On Friday, May 1, 2015, the Center for Language Excellence (CLE) presented the workshop entitled “Socio-Cultural Competence Assessment”. The workshop had 20 attendees including four CLE staff and 16 language instructors from ten different departments, servicing 14 different languages (Chinese, Czech, ESL, French, Greek, Hindi-Urdu, Indonesian, IsiZulu, Italian, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, Swahili, and Ukrainian). Another attendee was from CELCAR. The presentation was led by Maria Shardakova, Director of Language Assessment for the Center for Language Excellence.

This workshop was the 11th of a series of workshops offered by CLE.

The workshop began with Maria Shardakova opening the discussion by briefly surveying the status of culture teaching in foreign language classrooms. She referenced the 2007 MLA report, the National Standards, and other important standard-setting documents that repeatedly emphasized the importance of teaching culture in foreign language classrooms. Yet, the pedagogy for infusing culture into the language curriculum remains elusive. Shardakova illustrated her point by evaluating various foreign language textbooks and assessment protocols, explaining how the teaching of culture continues to remain on the sidelines. Next, she presented a theoretical framework of how to integrate the culture teaching into the language curriculum. Further, Shardakova illustrated how the teaching of culture can be incorporated into language curricula, and how to sequence the discussion of culture from the novice through advanced level of linguistic proficiency. Finally, she presented an assortment of activities for teaching culture at the various levels of instruction, including awareness raising tasks, tasks that promote critical thinking, and tasks that prompt learners to demonstrate appropriate behaviors.

The post-workshop survey evaluation showed that overall the participants said the workshop was very helpful.

Below are what some of the participants had to say about the workshop:

“Whatever Maria deigns to teach us! (We know it will be good!).”
“Very engaging, organized presentation!”
“Great presentation. The presenter is knowledgeable, and the presentation is very clear and interesting!”
“I found the information to be very useful.”
“This is a great resource!”