Every year during Black History month, Ileana Porges-West ’74 teaches her students all poems of Langston Hughes, beginning a month’s worth of classes dedicated to learning American history.

Porges-West teaches reading, writing, and speaking English as a second language at M College. Her students are recent immigrants and tend to be older women, the majority of the first in their families to attend college. They come from a variety of different countries, circumstances, some having to take classes on and off due to health, family, and job issues.

Porges-West came to be a second-language professor after re-evaluating her life and to the world. Interested in comparative cultures, she strove to promote cultural awareness and acceptance during her 25 years of work in corporate America, most of which she spent and from the Caribbean and Latin America. As she neared 50, however, she decided to pay attention to a career where she could make a difference. She found that career at Miami College’s English Academic Program (EAP), which extends beyond student proficiency as a second language.

“My educational philosophy is holistic and goes far beyond teaching EAP competencies,” West says. “One attraction of the EAP discipline is that in the course of teaching English include multidisciplinary and multicultural content from the arts, history, literature, science, business to develop a global consciousness among my students.” She teaches informal technical literacy as well, seeking to offer students as many opportunities as possible.

In her classroom Porges-West aims to teach her students about diverse cultures, including historical perspectives. She brings in outside experts and speakers to broaden her worldview and aspirations, and help them formulate their goals. She uses celebrations to teach, such as focusing on Caribbean writers and culture around Columbus Day.

“As a faculty member it is a challenge to prepare those students who have academic difficulties or their own countries alongside those who have a weak educational background or are not motivated,” she says. “However, the lives that I have touched and the students for whom made the American Dream a reality make me excited to go to work every day, and I am fulfilled in what I’m doing.”

— Amy Boggs ’07