

THE CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION
ARMENIAN COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENT

ARMENIAN CONTENT COURSE

WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE
IN-SERVICE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM - LEBANON

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1. Introduction - Background:

The Armenian community in Lebanon is a crucial element in ensuring the vitality of the Western Armenian language. The Armenian Communities Department of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (henceforth CGF) remains committed to supporting programs that emphasize education, innovation, youth engagement and local participation, to ensure the vitality of Western Armenian.

In 2019, CGF developed a targeted strategy regarding Armenian schools and educational programs in Lebanon, with a special focus on the effective teaching and transmission of the Western Armenian language. It is in this context that CGF has sought to create a university level In-Service Teacher Development Program specifically for teachers who use Western Armenian as a language of instruction in Armenian schools in Lebanon today. The creation of a teacher development program constitutes one of the five pillars of CGF's broader educational strategy for Lebanon.

Within the framework of this *In-Service Teacher Development Program*, CGF seeks to create a **Western Armenian content course** (henceforth the Course), which would be part of the teacher development program and which would be delivered entirely in Western Armenian.

The main aim of the Course is to provide further support to the teachers involved in the teacher development program with relation to the Western Armenian language. CGF will collaborate with local and international professionals in the field to develop a Course that would be incorporated into the teacher development program with the aim of developing the participants' linguistic, cultural, analytic, and critical thinking skills *in* the Western Armenian language.

2. Context - Objectives:

CONTEXT

The existing practice through which Western Armenian is taught today in Lebanon (as well as elsewhere in the Diaspora) faces complex and multifaceted challenges. Finding solutions to these challenges is equally complex. For CGF, addressing these problems in general – and in Lebanon specifically – goes beyond merely sending funds to schools; it rather requires addressing the inherent problems collectively. CGF hopes to take part in helping meet some of these challenges by investing in the schools and the teachers – always having the effective transmission of the Western Armenian language as a priority, in order to ensure its vitality and to reestablish a sound relationship between the language and today's youth.

It is important to note that during the last few decades, Western Armenian has almost always been offered to its learners solely within the Armenian national context and less as a language of *creativity* and *a language of the world*. For understandable reasons, and taking into consideration the historical and current sociological and political contexts, Armenian Schools in Lebanon have adopted a stance which mainly revolves around *preserving* the language and using it as a means of transmitting traditional and cultural values. However this stance is becoming increasingly less effective and can no longer ensure the vitality of the Western Armenian language as a language of the world, and therefore a living language.

CGF deems it necessary to bring about a reform that would enhance the emergence of a new Western Armenian speaking generation that can *internalize* the language and *create* in it. In order to make this possible and in order to ensure the effective transmission of Western Armenian to new generations, it is not only imperative to have instructors who are armed with the right pedagogic methodologies, who have the necessary professional skills, and who are able to teach with and in the language resourcefully, but it is equally crucial to have instructors who can do it *in* the target language – *in* Western Armenian – by bringing Armenian out of its current (confined) context and into **the reality of today's world**.

This Course aims to achieve the latter by strengthening the role of Western Armenian, and its inherent linguistic mindset, in shaping our worldviews and the way we perceive the language with all its linguistic, cultural, and sociological features. This would in turn have its explicit effect in shaping the way the language is transmitted to the next generations.

OBJECTIVES

The Course aims to target the professional development of the teachers in and with Armenian; while targeting the development of linguistic, cultural, analytic, and critical thinking skills *in* the Western Armenian language.

The *main objective* of this auxiliary Course is to provide opportunities for participating teachers to develop all of the following **IN** Western Armenian:

- The articulation of new ideas in Western Armenian and the development of capacities for self-directed learning and the ability to be self-critical. Taking charge of one's own thinking and having reflection on the production of ideas in Western Armenian.
- The advancement of creativity and innovation using Western Armenian.
- The understanding, analysis, and examination of disciplinary knowledge and social realities using Western Armenian.
- The association of subject matter with social milieus, and the development of critical thinking in Western Armenian, thus reestablishing the high degree of correlation of critical thinking with language-related achievements; wherein critical thinking would improve writing abilities, language proficiency, and oral communication abilities by expanding the language experience and making it more "meaningful" or relevant for its users.
- The development of professional skills and analysis in Western Armenian. Language development and thinking are closely related, and the integration of more cognitive processes of thinking (*higher-order*) should be an integral part of any course.

Some of the *specific objectives* can include but are not limited to:

- Introducing the participants to post-Genocide era Western Armenian literature and arts (culture), and the analysis of the diasporan "social philosophy" and diasporan identity, developed by some of the great Armenian thinkers in the East and the West.
- Referencing and analyzing Western Armenian pre and post-Genocide press in the world.
- Discovering Armenian progressive theories and productions, addressing philosophical enquiry and discovering contemporary academic and intellectual productions (e.g. feminist theory, post-modern identities, etc.).
- Introducing the participants to the analysis of world issues (specifically also pertaining to the millennials), ranging from politics to the climate crisis, from technology to poverty, from the rise nationalism to conflict and war, from the refugee crisis to identity issues, in the Western Armenian language.
- Introducing the participants to today's thinkers, creative individuals, philosophers, intellectuals, and activists who live in, work, and develop content in Western Armenian.
- Promoting the development of global skills such as communication and collaboration, creativity and critical thinking in WA, which are critical for lifelong learning and success in transmitting the language.
- Reestablishing the crucial role of native speaker language teachers as invaluable sources of linguistic knowledge.
- Improving language skills in a manner that is modern and relevant to today's youth.
- Instilling appreciation of modern culture and global cultural trends.
- Encouraging innovation that is conducive to produce and create in Western Armenian.
- Providing the linguistic tools to analyze the modern world, and speak and write about it, in Western Armenian.

3. Course Organization:

FIRST STAGE | LEBANON

Initially, CGF envisions the Course to ideally be in the form of a yearly seminar held in Lebanon, which would be an auxiliary to the main course developed by the Lebanese partner university. The seminar would feature lecturers, professors, or professionals who would deliver Master Class style seminars and courses to the participants in Armenian. If needed, it would also be possible to organize the Course in an online format, or resort to another appropriate mechanism to deliver it.

The Course will be open to all participants of the *In-Service Teacher Development Program* in Lebanon. CGF will also consider making this specific Course open to participants from the Syrian Armenian community, mainly those who teach at Armenian Schools in Syria today. The Course will also be open to Armenian students who, as CGF scholarship recipients, would be enrolled at major universities in Lebanon majoring in the field of Education.

SECOND STAGE | OTHER DIASPORAN COMMUNITIES

We envision this Course to be extended into a broader initiative incorporating other diasporan communities. It will be designed and custom-made based on the needs of today's Armenian-speakers who work with and produce content in Western Armenian. Once it is featured in Lebanon, the Course will be developed further and will be open to other communities and interested participants (mainly teachers who use WA to instruct or those who work in Armenian schools) from the rest of the Diaspora.

The Course shall be developed in such a way that it would provide a flexible and organic way to internalize new reflective techniques, to acquire new linguistic skills, and to deliver quality educational experiences. The Course also aims to deliver accessible content with delivered resources that can be reused and remixed. The elements, lectures, or master classes comprising the Course, will be designed to be "challenges" rather than lessons, and will aim to give thinking opportunities rather than enforcing simple tutelage.