

## Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

### Assessment Grant Proposal

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I. Description of course: Spanish 250--Spanish for bilinguals (6) is an introductory level Spanish course for bilingual students. We offer two sections of 30-35 students each semester. After completion of this course students enroll in Spanish 312&313 (a six-unit advanced grammar and composition course for native speakers).

These courses have been designed to address the particular linguistic needs of the Spanish-English bilingual population with special emphasis on the acquisition of a solid grammatical base and the development of writing, reading and oral skills.

Course significance: theory and practice.

The teaching of native speakers or "heritage students" is a relatively new field that emerged out of foreign language departments and research on teaching English to speakers of non-standard varieties during the late seventies to provide these students a curriculum appropriate to their wide-ranging needs.

Some heritage students possess some cultural knowledge, but lack linguistic proficiency; some have adequate oral skills, but can communicate only in one register; some have mainly passive knowledge of the language; that is, they have fair listening-comprehension skills, and are "English-dominant". These examples are but a fraction of the linguistic variations these students bring to the classroom.

The latest research shows that these students face unique linguistic and cultural challenges that are different from those of the non-native student (Colomb' & Alarc-n, 1997). However, they all have one important element in common with the non-native speaker or second language learner: they must acquire the four linguistic skills through language acquisition processes that are very similar to those of the non-native speaker. In other words, many heritage students learn their "home language" as a second language, English being their dominant language. Therefore, the prerequisite for the course is communicative competence in Spanish with the prior absence of formal instruction in Spanish. In essence, these students are "learning" academic Spanish for the first time, as would the monolingual student studying Spanish or German.

Clearly, these students benefit from instruction that is based upon research on heritage speakers learning patterns, particular difficulties, and that builds upon the strengths and knowledge that they bring into the classroom.

This is particularly important in view of the data collected from a survey conducted in Spanish 250 and Spanish 312&313 for native speakers. The survey reveals that an overwhelming percentage of our students want to pursue a career in education (44%).

Course objectives: to develop overall proficiency in the Spanish language and the cultures of the Hispanic world, with special emphasis on the following areas:

A) development of students' command of the written language. In particular, vocabulary expansion,

spelling accuracy, orthographic accents; syntactic mastery. Composition skills are a major component of the course as evidenced in the essay component of the exams, and the eight compositions students are required to write.

B) advanced oral proficiency and communicative competence. Students are exposed to a variety of linguistic registers and dialectal differences. This area specifically addresses the topic of linguistic sensitivity by making students aware of individual, social and regional language repertoires.

C) development of advanced critical reading and thinking skills. From simply recognizing and then incorporating new vocabulary to learning to skim and scan materials, students acquire crucial reading strategies that are easily transferable. By extrapolating grammatical rules from examples, or constructing grammatically correct structures from rules, students are continuously applying logical reasoning and deductive and inductive analysis. Understanding the theory of how a language works and does not work allows students to practice problem-solving skills every time they are confronted with a new grammatical structure or usage. Moreover, Spanish is constantly compared and contrasted with English, usually the dominant language of the bilingual student. This creates a dual system of reference for students, who learn how each of the two languages works. Students are also exposed to various types of reading materials ranging from literary texts, journalistic prose, textbook essays, to commercial and business documents. Students are familiarized with a wide array of publications in Spanish available at the library, and published in the community. Students have access to periodicals, newspapers, magazines, books, videos, audio tapes, and the internet.

D) development of cultural knowledge and competencies through readings, individual and group projects. The textbook provides information and cultural readings pertaining to each nation of the Hispanic world and to the Latino populations in the U. S. Students study and compare regional, dialectical and individual variations of the Spanish language bringing into focus the cultural contexts in which these linguistic registers emerge. In addition, the text and the package of instructor's materials contain articles and literary readings dealing with various aspects of Latin American, Spanish and Latino culture. Oral presentations, compositions and group projects give students the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the history, the geography, the politics, and the arts of Latin America, Spain and Hispanic US.

#### Student Population:

Our student population presents a great deal of ethnic and cultural variation ranging from students that were raised in various Spanish-speaking countries, to those raised in the U.S. By parents that are first, second, and even third generation immigrants.

Our students' reasons for wanting to learn Spanish range from personal to professional. Among the latter, the majority are considering careers in teaching, though a significant number of them are also preparing for careers in healthcare, journalism, social work, law, business, and academia.

In order to be able to enroll in SNS classes all students must have grown up in a Spanish-speaking or bilingual Spanish-English speaking environment. Therefore, all students understand spoken Spanish and can communicate orally with varying degrees of competence. However, our students' linguistic competencies in Spanish range from high to minimal in the areas of reading and writing.

#### Current Assessment Practices and Instruments:

Students are given a diagnostic test the first week of classes. Then, they are evaluated in a variety of modes: quizzes, tests, compositions, oral presentations, class participation and attendance. However, the present modes of assessment are lacking in the following ways:

They are not grounded in the latest research.

They are not standardized across sections.

They do not reflect entirely the goals for the program at large.

#### Current Needs to be Addressed by the Project:

The acquisition of Spanish as a second language has been increasingly addressed in recent years by the fundamental sciences and applied linguistics. These efforts have resulted in a body of theory and a methodology which have facilitated the elaboration of standards and objectives. The instructional field of teaching Spanish for native speakers (SNS) has not yet been developed to the same extent and presents a unique challenge to its practitioners. In terms of student outcomes, the instructors of SNS face the teaching of SNS courses with a set of expectations not usually reflected in the objectives outlined in the course syllabi, much less in the measuring tools available to them. These expectations include some of the currently accepted language development goals clustered under the five c's (communication, culture, connections with other curricular areas, comparisons with other languages/dialects and cultures, and community interaction and service). They also focus on some or all the instructional goals currently identified for the native language system itself, namely: transfer of literacy skills, acquisition of standard language (prestige variety), expansion of bilingual range, and native language maintenance.

Spanish 250 is a clear example of these concerns. We need to thoroughly analyze the perceived needs of our students and our expectations as instructors under the light of the most current literature, and then identify and establish attainable goals which will develop the most valuable outcomes. We will then be able to develop an equally effective assessment system for the course which correlates precisely with explicit goals formulated in terms of student outcomes.

#### Rationale:

Research in the area of Spanish for native speakers (SNS) has identified the development of assessment tools to be one of the most critical needs of the field. To that end, a number of leading researchers (Roca, Valds, Pino, Lipski) have taken to the task of developing a series of national assessments tools for the SNS population. While it is important to develop criteria that are valid at a national level, the field recognizes that it is equally important to develop specific criteria that address the needs of particular SNS populations in different parts of the U.S. Our goal with this project is to develop a series of assessment tools for the SNS student population at CSULB.

#### II. Description and Time Line of Activities Accomplished with the Assessment Planning Grant:

- definition of the problem Summer 1998

- elaboration of the draft of the proposal for the development of assessment instruments for the course. Sept./Oct. 1998
- attendance to applicants' workshop on October 8
- writing of final proposal by October 23

### III. Description and Time Line of Activities to be Accomplished with the Full Assessment Grant::

The goal: to develop a series of assessment tools that:

Are in keeping with the national foreign language standards: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities.

Are reliable indicators of whether or not students enrolled in these courses are developing the necessary skills for:

A. Pursuing more advanced Spanish-language courses

B. Making appropriate use of the Spanish language in the various Spanish-speaking southern California communities (both of a professional and social nature)

Are in keeping with the findings and recommendations of the latest research on heritage languages.

Together, present a coherent, uniform, and detailed vision of our Spanish-for-native-speakers (SNS) curriculum.

Are responsive to the particular professional, career, and interpersonal needs of our student population.

The design of the assessment tools for the course will be informed by five areas of study that will constitute the focus of this project:

0. Literature research: the Spanish program has been awarded a NEH Humanities Focus Grant to study the research conducted in the last 15 years on issues of heritage language learning and teaching. In addition, the grant provides us with the opportunity to work with SNS (Spanish for native speakers) teachers from LBUSD and CSULB lecturers and teaching associates currently teaching Spanish 250 and 312&313. From these activities, carried out in eight all-day seminars throughout the year, we will be able to discuss the new theories of heritage language acquisition and more importantly, to see how these match or subvert the course's objectives, the articulation with the subsequent courses, and the specific standards and criteria developed by the team. In this project we will also conduct a study of evaluation procedures and instruments already developed and used in the field as well as the latest principles of instrument development and validation. The results of these combined research projects will be presented in a literature review report to be completed by March 1999.

1. Study of the program entering population: an analysis of the span 250 entrance test already in place and the results achieved by the entering students in the past years, together with an analysis of the results of recent student population survey will provide information about the actual student needs. This information will lead to a more substantiated definition of course goals. The data analysis will be completed by April 1999.

2. Formulation of goals for the SNS program: a preliminary task already in progress is the formulation of standards and criteria for the entire SNS program. This work will be accomplished by adapting the goals presented by the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (five c $\tilde{O}$ s) to some of the already existing instructional goals identified for heritage language students across all curricular elements (language system, cultural knowledge, communication strategies, critical thinking, learning strategies, other subject areas, and technology). These goals will then be translated into objectives defined in terms of student outcomes. These objectives developed by the team will be presented to other members of the department and the Long Beach Unified School District for discussion, feedback and revision. This document will be completed by August 1999.

3. Selection/development of measuring instruments: the literature review, the contributions of team members, and other colleagues and professional associations will yield a pool of evaluation instruments which will be analyzed in light of the desired student outcomes. This analysis will lead to the identification of existing instruments which could perhaps be adapted without modification, and instruments which could be used as models. The development of new instruments will follow the design principle which states that "an instrument should test each objective by requiring performance on critical attributes within the domain of behavior targeted by the objective in the mode of presentation used in the prospective instructional activities". These instruments will be available by September 1999.

4. Validation of instruments: we will run a pilot course in the fall of 1999 to test the assessment instruments and to evaluate course goals and student learning outcomes. A span 250 pilot course will be run in the fall of 1999 to test the assessment instruments and to evaluate course goals and student outcomes. Nevertheless, all instruments will be first tried in a small scale prior to its use in the pilot course.

#### IV. Description of Collaborating Faculty:

Dr. Maria Carreira

Mar'a Carreira is assistant professor of Spanish and coordinator of lower-division courses for all the languages taught at the RGR L&L department. She has published in the areas of Spanish morphology and phonology, and the acquisition of Spanish as a first and second language. She developed with Dr. Claire Martin Spanish 250, Spanish 312 and 313 for native speakers. Dr. Carreira was a member of the Modern Language Association Foreign Language Teacher Preparation Project (1995-97). She is also representing CSULB in the National Initiative on Heritage Languages sponsored by the AAC&U and the National Foreign Language Center at the Johns Hopkins University.

Dr. Griselda Dominguez Sasayama

Griselda M. Dom'nguez Sasayama. Ed.D. In Instructional Science and Technology. Doctoral dissertation: *ÒThe Effects of Rules, Examples and Practice in the Learning of Concepts, Principles, and Procedures: a Cross-Cultural StudyÓ*. She has conducted most of her research projects in the area of language acquisition and learning. Currently, she is Single Subject Teacher Credential Program advisor and field supervisor for foreign languages. She is also instructor of education and Spanish language.

Dr. Claire Emilie Martin is professor of Spanish, chair of the RGR L&L department, undergraduate advisor and Spanish program director. She developed with Dr. Carreira the Spanish 250 course and

created the native speaker sections of the third year language courses, Spanish 312 and 313. She is a member of the Language Mission Project and the National Initiative on Heritage Languages sponsored by the AAC&U and the National Foreign Language Center at the Johns Hopkins University. She also participated in the Modern Language Association Foreign Language Teacher Preparation Project, and organized two one day seminars featuring leading authorities in the field of heritage language learning: Dr. Guadalupe Valds (Stanford University) and Dr. Ana Roca ( Florida International University). She has been the recipient of a 1998 mini-grant award on the subject of heritage language research, and an NEH Humanities Focus Grant in collaboration with LBUSD.

#### V. Budget:

1. Faculty support for planning activities during the spring and summer of 1999: \$1,200.00 per faculty=  
\$3,600

2. Student assistants (2)= \$ 2,000.

3. Photocopies= \$400.

Total= \$6,000.