

# ASU course explores culture through an interdisciplinary lens

**Students consider history from a variety of perspectives, including geography and art**

By Megan Neely, ASU News  
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When Razieh Araghi joined Arizona State University in fall 2025, she wanted to show students the power of humanities.

Her course — SLC 202 Exploring Cultures: Words, Images, Stories — aims to do just that, by introducing them to a wide range of resources, including maps, museum exhibits and world literature, that demonstrate how our understanding of history and culture is shaped by the words, images and stories we share.

“I thought this would be an interesting point of view to show students that it is not about just coming to classes in humanities, sitting and reading a text,” said [Araghi](#), an assistant professor in the [School of International Letters and Cultures](#).

Araghi partnered with [Matthew Toro](#), director of maps, imagery and geospatial services at ASU Library and founder of the [Map and Geospatial Hub](#), to give her students access to the kind of geocartographic resources that show how maps influence one’s view of the world.

“One might view that topic — maps as a worldview — as overly abstract for a course on global cultural literacy. What struck me was how thoughtful and profound that framing was,” Toro said. “As a geographer who thinks deeply about maps, spatial representation and our collective relationships to geography — from the local to the global — I found myself particularly energized by the intellectual depth Araghi was seeking for her students.”

At the hub, students viewed a variety of map collections, and Toro shared that maps are among the oldest and most effective tools humans have developed to communicate geographical knowledge. However, he also emphasized that those same maps are simplified versions of reality that can influence how people perceive geography, thereby informing or distorting individual worldviews.

“Maps are inherently subjective and laden with complex ideas about the places they represent or misrepresent. All of us carry a highly personalized and inherently biased view of the world,” Toro

said. “The more we can recognize how different forms of information — including geographic information presented on seemingly neutral maps — influence that worldview, the more critically and thoughtfully we can engage with them.”

Araghi also took students to the [ASU Art Museum](#) to conduct visual analyses of different exhibitions through a humanistic lens.

Spanish major Cameron Rastedt’s favorite part of SLC 202 was learning about the history of different forms of communication and storytelling, saying Araghi did well to stress the importance of considering the context within which history is written and stories are formed, and how that affects perspective.

“This class is excellent at supplying supplemental information for giving a broader understanding of culture and how it is shared,” he said.

He chose to focus his midterm project on the “[Tierras Reimaginadas: Migration](#)” exhibit, which asks viewers to question their perspective of human migration.

“One thing I loved about this project was that I had the chance to personally reach out to the artist and interview them in Spanish about some of the work they had done that was presented in the museum. ... It helped me connect deeper with the soul meaning of the project, which was to understand the different mediums of storytelling and sharing culture,” Rastedt said.

Clio Skye, who is studying anthropology and minoring in linguistics, said her favorite part of the course was the reading materials, which looked at world literature. She said they helped her realize the power that translation has in literature.

“As someone who works in linguistics, considerations about a translator’s motivations, personal biases and end goals have changed the way I read translated texts now; and changed how I think about the art of translation in general,” Skye said.

Her midterm looked at three maps of the Balkan Peninsula, each from a different decade, and analyzed how they convey the history of political influence in the areas they depict. Skye believes that consuming stories, films and texts across time, cultures and media is the best way to understand an issue in its entirety.

“For others who may not be as passionate about the humanities as I am, I think that courses like this encourage cultural relativism in individuals. Consuming art made by many different kinds of people can help you understand others in your daily life better,” she said. “Whether you’re a lawyer, a businessman or a doctor, the empathy gained from analyzing the perspectives of others is an invaluable skill that will help you do your work better.”

The [next installment of SLC 202](#) will begin this March.

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