

May 2010

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Recommended Citation

Ray, Nina M. (2010) "Beyond Spanish for Business: Teaching Marketing Issues in the Spanish-Speaking World," *Global Business Languages*: Vol. 5 , Article 9.
Available at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl/vol5/iss1/9>

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BEYOND SPANISH FOR BUSINESS:
TEACHING MARKETING ISSUES
IN THE SPANISH-SPEAKING WORLD

In this era of downsizing, institutions of higher education are having to make do with limited resources while still preparing students for the global economy of the new millenium. Several professors (for example, Koch 1997; Loughrin-Sacco, McCain and Ray 1994; Loughrin-Sacco and Ray 1994; Ray and Ryder 1997; Uwah and Nelson 1998; Vogt 1998; and Wood 1998) have written earlier about how cross-campus collaborative efforts can help with this preparation of students. And, many more are actively incorporating this collaboration into their course offerings (see, for example, Kelm 1999, Parle 1996, and Wood 1998). While most authors propose that language study be incorporated into the business curriculum, others (Ray 1999, Tissera 1999, and Wood 1998) also suggest that the study of film and literature can help students develop an international orientation and understanding.

Rather than having an international business faculty, our college draws on the resources of internationally oriented faculty from each functional discipline. Among the objectives of our international program are (1) development of foreign language competencies, (2) the understanding of the practical operation of business in other cultures, and, of course, (3) the preparation of future business practitioners for international careers with companies in our state. We have sought opportunities to achieve all of these objectives through grant applications and individual efforts to develop course materials (See Loughrin-Sacco and Ray 1994 for a description of a successful collaborative effort between a College of Business and a Department of Modern Languages). A good place to begin searching for funding possibilities is the International Studies Branch of the Center for International Education at

the U.S. Department of Education⁴⁶ or a CIBER (Center for International Business Education and Research) location at a nearby university. One can also attend workshops and paper presentations such as Loughrin-Sacco's (2000) "Funding International Business & Foreign Language Programs through Federal & Private Sources" at the *Language, Communication and Global Management* conference co-hosted by The American Graduate School of International Management and Eastern Michigan University.

Our university received a Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum Grant (FLAC) from the U.S. Department of Education. Because of the grant, diverse classes around campus, such as Criminal Justice and Social Work, were offered either in the Spanish language, or with a significant Hispanic cultural component. A colleague in the Chemistry Department wrote a lab manual in Spanish for his introductory course. A German-speaking faculty member in the College of Business was to offer a Business in Germany elective, to be taught in German. Our FLAC efforts ranged from teaching mostly typical course content in another language to using the other language to read and discuss subject matter issues particular to a country or culture.

As part of the grant, I taught a 3-credit "Marketing Issues in the Spanish-Speaking World" class. Much of the class was taught in Spanish, especially when visitors came to speak (e.g., Commercial Consul from Spain, Consul from Mexico, sales representatives from a local computer manufacturing company who sell to Latin America) However, some cases from English-language sources, such as the Harvard Case Clearing House, were included in the required reading list. The cases chosen reflect marketing decisions faced by U.S., Spanish, and Latin American firms that deal with exporting and globalization issues.

As valuable as Spanish-for-Business courses are, our experience is that unless the instructor has significant business background, the content of such courses is mostly vocabulary and translation. At best, a class is "a Spanish class about business" (Parle 1996, 83). Luckily, we have been fortunate at our university to have had as teachers of the course both a Spanish-speaking member of the Department of Marketing and a

⁴⁶ A link to the Dept. of Education's funding opportunities for International Business education can be found at such sites as San Diego State University's CIBER home page <<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/ciber/>>. A direct contact for grant assistance at the U.S. Department of Education is Christine Corey at (202) 502-7629 or <christine_corey@ed.gov>.

professor in the Department of Modern Languages who studied and practiced economics in Bolivia. We feel it is important to have significant business content in addition to the language content in a Spanish-for-Business course. The FLAC grant afforded us an opportunity to go even further—to concentrate on the business (specifically marketing) issues in important emerging markets (most in Latin America) and in Spain, a European Union “success story.” Therefore, comfortable that this course was certainly more than simply a vocabulary course, we had no trouble allowing our students to use the class as a business elective.

This article describes the content and format of the course, “Marketing Issues in the Spanish-Speaking World.” In doing so, the author hopes that others may be motivated to offer such a class and that a dialog can begin which includes a sharing of ideas and suggestions for class content and materials. For our class, we not only were able to concentrate on relevant global marketing topics of importance to the Spanish-speaking world, but to practice and improve upon our Spanish-language abilities as well. And of course, having the ability to speak and read in Spanish enabled us the opportunity to use an expanded base of resources (cases written in the Spanish language, newspapers from Spain and Latin America, talks with native Spanish-speaking guest speakers) from which we could learn even more about marketing topics. We exemplified a true incorporation of Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum with “Marketing Issues in the Spanish-Speaking World.”

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course is an application of current political, legal, technological, competitive, economic, and sociocultural forces which shape the product, price, distribution, and promotional aspects of firms’ and organizations’ marketing campaigns in Spanish-speaking countries, and also the United States. Representatives of the local Hispanic business community and trade experts with knowledge of Spanish-speaking countries are invited to speak to the class. Spanish language proficiency is required.

Although we attempt to conduct the class in Spanish, some of our guest speakers feel more comfortable speaking in English and most of the readings and class materials are in English. The general class policy is to write the formal class project in English, but to conduct presentations and

conversations during class in Spanish. Nonetheless, are fairly flexible with this policy.

CLASS READINGS

The required text for the class was Fairbanks and Lindsay's (1997) *Plowing the Sea: Nurturing the Hidden Sources of Growth in the Developing World*.

Some Spanish-language cases were used from *Casos Prácticos de Marketing* (Lambin 1995). In order to focus on the several cases which detailed marketing problems encountered in Mexico, Colombia, and Spain, we avoided those non-Hispanic selections which had been translated into Spanish for the book.

Since not all of the students in the class had an extensive quantitative marketing background, we emphasized the language and cultural aspects (part of the marketing environment which every marketing text discusses) of these cases instead of thorough economic and financial analysis (which could be included for classes containing students with more advanced quantitative skills). In addition, competitor and customer analysis (described by Harvard Business School Publishing as one major focus of the class text) is an important aspect of the marketing environment. We also thoroughly discussed the "Four Ps" of the marketing mix (product, place, promotion, and price) as they applied to our readings and in-depth topics of interest. This typical format for discussing marketing is also followed in many texts written in Spanish (for example, Churruca and García-Lomas [1995], Mestre [1996]). In no way did we feel that the marketing content of the class was compromised.

A list of cases used in the class, as well as a brief description of each, appears in the Appendix. This list also includes some cases which had been originally considered for class readings, but which were not used for a variety of reasons.

Using cases in this manner does not develop students' critical thinking skills and their ability to defend ideas under criticism. It places the burden on the professor for explaining the "right" answer, instead of allowing students to develop sound strategies themselves (Dröge and Spreng 1996). It also does not take complete advantage of much more than the descriptive value of cases. The *interpretive* and the *comparative* benefits (Valentin 1996), even if present in the case, are probably

shortchanged. Even when engaging in a *student-led method* (Dröge and Spreng 1996), students spend an inordinate amount of time describing case facts instead of interpreting what these facts mean. Therefore, in whichever manner cases are used, professors must innovatively attempt to bring out the underlying richness of the case histories. Andrews (1997) found that when cases are systematically varied and when students are able to transfer learning from case to case, some problem-solving skills are developed. In our situation, class members were challenged to develop their cultural analysis skills, and to some degree, their language skills. Spanish and Latin American business issues that many traditional texts ignore became the focus of discussion, and resulted in themes which continued from one case to another.

In addition to the text and cases, we read current articles from the popular and business press. For example, we discussed the economic and trade implications of Puerto Rico becoming the 51st U.S. state (Ferre 1998, Harper 1998, and “Puerto Rico Gov. To Lobby” 1998), the impact on world physical distribution of the handing over of the Panama Canal (Vogel 1997b), a recent trade mission which many state dignitaries and businesspeople took to Mexico (Cole 1998a, b, and c), problems of protecting brand names around the world (Parker-Pope and Friedland (1998), and Mexican exports to markets in the United States (Millman 1998).

Students also received more traditional “lectures” based on research available in the trade press and academic journals (which they were not required to read). Such topics included the changing role of the Spanish consumer (Nuevo and Bennett 1997), the importance of Mexican agricultural exports to the European markets (Burke 1997), the important reforms made by the country of Guatemala to attract foreign investment (Vogel 1997a), and the growing importance of the Third World’s share of tourism (Belk and Costa 1995). Additional lecture material was gathered from books such as Tuller’s (1995), *Strategic Marketing in South America*.

COURSE FORMAT

A great deal of emphasis was placed on hearing from the experts in the field. The text and case readings concentrated on specific “real-world” situations of local companies solving real marketing problems and foreign firms strategizing to enter Spanish and Latin American

markets. Our guest speakers shared their experiences in the fields of banking, telecommunications, computer sales, infrastructure development, law, construction, and media sales, among others. Our students certainly were exposed to a wide variety of experts and concrete examples of marketing in Spain, the Hispanic U.S. market, and Latin America.

Students wrote and presented to the rest of the class a term project. They had the following options for their semester projects:

- Collect lists of “country experts” and work with other class members to formulate questions for them. Be responsible for the tabulation of responses and presentation to class.
- Compile a list of on-line major Spanish-language newspapers. Follow one throughout the course and periodically report on relevant marketing news in that country.
- Update one of the cases discussed during the semester and present the findings to class.

Students updated the Banco Popular, Televisa, and the Colombian Cut Flower cases. Others researched opportunities for investment in Guatemala, Costa Rica’s interest in advanced technology and Telecommunications in Chile. One student undertook the informal survey of country experts. This last project was perhaps the most interesting, because the student had maintained contact with the experts throughout the semester and the project was more personalized than a common “library” project. Most students, even those with less-than-perfect language skills, chose to present in Spanish.

REACTION TO THE CLASS

Students’ Reactions

Since the class was small (eight were registered), class members stated that having a small group of students, all with similar interests and language abilities, made for an interesting semester. They very much liked hearing from the guest speakers; the local attorney and construction company executive were their favorites, followed by our state’s trade representative in Guadalajara, and the sales representatives from a local computer manufacturer.

Class evaluation surveys at the end of the semester asked about the value of the cases for informational reading and discussion instead of traditional, extensive analysis. Students' opinions were split evenly regarding how valuable they felt it was to have Spanish-language cases (in contrast to the English-language ones). They agreed that information-only cases were preferable to those that might have required extensive analysis, but in general they questioned the cost value of case purchases. The major exception to this sentiment was the English-language case about the Colombian Cut Flower Industry. Many thought this was the most valuable case because it tied in to a discussion in their text and thoroughly presented an example of the implementation of the product, price, promotion, and distribution aspects of the marketing mix. They also liked the Gallo Rice case because it provided interesting information about the company's products. Single "votes" for favorite case included Layton Canada (because the student did not know about these political problems with Cuba before reading the case), International Chemicals (because of its emphasis on the collection of marketing research data), Francisco de Narváez at Tía (because the case shows how commerce must change with the times), and Televisa (because the student watches Televisa shows at home with her family).

Comments about the course in general centered on the complaint that even without emphasis on "the numbers," there was too much financial information presented in class readings ("crunching the numbers" is often part of marketing case analysis). Some had signed up for the course hoping it was in fact more of a traditional Spanish-for-business class and they did not feel their language abilities improved enough.

Professor's Perspective

Not being a native speaker, I found it difficult to continue the commitment to speak for three hours at a time in Spanish (the class met once a week for three hours). However, the class policy was somewhat flexible on the language used in class, even if all of us attempted to use Spanish as much as possible. Those teaching such a class should be certain of their own language abilities.

The list of cases used for class readings in the Appendix is extensive, and compiling such a list is not a simple task. Care was taken to form the list with companies whose cases not only demonstrate some important marketing lesson, but contain some information regarding the business

culture climate in the country. As the students were quick to point out, sometimes that meant that a case might not be as timely as they would like. Plus, since the marketing background varied quite a bit among the class members, we could not delve too much into substantive business issues. On the other hand, the diversity of the class was nice. We had young students with no business experience and little international travel behind them, but we also had a class member who had traveled extensively to Latin America with one of our state's largest corporations.

Dröge and Spreng (1996) relate that a disadvantage of having students lead the discussion of case material (such as with formal student presentations, a technique not used in our class) is that the instructor does not have control over the direction of the discussion. Having secretarial or work-study support designated to help with arrangements with outside speakers would have been very beneficial.

We found that our department was sometimes in the position of justifying this course offering, especially once the administration learned that only eight students enrolled. It is important to have strong prior support and encouragement from the administration if a new course has low enrollment.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Early and frequent promotion of the class offering is a must, especially in university environments where such narrowly defined special topics classes are limited. Uwah and Nelson (1998) commented that students who are most likely to succeed in their Business French course are those who have spent time abroad, and these students should be especially targeted for such course promotions. Lists from Study Abroad offices can be obtained. And, at our university, many returning missionaries become our International Business students. Perhaps targeting efforts could be coordinated with local church sponsorship.

While it is important to try to estimate demand for such a course, we found it was almost impossible to do so until the class was in the university schedule and promoted during registration. Unfortunately, our promotional efforts generated a great deal of interest, but resulted in very few actual class members. A business colleague was also going to offer a Business in Germany course (in German) as part of our FLAC grant. He too was welcomed with lots of interest on the part of students. Unfortunately, only one person enrolled, and the course was never

offered. We would be well served to heed Brokaw's (1996) words, even though he was writing about short-term international exposure for U.S. students abroad. He said that we should ask ourselves "what does the customer want, and what are the administrators able to deliver?" (93). In addition, we "must weigh the effort involved against the evaluation of that effort by others" (92). While I certainly would be willing to offer such a class again, others might not think the effort is worth it. We were fortunate in the College of Business; many of our colleagues across campus taught their FLAC courses as overloads, while we were able to offer the class as part of a normal teaching responsibility.

We also found it beneficial to promote the important guest speakers who would be visiting us. Issuing the invitation to non-class members across campus reinforces the collaborative, interdisciplinary aspect of such a class. In addition, when other faculty members are the guest speakers, it reminds faculty colleagues and the administration of the amount of effort many of our faculty have gone through to make the class a success.

Regarding the format of the class, I suggest that we pay closer attention to Dröge and Spreng's (1996) description of the *student-led method* of case analysis. This method does work well in small classes. And until U.S. business course offerings are truly integrated with languages across the curriculum, we will probably continue to see small enrollments in classes with such a narrowly defined subject matter.

Perhaps Vogt (1998) said it best. We are trying to "enable students to 'rise above the mean sea level.' Our aim is to help them *distinguish themselves in a global setting by teaching them how to learn about the souls of other cultures*" (22). In conclusion, I hope that I have provided others with ideas of how instructors in a variety of disciplines can help colleagues in Business Schools to incorporate a knowledge of other languages and cultures in order to prepare our students for careers in the global marketplace.

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APPENDIX: CASE DESCRIPTIONS⁴⁷

(ARGENTINA)

Francisco de Narváez at Tía (A and B). Describes Francisco de Narváez's leadership efforts to transform his family-owned business into a market-driven, professionally run global company. Harvard Business School cases⁴⁸.

Gallo Rice. Describes a company marketing branded rice products to three different countries — Italy, Argentina, and Poland. Explores the differences and similarities between the countries in terms of consumers, competition, products, and margins. Harvard Business School case.

(CHILE)

Sunberry. A raspberry farmer and Latin agribusiness development company explore alternative structures to help a producer in Chile develop non-traditional food exports to Europe and the United States, such as raspberries. Harvard Business School case. Note: as of October, 1999, this case is no longer available from the publisher.

(COLOMBIA)

Corposol. Traces the evolution of Corposol, a nongovernmental organization dedicated primarily to lending to low-income microentrepreneurs. Its growth has made it the largest microenterprise lender in Colombia. It also diversified into other services for its clients and created for-profit and not-for-profit subsidiaries. These actions create new challenges and strategic issues for management. Harvard Business School case.

The Cut Flower Industry.⁴⁹ The Colombian Cut Flower Exporting Association faces several problems concerning local government regulations and import restrictions from the U.S. government. The

⁴⁷ Unless noted, descriptions of cases are those provided by the publishers.

⁴⁸ Descriptions of Harvard Business School cases can be found at Harvard Business School Publishing <<http://www.hbsp.harvard.edu/home.html>>.

⁴⁹ By far, students voted this the most informative, which helped them “learn the most about a particular country, industry, or marketing issue.” They liked the integration of this case to the material contained in their text.

Colombian Export Promotion Agency also faces decisions as to its policy stance toward the industry. Harvard Business School case.

(CUBA)

Layton Canada. In 1993, Layton Canada found itself caught in an intractable political situation. As part of a global reorganization process, the firm has been transformed from a subsidiary of a Dutch parent corporation to a subsidiary of a U.S. parent. Now, if it continues with its usual practice of exporting electrical components to Cuba, it will violate U.S. export law. If it ceases, however, it will violate Canadian law. Harvard Business School case.

(MEXICO)

Agro Industria Exportadora S.A. Agricultural processing company who is attempting to take advantage of Mexico's potential in world agribusiness, especially with regard to exporting to Japan. Found in Terpstra and Sarathy⁵⁰ (1997, pp. 397-401).

The Bull Market International Printers (A, B, and C). This case looks at a situation in which a German managing director, newly assigned to his organization's Mexican subsidiary, confronts a dilemma in which cross-cultural understanding plays an important part. The German's preparation and training for the move are touched on, as are the stereotypes of German business practices vs. Mexican business practices. The potential for cross-cultural conflict is examined in the context of the successful negotiation of an important contract between the German managing director and a major Mexican client. INSEAD⁵¹ case.

Grupo Industrial Bimbo S.A. de C.V. The largest food company in Mexico is planning its future strategy in bread products, flour milling, and related food products as it develops its permanent strategies in Mexico and its markets in Mexico and overseas. Harvard Business School case.

⁵⁰ Descriptions of cases found in Terpstra and Sarathy (1997) are those of the author of this article.

⁵¹ Descriptions of INSEAD cases can be found at <<http://www.insead.fr/Research/RandD/cases>>.

La Guerra de Los Guantes: Analysis of the competitive environment of a private Mexican firm. Should they concentrate on the internal market or on the export market? Found in Lambin⁵² (1995).

Neilson International in Mexico. Examines a proposed marketing joint venture that would introduce Neilson brand chocolate bars to Mexican consumers. PepsiCo Foods' Mexican subsidiary — already servicing 450,000 retail stores — has suggested a joint branding agreement. Alternative distribution arrangements were available that would allow Neilson to maintain greater control over its name, at the cost of slower market access. Richard Ivey School of Business (The University of Western Ontario) case⁵³. A 1999 revision and a sequel (B) are now available.

(SPAIN)

Banco Popular Español: Las Super Cuentas. In September 1990, in the face of intensifying competition for current accounts in the Spanish retail banking market, Banco Popular Español had to make a decision on whether or not to introduce Las Super Cuentas. INSEAD case.

Fonfresca Aguas del Moncayo. S.A. Importance of choosing the proper growth strategy for a product which is not very easily differentiated from the competition. Found in Lambin (1995).

L'illa Diagonal Winterthur. Changes in channels of distribution, especially those that involve large commercial centers (Barcelona, Spain). Found in Lambin (1995).

El Toro de Osborne. A new outdoor advertising law in Spain threatens some well-loved billboards throughout Spain. Found in Lambin (1995).

Viña Tondonia, S.A. Wine exporter in the Rioja region of Spain attempting to increase the presence of its wines in Japan. Found in Lambin (1995).

⁵²All English descriptions of Lambin (1995) cases are those of the author of this article. They are either summaries or translations of the Spanish descriptions found in Lambin.

⁵³Descriptions of Ivey School of Business cases can be found at <<http://www.ivey.uwo.ca/cases>>.

(U.S. HISPANIC MARKET)

Grupo Televisa S.A. de C.V. Top management of Univisa, the North American subsidiary of the Mexican media conglomerate Televisa, meet to determine how to pursue opportunities to serve the Spanish-speaking population in North America. They must determine how to relate Univisa's market penetration strategy in North America to the broader global expansion strategy of Televisa. Harvard Business School case.

(VENEZUELA)

Astra Sports (A and B). A: Astra executives meet to discuss how to counteract the appearance of Korean-made counterfeit athletic shoes in Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

B: Astra executives meet to discuss their options with a Venezuelan company that, for seven years, manufactured and marketed athletic shoes under the Astra name without authorization from Astra. Harvard Business School cases.

(FICTITIOUS LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRY)

International Chemicals. A U.S. manufacturer of dry cell batteries was exploring the possibility of establishing a manufacturing plant in "Latinia." Market studies and general marketing research need to be collected. Found in Terpstra and Sarathy (1997, 328–334).