Community-engaged learning is a powerful approach in moving heritage speakers from performance to proficiency-based learning while also serving the community and fostering civic engagement. This presentation will discuss a project-based learning curriculum developed for a semester-long Russian language course “Russian in Boston” at Boston University. This talk intends to enable a dialogue of interrelated approaches informed by critical engagement with Russian-speaking diaspora of the post-Soviet era. Diaspora communities in Boston constitute unique cultural and linguistic resources for Slavic programs locally while also presenting particular challenges for language programs globally. The exceeding difficulty stems in part from regional post-Soviet histories and connotations that resist easy equivalencies. Thus sustained contact with local diaspora collecting data for an extended period of time and observations and interviews in situ may lead to interesting discoveries in the modern history of Russian society and increase linguistic knowledge of Russian language change.

I include the report on public data from the U.S. Census Bureau to describe basic demographic characteristics of the members of Russian-speaking diaspora and elaborate on multiple research methods that were utilized to create a multidimensional overview of the City’s diaspora communities. This presentation encourages that the frameworks used to collect and share social experiences of the Russian-speaking diaspora as well as the methods employed to evaluate and interpret the collected data be rethought. The pedagogical implications of research in linguistic and social studies of émigré communities in general will be addressed. The maintenance of intergenerational familial communication (children- parents; grandchildren-grandparents) emerges as one of the most important factor for the diaspora support regarding the study of Russian among heritage students. The paper expands upon different approaches to assess both language performance in class and level of proficiency outside of the classroom to determine the extent to which students can recall produce and manipulate what was learned in class. The models and practices discussed in this paper illuminates the theoretical frameworks that guide the engagement with local diaspora and inform research.