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LARC for Curriculum Innovation.

Redesigning a course: Responding to shifting learner typologies. The development of a Spanish Composition and Discussion course that prepares Heritage Speakers for future research.

Participants: Michael Woods, Patricia Varas, Ana Montero

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### **The Course Involved**

The purpose of this grant is to design a Writing Centered course geared towards Heritage speakers of Spanish. We will redesign a section of “SPAN 331 - Composition and Discussion” to 1) respond to heritage learner needs and 2) to include inquiry-based learning to explore bilingualism and biculturalism. This course will be offered once a year. Although the curriculum and pedagogical considerations will be implemented under the assumption that the students who take this class will have self-identified a personal connection with the language, everybody would be welcome. Undoubtedly, the Hispanic/Latinx community is one of the most important populations in the Pacific Northwest in number and cultural richness. Willamette University is one of the only institutions of Higher Education in Oregon that does not currently offer Spanish as a heritage language courses.

### **Narrative Description of the Innovation**

Heritage learners are defined as those who seek “to explore and develop their connection to the Spanish language. Such a connection to the language may come through community, family, or cultural heritage” (Wilson & Martínez 2010). The course will provide careful attention to the specific linguistic, academic, and cultural needs of Spanish in heritage language students, while increasing analytic skills and developing an understanding and passion for acquiring knowledge. Multicultural learning poses its own methodology and challenges. With respect to their cultural background, heritage students are bilingual and bicultural and, as such, merit a contextualized pedagogy that speaks to their experiences through topics that expose them to a world that is familiar to them yet usually neglected in their formal education.

Students of Spanish as a heritage language enter the classroom with several reservations: they often feel uncomfortable and inferior to second language learners who have been exposed to linguistic terminology and formal varieties of Spanish and they experience “feedback” differently because it is tied in with their personal identity and cultural heritage. This creates issues of diversity in the classroom that have been shown to lead to high drop out rates. It has been demonstrated, however, that there is a link between retention rates and enrollment in classes of Spanish for Heritage Speakers (Zylik 2016). Despite being bicultural and bilingual, heritage speakers face serious issues of retention due to being placed in mixed classes. By creating a sociolinguistically informed curriculum and culturally responsive assignments, a Spanish for Heritage Speakers course aims to promote and validate students’ bilingual experiences as tools for co-constructing access to more formal registers of Spanish, while developing their bicultural identity and making them analytical thinkers and producers of knowledge.

We will develop assignments and workshops that promote “student inquiry,” while responding to distinct pedagogical needs and connecting them with cultural heritage. Throughout the semester we will develop a list of questions, themes or topics dealing primarily with the Latinx/Hispanic populations in the US: migration, bilingualism, biculturalism, Latinx literature, art, cinema, etc. We will include in the syllabus research, library and methodological workshops, how to ask research questions, how to create a paper proposal, among others. Research assignments that primarily deal with the Latinx population in Salem and the area will be implemented, ending in a research project in which the accumulated skills will come to fruition. Students will become aware that although the world that is familiar to them might have been neglected in their formal education, it has value not only as an experiential and testimonial reference, but also as material that must be analyzed, to promote understanding and action.

We propose to guide our students through a map of knowledge and inquiry that leads them from the Discovery of Scholarship through Scholarly Inquiry to a final research project that makes them Producers of Scholarship (See <http://oscar.gmu.edu/fac-staff/Mapping.cfm>). In this manner, we support and create an active dialog that promotes learning as an activity that is related to topics of interest and relevance, while at the same time demystifying academia as a bastion of privilege. In the following paragraphs we will describe the specific steps and activities that we will use:

### **Discovery of Scholarship**

First, students will go out into the community and gather information about bilingualism. In the first activity, students will use place-based Apps such as SWARM to explore and document the local linguistic landscape via check-ins and photos, generating a map of bilingualism in Salem. The originality in using these Apps is to create assignments that will expand on them and engage our students in place-based learning with the local community. SWARM®, for example, would serve as a great venue to examine the local “linguistic landscape” of Salem. The study of linguistic landscapes is a field within sociolinguistics, which constitutes research. Second, students will engage in service learning at Latinx-serving organizations such as local schools.. Finally, students will conduct an oral history with a Spanish speaker in the community using the StoryCorps App to explore attitudes towards bilingualism. Through these activities, students will become aware that experiential learning constitutes scholarship.

### **Scholarly Inquiry**

We will combine the previous fieldwork in the community with library research by discussing secondary readings<sup>1</sup> to help contextualize and explain students’ findings. Students will analyze their experiences to be able to distinguish between personal beliefs and evidence; explain the implications of their discovery as a form of new knowledge and what impact it has on them and society; and understand how these articles constitute knowledge and transmit it within a discipline. We will conduct “fishbowl” and “jigsaw” discussions to discuss the readings, facilitate a brainstorming session to generate topics for their papers, and reflect on how the data they have discovered can be interpreted and incorporated into their essays. We will go to the library and conduct workshops on how to use the library, how to ask research questions, and how to create a paper proposal. Students will learn how to develop a thesis statement, gather evidence to support it, and justify their project as original and relevant to their audience.

### **Creation of Scholarship**

For the last stage, we have designed three writing exercises that require different writing and research skills. Starting from a personal application, students will offer a snapshot into their life as a Spanish-speaker in the US. In the second exercise they will move from the intuitive and apply the articles we have discussed and their data and explain how their voice is articulated as a product of analysis by writing a linguistic autobiography. Finally, students will choose a topic related to the information they collected and investigated. They will communicate their findings in a written essay and in an oral presentation to their peers in a scholarly or creative manner and identify questions raised by their research.

### **Goals of the Innovation**

In this course we will consciously support and develop “student inquiry” by integrating these activities and assignments. Multicultural learning presents its own challenges and we would like to address them by making our students aware that knowledge has many forms and that though we value them all we will be concentrating on “evidence-based understanding.” Some of our main goals in this class are to make students conscious of the difference between personal beliefs, claims and opinions and to learn how to evaluate information and its sources so as to build arguments that articulate newly acquired knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Bibliography on this and other aspects of this proposal can be furnished upon request.

and impel action through its social impact. (See <http://assessment.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Students-as-Scholars-Master-Rubric-Updated-July-2013.pdf>)

Data and statistics regarding retention support the importance and necessity for this curricular innovation. According to data provided by Michael Moon, Senior Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Institutional Research in the College of Liberal Arts, the population of Hispanic/Latinx students has almost doubled in the period from fall 2009 to fall 2014: from 7 percent to 12 or 13 percent, or from about 40 students per year to about 70. This increase is partly due to a tripling in numbers of students from California. We are retaining this population of Hispanic/Latinx students equal to that of White students over this period. The retention rate of Hispanic/Latinx students has persisted at a higher rate than have students in other traditionally underrepresented ethnic groups. In order to keep and increase these encouraging numbers we must actively mentor and model for students through our classes for retention and success. In the same sense, a recent study at the University of California Santa Cruz, shows that, according to statistical research carried out by VPDUE Richard Hughey comparing enrollment figures from 2005 with enrollment and graduation rates in 2009, Hispanic students who had enrolled in at least one course in the Spanish for Heritage Learners sequence graduated at the rate of 85%. In contrast, Hispanic students who had not enrolled in a course of the sequence graduated at the rate of 67%, a significant difference. An additional finding was that 60% of these students graduated within 4 years.

### **Work Plan for the Grant Period and Implementation Schedule**

Development: Consult with established practitioners and developers of curricula in the Northwest of Spanish as a heritage language; organize a workshop for the department (and interested Willamette faculty) for which we are seeking a grant from the Presidential Discretionary Fund; attend the Second Symposium for Spanish as a Heritage Language; establish community contact for potential service-learning for community-based experiential learning. Creation: Adopt texts and develop the syllabus and rubrics that address multicultural learning and student inquiry by following a map of knowledge and inquiry and respond to Willamette's mission of enrollment of a diverse student body and engagement with our own local reality. Implementation: Pilot the course during the 2016-2017 academic year.

### **Assessment**

Every year: Complete pre- and post-surveys with students; conduct interviews with a sample of students; debrief as a department about the course once it concludes; every three years we will use a tool we will develop to assess the pedagogical value of the course.

### **Proposed budget:**

Materials 200.00/person	\$600
Stipend	\$4,000
Total \$4,600	