

# DIFFICULT SUBJECTS

## DIFFICULT SUBJECTS: K-12 TEACHING INSTITUTE

Hosted by The Ohio State University's Global Arts + Humanities Discovery Theme

### About the institute

The Difficult Subjects: K-12 Teaching Institute — hosted by The Ohio State University's Global Arts + Humanities Discovery Theme — brings together elementary, middle and high school teachers from Central Ohio for an exploration of multidisciplinary approaches to understanding and teaching difficult subjects in America's past and present. 'Difficult subjects' are complex societal challenges that are multifaceted and hard to confront, often because they involve histories of injustice, oppression, or uncomfortable truths about power and human behavior. These subjects — like slavery, climate change and immigration — also significantly shape the contours and trajectory of American society as a whole.

### Why multidisciplinary?

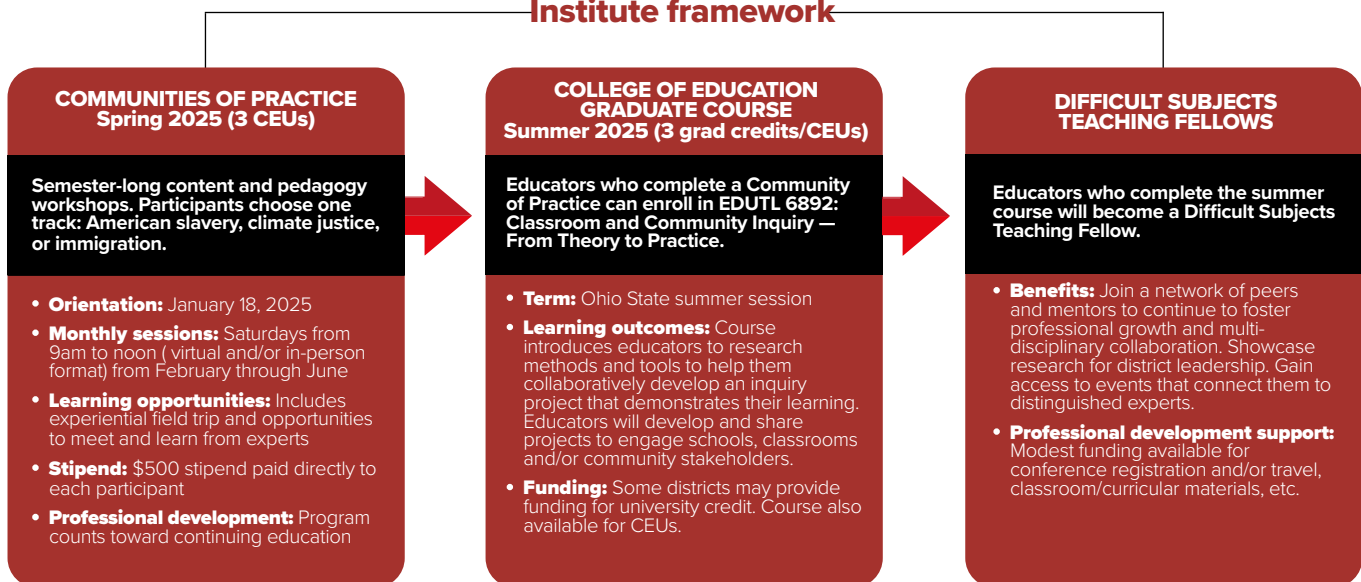
Content workshops are the heart of the institute. These are led by scholars from Ohio State's College of Arts and Sciences who have expertise in history, literature, art, the environment, music and performance. The institute also brings in teaching experts to share pedagogical techniques, as well as multicultural curriculum developers to provide instruction on complementing and supplementing State of Ohio standards pertaining to difficult subjects.

### Institute design

Rather than approach difficult subjects from the top down, the institute approaches these topics from the bottom-up and the inside-out. The format draws heavily on culturally-responsive teaching methodologies that can be applied to teaching difficult subjects in person and remotely, synchronously and asynchronously.

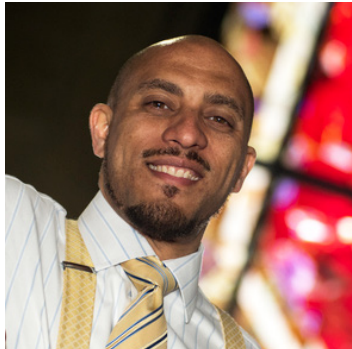
Having elementary, middle and high school teachers as a part of the institute reflects the guiding pedagogical belief that teaching difficult subjects effectively requires scaffolding, or introducing difficult subjects to students early in their educational journey and complicating their understanding of these subjects as they mature. Having teachers who specialize in a range of arts and humanities subjects also reflects a fundamental pedagogical belief that difficult subjects are best learned across the curriculum, rather than in isolated subject areas.

### Institute framework



## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

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I am Hasan Kwame Jeffries, Director of the Difficult Subjects Institute and an associate professor in the Department of History at The Ohio State University. I am honored to have the opportunity to lead this initiative and am thrilled that you will be joining us for what promises to be a rich and rewarding experience.

The Difficult Subjects Institute provides valuable professional development opportunities that align with the educational goals of each district. By participating, educators will gain a deeper understanding of the subject areas and acquire effective teaching strategies to positively impact their students' learning experiences. Your partnership will enable us to empower educators to navigate these challenging topics with skill and sensitivity.

*“In a time when teachers are being pressured to dismiss rather than discuss historical experiences and people’s identities, teaching difficult subjects has become unusually hard. Multidisciplinary approaches provide a way out of this morass. For teachers, multi-disciplinary approaches enable teaching topics from different angles, thereby avoiding many current political pitfalls while still teaching challenging content.”*

**HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES**  
Difficult Subjects Institute Director

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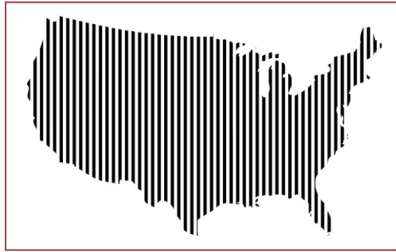
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**[GO.OSU.EDU/DIFFICULT-SUBJECTS](http://GO.OSU.EDU/DIFFICULT-SUBJECTS)**

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# COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The Difficult Subjects Institute fosters community among Community of Practice participants by cultivating group-centered relationships over the course of the program through multiple meetings: starting with online webinars, continuing with an experiential-learning field trip and culminating with a multi-day, on-campus, curriculum-development workshop. The institute currently has three Communities of Practice:



## American Slavery

The importance of teaching American slavery accurately and effectively has taken on added urgency. Students need to understand the deep roots of racism and the enduring legacy of slavery in order to make sense of the times in which we live.



## Climate Justice

Future generations will be faced with increased climate-driven hardships. As such, students and educators need to understand the effects of climate change while equipping themselves with tools build a sustainable and equitable future.



## Immigration

Focusing on the US southern border, this CoP explores ideas about south-to-north migration, the US's role in determining economic and social realities of sending countries, oral histories, media streams, and what it means to be an "American."

## COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE LEADERS



### AMERICAN SLAVERY **Hasan Kwame Jeffries** **DSI Director and Associate Professor of African American History (Ohio State)**

Jeffries is the author of *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt*. From 2010-2014, he was lead historian and scriptwriter for the \$27 million renovation of the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis. Jeffries conducted teacher development workshops across the country and edited *Understanding and Teaching the Civil Rights Movement*. He has worked with the Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance division to produce the major national report "Teaching Hard History: American Slavery." He has also made media appearances locally and nationally and was a featured historian on the Emmy-nominated documentary, *Black America Since MLK: And Still I Rise*.



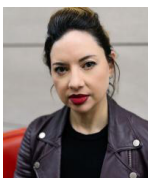
### CLIMATE JUSTICE **Kelsea Best** **Assistant Professor of Civil Environmental and Geodetic Engineering (Ohio State)**

Best's research focuses on understanding how climate change interacts with human societies and infrastructure, how people may adapt to climate change effects and how climate adaptation measures can be designed and implemented in a just and equitable way. Her work is highly interdisciplinary and strives to connect methods, disciplines and researchers from across geographies and fields. Best's research is grounded in data-driven methods, including machine learning and agent-based modeling, but it also seeks to advance conventional modeling approaches by expanding the role of personal narrative and community participation in informing computational models.



### CLIMATE JUSTICE **Jason Cervenec** **Education and Outreach Director at Byrd Polar and Climate Research Center (Ohio State)**

The diverse outreach portfolio of the Byrd Center reaches ~12,000 individuals annually and includes programs in cutting-edge science, science education, history and the arts. Cervenec earned a BS in biology and an M.Ed. in secondary science education from Ohio State. He began his career as a teacher of high school science, which he taught for more than a decade. During that time, Cervenec established two Science Olympiad teams and served as a lead instructor on an Ohio Board of Regents grant to train teachers in modeling instruction. He currently leads the Columbus Climate Change Action Plan Task Force and volunteers with Franklin County's Restorative Justice Circles.



### IMMIGRATION **Paloma Martinez-Cruz** **Professor of Latino/a Cultural and Literary Studies (Ohio State)**

Martinez-Cruz teaches Latinx cultural studies in the areas of performance and popular culture; decolonial methods and practices; and Latin American and Latinx gender studies and feminisms. An interdisciplinary scholar-artist, she publishes poetry and fiction, directs and performs with the Taco Reparations Brigade performance troupe and coordinates Onda Latinx Ohio, an arts initiative showcasing Latinx arts from the Midwest and beyond. She is the author of *Trust the Circle: The Resistance and Resilience of Rubén Castillo Herrera Food Fight!*, *Millennial Mestizaje Meets the Culinary Marketplace* and *Women and Knowledge in Mesoamerica: From East L.A. to Anahuac*. She is also the editor of *A Handbook for the Rebel Artist in a Post-Democratic Society* by Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Saúl García-López.

## HOW TO APPLY

District leadership may nominate educators. Educators can also nominate themselves. All nominations can be submitted by completing [this webform](#). For more information, see the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) on page five.

# EDUTL 6892: CLASSROOM AND COMMUNITY INQUIRY – FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

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## **Stephanie Power-Carter** **Professor of Teaching and Learning (Ohio State)**

Power-Carter is a professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning and the director of the Center for Video Ethnography and Discourse analysis (CVEDA). Her passion is to engage in research that helps us to see each other's humanity more fully. She uses discourse analysis a way to see and examine how people use language to negotiate their identities and to better understand how Black youth, and youth from historically resilient communities navigate their educational experiences. Power-Carter's scholarship examines the resilience, possibility and potential of Black youth.

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## **Overview**

The Difficult Subjects: K-12 Teaching Institute, in collaboration with the College of Education and Human Ecology, will offer educators who have completed the institute the opportunity to extend their inquiry via a credit-bearing course at The Ohio State University. EDUTL 6892 will be offered as a four-week online course during the second summer term.

This course will:

- Offer educators the opportunity to apply and translate content knowledge.
- Invite creativity, interdisciplinarity and innovation.
- Provide Communities of Practice teams time to explore an area of interest related to their “difficult subject”.
- Introduce educators to research methods and tools to help them collaboratively develop an inquiry project that demonstrates their learning.
- Translate and share inquiry projects in ways that engage schools, classrooms and/or community stakeholders (E.g., curricular development; interview project, mini- documentary, interactive professional development).

## **Eligibility and Enrollment**

Educators must have successfully completed a DSI Community of Practice (American Slavery, Climate Justice, Immigration). Please complete [this webform](#) to express your interest.

## **Funding**

Some districts may offer funding toward this opportunity. Please check with your district as soon as possible to see if funding is available to support your enrollment in the course. If funding is not available and you still wish to participate, we will work with you to explore options for the course to count toward CEUs.

## **Questions**

Email Difficult Subjects Institute Program Coordinator Siatta Dennis-Brown ([dennis-brown.1@osu.edu](mailto:dennis-brown.1@osu.edu)).

**Educators who complete the summer graduate course  
will become Difficult Subjects Teaching Fellows**

# DIFFICULT SUBJECTS TEACHING FELLOWS

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## **Benefits**

Difficult Subjects Teaching Fellows a network of peers and mentors to continue to foster professional growth and multi-disciplinary collaboration. Fellows gain access to events that connect them to distinguished experts and may participate in a showcase for district leadership highlighting their research.

## **Professional development support**

Modest funding is available for conference registration and/or travel, classroom/curricular materials, etc.

## **Questions**

Email Difficult Subjects Institute Program Coordinator Siatta Dennis-Brown ([dennis-brown.1@osu.edu](mailto:dennis-brown.1@osu.edu)).

# FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS

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## **GENERAL**

- **Which educators would benefit from participating in the DSI?**

Any K-12 educator would benefit from participation. Multi-disciplinary seminars and workshops are at heart of the program curriculum and are led by scholars from The Ohio State University's College of Arts and Sciences who have expertise in history, literature, education, art, music and performance. Recognizing the value of practice, the institute also brings in teaching experts (to share pedagogical techniques) and multicultural curriculum developers (to provide instruction on complementing and supplementing State of Ohio standards pertaining to difficult subjects).

- **What is the institute's policy on attendance?**

DSI participants are expected to attend all of the sessions unless there are exigent circumstances. We understand that life happens and conflicts may arise. However, we encourage participants to consider applying for the following year if they are unable to fulfill this commitment. Please note that if CoP participants are unable to attend the final field trip, the final stipend amount will be prorated down to \$250.

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## **COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE (CoP)**

### **ENROLLMENT**

- **What is the enrollment process?**

District leadership may nominate educators. Educators can also nominate themselves. All nominations can be submitted by completing [this webform](#).

- **Can I enroll in two tracks simultaneously?**

No. Each track runs concurrently; therefore, participation is limited to one track per year.

- **Can I enroll in a second track if I've participated in a previous year?**

Yes, per the discretion of DSI leadership. Email Program Coordinator Siatta Dennis-Brown (dennis-brown.1@osu.edu).

- **Can I participate if I am educational staff but not a teacher?**

Yes, per the discretion of DSI leadership. Email Program Coordinator Siatta Dennis-Brown (dennis-brown.1@osu.edu).

### **FORMAT**

- **What is the format of the sessions?**

Sessions may be virtual or hybrid depending on the format indicated by the instructor.

- **How long and how often are the CoP sessions?**

Programming consists of 30 hours of engagement. It includes an orientation session (January); five three-hour Saturday seminars (monthly); and an in-person experiential-learning field trip and workshop (June).

### **COST & MATERIALS**

- **How much does it cost to participate?**

There is no cost for educators to participate in the Communities of Practices — the institute offers each educator a modest stipend and provides textbooks, parking and field trip food and travel. CoP stipends will only be dispersed following successful completion of the program.

- **How long will it take for me to receive my stipend at the completion of the program?**

Electronic direct deposits may take up to 60 days. Regular checks may take up to 90 days.

- **What is the vendor form? How and why should I complete it?**

The Ohio State University requires all participants to submit a completed vendor form in order to receive a payment. This form establishes participants as vendors in the university system.

- **When will I receive DSI books and materials?**

Participants will receive their textbooks and other relevant resources at the mandatory orientation.

### **CONTINUING EDUCATION (CEUs)**

- **How do educators earn credit for participation?**

Upon successful completion of the CoP, educators are awarded a certificate and verification of contact hours that may be submitted for [CEU](#) consideration to the relevant district committee.

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## **SUMMER GRADUATE COURSE**

- **How much does it cost to participate?**

The summer graduate course has a tuition; some districts may provide funding to cover this cost. If funding is not available, the course may be taken for CEUs.

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## **CONTACT**

Have a question that wasn't answered above? Email Program Coordinator Siatta Dennis-Brown (dennis-brown.1@osu.edu).

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE  
**Sample Curricula**



The importance of teaching American slavery accurately and effectively has taken on added urgency. Students need to understand the deep roots of racism and the enduring legacy of slavery in order to make sense of the times in which we live. As educators, we are duty-bound to help students comprehend difficult subjects. This community of practice provides educators with the tools to do just that.

This community of practice will also work to intentionally foster community among the educator participants. The goal is to enhance the learning experience of the participants by cultivating group-centered relationships over the course of the year through multiple meetings, starting with webinars and continuing with an experiential-learning field trip to the National Underground Railroad and Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio. The program will culminate with a 3-day, on-campus, curriculum-development workshop.

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## SAMPLE CoP CURRICULUM

### **SESSION ONE Teaching American Slavery Today**

Americans have an aversion to history – to stories about the past that make us uncomfortable in the present. We are especially disinclined to engage with histories that deal directly with race and racism, starting with slavery. In this opening session, we will explore the importance of confronting the most painful aspect of America's past – slavery, and highlight ways to use the Framework for Teaching American Slavery – produced by Learning for Justice, the education arm of the Southern Poverty Law Center – to teach American slavery effectively.

### **SESSION TWO American Slavery – The View from the African Diaspora**

Chattel slavery was not an American invention. It was a global system of involuntary servitude that American colonists and the nation's founders embraced. At the same time, African people were not always chattel slaves. They were a free people who developed politically-sophisticated, economically-strong and culturally-rich societies on the African continent. This session looks at approaches to teaching American slavery that treat it as a global phenomenon and center the history and humanity of African people, prior to and during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

### **SESSION THREE The Colonies and the Constitution**

Slavery is frequently framed as America's original sin. It wasn't. It was America's origin. It was the economic engine that fueled the growth of the colonies and the birth of the new nation. This session examines the evolution of slavery during the colonial era and tackles approaches to teaching the intersection of slavery and the U.S. Constitution.

### **SESSION FOUR Resistance to Slavery**

Resistance to slavery took many forms, from subtle acts of sabotage and subterfuge to outright rebellion. Teaching Black resistance poses unique challenges, but it is also essential to illuminating Black humanity. Students often ask, "If slavery was so terrible, why didn't the enslaved resist?" The answer, of course, is that they did, constantly. This session will examine the persistence of Black resistance to the institution of slavery, focusing specifically on freedom seekers – those enslaved persons who risked their lives by attempting to escape bondage.

### **SESSION FIVE The Civil War and Slavery**

In a survey of high school students conducted by the Southern Poverty Law Center a few years ago, a majority of respondents failed to identify slavery as the primary cause of the Civil War. This is a legacy of Lost Cause indoctrination. This session takes an honest look at the coming of the Civil War and the role that African Americans played in their own liberation. It will also consider ways to deconstruct the Lost Cause narrative and its white supremacist legacy.

### **SESSION SIX Reconstruction and the Power of Place**

Reconstruction is usually taught as a failed experiment in multiracial democracy. It wasn't. Reconstruction didn't fail. Reconstruction was defeated by white southerners – former Confederates and former enslavers – who were determined to reassert control over Black labor. This session explores Reconstruction from the bottom up, shining a spotlight on one of the first communities of freed men and women – Mitchelville on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, and the ways African Americans worked to give meaning to emancipation. This session will also contextualize the myriad obstacles freed men and women faced along the way, from racial terror to disenfranchisement.



According to the Sixth Assessment Report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, climate change is unequivocally caused by human activities. Impacts of climate change vary by extent and location worldwide, but one fact is clear: climate change is disproportionately affecting low-income families and communities that are predominantly Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

Human-driven causes call for human-driven solutions, and achieving a climate-resilient future requires equitable practices. Future generations will be faced with increased climate-driven hardships and are equal participants in accomplishing global climate goals. As such, students and educators need to understand the effects of climate change at home and in their local communities, while also equipping themselves with tools to build a sustainable and equitable future. This Difficult Subjects CoP aims to provide the facts, solutions and resources to do just that.

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## SAMPLE CoP CURRICULUM

### SESSION ONE Nourish

Wrapping our minds around climate change and its impacts is a daunting task for researchers, politicians, educators and spiritual leaders, as well as family and community members. We are all affected by climate change, but it will impact some people more than others, each in a unique constellation of ways. This session will introduce climate change, its impacts and how we can navigate conversations about this difficult topic with each other and within ourselves.

### SESSION TWO Flow

Extreme rainfall events affect all corners of the United States, but the frequency and severity of these events has already increased and is expected to continue. Collective actions we take as communities and individual actions we take as homeowners and organization leaders play a role in determining our resilience to heavy-rainfall events. This session will explore how stormwater and flooding are emerging concerns for Central Ohio and what resources are available to address the issue through both infrastructure and behaviors.

### SESSION THREE Move

According to Project Drawdown, alternative transportation, when used for around 30 percent of urban passenger trips, could offset up to 15 gigatons of carbon dioxide emitted from cars. Central Ohio has some alternative transportation infrastructure in place, but is there room for improvement? This session will explore the transportation resources available to Central Ohioans, gaps in transportation availability, co-benefits that might not be obvious, and what the future of mobility looks like for the region.

### SESSION FOUR Grow

Green lawns are being replaced with native plants, perennials, rain gardens and pollinator-friendly landscapes in a growing movement to support local ecology and food systems. Ohio is home to almost 1,900 native plants that provide benefits including food sources for wildlife and people, stormwater control, natural cooling and beauty. This session will cover the environmental, economic and cultural benefits of gardening.

### SESSION FIVE Cool

It's no secret that climate change is making things hotter. Urban neighborhoods with extensive pavement, dark roofs and few trees feel the greatest impacts in the summer and during heat waves. These same neighborhoods are often more socially vulnerable and lower-income with older, less-energy efficient housing. This session will cover the Urban Heat Island effect and how to stay cool when the weather gets hot.

### SESSION SIX Community Dialogue

This final session will revisit the topics of the previous sessions with an immersive experience in the Franklinton neighborhood of Columbus. Franklinton is a neighborhood of contrasts: an early settlement a short distance from the state capitol that has been ravaged by floods and historic underinvestment but is now experiencing renewed interest by outsiders while simultaneously working to meet the needs of long-term residents. Visit local organizations to learn about on-the-ground impacts as well as mitigation and adaptation strategies for climate change in Central Ohio. You will hear from a diverse array of researchers, practitioners and residents.





Teaching about immigration has never been more urgent as messages about scarcity, economic and environmental crisis, crime and national identity compete to shape our views on borders and the people who cross them. With a focus on the US southern border, this community of practice provides a safe space to explore ideas about south-to-north migration, the role of the US in determining economic and social realities of sending countries, oral histories, media streams, and a deep dive into what it means to be an “American” at hemispheric, national and local levels.

This community of practice explores key problems and prospects of immigration pedagogy through readings, viewings, lecture, discussion, experiential exercises, culinary developments and dialogue. We’ll take into account approaches from human rights, labor, fine and applied arts and oral histories for a multi-sensorial and community-centered learning experience with both online and in-person sessions in Columbus and an experiential-learning field trip. The program will culminate with an on-campus, curriculum-development workshop.

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## SAMPLE CoP CURRICULUM

### **SESSION ONE The Embodied Border**

*Who are we, and how do our names, faces and stories of home and place affect our understanding of migration to the United States today? What are some of the risks and rewards involved in teaching about migration to young people?* Our first session will take a long historical approach to understand what it means to be an “American.” We’ll examine who is invited – and who is excluded – to participate in the national project and be introduced to a selection of free tools and resources available to educators in this field.

### **SESSION TWO Citizens, Denizens and Dissenters**

*How can we make sense of migration narratives when there are so many conflicting reports and opinions about who belongs in the United States and who should be excluded?* We’ll analyze mainstream news reporting to understand how different media outlets stoke our emotions. We’ll then examine the oral history of Rubén Castilla Herrera, an Ohio leader of immigration reform, and learn from immigration attorney Nicholas Pasquarello about the Columbus Sanctuary Movement, migrant rights, and the prospects of decriminalization and abolition.

### **SESSION THREE Intolerance and Integration**

Xenophobia is dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries. While our natural human condition instills a powerful need to feel accepted in our group, what happens when members of our community perpetuate xenophobic prejudice and view migrants and other vulnerable populations as less than human? Our third session offers a participant-focused session that dives into US histories of intolerance, while surveying national and local programs and centers facilitating, supporting and promoting the integration efforts of individuals and communities.

### **SESSION FOUR Ohio Sent and Received**

A 2015 report issued by the UCLA Blum Center on Poverty and Health in Latin America ranked Ohio last in the nation for policies and laws that exclude undocumented immigrants. Rating each state’s policies as “inclusive” (supporting health and well-being) or “exclusive” (harming health and well-being), Session Four looks at Ohio’s history of population, migration, and narratives of inclusion and exclusion through the markers of race, class, language, gender and other categories to understand how the state has developed ideas of territoriality and belonging.

### **SESSION FIVE Distances and Diaspora**

A diaspora is a dispersion of a formerly-concentrated group of people sharing cultural similarities and homelands who have been compelled to displace and live in geographically distant areas of the world. In Session Five, we examine diasporic cultural expression and the artistic practices that help create and incentivize placemaking and cultural pride. We’ll read *The Distance Between Us: A Memoir* by Reyna Grande and *When I Get Older: The Story behind “Wavin’ Flag”* by K’NAAN to explore various pedagogical possibilities of memoir and music in the study of displaced peoples.

### **SESSION SIX A New Taco Tale — Unlearning Food in Ohio**

It’s an all-too-common Columbus story: Popular restaurants offering Mexican-inspired fare veer into the unsavory territory of cultural misappropriation. How can we learn from past mistakes related to appropriation, microaggressions and slurs to promote equitable social engagement and informed consumer behaviors that foster dignity and respect? We’ll go on an alternative taco tour of migrant-owned local businesses to sample heritage cuisine, interrogate racist tropes in the culinary marketplace and consider how food can serve as a scaffolding for cultural border crossing and discovery.