

## Elizabeth Mahoney



World Language department chair Elizabeth Mahoney has been teaching at Ursuline Academy for 7 years. She came to Ursuline after completing a sabbatical year in Valencia, Spain. A Spanish teacher with 30 years of experience, Ms. Mahoney enrolled in a Master's program in The New Technologies Applied to Education at the Universidad Catolica de Valencia, in order to update her technical knowledge and refresh her language skills. It turned out to be a timely plan, as her focus of study came in handy during the Covid pandemic and remote learning.

After spending each school year with our students in Dedham, Ms. Mahoney returns to Valencia almost every summer to spend more time immersed in the culture and language of Spain. Ms. Mahoney currently teaches Spanish IV, V, and AP Spanish Language and Culture, and most of her students are juniors and seniors.

What does she love most about her students? “Their love of learning. That is such a blessing,” she says. “The students say thank you at the end of every class, they actively engage in whatever you teach them and then take it to the next level.” Ms. Mahoney also enjoys her role as department chair and she has taken on the role of mentor to new teachers, helping new staff to feel welcome in the Ursuline community.

One of Ms. Mahoney’s favorite traditions at Ursuline is Homecoming. She enjoys seeing former students and their families and hearing about all they have been up to since graduating from Ursuline.

Immersing students in the language and challenging them to understand and communicate in Spanish is the main goal of Ms. Mahoney’s classroom. She enjoys having the students read and watch films completely in Spanish without any subtitles. Watching video clips, movies, and listening to music videos actually helps the students to become familiar with Hispanic non-verbal communication in addition to a variety of Spanish accents. Her students watch a movie called “El Estudiante,” which is the story of an elderly man who returns to college and shows how he values his marriage; he is able to impart wisdom to his college classmates and new friends. Her students also read *El Principito* or *The Little Prince*, which can help them to better understand what they are reading.

Ms. Mahoney relishes the opportunity to write college recommendations for her students. When they complete forms to request a recommendation, each student has to include what she enjoyed most about the class. Ms. Mahoney finds that most of her seniors’ favorite moment was their Spanish IV Immigration Project. Through this project, students learn about Hispanic immigration to the US and at the end of the unit, have the opportunity to interview someone who has emigrated from a Hispanic country, in Spanish. Students are amazed that they can actually conduct an interview in Spanish and understand the responses of the person they are interviewing. They empathize with the challenges and joys of the immigration stories being shared with them. The project allows students to gain experience and confidence in communicating with a native Spanish speaker.

In the summer, Ms. Mahoney travels back to Spain any chance she can get! This past summer, she connected with a recent graduate, Sara Wheeler ‘22, who was in Valencia visiting with her pen pal from senior year Spanish class and together, they took a boat trip on the Albufera, a lagoon and natural park in Valencia. Valencia has its own language and a culture of its own. For the past two summers, Ms. Mahoney has been taking intensive courses in Valenciano, the local language, while learning more about the food, songs, dances, and traditions of the Valencian people. These summer language classes inspire her with new strategies for teaching language, which she is able to bring back to her classroom in Dedham each year.

