



STARTALK Connection & Celebration

May is designated as Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month, which celebrates the contributions and achievements of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders in the U.S. There was no better way to celebrate AAPI than hosting a STARTALK Connection and Celebration event on NLU's Lisle campus.

NLU has been awarded two rounds of the STARTALK grant, which supports pre- and in-service Chinese language teachers for a year-long professional development program. The program is primarily developed as a virtual program, which provides access to participants from different geographic locations in Illinois. The 1st round of participants started in Spring 2023 and will finish the program in May 2024, while the 2nd round of participants started in Spring 2024.

On May 11th, 2024, Dr. Xiaoning Chen, co-director of the grant, and her team organized a face-to-face STARTALK Connection and Celebration event that brought together participants from two rounds of NLU STARTALK program to the NLU campus.



The event started with an icebreaker activity, allowing participants to get to know each other across two cohorts and build a community of Chinese language educators in the Chicago area. It was followed by representative mentor teachers and teacher participants sharing their insights and experiences throughout the program.



One of the highlights of the event was a captivating paper cutting activity led by Ms. Lucy Liu, a well-known paper cutting artist who is also an NLU STARTALK participant in the 1st cohort. Participants immersed themselves in the intricate art form, using it as a means to explore cultural nuances and innovative teaching methods where art is seamlessly integrated into world language education.



After enjoying lunch that featured authentic Chinese cuisine, the festivities reached a crescendo with a performance by the Dong Fang Drama Group, showcasing the richness and diversity of Chinese classic and modern literature through the medium of theater. Through their dynamic portrayal of characters in complex sociocultural contexts, the group captivated the audience with lingering echoes of laughter and showcased the power of performative language teaching. The director of the Dong Fang Drama Group, Ms. Ling Chen, is also one of the participants in the 1st STARTALK cohort.



Many participants expressed the significance of the event to them. One commented: "I have taken courses at more than six different universities in Chicago in the past 13 years. Today is the happiest and most heartwarming gathering I've ever had, where we communicated in Chinese, our native language, enjoyed delicious Chinese food, learned Chinese paper cutting, and watched an excellent drama performance. It was truly an unforgettable day. Many thanks to Dr. Chen and all the mentor teachers for their dedication to this program."

The participants' words are testimonies that the NLU STARTALK program serves as a catalyst for linguistic empowerment and cultural exchange. An event like this not only enriches our understanding of language education but also fosters a sense of global citizenship and interconnectedness.

