Global Business Languages

Volume 2 *Cultures and Cross-Cultural Awareness in the Professions*

Article 8

5-21-2010

Achieving Linguistic Proficiency and Cross-Cultural Competence in the Health Professions: An Intensive Content Model

Barbara D. Wright
University of Connecticut, Storrs

Elaine M. Geissler
University of Connecticut, Storrs

Christina E. Cowell
University of Connecticut, Storrs

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl

Recommended Citation

Wright, Barbara D.; Geissler, Elaine M.; and Cowell, Christina E. (1997) "Achieving Linguistic Proficiency and Cross-Cultural Competence in the Health Professions: An Intensive Content Model," *Global Business Languages*: Vol. 2, Article 8.
Available at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl/vol2/iss1/8

Copyright © 2010 by Purdue Research Foundation. Global Business Languages is produced by Purdue CIBER. http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl

Barbara D. Wright
Elaine M. Geissler
Christina E. Cowell
University of Connecticut, Storrs

ACHIEVING LINGUISTIC PROFICIENCY AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS: AN INTENSIVE CONTENT MODEL

This article describes a unique and highly successful intensive Spanish course designed for students in the health professions. The course combines elements of the classic Middlebury-style immersion with a content-based methodology. Course content focuses on cultural dimensions of health and wellness in Spanish-speaking communities. At the end of three weeks, students demonstrate significant gains in Spanish proficiency and cultural competence; in addition, they report high motivation to continue learning Spanish and new insight into the ways Spanish skills and cultural knowledge can help them function effectively as professionals.

INTRODUCTION

Educators in the health professions today—and the students who are training to become health professionals—find themselves caught in a set of contradictions. Educators know very well that the US is becoming an increasingly multicultural society, and that linguistic and cultural knowledge can help health care professionals to serve their patients more effectively. But at the same time, professional curricula have become more and more demanding, responding to the requirements of licensure examinations and accreditors. The typical course of study in schools of nursing or allied health today leaves little space for a seemingly marginal subject such as a foreign language.

Enrollment of US students in the traditional European languages, meanwhile, is stagnant or declining (Honan); the exception is Spanish, where interest has risen modestly. At the same time, when students are asked whether learning a foreign language is important, and what are the

most important reasons for doing so, they respond with enthusiasm. Linda Pavian Roberts, for example, reports overwhelming support for language study by entering freshman (277). Interestingly, it is the benefit derived from the study of culture that is cited most frequently by students as a reason to study a foreign language (277, 281); students generally do not view language skills as enhancing their marketability. In other words, students believe language study provides personal gratification but not practical payoff. And at a time when students are under increasing financial pressure to complete a degree as quickly as possible, the personal or affective is likely to be sacrificed on the altar of practicality, even when students know that they are likely to work in an area with a significant Spanish-speaking population.

It is this set of contradictions that a grant-funded project at the University of Connecticut seeks to address. In 1994, the University of Connecticut received support from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), an agency of the US Department of Education, for a three-year project that has come to be known as Spanning. The project is designed to enhance the professional education of students in the schools of Nursing and Allied Health by adding cultural knowledge and some facility in Spanish to their repertoire of skills.

Health care educators on campus hardly needed to be convinced of the value of the project. In terms of demographics, the state's Spanish-speaking population—largely Puerto Rican but including growing numbers of Central and South Americans—comprises its largest and fastest-growing minority group (officially 10 percent but widely acknowledged to be underreported, with over 75 percent growth since the census in 1990). Hartford Hospital reports that some 70 percent of its patients are Spanish speakers.

The problem for professional schools, at Storrs as elsewhere, has been finding mechanisms that will allow them to provide linguistic and cross-cultural training despite students' already packed schedules. At the same time, language departments face the challenge of devising approaches to language instruction that will get around US students' traditionally poor motivation to learn a second language and that will counteract prior negative experiences with conventional language learning.

The Spanning project has made progress on both these fronts, though much remains to be done. Spanning has developed two models for fusing language and culture with existing professional curricula rather than pro-

viding them as add-ons. First, there are Spanish-language modules—one-credit, one-hour courses—that accompany existing core courses in the Nursing and Allied Health curricula. Although these modules are taught in Spanish and give students an opportunity to develop their Spanish skills, their primary purpose is to supplement the professional courses with information or a perspective unavailable in English. This approach is derived from foreign-language-across-the-curriculum (or FLAC) efforts pioneered at Earlham (IN) and St. Olaf College (MN). In our second model, the primary goal is developing language proficiency, but doing so through a focus on content of broad professional relevance. It is this second model that we focus upon here.

Spanish 190: Language, Culture, and Health in Spanish-Speaking Communities is an intensive three-week course that has been offered twice now, in the summer of 1995 and again in 1996. It includes elements of the classic language immersion such as a pledge to speak only Spanish for the duration of the course, in class or out; group meals at which instructors are also present, to aid (and enforce!) the use of Spanish; and recreational or informal activities as well as formal instruction, all conducted in Spanish. Students who choose to live on campus are housed together, away from other students.

The second important characteristic of Spanish 190 is its content-based approach. This course includes such topics as beliefs and values in Spanish-speaking communities associated with diet, physical activity, weight and body image, or high-frequency illnesses in the Spanish-speaking population. However, the course also looks at the larger social, economic, and cultural context in which Spanish speakers in the US live, examining such topics as immigration, acculturation, the role of the family, gender relations, generational differences, changes in economic or social status, spirituality, traditional health practices, and access to Western health care.

At the University of Connecticut, we have been able to build on two prior projects in language for specific purposes (LSP) that employ a content-based methodology: a program that combines German with engineering; and a project that links several European languages with social science disciplines. Spanning, however, is the only project we are aware of, on our own campus or elsewhere, that has developed an intensive content-based immersion of the kind described in this article. It is also the only project on our campus that has involved our own graduate stu-

dents from the language department in the creation of customized course materials and the actual teaching of classes. The major credit for the success of Spanish 190 belongs to those graduate students, who have embraced this project with an enthusiasm and sense of mission seldom seen among regular language faculty.

A CLOSER LOOK AT SPANISH 190

In this section we describe the goals of the course for various constituencies, the process of curriculum and materials development, and key features of the instructional methodology. We also profile our instructors and course participants, and finally we turn to the theoretical assumptions about language acquisition upon which Spanish 190 is based.

Goals

When course development began in January 1995, the goals of the instructors of Spanish 190 were, first, to educate course participants from the health care professions about cultural beliefs related to health in the Spanish-speaking community; and second, to increase participants' ability to speak and understand Spanish. In other words, the goals were twofold, cultural and linguistic, and flyers advertising the course clearly described its dual purpose and focus on health.

When students enrolled in Spanish 190 in 1995 and 1996, they, too, had both linguistic and cultural reasons for being there.[1] At the beginning of the course, more than half of the students (60%, N=14) indicated that of the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing) they were most interested in improving their speaking skills only. Another 20% (N=5) wanted to improve both speaking and listening comprehension. Twelve percent (N=3) wanted to improve listening skills only. After completion of the course, 64 percent (N=14 out of 22) reported they had achieved this goal. Other participants referred to improving listening skills as much as, if not more than, speaking skills. While we did not ask participants what their specific cultural learning objectives were, between 90 and 100 percent[2] of the students reported they they had achieved their goals for cultural competence.

[1]Of the 34 students who registered for Spanish 190, 25 returned a lengthy post-immersion questionnaire, a response rate of 73.5 percent. Unless otherwise noted, the percentages and Ns that follow are based on this group of 25.

[2]This represents the range of results for the two times that the course has been offered so far.

Course and Materials Development

The first step toward designing Spanish 190 was taken in fall 1994, when a description of the course was presented to the Courses and Curricula Committee of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for approval. The three weeks of the course were to be devoted to a set of interrelated topics. Week 1 would treat the family, immigration, acculturation, and generational issues; Week 2 would deal with diet and nutrition as well as aspects of mental and physical health; and in Week 3 alternative medicine and Spanish speakers' access to Western health care would be covered. The 1995 offering of the course followed this plan, while in 1996 the topics for weeks 1 and 2 were transposed.

In designing the curriculum and developing course materials, a basic principle of Spanish 190 has been to identify and use authentic[3] materials whenever possible. Our assumption was that while authentic materials are more challenging than the artificial texts written specifically for language learners, they would also be more reality-based, more persuasive, and more motivating. Thus the graduate students and language coordinator working on the course began searching newspaper databases for articles related to the topics the course was going to address; collecting real print materials from countries such as Spain, Venezuela, and Mexico; and going to local hospitals and Hispanic health advocacy groups to obtain written and videotaped materials. The didactic soap opera *Destinos*, WGBH broadcasts of *La Plaza*, and feature films such as *El Norte* or *Mi Familia* all supplied clips that could be used to illustrate cultural issues. We also videotaped health presentations given in Spanish to the Spanish-speaking community at local hospitals. We even produced our own videotape on the health beliefs of Spanish speakers in Willimantic, CT, when we failed to find anything appropriate on the subject elsewhere.

The health education materials we collected on different health problems and their treatment—such as AIDS, diabetes, and high blood pressure—were used in class for a variety of exercises. One activity brought together the linguistic and cultural aspects of Spanish 190 in a particularly vivid way. Students were given a number of pamphlets from different sources, all dealing with the same health issue, and were asked to compare them. This produced a valuable discussion about how pamphlets

[3]"Authentic" in a language-learning context signifies materials produced by native speakers for native speakers, such as newspapers, hospital pamphlets, and videos.

originally written in English for a mainstream US audience, then translated into Spanish without any attempt to accommodate cultural differences, were probably less effective in communicating their message than pamphlets written specifically for a Spanish-speaking audience. The pharmaceutical companies Lilly and Novo Nodisk, for example, have produced very culture-specific health education pamphlets, whereas US government agencies, among others, often do not.

Despite our focus on authentic materials, we did examine existing Spanish textbooks, and found ideas and material for Spanish 190. In particular, *Entre Nosotros: Communicating With the Hispanic Client* by Barbara Lotito (now regrettably out of print) proved a key resource in developing curriculum on such topics as non-verbal communication, the family belief system, gender roles, and behaviors relevant to the client/patient relationship.

In the search for materials that we could use to teach active language skills, we reviewed a range of medical conversation textbooks, for example, Escandón, Jarvis, Jordón, Kite, and Teed. Most of these were organized around very specific situations such as "admitting the patient," "taking a medical history," "doing a psychological assessment," and the like. Although these textbooks did not offer much linguistic or cultural authenticity, we did find them useful, especially Teed, because they provided models for the didacticization of our own materials and alerted us to the professional perspectives and needs of students in particular fields such as mental health.

The Daily Routine

As noted above, Spanish 190 is an immersion course in which only Spanish is spoken both inside and outside the classroom. On the first day, participants sign a contract agreeing to speak only the target language, and they receive a hand-out with useful phrases to help them maintain their pledge. The contract is a concrete symbol of students' commitment to the immersion method, and it has proven to be a key factor in maintaining a Spanish-only environment.

Each day is divided into sessions with specific topics and kinds of activities. In both 1995 and 1996 we started each day with a three-hour morning session devoted to a cultural topic. While the instructors do introduce the topic, this is no one-sided lecture. Rather, we make a point of drawing on the specialized knowledge of the students to supplement the

content supplied by the instructor. For example, if the topic is alternative health beliefs in the Spanish-speaking community, the instructor presents his/her material while also asking about students' first-hand experience in treating patients with similar or different beliefs. This constant sharing of information, both between instructor and students and among students, creates an exciting atmosphere of constant exchange, discovery, and highly personalized instruction.

The three-hour morning class[4] is followed by a lunch hour[5] during which instructors and students eat together and continue to speak Spanish. Lunch is followed by a conversation hour—a less structured, more casual opportunity for students to converse or perform role plays related to specific, concrete situations, in contrast to the more complex or abstract topics treated during the morning. The next hour is devoted to a workshop. In 1995, workshops were geared to students' specific grammar needs (assessed *ad hoc* as the course went on) and occasionally included such topics as strategies for viewing videos, techniques for interviewing, or specialized vocabulary.

In 1996 we made the workshops more consistent in content and format, and coordinated grammar more closely with content. For example, to teach students "ser" and "estar" we used a medical situation—"filling out the admission form"—that elicits a series of different questions and answers: questions regarding nationality, profession, or civil status that require "ser," for example; and other questions regarding location and physical condition that require "estar." Additional workshops in this series include "taking a medical history," "giving directions in the hospital," and "communicating discomfort." Each workshop has a content topic that coordinates with one or more grammar topics, and the series as a whole increases in difficulty.

Finally, Spanish 190 includes a cultural or recreational period each day. This is a necessity, since one of the biggest problems with an immersion course like ours is fatigue. Students' concentration and energy levels tend to flag as the day wears on, their best efforts notwithstanding. It is essential, therefore, to finish the day with pleasurable, less strenuous activities that can still contribute to language acquisition, such as watch-

[4]This time period may also be devoted to guest speakers who discuss their work with Spanish-speaking clients.

[5]In 1995 a special chef cooked foods from Spanish-speaking countries and gave menus to the students so they could "learn as they ate." Unfortunately, this feature of the course proved prohibitively expensive and was discontinued in 1996.

ing a movie, playing a game, singing, dancing, cooking Latino food, or enjoying some other kind of entertainment. Homework assignments were minimal or non-existant in 1996, because students in 1995 said they could have profited from a few hours of evening time to process, in their own way, what they had been exposed to during the day.

The People Who Make It Happen

The Spanning project originated within the University of Connecticut's Department of Modern and Classical Languages (MCL), but the impetus did not come from the Spanish Section. A professor of German, coauthor Barbara Wright, who had been involved with other language-across-the-curriculum efforts on campus, conceived the project, obtained funding, and found highly qualified professional advice regarding Spanish from her Bolivian-born colleague Professor Nila Marrone.

Recruitment and training of the front-line instructional personnel came next. A survey of graduate students in MCL revealed a significant number from the Spanish section eager to participate as teaching assistants (TAs). Criteria for selection included pedagogical experience and talent, interest in content-based methodology, excellent Spanish language skills, creativity, intellectual liveliness, and willingess to acquire "an educated layperson's knowledge" of the subject matter taught in Nursing and Allied Health. The project was fortunate to be able to recruit four excellent TAs, two native Spanish speakers (one from the Dominican Republic, the other from Spain) and two US students, including coauthor Christina E. Cowell, with extensive experience living, studying, and traveling in Spanish-speaking countries. In the second year of the project, two more TAs, Spanish speakers from Puerto Rico and Venezuela, were added to the crew, and one of the original TAs was released to take on other responsibilities in MCL. Thus the project has suffered little turnover.

A third instructional group has played a less visible but nevertheless important role in the Spanning project. These are the faculty in the schools of Nursing and Allied Health who have helped to implement the one-credit modules described in the introduction or have served as resource persons for Spanish 190. Coauthor Elaine M. Geissler is a two-time veteran of Spanish 190 and became associate director of Spanning in summer 1996.

And who are the students in Spanish 190? The minimum requirement for admission to the course is two years of high-school Spanish, or one year at the college level, or the equivalent. To double-check skills, students also had to participate in a brief interview before Marrone gave consent to enroll. This process has proven cumbersome but important, since it alerts instructors ahead of time to the range and distribution of skill levels with which they will be dealing and provides information about students' specific professional backgrounds and interests.

Spanish 190 was conceived as an opportunity primarily for undergraduates in the health professions, but it was by no means to be limited to them; professional faculty, adjuncts, and practitioners from the community were also invited to participate. And they did. Of the total 34 who enrolled, RNs comprised 29 percent (N=10), while community and mental health professions other than nursing supplied 38 percent (N=13); undergraduate and graduate students constituted 14.7 percent (N=5), while only 5.9 percent (N=2) were faculty or adjuncts at UConn. Clearly, Spanish 190 attracts more students from off campus than on. Another surprise was the enrollment (11.8% or N=4) of a pair of business students, an ESL teacher, and a military officer soon to be posted to Latin America.

All except one student came from our home state of Connecticut. However, despite the predominantly in-state residence statistics and the small size of the state, 13 students (38%) opted to live on campus during weekdays. Females outnumbered males roughly 75 to 25 percent (or 25 to 9). Ages ranged from a 17-year-old who was entering as a college freshman to gray-haired professionals. Remarkably, all 34 students completed the three-week immersion, even though many of them found it grueling.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The theoretical foundation for Spanish 190 is the Natural Approach to second language acquisition advocated by Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell. The Natural Approach is based on five hypotheses, which by now are familiar to the language-teaching profession:

> 1) the distinction between acquisition and learning (i.e., the difference between merely knowing *about* the language and being able to function *in* the language; Krashen argues that the goal of language instruction must be acquisition, not merely learning);

2) the natural order hypothesis (i.e., that there is a natural order in which children—and students—acquire the grammar needed for communication, an order that bears little resemblance to the order in which formal grammar is introduced in language classes);
3) the monitor hypothesis (i.e., that students can learn to consciously monitor their language production for formal correctness, and that the goal of instruction should be neither too much nor too little monitor use);
4) the input hypothesis (i.e., that language acquisition occurs when students are exposed to comprehensible input in the target language. Comprehensible input + 1—that is, input just beyond the present skill level of students—stretches them and lays the foundation for progress to the next level of skill); and
5) the affective filter hypothesis (i.e., that language acquisition proceeds most successfully when students are free of anxiety and fully open to comprehensible input).

The last two points are of special importance; the value of language classroom activities, according to Krashen and Terrell, can be measured particularly "by the degree to which the affective filter is lowered, as well as the amount of comprehensible input provided" (58).

Spanish 190 meets the criteria for successful language instruction that are implicit in each of these hypotheses. The immersion format demands constant, authentic, active language use, and use supports acquisition. In creating grammar and vocabulary lessons, our instructors are not concerned with the traditional order in which this material is usually presented in Spanish language textbooks; rather they allow student need, desire, and relevance to the topics dealt with in the cultural portion of the course to influence the sequence of presentation. Thus Spanish 190 follows what is, in effect, our own pragmatically defined "natural order" in dealing with grammar.

Spanish 190 speaks to the monitor hypothesis by offering some grammar-oriented activities—in part because we find that more concrete, structured work on grammar and vocabulary is a welcome change of pace from the morning sessions, with their heavy focus on input treating fairly abstract, challenging topics; and in part because students clearly hunger for some structure and guidance on particular grammar problems that trouble them as they work to extend their active language capabilities. As Krashen and Terrell point out (58), the optimum in language

instruction is to provide a balance of acquisition and learning activities, not to do away with grammar altogether. In Spanish 190, the grammar activities are clearly secondary and supplementary to the content presented, but they still represent an important part of the course.

The Spanish 190 environment is extraordinarily rich in input of high interest and varied format (e.g., readings, and also guest speakers, feature films, videotaped interviews, cartoons, graphics, dialogues, etc.). The course's focus on cultural dimensions of health raises two legitimate questions, however. First, what definition of "culture" do course instructors work from; and second, given the abstract nature of the concept of "culture," is the input *comprehensible*? Input without comprehension, after all, cannot contribute to language acquisition.

Clearly, the notion of "culture" that Spanish 190 employs is neither the "high" culture of great art, literature, or musicians, nor the "low" culture of everyday habits and holiday customs. We include those phenomena, but Spanish 190 moves beyond them to embrace an ethnographic definition of culture that has been propagated in language teaching for at least the last twenty years. In Spanish 190, culture signifies

> knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, timing, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions; manifest[ing] itself in patterns of language and in forms of activity and behavior that act as models [for both behavior and communication]. (Samovar, Porter, and Jain 24; see also Bloch 27; Damen 73; Galloway 89; Seelye 12–15)

Such a vast and amorphous system, one that, as H. Ned Seelye argues, really defies simple definition, requires an organizing framework if it is to be taught with any coherence or comprehensibility. Thus Bernard A. Mohan advises identifying a topic or theme, advice that was followed in designing Spanish 190.

The content-based approach, with its use of authentic materials and inclusion of fairly sophisticated and abstract subject matter, assumes that students' cognitive maturity and prior knowledge will help them to comprehend the information presented in class in Spanish. Janet Swaffar argues that particularly older students' disadvantages in mastering formal lingustic features may be offset by their advantages in conceptualization. Or as Heidi Byrnes puts it, the more fully the student commands the

content, the less dependent s/he is on linguistic elements. Other studies, albeit with some caveats (Barry and Lazarte, Hammadou), support the notion that the extralinguistic knowledge of all students, from undergrads through senior professionals, can be exploited as a pedagogical strategy in the language classroom.

Krashen and Terrell argue, finally, that in order for language acquisition to take place, students' affective filter must be reduced. Anxiety, however, raises the filter and impedes language acquisition. To reduce anxiety, Krashen suggests that the most effective approach is to make the message so interesting that students forget that it is in another language (Young 433). This of course coincides perfectly with the focus in Spanish 190 on content of compelling interest to health care professionals.

Initially, minimizing anxiety was not a conscious priority for Spanish 190; however, we discovered from our "before" and "after" questionnaires that we were doing many things right. First, the immersion format and the isolation of the group forge a strong sense of group identity. "Club membership," in Krashen's words, is a phenomenon that reduces anxiety and lowers the affective filter (Young 428). Second, our instructors all subscribe wholeheartedly to the notion of an interactive, learner-centered classroom; they conduct class as facilitators rather than authority figures or drill sargeants, creating a comfortable social context for students' efforts. When error correction takes place, it is never humiliating. Frequent work in pairs or small groups means that students speak frequently, but not in front of a large audience. Games and a wide variety of activities also help, as do the subordinate role played by formal grammar instruction and the opportunity we give students to express their fears on the "before" questionnaire (cf. Young 431–34).

EVALUATION

Spanish 190 has been evaluated from the perspective of the student participants and from that of the instructors. We share those results here, followed by observations on the unique value of the course to both professionals and students.

Students were attracted to Spanish 190 by their expectation that they would learn some Spanish (56%, N=14) and learn about the culture of Spanish speakers (32%, N=8) and by the desire to experience immersion (8%, N=2). When asked what they thought would be the greatest impediment to others taking the course, 60 percent (N=15) responded that it

would be the difficulty of obtaining time off from work for three weeks. Nevertheless, employers did pay the university fees and compensated work time for 40 percent (N=10) of our students. This suggests that while undergraduates may be ambivalent about studying Spanish, practicing professionals and their employers do see its value.

Within the affective domain, 16 percent (N=4) credited Spanish 190 with boosting their confidence level, courage, and self-esteem, and another 16 percent cited increased sensitivity to cultural similarities and differences as outcomes. Congruence between the linguistic goals of the students and the curriculum and method of the course were rated as a good to excellent match by 88 percent (N=22) of the respondents. After completion of the course, 64 percent (N=16) rated their understanding of Spanish-speaking cultures (i.e., foods and customs, perceptions, value systems, family and social networks, spirituality, etc.) as broad (62.5%) to near-native (37.5%). It is unclear whether the latter group included any of the three Puerto Ricans who enrolled in the course. Overall, a very solid 96 percent believed they had achieved their goals for cultural understanding. These data lend strong support for the student-perceived efficacy of our method.

For 84 percent (N=21) of the students, the immersion changed their ideas about the ways in which knowledge of Spanish language and culture could help in their work. The examples respondents offered for how their professional behaviors had been affected included: designing care and interaction based on Spanish speakers' beliefs and values; greater understanding of cultural identity; becoming less judgmental; and recognizing their own stereotypes.

Eighty-four percent (N=21) are now more likely to use Spanish in their work setting, while eight percent (N=2) indicated this was not applicable to their situations. All but one respondent, 96 percent, are now more likely to seek further training in Spanish language and culture. Means to this goal include enrolling in more courses, travel, self-study, utilizing Spanish-language media (e.g., TV, newspapers, radio) and practicing the language with Spanish-speaking colleagues at work.

Weaknesses of the method from the perspective of participants include the overwhelming nature of the experience, mental exhaustion, and stress. Because the 1995 class felt strongly that a ten-hour day was too long (we met from 9 am to 7 pm), the day was shortened to eight hours (ending at 5 pm) in 1996. Twenty percent (N=5) wanted more time for

grammar review. The lack of homogeneity of skill levels and expectation that students speak only Spanish frustrated students who were unable to understand course content, respond during discussions, or formulate questions. It is interesting how many respondents seemed to feel that everyone *else* in the group had more language skills than they did. More proficient students enjoyed the guest speakers, who were health professionals representing local Spanish-speaking communities, while those with lower skill levels did not find these sessions helpful, nor did those students who were not from the health professions.

Strengths of Spanish 190 included both learning language in context and the immersion experience. Hearing and speaking Spanish all day—without a focus on grammar or memorizing—was valued and facilitated students' thinking in Spanish. Several respondents concluded that the experience was the next best thing to visiting a Spanish-speaking country. One professional cited greater sympathy for clients from other countries who must function in English. Evaluated as very helpful or extremely helpful were the sessions on cultural dimensions (88%, N=22), conversations (76%, N=19), grammar workshops (68%, N=17), and speaking Spanish during mealtimes (64%, N=16).

Though responses were generally very positive, they also included suggestions and criticisms of Spanish 190. Some students wanted an opportunity to speak English at some point during the day, particularly to ask grammar questions. Some also requested language lab time. This is something we have considered including in the curriculum, but appropriate software is difficult to identify[6]; finding time during an already shortened day is also a problem.

As adult learners, some students felt embarrassed at having to speak in front of others in less than perfect Spanish. This is an affective dimension that is hard to overcome, except by providing a relaxed, non-threatening, and supportive atmosphere. Almost all participants felt overwhelmed during the first few days, yet at the end of the course they realized how much they had learned and praised the method and instructors for bringing them so far. The irony is that so many found the method acutely stressful, yet were ultimately motivated and helped by it.

Instructors have had their own experience with the new and daunting. The transition from the traditional, form-based method of language in-

[6]We are in the process of surveying what is currently on the market, determining what could be useful to us, and thinking about what Spanning could contribute.

struction to a content-based approach, and learning about subject areas that were not at all their own areas of expertise, proved unnerving at first. The TAs discovered that their anchor was their students. They could call on students for help with health-related material, while contributing their own linguistic and cultural expertise. This mutual dependence in the classroom has doubtless contributed to the special sense of comradery that both students and instructors enjoy in Spanish 190.

Instructors feel strongly, after an experiment in 1996 with more heterogenous skill levels and professional interests, that consistency in students' skill levels and professional background must be maintained if the course is to be fully successful. Heterogeneity on both levels frustrated not only students but also instructors, and led to stressful, spur-of-the-moment adaptations. Alternatively, the class can be divided into a wider range of skill-levels (thus far we have worked with only two groups, a higher-level and a lower-level skill group) with related but different instructional materials. This solution, however, entails additional cost.

Instructors were enthusiastic about the formal pre- and post-testing of students' proficiency introduced in 1996. Students were asked a series of questions and their answers were transcribed; at the end of the three weeks, a similar set of questions was asked and students' performance again transcribed. Students received copies of both transcriptions. This not only provided useful information for instructors at the beginning of the course; it also gave students and instructors alike concrete evidence of dramatic progress at the end of the course.

Finally, instructors have emphasized that excellent communication and ongoing coordination is essential if there is to be coherence of materials and methods over the course of a day and across the three weeks. Such coordination includes the four instructors and language coordinator, of course, but also extends to professional faculty in Nursing and Allied Health, who should be involved in vetting the materials produced for the course to help ensure quality.

In a sense, the bottom-line evaluation question is whether Spanish 190 is worth it. Does it provide something to health care professionals that is important and that they cannot get any other way? Geissler believes it does. "Getting to know your client," in her view, is the *sine qua non* for creating a caring, effective health care environment. This is even more true when a long-term relationship is involved, or when the health care worker goes into the client's home and must function entirely within the

client's culture. Cultural sensitivity can be cognitively acquired in a classroom using English as the language of instruction. That offers the professional the chance to at least become *aware* of cultural issues during an interaction. Cultural *competence*, however, requires more than awareness; it also requires the know-how to function appropriately and effectively with people from the target culture. Short of spending time in a foreign country, the only place this more ambitious goal can be approached is through an immersion in language and culture of the kind that Spanish 190 offers.

ADAPTING THE SPANISH 190 MODEL TO OTHER LANGUAGES AND OTHER PROFESSIONS

The significant progress in linguistic proficiency and cultural competence that Spanish 190 students demonstrate, along with the enthusiasm they express both for the course and for continued language learning after the course, suggests that this course format should be adapted to other languages and other professions. This can be done in almost infinite permutations: a vast range of languages and cultures can be combined with an equally vast range of disciplinary or professional fields. The treatment of the discipline or professional field can then emphasize not technical aspects—after all, the language instructors cannot and do not wish to present themselves as experts in an entirely different field from the one they have spent years studying—but rather the underlying cultural values or patterns that influence the particular manifestation of that discipline or profession in a given linguistic community.

Thus, for example, we can imagine a "Chinese 190" course that teaches Chinese with a content focus on business. Of course students in the course would have an opportunity to develop language skills through communicative activities set in a business context. But it would be essential to look at underlying cultural elements, as well, such as the effect of foreign invasions or British colonialism on the Chinese approach to business relations with the West or other regions of the world; the role of commerce in Chinese society and the historical or modern status of manufacturers and merchants, bankers, managers, or skilled and unskilled workers; traditional and modern relationships between social classes, or between men and women, and their effect on business interactions; the influence of such values as family or honor or work ethic on business practice; the boundaries between professional and private life,

between work and leisure; and the typical settings in which business is conducted formally or informally.

A course of this kind would not attempt to teach students technical aspects of doing business in China, such as how to obtain an import license or set up a joint venture, since that is better left to schools of business administration. But the course would give students a deeper appreciation of what it means to do business in the Chinese cultural context, along with improved linguistic proficiency and greater awareness of appropriate behaviors. Course materials could be developed from business publications, of course, and also from contemporary popular print and electronic media, films, literature, advertisements, and other authentic sources. Such a course would resemble the "cultural approach to teaching business German" described by David L. Dysart, but would go beyond it by putting less emphasis on business items *per se* and more on cultural context.

Or we can imagine another example: a German course for scientists and engineers specializing in environmental protection, pollution prevention, ecologically sound agricultural practices, and the like. German is a logical complement to such fields, given the pervasive environmental consciousness in Germany and the strong political influence exerted over the last 25 years by its environmentally-oriented Green Party. As a result, Germany leads Europe, and arguably the world, in the development of processes for recycling industrial waste, automobiles, and household refuse. A "German 190" course, however, would not focus on a highly technical or scientific discussion of such topics. Rather, students could discover how such topics are portrayed in the popular media, and could engage in debates or role plays between the converted and the opposed or the indifferent. Beyond that, the course would look more deeply at the values assigned to nature in German culture, the relationship of the individual to nature, and the very positive value attached to "natural" products. They could examine the rapid and traumatic transformation of Germany into an industrial nation at the end of the nineteenth century, and the simultaneous emergence of a "reform" movement that advocated a simpler, less processed diet (leading to the first "health food" stores); loose, comfortable clothing; physical fitness; and a more "natural" lifestyle that included hikes in the woods and communion with nature.

Students in "German 190" could look at the tense relationship between Enlightenment values (such as technology, utilitarianism, and ra-

tionalism) and Romanticism (with its emphasis on the affective, magical, and spiritual) that is still being played out today, in modern Germany. They could look at the sacrifices Germans are willing to make for the sake of the environment—and sacrifices they are unwilling to make, such as speed limits. As in the Chinese business course described above, students would have plenty of authentic sources to work from, they would develop their linguistic skill through intensive work with these materials, and they would emerge from the course with a deeper understanding of the cultural context in which Germans are working to solve environmental problems. Thanks to their more sophisticated language skills, US students would then be in a position to study in Germany, work in a German research laboratory, or participate in an internship, and bring that knowledge back to the US. At the same time, those students would understand that transferred knowledge must be adapted, not simply adopted, when it enters a different cultural context.

CONCLUSION

We believe that with Spanish 190, the Spanning project has created an extraordinarily powerful model for language and culture learning in the professions, a model that can and should be replicated. Such courses can contribute to the growth of language-for-specific-purposes (LSP) offerings while providing an antidote to many of the problems associated with LSP courses.

Currently the number of LSP courses in the US appears to be stagnating or growing at only a slow rate (Uber Grosse and Voght 41). Reasons for discontinuing LSP courses or not offering them in the first place typically include low enrollments, lack of a fit between the liberal arts mission of the institution or the language department, and a lack of interest on the part of language faculty. The generic quality of the Spanish 190 model, however, promises to attract larger numbers of students from wide-ranging, albeit related, fields. The focus of the course on deeper cultural structures is certainly compatible with liberal arts education, and this kind of focus is also likely to be far more congenial to language faculty—and closer to the kinds of interdisciplinary cultural studies now in scholarly fashion—than a superficial notion of LSP conceived as a crash course in technical vocabulary. Language teaching staff will still need special preparation in order to be able to put together such a course; the work involved, however, is likely to be more appealing than the effort

required to prepare for a technically oriented LSP course. Indeed, courses like Spanish 190 may offer a viable way to bridge what is described by James as a "gap" (85) and by Kramsch as a "dubious dichotomy" (2) between language courses on the one hand, and literature courses on the other.

The major disadvantage of the Spanish 190 model is its cost. The course is labor-intensive to teach. In addition to a staff of instructors, a language coordinator and administrator are required; arrangements for meals and lodging must be made; and guest lecturers, feature films, and an occasional performer all cost money. Moreover, because of Spanish 190's unique curriculum, appropriate textbooks cannot simply be purchased. Months of prior planning and materials development preceded the first offering, and a second version of the course, developed over the second year so that students would be able to take the course a second time for credit, also required considerable time and effort. The labor and resource materials that were purchased in developing the course must also be figured in as part of its cost.

Thus the Spanish 190 model is likely to be affordable—both to the student and to the department—only when it is subsidized by outside funding of some kind, at least in the developmental phase, or until suitable materials become more widely available. On the other hand, the advantages of the course are so manifest, and the enthusiasm of those who have experienced it is so infectious, that we can imagine many possibilities for raising the money necessary to develop and offer the course.

If indeed the Spanish 190 model becomes commonplace, it will represent a triumph of synthesis over thesis and antithesis on several fronts. It will help to render moot the debate over language versus literature, or culture versus language; it will contribute to a rapprochement between C. P. Snow's two centrifugally drifting cultures; indeed, it may even allow students to reconcile the personal and the practical when they elect to study a language.

REFERENCES

Barry, Sue, and Alejandro A. Lazarte. "Embedded Clause Effects on Recall: Does High Prior Knowledge of Content Domain Overcome Syntactic Complexity in Students of Spanish?" *Modern Language Journal* 79.4 (1995): 491–503.

Bloch, Brian. "The Language-Culture Connection in International Business." *Foreign Language Annals* 29.1 (1996): 27–36.

Byrnes, Heidi. "Getting a Better Reading: Initiatives in Foreign Language Reading Instruction." *Initiatives in Communicative Language Teaching II.* Ed. Sandra J. Savignon and Marge S. Germs. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1987. 172–203.

Damen, Louise. *Culture Learning: The Fifth Dimension in the Language Classroom.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1986.

Dysart, David L. "A Cultural Approach to Teaching Business German." *Foreign Language Annals* 28.1 (1995): 147–55.

Escandón, Ralph. *Bilingual Vocabulary for the Medical Profession.* Cincinnati: South-Western, 1982.

Galloway, Vicki. "Toward a Cultural Reading of Authentic Texts." *Languages for a Multicultural World in Transition.* Ed. Heidi Byrnes. Lincolnwood, I: National Textbook, 1992. 87–121.

Hammadou, Joann. "Interrelationships among Prior Knowledge, Inference, and Language Proficiency in Foreign Language Reading." *Modern Language Journal* 75.1 (1991): 27–37.

Honan, William H. "Language Study Shifts Again: Chinese Is Up, Russian Down." *New York Times* 9 Oct. 1996: B9.

James, Dorothy. "Reshaping the 'College-level' Curriculum: Problems and Possibilities." *Shaping the Furture: Challenges and Opportunities.* Ed. Helen S. Lepke. Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Middlebury, VT, 1989. 79–110.

Jarvis, Ana C. *Spanish for Social Services.* Lexington, MA: Heath, 1980.

___, and Raquel Lebredo. *Spanish for Medical Personnel.* Lexington, MA: Heath, 1992.

Jordón Tabrey, Julia, et al. *Communicating in Spanish for Medical Personnel.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1975.

Jurasek, Richard. "Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum: A Case History from Earlham College and a Generic Rationale." *Language and Content. Discipline- and Content-Based Approaches to Language Study.* Ed. Merle Krueger and Frank Ryan. Lexington, MA: Heath, 1993. 103–11.

Kite, Ralph. *Spanish for the Medical Professions* (Supplement to *Destinos: An Introduction to Spanish*). New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993.

Kramsch, Claire. *Context and Culture in Language Teaching.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993.

Krashen, Stephen D. *The Input Hypothesis. Issues and Implications.* London: Longman, 1985.

___. *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning.* Oxford: Pergamon, 1983.

___, and Tracy D. Terrell. *The Natural Approach. Language Acquisition in the Classroom.* Hayward, CA: Alemany, 1983.

Lotito, Barbara. *Entre Nosotros: Communicating with the Hispanic Client.* New York: Newbury House, 1988.

Mohan, Bernard A. *Language and Content.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1986.

Roberts, Linda Pavian. "Attitudes of Entering University Freshmen toward Foreign Language Study: A Descriptive Analysis." *Modern Language Journal* 76.3 (1992): 275–83.

Samovar, Larry A., Richard E. Porter, and Nemi C. Jain. *Understanding Intercultural Communication.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1981.

Seelye, H. Ned. *Teaching Culture. Strategies for Intercultural Communication.* 1974. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook, 1987.

Swaffar, Janet. "Using Foreign Languages to Learn: Rethinking the College Foreign Language Curriculum." *Reflecting on Proficiency from the Classroom Perspective.* Ed. June K. Phillips. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook, 1993. 55–86.

Teed, Cynthia, Harold Raley, and Jeffry B. Barber. *Conversational Spanish for Medical and Health Professionals.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1983.

Uber Grosse, Christine, and Geoffrey M. Voght. "Foreign Languages for Business and the Professions at US Colleges and Universities." *Modern Language Journal* 74.1 (1990): 36–47.

Young, Dolly Jesusita. "Creating a Low-Anxiety Classroom Environment: What Does Language Anxiety Research Suggest?" *Modern Language Journal* 75.4 (1991): 426–37.