

Center for Writing Excellence Department-Development Grant 2009
“Integrating Writing Throughout the Spanish Basic Language Curricula”
Department of Spanish and Portuguese

Student Need, Benefits, and Numbers

In an increasingly interactive world, the value of foreign language acquisition is unquestionable. Proficiency in a foreign language, cultural understanding and sensitivity are the key motives in international business and political settings nowadays. In this regard, The Department of Spanish and Portuguese is responsible for helping to prepare our students for such settings. The beginning and intermediate Spanish courses offered by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese (constituting the Spanish Basic Language Sequence, namely, SPN 101, SPN 102, SPN 111, SPN 201, SPN 202, and SPN 211) are designed to develop in students the knowledge, understanding, and skills involved in learning Spanish (two input skills, listening and reading, and two output skills, speaking and writing). Basic Language Sequence coordinators work together to establish criteria for measuring language competence based on performance in real-life contexts (following Task-Based Language Teaching approaches). In order to measure speaking skills, we provide holistic tests (oral interviews and presentations) that acknowledge language competence. We follow The American Council of Teaching of Foreign Language’s (henceforth ACTFL) Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) guidelines and procedures that have been favorably reviewed by the American Council on Education (ACE) College Credit Recommendation Service. We are ready now to proceed with the implementation of the writing component in the courses that constitute the Basic Language Sequence courses in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, following ACTFL Writing Proficiency Test (WPT) guidelines. By enabling language learners to be tested for life experience in a standardized way, the OPI and WPT can help both the student and the educational institution achieve an accurate picture of the learner’s level of spoken and written language capabilities.

The proposed project will serve more than 15 teaching staff and approximately 1000 students (per semester) studying Spanish in beginning and intermediate levels. On the one hand, the team members in the current proposal will work on the creation of writing assignments (prompts) and their rubrics following the proficiency guidelines recently established by ACTFL. The team members in the current proposal would need to be mentored and be knowledgeable with ACTFL’s WPT procedures so that we can implement them in our Spanish Basic Language Sequence. Once writing assignments and rubrics for each level are designed, language coordinators will train Spanish Basic Language Sequence teaching staff about how to create and to evaluate assignments that focus on writing skills.

Objectives

We see this project as a long-term process that includes at least three entire semesters starting Fall 2009. It is our hope that the advanced Spanish level courses (SPN 311 and higher) will implement WPT procedures and guidelines similar to and consistent with those that we aim to implement in the Basic Language Sequence courses. We would like to achieve the following objectives:

1. Receive training (language coordinators) when identifying the nature of writing prompts and assessment procedures established by ACTFL's WPT.
2. Create writing prompts in Beginning and Intermediate Spanish levels for each topic and create a developmental writing sequence among levels of proficiency.
3. Design detailed rubrics that follow ACTFL's WPT assessment criteria, namely, task and functions, context/content, text type and length and accuracy.
4. Ask for advice from assessment experts from ACTFL board when evaluating the materials prepared by language coordinators in our department.
5. Educate teaching staff in Basic Language Sequence courses on what are effective writing mechanisms, how to write effective prompts, what constitutes ACTFL's WPT standards, and how to evaluate students' writing throughout different levels of proficiency.
6. Integrate those writing prompts and rubrics in our Basic Language Sequence courses to help students improve their writing skills in Spanish. We will be monitoring and assessing students' writing development through collecting students' writing samples (IRB procedures will be followed).
7. Identify assessment tools to evaluate the impact of the implementation of the writing tools into students' writing.
8. Consult with assessment experts at Miami University when conducting formative and summative assessment procedures.

Project Plan (Including Schedule and Assessment Strategy)

This project will be carried out over multiple semesters before becoming an established part of the curriculum in the Basic Language Sequence courses.

- **Fall 2009.** We will begin collecting samples of student writing in the following Basic Language Sequence courses: SPN 101, SPN 111, SPN 201, and SPN 202. These samples will serve as our baseline or preliminary data, and the team members will apply for IRB approval. Team members will begin meeting to discuss ACTFL writing proficiency standards appropriate for students enrolled in the Spanish Basic Language

Sequence. In November, team members will attend the ACTFL Writing Proficiency Guidelines Familiarization Workshop and the talks on Foreign Language writing procedures during ACTFL 2009 conference.

- **Spring 2010.** Team members will continue collecting samples of student writing. Samples will be collected from SPN 102, SPN 111, SPN 201, and SPN 202. Team members will also meet regularly to revise writing prompts and grading rubrics for department-wide use in the Spanish Basic Language Sequence courses. We plan to request that an ACTFL consultant/trainer review and assess these revised rubrics and prompts to ensure that we are following national standards. We would like to train all the Basic Language Sequence teaching staff (instructors and faculty) on designing appropriate writing prompts for assignments and on assessing student writing with the revised rubrics. During that training, faculty will be asked to assess the same student writing samples using the revised rubrics to assure consistency in grading. Furthermore, we plan to consult with Howe Center staff in designing an effective training session for faculty.
- **Fall 2010.** We will implement the new grading rubrics for composition writing and the new prompts that are aligned with national ACTFL standards of proficiency in all sections of the Basic Language Sequence courses. We will collect additional samples of student writing. To assess our consistency across the various sections in the Basic Language Sequence, we plan to hire an independent rater. Team members will look for matching funds in the Assessment Office when hiring said rater. The independent rater and faculty will assess select samples of student writing, utilizing the new grading rubrics.
- **Spring 2011 and beyond.** We will continue implementing and assessing student writing based on national standards in order to develop more proficiency in our students' writing in Spanish. Team members will review and compare the independent rater's assessment of student compositions with faculty-assessed student compositions to determine what further training, if any, is needed to establish more consistency in this area (accepted consistency determined at least 80% reliability). The writing prompts and grading rubric could be revised at this time, if necessary to provide more specific guidance to faculty. At this time, we would like to begin offering writing workshops through the Howe Center for Spanish students on general principles of the writing process. We will work with Howe Center staff in designing these workshops.

We would also like to begin comparing samples of student writing after this plan has been fully implemented (from Fall 2010 and Spring 2011) with the samples collected before our plan was put into effect (from Fall 2009 and Spring 2010) to see if there are general improvements in the overall writing proficiency demonstrated in the Spanish Basic Language Sequence. Language coordinators will be asking for advice with a consultant in Miami University to help in identifying evaluation tools to track writing developmental skills.

Team Members

Eva Rodríguez-González, Assistant Professor (Spanish Basic language Supervisor)
Tiffany Belka, Lecturer (SPN 101/102 Coordinator)
Leah Henson, $\frac{3}{4}$ Instructor (SPN 111 Coordinator)
Nohelia Rojas-Miesse, Lecturer (SPN 201/202 Coordinator)

Estimated Budget (Workshop and Conference)

The funds will be used to attend the ACTFL conference from November 18-22, 2009 in San Diego, California as well as to take part in the ACTFL Writing Proficiency Guidelines Familiarization Workshop. The workshop is given by ACTFL in San Diego, California on November 19, 2009.

ACTFL describes the Writing Proficiency Guidelines Familiarization Workshop as follows:

"Intended as an introduction to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines – Writing (Revised 2001), this workshop introduces participants to the major and minor level descriptors and the criteria for assigning a global writing proficiency rating. Participants explore a variety of writing tasks across levels of proficiency, evaluate language samples based on the criteria as described in the Guidelines, and design appropriate writing activities and writing assessment prompts at the four major levels. Participants discuss the implications of the ACTFL Proficiency Scale for establishing program goals, and for planning curriculum, instruction, and assessment."

Estimated budget for the four participants:

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| Workshop registration fee (early bird): | \$135 per person | \$540.00 |
| Conference registration fee (early bird): | \$195 member (2) ¹ | \$390.00 |
| Conference registration fee (early bird): | \$275 non-member (2) | \$550.00 |
| Airfare (economy class): | \$375 per person | \$1,500.00 |
| Lodging near conference site: (2 rooms for 4 days each) | \$200 per night | \$1,600.00 |
| Per diem (4 days at \$60 per day): | \$240 per person | \$960.00 |
| Total estimated cost: | | \$5,540.00 |

¹ Two of the team members are ACTFL members.

Total funding requested:

\$5,000.00

Deliverables

We would welcome the opportunity to write a report and share our project findings with the Miami University community through talks given on campus (to which local high school teachers will also be invited). We also hope to share our newly revised system of department-wide rubrics and writing prompts based on national standards with our non-Miami colleagues by presenting our findings at the annual conference of the Ohio Foreign Language Association (OFLA), the Central States Conference and at Miami University's conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in October 2010.

Signature of Department Chair

Dr. Charles Ganelin, Chair

Department of Spanish and Portuguese