without the need of an instructor requiring graded response assignments every week. Students are enrolled in our courses for a reason; they care about the topics we are teaching, and they will find ways of immersing themselves in them without the need of the threat of punishment by grades or attendance calls. I believe there is certainly room to explore a middle ground between those two models.

What impact has your experience teaching Portuguese at Harvard had on your teaching philosophy? Has it also changed the way you see yourself as a student?

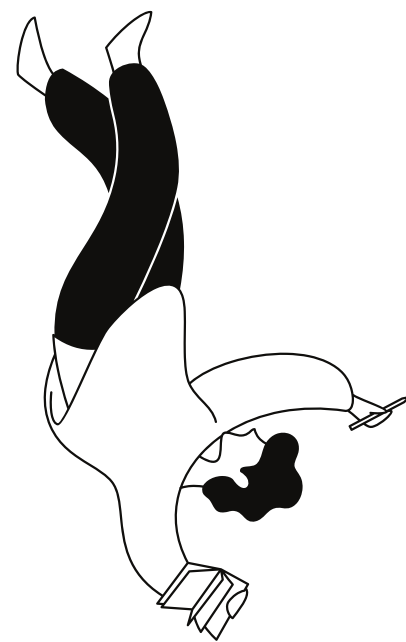
A very positive impact it had on my teaching philosophy was forcing me to rethink my own language from a perspective of a non-native speaker. It was simultaneously an effort of alterity and empathy to which I had never been exposed on that level before. It also made me realize how important it is to foster a welcoming environment in my classroom, especially in the case of Portuguese 10, when students are feeling most vulnerable. On the other hand, it has reinforced my belief that students should be treated as adults and never infantilized in any way – when we treat them as equals on a human level, they rise to the challenge of being active actors of their own learning process. It's not a matter of emancipating our students, but merely of acknowledging an emancipation that is already there, and letting them enact it in the classroom.

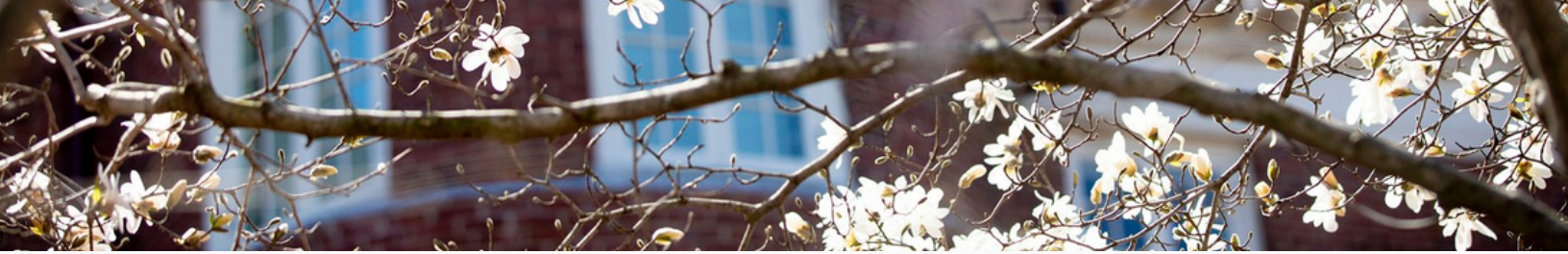
"I am always in favor of students having autonomy over their learning process and, in a bigger picture, their lives"



Speaking of being a student and instructor at the same time, how has it been for you to prepare for your General Exam in RLL while teaching? Do you have any advice for future doctoral students who will be in the same position?

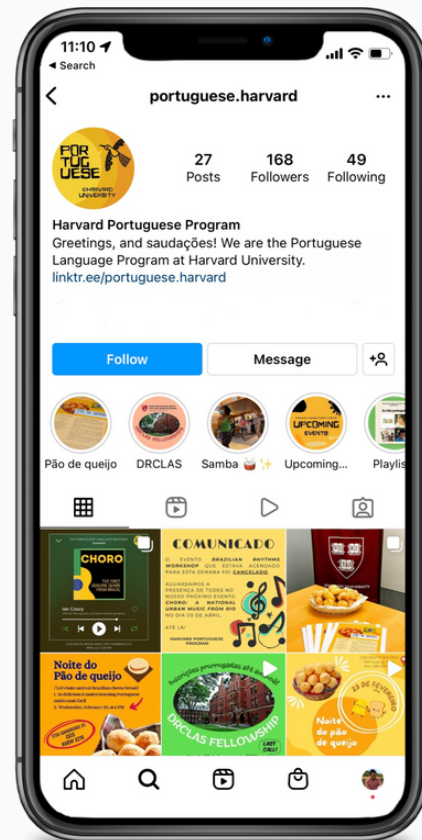
It has frankly been very unpleasant and much more challenging than it would be necessary or even healthy for any of us. The General Exam is a great opportunity for us to connect with our field more broadly and to explore authors and works that we couldn't explore in other occasions due to other circumstances. However, doing that properly requires time not only to read, but to think about what we are reading – academic knowledge cannot be produced at such an unnaturally accelerated rhythm. I believe that teaching and preparing for the General Exams simultaneously is counterproductive. But since that is the reality that we are facing, the advice I could offer for future PhD students in this position would be to try to incorporate as many readings as they possibly can from the syllabi of all the classes they have taken at Harvard and before coming to Harvard; limit each essay to a single central argument (that should even be broad enough and vague enough so you can link many of those readings more easily); and have a frank conversation with your course heads so they can be reasonable with their expectations of your teaching assignments for that last semester, since your generals should certainly be your main priority.





What other takeaways do you have for future teachers of RLL?

Understand that teaching is a constitutive part of your degree – and that has two implications. It means that you should never neglect it, or see it as a minor duty, since it is a very important part of your training as a future scholar, so you should dedicate the appropriate amount of time and effort to make it work in the best way possible for you and your students. But also understand that it is not the only nor the central part of your PhD, and teaching should not take up so much time that it prevents you from doing your research. It is an important part of your degree, but not its entirety. Finding the balance between being a dedicated instructor and remembering that we are still students and researchers is the main challenge of our PhD here.



Make sure to follow @portuguese.harvard on Instagram and stay tuned for news about the Portuguese program!





Relevant news and resources from the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning



Tailored Pedagogy Workshops

PhD students and instructors at all stages can request a tailored pedagogy workshop. Examples of topics include difficult conversations, critical pedagogy, and teaching with images and objects. The Bok Center can customize the message and the activities of the workshop to the particular needs of your group. The form to request a custom workshop is [available here](#).

Walking with the Bok Center

Looking for a way to get your day off to a good start, to enjoy the spring weather, and to connect with colleagues about your teaching victories and questions? Join a rotating crew of Bok Center staff for a twice-weekly morning walk, every Tuesday and Thursday morning from 9:00–9:30 (weather permitting).

More info and RSVP [here](#).



FOLLOW THE BOK CENTER ON INSTAGRAM!

The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning has a new Instagram page! Follow @DerekBokCenter to keep up with our latest events and news!





RLL "Future Thinking" Discussion Series

The second half of the "Future Thinking" discussion series is taking place this Spring! The first talk this term was "The Future of Linguistic Communities."

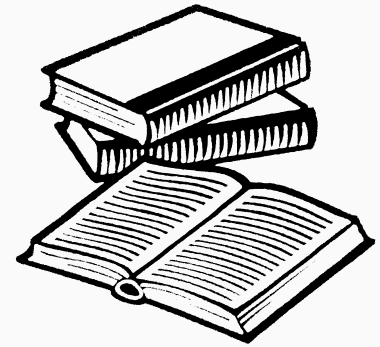


The second one, The Future of Language Textbooks, will be by Professor Carl S. Blyth, Director of the Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning at the University of Texas at Austin.

Wednesday, April 20th, 4pm

Zoom link: <https://harvard.zoom.us/j/6596662478>

Upcoming
events
of interest



LIVE WEBINAR | APRIL 5 | 4:00 PM ET

Digital Multi-Literacies Reframed

A critical conversation in language education

The pandemic has shed new light on the role of technologies and how connectivity, affordability, and technology access intersect. Looking forward, this webinar explores how digital multi-literacies has been reframed over the last couple of years and its implications for national, state, and local policies.

[Learn more and register here](#)





Registration is open for the Consortium for Language Teaching and Learning's Spring 2022 Symposium, hosted by Harvard University.

The past two years have presented extraordinary challenges for the teaching of languages, literatures, and cultures across the world. Educators have had to adapt to meet learners' needs, to innovate with the help of technology, and, in this latest phase of the pandemic crisis, to envision a lasting set of methodologies and practices that effectively leverage resources, techniques, and collaborative tools.

The Symposium will be held virtually via Zoom. It will run from 9am – 5pm EST, with a few comfort breaks and lunch, ending with a roundtable event with our discussants.

For more info, please see the Symposium website [here](#).

CLTL 2022 SYMPOSIUM

Harvard Language Center

Future Thinking on Language Teaching and Learning

Sonia Colina, University of Arizona

Rick Kern, UC Berkeley

Kim Potowski, University of Chicago

Steve Thorne, Portland State University

Bridget Yaden, Pacific Lutheran University

April 29, 2022

9am-5pm EST

To register, please visit

<https://forms.gle/xHUxyGQPLZZaA3yL7>





Interested in being featured in a future edition of “RLL in the Classroom?”
Wish to nominate a TF/TA?

Please reach out to Luca Politi (lpoliti@g.harvard.edu) or Juan Arias (juanarias@g.harvard.edu).

RLL



Join our monthly TF/TA get togethers!

Last month, we celebrated the beginning of the spring recess at The Cellar.

We are excited to announce that our next event will take place on April 15th at 7pm, also at The Cellar! Save the date!



We'd love your input...

What's on your mind lately regarding teaching? Do you wish to have a breakout discussion session to float an idea or discuss a recent teaching experience? We'd love to hear about your challenges, successes, or open questions.

No matter how small the comment, we encourage you to [submit this form](#) (anonymous responses are welcome). Your responses will help Juan and Luca to plan events, conversations, or future forum mailings. If it's on your mind, chances are it's on another's as well!