

Language Education with Practical Application



very fortunate to be able to work with local health care facilities and businesses in the Warwick area. We have a Cuban doctor on staff in Warwick's Kent Hospital whom the students met and interviewed.

"I really had to search to put together the curriculum. I had to find college texts, online materials, and medical magazines as there's not much available in the way of secondary school texts for this subject area.

"I'm not a doctor," Miller emphasizes, "But I found out enough and worked with professionals who could provide the medical terminology."

Rather than teaching them just to conjugate verbs, Miller gave students the language learning and connections they needed for technical positions. Her cultural segment involved planning a menu and nutrition for patients with various dietary needs. Students put together a nutrition plan for diabetics who might be Muslim, for example. Students looked at emergency materials, and learned how to transcribe relevant medical information in Spanish. They also spoke with nurses, who taught them how to take blood pressure and use the vernacular for what they did.

Miller's business and travel Spanish classes included field trips to local restaurants and businesses where students learned about customs in other languages.

"We have a culinary school here in Warwick—so I'd eventually like to introduce other courses like French into the LSP program." Miller is an advocate for LSP programs and has attended conferences and workshops where she has spoken about her high school courses.

"It's very important for students to see how language works in the real world," she says.

Learning the Language of the Streets

In addition to meeting the needs of globalization, language programs in the United States must look at how to respond to the growing foreign-language-speaking population on our own shores.

In 2003, a pilot program in the Distance Learning Department at the University of Texas-Arlington (UTA) took a giant step toward working with the city's large (21%) Hispanic population in the area of law enforcement. Students in the LSP distance-learning program were able to use basic Spanish in dealing with traffic accidents, domestic disputes, burglary investigations, and spats involving juveniles, as

well as many other legal problems. With a requirement that students take a written law enforcement competency exam in the language, this specific training was offered to law officers via the Internet. Instead of focusing only on reading, writing, grammar, listening, and culture, law enforcement officers in the program used a state-developed Spanish for Law Enforcement course, originally part of a correspondence course offered by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement.

"It's extremely important to be able to take an offense report, be reasonably able to comfort a crime victim, take different traffic reports and . . . handle everyday situations," says Elizabeth Kozak, then UTA's coordinator of special projects for distance education.

The 14-week course (approximately 40 hours of study) was workplace specific and taught very specialized phraseology. The Internet-based instruction included text, visual, and audio examples, where law enforcement officers heard correctly phrased and accented examples, including slang and street-talk. A cultural component of the course also examined issues such as etiquette and personal space.

Communicating Medical and Business Needs

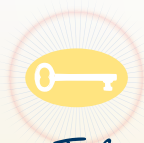
At the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures introduced Spanish courses tailored for students and professionals in the health and business fields in 2001. Directed by Dr. Lourdes Sanchez-Lopez, who designed and taught English for Specific Purposes in Spain, the Spanish for Specific Purposes program gives students technical vocabulary, conversational Spanish, and Spanish culture to help them achieve their professional goals and work with the large Hispanic community in the Birmingham area.

"We strongly believe that offering this program is critical to prepare millennial students for a more competitive professional future," Sanchez-Lopez emphasizes.

Spanish for Health Professionals gives students the conversational skills and vocabulary necessary to communicate with patients, while students taking Business Spanish write business letters, memos and e-mails, and make presentations in Spanish. Students in Spanish for the Professions learn the vocabulary, language, and cultural background they will use in their professional field.



Left: Dr. Lourdes Sanchez-Lopez, standing, with students in Advanced Business Spanish class, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, UAB. **Right:** Elisha Gentle, UAB student who studied abroad in Tunisia this year, sings in Arabic at the Tunisian Community Center Annual Conference, May 2007.



Kaiser Permanente: Tailoring Health Services to Culture

Treatment that is medically appropriate and tailored to culture, as well as gender, language, literacy, health condition, and health beliefs, is now in place at many health care organizations.

Staff and physicians at Kaiser Permanente's Institute of Culturally Competent Care, founded in 1999, are part of the bilingual staff and professional interpreters who assist in any of the 140 languages spoken in California. Kaiser also offers printed materials in such dominant languages as English, Spanish, and Chinese; many of its Northern California physicians are proficient in such languages as Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Somali, Tagalog, and Russian. With this improved communication, Kaiser members can have check-ups, physicals, and well visits in their native language.

"Some of our staff are already bilingual, but some have gone back to school to learn medical terminology in a given language," says Maria Servin, Service Director for Marketing and Diversity at Kaiser's Fremont/Hayward/Union City, California facility. "Some of our interpreters took Medical Spanish at community college, UC-Berkeley, or the San Francisco Health Care Institute connected with San Francisco City College.

"All of our health workers in Northern California must pass assessments in different language capabilities."

The bilingual program (mandated by the U.S. Department of Social Services, Office of Minority Health for all managed care organizations) requires regular language assessment conducted by Kaiser. There are regular training classes at various language levels so that staff are at least able to use language in a conversation with a patient. "We want to make sure that they are taking accurate information," Servin says. "And the cultural aspect is very important."

"The courses have been designed for traditional as well as non-traditional students," Sanchez-Lopez explains. "The objective is to fulfill academic need for their future careers and also to reach out to local professionals."

The growing Hispanic community in the Birmingham area requires many professionals—teachers, health workers, business people, law enforcement officers—who need to communicate with the Hispanic community. The student body is comprised of these professionals, as well as students who anticipate the need for language and culture in their future careers.

"The course content is vocabulary and culture-based," Sanchez-Lopez says. "Students learn the vocabulary, language, and cultural background they will use in their field through extensive classroom practice and—in some specific cases—out of class as well."

Students can also take Spanish Translation and Interpretation, and participate in a weekly Medical Spanish Conversation Roundtable (free and open to all students in health-related courses).

"These popular courses are completely full each semester," she notes.

Focusing on Cultural Competency

Why the emphasis on health-related language courses? The answer lies, as it often does, with programs that are an offshoot of government funding.

Since 1993, when the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health (OMH) first defined and addressed health care needs of minority and foreign-born populations, the funding of models assessed whether faculty development programs in health professions could provide cultural competency. This broad-ranging competency encompasses everything from how a foreign-speaking culture reacts to medical intervention, to the dispensement of medication, to actual translation or interpreting services.

Incorporating cultural competency for students and faculty and the introduction of professional interpreting and translation courses is now improving access to health care services by language minority populations—and augmenting the growth of language education for specific purposes throughout educational institutions at all levels in the United States.

The OMH developed cultural competency standards on Culturally and Linguistic Appropriate Services (CLAS) in 2001, directed specifically at health care organizations. The goal was to make health care organizations and individual providers more culturally and linguistically accessible to the communities served. The premise: that staff at all levels in health care organizations should receive ongoing education and training so that the organizations could provide language staff and interpreter services—and more—for patients with limited English proficiency.

The OMH reasons that family and friends should not be the ones to provide the interpretation services. Courses based on the standards were soon implemented at educational institutions, residing in various schools and colleges, and within various departments and programs—from medical colleges to schools of social work and public health, to veterinary, dentistry, nursing schools, and nutrition programs.

At Texas A&M, for example, the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences offers an International Certificate in Cultural Competency and Communications in Spanish. Students who complete the certificate study abroad to learn the culture and gain sensitivity in a foreign environment.

Studying Arabic for Specific Purposes

At UAB, Arabic instructor Lamia Zayzafoon offers basic writing skills including discipline-specific writing related to such majors as business communication, law, or journalism.

Her students represent diverse disciplines and interests. Stacey Banks, majoring in anthropology, is interested in a career in world music and cultures. Elisha Gentle, who spent part of this year studying abroad in Tunisia, is pursuing a minor in Arabic and International Business and majoring in Economics. Sharon Wellburn is majoring in Pre-Medical Technology.

In Zayzafoon's classes, they learn to state their major and name their department in Arabic, write a job application, and improve their linguistic and cultural competency using structure, formal style, and polite requests.

"I emphasize the diversity and the changes in the production of Arabic cultures," Zayzafoon says. "Arabic culture is an imagined community which keeps changing according to the political and economic interests at stake." Since the Birmingham area has a significant Lebanese and Palestinian population, students often work with this community for on-campus festivals and workshops.

This sort of growing partnership between language schools and the local community—even with a less commonly taught language like Arabic—appears to be yet another sign of the importance of LSP and its role in the future of language learning in the United States.

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Language for a Very Specific Purpose: Christian Figueroa—Singer, Actor, Composer

When Christian Figueroa came to upstate New York from his native Puerto Rico, he was already bilingual. Bent on a Bachelors of Music degree in Vocal Performance at Syracuse University, he augmented his fluent Spanish and English with language classes in Italian, German, and French for the musical repertoire he would soon encounter. He also took English diction classes and learned the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

Unlike the Language for Specific Purposes classes that target students who must communicate with foreign language communities in areas such as medicine and law enforcement, his language classes were designed for communication with a population literate in the language of music appreciation. And, he knew that he would be communicating with an audience who was there for entertainment.

"Learning languages is part of the Vocal Performance major at Syracuse and many other music and theatre art educational institutions," Figueroa explains. "Some of the professors are linguists, others have a background in musical performance at a very high level. If students are going to perform opera or operetta, they need to know its languages."

Figueroa continued his education with a Masters in Music

at the prestigious New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, where language coaching was also in the curriculum. With roles in the College Light Opera Company on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, he quickly put his language knowledge to use. He recently had lead roles with Opera Boston, including Offenbach's "La Parisienne," and revived his portrayal of Che in

Andrew Lloyd Weber's "Evita" at the Dartmouth College Hopkins Center in Hanover, New Hampshire. ("I used a Spanish accent for that one," he said.)

"Students who have a talent for musical performance or theatre should realize how important languages can be in their career. Even if they don't end up ultimately on the

performance side of the spotlight, they can put their language ability to good use in diction coaching, libretto translation, and interpretation. Many operatic librettos are in a language other than English, so training for the theatre is definitely an opportunity for language educators to explore with their students."

In addition to Syracuse and the New England Conservatory, there are major language programs incorporated into the musical performance curriculum at theatre arts departments in Indiana University, Oberlin, and Ohio University.



Christian Figueroa revives the role of Che in Andrew Lloyd Weber's Evita, at the Dartmouth College Hopkins Center.