
College-Level Spanish Programs in the Fight for Social and Racial Justice: Intercultural Communication and Content-Based Instruction Initiatives

LAURA CESARCO EGLIN

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON, DOWNTOWN

MOLLY TUN

THE STEAD SCHOOL

Introduction: Intercultural Communication (IC) and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

In the last decade, movements across U.S. college campuses and their surrounding communities have made the fight for racial justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion more visible. While these struggles have been long-standing, they have recently gained more attention in connection with blatant racial injustices exposed in 2020 while the world has been “on pause” during the COVID-19 pandemic. Institutions have varied in their responses to these mostly student-led movements, however, and administrative commitments to DEI have often been insignificant, partial, or slow in coming. Cultural competency, introspection, self-awareness of unexamined bias, and IC are topics at the forefront of recent training efforts related to DEI. We believe that programs like the one we helped to develop, which focus precisely on these topics, are fundamental to contribute to these DEI initiatives and to work to improve campus climate.

DEI efforts have shown that institutions of higher education must partner with the community and put faculty, students, staff, activists, and community members in dialogue with one another. College-level Spanish programs, in particular, must create stronger ties between their institutions of higher learning and the larger community in order to bring community concerns to the forefront of curricular and campus decisions. The prevalence of Latinx communities and Spanish in most cities and regions of the U.S. allows symbiotic relationships to be built between communities and colleges in order to best address issues and policies that lead to more racial and social justice.

Furthermore, language and culture studies, especially connected to community partnerships, are crucial in transforming perceptions of the target language community and have the ability to challenge stereotypes as well as foster positive attitudes towards the target language community, thus further motivating communication and engagement with this community. These initiatives need to engage with community input to develop “critical awareness of the socioeconomic and sociopolitical realities of domestic Spanish-speaking communities by taking on politically charged issues, such as social injustice and marginalization” (Brown et al. 11-12). Moreover,

there is a ‘disconnect between the cultural content of the postsecondary Spanish curriculum and the cultural realities of many Spanish-speaking communities throughout the United States . . . in order to bridge the gap between the somewhat idealistic portrayals of international Spanish-speaking communities in textbooks and multimedia and the serious challenges many domestic Spanish-speaking communities face, we recommend that Spanish curricula do more to take on politically charged issues, such as social injustice and marginalization, even at the beginning levels.’ (16)

While many textbooks provide idealized, exoticized, and uncontextualized portrayals of the Spanish-speaking world, demoralizing generalizations—including stereotypes of poverty, corruption, and violence—must also be addressed in order to move beyond these perceptions. A content-based language and culture classroom provides students with the chance to grapple with the target language community’s issues of concern and to learn about the struggle for DEI from the cultural perspective of marginalized and non-dominant social groups, as well as to explore the richness of cultural traditions, values, and perspectives of Spanish-speaking contexts.

For those college students who identify as part of the target language (Spanish speaking) group and/or non-dominant social group (Latinx, Latino, Latina, Hispanic, Latin American, Mexican American, Chicanx, etc.), a focus on issues facing these communities through the lens of racial justice, diversity and power, on colonial relations, and an analysis of different cultural perspectives is much appreciated, given

that college curriculums and coursework are generally not envisioned with these objectives in mind. A focus on culture in the classroom, especially for heritage or native speakers, affords an opportunity for these learners to gain self-awareness and to consider the ways in which they have been positioned in society—a lesson often negated or omitted from coursework across the college curriculum.¹ Yet another way in which this approach to teaching Spanish is beneficial to heritage and native speakers is that their cultures are centered, implying that these are relevant; they are an intrinsic part of the country they live in, which ultimately fosters a sense of belonging to the campus culture.

Objectives of IC

The IC designation at Simpson College has been one of the embedded skills for approximately the past ten years as part of the General Education curriculum. The purpose of the one-course requirement² of the IC-embedded skill is outlined by the College,³ and appears on the college website as of May 3, 2022:

Engaged citizenship on a global level includes communicating with others across cultural and linguistic lines. Courses in this category are designed to put students in direct contact with speakers of languages other than their own. Cultural information and experiences will be shared through the medium of a nonnative language.

Intercultural Communication courses are not focused on achieving language competency, but rather on learning through experience. In these courses, it is the experience of communicating with people using a nonnative language⁴ that brings expanded cultural and linguistic understanding. Since intercultural communication is a daily reality for much of the earth's [sic] population, this requirement allows students to understand the world through the eyes and words of others. Students will analyze and reflect on the value of using multiple linguistic resources to access other cultural views. As a result, students will gain new perspectives on their own culture.

The student learning outcomes, evaluated through course activities, assignments, and reflections in all IC courses are defined as follows:

IC SLO1.	identify distinctive cultural practices, products and perspectives of the cultures under discussion
IC SLO2.	improve their ability to communicate in a nonnative language about topics of cultural interest
IC SLO3.	evaluate their ability to and the importance of being able to communicate with speakers of another language

Table S1: IC Student Learning Objectives (SLO)

The IC requirement, thus, presents a focus on cultural competency, which differs greatly from traditional, or even current, language-learning practices in the U.S. As opposed to common nomenclature at many institutions, this general education course should not be conflated with a “language requirement,” since the IC requirement relates to culture and communication as opposed to language. Within the constraints of a one-semester, four-credit course, the goal is not language fluency, but the acquisition of cultural knowledge through conversations in a language other than English. At the time of implementation of this requirement, according to the “The New Curriculum Proposal for Simpson College: Brief Document,” the course offerings allowed for this experience to be completed through coursework conducted in French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Thai languages, and later Arabic (16). This goal is further articulated by the title of the Department in which these courses were concentrated; as opposed to a “Spanish Department” or “Modern Languages Department,” or worse, “Foreign Languages Department,”⁵ these courses were part of the “World Language and Culture Studies Department” which considers both language (as an intrinsic part of culture) and culture (including those aspects deemed important to the target language communities) as vital components to its educational mission and title, and does not assume that the language(s) and culture(s) in focus here are not an intrinsic part of the U.S.

The language-culture duality of the IC requirement shares many similarities with the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages, published by the American Council on the Teaching

of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in 1994, which proposed to make language-learning in the U.S. extend beyond the instructional setting and to “prepare learners to apply the skills and understandings measured by the Standards, to bring a global competence to their future careers and experiences.” The areas stressed by these standards (also known as the “5 Cs”) stress the importance of communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities in all language learning programs. While the first two standards are implicit in the title, we can map these standards to the IC course characteristics as follows: Communication (IC CC1, IC CC5), Cultures (IC CC3, IC CC4), Connections, and (IC CC2) Comparisons (IC CC3). The least representative standard is that of Communities, described as the ability to “communicate and interact with cultural competence in order to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world,” in which case “[l]earners use the language both within and beyond the classroom to interact and collaborate in their community and the globalized world.”

In addition to working towards the language learning goals outlined by ACTFL in 1994, a successful IC course is intrinsically related to improving campus climate and DEI. One way to understand this connection is by examining the models of intercultural development and competency, since progress made on these scales better equips students and individuals to act with respect, understanding, and empathy towards all community members across cultural divides. For example, the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC, adapted from the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity originally proposed by Milton Bennett) illustrates how individuals with greater intercultural mindsets are able to shift their cultural perspectives and behaviors in order to build bridges across diverse communities and foster a culture that values diversity. The IDC maps out five levels of intercultural development starting with denial (misses difference), polarization (judges difference), minimization (de-emphasizes difference), acceptance (deeply comprehends difference), and adaptation (bridges across difference). As students develop IC, their progress through the IDC can be mapped and measured (through course activities, assessments, and reflections), ultimately training students to notice, understand, and effectively foster DEI.

Below, we outline the ways in which we worked to increase community-engagement and extend the focus of the Spanish Program of the World Language and Culture Studies Department at Simpson College on IC, connections, community, diversity, and inclusion. Truly working towards these goals and providing students with meaningful opportunities to learn language requires extensive work, planning, and programming—both inside and outside the classroom; initiatives of both kinds are outlined below and can be adapted or modified to enrich any language and culture classroom of any level.

Methods: Strategies for Implementing IC in the Classroom

The language-learning pedagogy most suitable for teaching intercultural competency in the classroom is Content-Based Instruction (CBI). In this framework, students do not specifically focus on grammar rules and learning about the language, but rather, focus on using the language constructively and actively to talk about issues of importance and relevance in the target language context. This promotes a student-centered learning environment that activates motivation and, in turn, leads to language acquisition.

The advantages of content-based instruction are numerous. Motivation is increased when the material that is used for language teaching has an inherent value to the students: it creates a genuine, immediate need to learn the language. Content-based instruction is also often associated with the opportunity to spend more time in contact with the language, without losing out on instruction in other subject matter (in this case, the “other subject matter” would relate to intercultural competency). In addition, the range of vocabulary and language features that students encounter in learning academic subjects is more varied than that which is typically available in second and foreign language classes (Lightbown and Spada 211).

In most CBI scenarios, students do not rely on a single resource (most traditionally a clipart style textbook with vocabulary lists and grammar rules). Instead, they use a compilation of sources and formats (printed text, digital materials, interactive media, etc.) that exposes them to, and engages them with, the sights, sounds, expressions, traditions, and peoples of the cultural context(s) studied. Presenting students the opportunity to engage in genuine cultural texts (movies, videos, photos, poems, readings, newspapers, magazines, etc.) related to the

practices, products, and perspectives of the Spanish-speaking world encourages them to be active participants in the vocabulary-building process. Instead of simply using textbook vocabulary to describe hypothetical situations, the classroom becomes the space in which students and professors build a vocabulary list together (highlighting the importance of class time as well as student engagement and note-taking) based on a genuine need to grapple with cultural-based content. A stark contrast between a traditional approach and CBI is that many traditional Spanish textbooks unintentionally lead students to believe that Spanish is basically a translation of English, and that their academic and lived experiences closely parallel those of the Spanish-speaking world, along the lines of each chapter topic (food, transportation, work, home, school-life, vacations, etc.). All too often these textbooks teach students how to talk about their own experiences, in Spanish, but little about the ways in which these experiences compare or contrast to alternate cultural contexts.⁶

Additionally, while an illustrated manual might be of interest to an elementary-school student interested in reading picture books, such simplified and flattened views of cultures of the U.S. as well as those of Spanish-speaking countries do little to motivate a college learner, who would be more drawn to authentic and adult-aged materials (including documentaries, movies, newspaper articles, novels, blogs, etc.). Further, these authentic, age-appropriate materials must engage students in critical analysis and be grounded in the perspectives and conversations of interest that stem from authentic concerns of the Spanish-speaking communities. A CBI approach provides instructors and professors with the flexibility to incorporate current events and recent communications into the classroom, as well as readings and sources that are more personalized by either relating to the educator's area of expertise or student backgrounds and aspirations.

CBI contextualizes language studies and practice within a meaningful context, and relies on the use of wide variety of authentic target language materials to teach cultural perspectives and critical thinking. In connection with CBI, in recent years, many language and culture educators have promoted multiliteracies pedagogy, which focuses on linguistic and cultural diversity, to expose students to cultural texts of all kinds and respond to the sociocultural realities

of students and target cultures. “Within the multiliteracies framework, texts become the means through which students develop their literacy, and in doing so, gain access to products, practices, and perspectives of the target language and cultures they are learning about” (Méndez Seijas and Parra 91). This can be accomplished within a CBI and/or multiliteracies language classroom, or subject-based courses taught or discussed in the target language (see Klee and Barnes-Karol for an in-depth discussion of how *Languages Across the Disciplines* engages CBI in diverse areas of study to further develop language and culture skills). In “Content-Based Instruction in a Spanish-language Classroom,” Peart, Barrett, and Crawford examine how using content directly related to the family stories and lived experiences of their students (in relation to migration) led students to engage in the content while understanding and evaluating “the issue from multiple perspectives, showing empathy for others and expressing complex ideas using the target language in a sophisticated manner” (193).

While the commitment to teaching students meaningful cultural content in every course, regardless of level, is a consistent concern and goal, a CBI pedagogy is often applied in distinct ways in the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of a language program. The beginning-level students in the Spanish program at Simpson College, for example, pair more foundational language studies with culture studies. In this setting, the textbook is used as a resource, but the course focuses on enriching the textbook material with relevant cultural content and connections. Before starting each chapter, students read assignments in English and Spanish about the cultural traditions of that particular topic in different parts of the Spanish-speaking world, and compare and contrast those traditions with their own through homework activities and classroom forums. These images and descriptions form the vantage point through which the chapter topic is discussed. During each unit, students use the topic’s target communicative and grammatical structures to engage in cultural content (including the basics of geography, politics, music, demographics, etc.). At the end of each unit, students analyze a documentary, movie, photo collection, museum exhibit, etc. that features the course topics in an authentic and candid way. In first-year courses, subtitles (in English or Spanish) are used as needed and authentic materials are incorporated in addition to

the more standardized course materials.

At the core intermediate level, students acquire a comprehensive knowledge of the concepts necessary to engage in IC with Spanish-speakers and intercultural connections with the Spanish-speaking world. Courses are conducted almost exclusively in the target language while addressing topics such as colonization, social movements, dictatorships, immigration, U.S. intervention, globalization, and more. Through these courses, students continue their language acquisition journey while understanding and analyzing the factors (historical, social, political, economic, etc.) that underlie cultural perspectives, power relations, and intercultural interactions in general. In this learning format, students might practice specific grammatical structures in homework assignments or classroom discussions, but always in connection with the topic, requiring educators to build a repertoire of activities to be used in conjunction with the identified course materials and play a more active role in the intermediate-level course design.⁷

Ultimately, this approach has prepared students to engage in conversations with scholars and activists on various topics and make connections with their own local community. One initiative involved inviting speakers⁸ to our classrooms, which was a highlight for many students as they connected to the speakers' experiences and considered different approaches to identity, current issues in the Latinx communities in the U.S., and many possibilities regarding career paths.⁹ Through other course projects, students have also been asked to interview community members and to create their own Spanish-language sources. In the four steps of this learning task, students 1) use a wiki platform to brainstorm possible interviewee contacts in the community, depending on the target language and topical goals of the conversation, 2) carry out the interview and document the results via voice recording, video, or transcription, 3) post the results to a shared student forum and read and respond to classmates' interviews, and 4) use textual evidence, via direct quotations or by paraphrasing the classmates and interviewees, to support written assignments related to the topic, along with other print and digital sources. These interview assignments and community conversations allow students to gain confidence in talking about the issues and to engage with them in their own communities by listening to and learning from the Spanish-

speaking communities both within and outside the U.S.

Beyond the core intermediate level requirements, students have the opportunity to continue their content-based education at the advanced level through a variety of offerings that are immersive in nature and respond to student interests, such as SPAN 347, “Sustainability and the Environment,” designed by Cesarco Eglin. To complement their core requirements focused on topics, students are able to take skills-based courses, which use authentic and content-rich materials but focus on one particular skill (grammar, reading, writing, speaking, creative writing, translation, etc.). Since these skills-based courses are only two credits, instead of four, students work on particular aspects of the language each semester, often in addition to a full load of four semester courses. The offerings, redesigned by the authors and approved by the Simpson College faculty, include:

Beginning-level courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SPAN 110: Identity and Culture - SPAN 111: Memory and Culture
Intermediate-level courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SPAN 220: Social Movements in Culture - SPAN 221: Turning Points - SPAN 222: Immigration to the US - SPAN 223: Latin America / US Connections
Skills-based workshops (2-credit courses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SPAN 230: Spanish Vocabulary in Context - SPAN 231: Spanish for the Professions - SPAN 232: Advanced Spanish Grammar - SPAN 330: Pronunciations and Dialects - SPAN 331: Advanced Oral Communication - SPAN 332: Advanced Composition and Creative Writing - SPAN 333: Translation
Advanced-level courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SPAN 340: Latinx Communities - SPAN 341: Film in Spanish - SPAN 342: Cultural Topics in the Spanish-speaking World - SPAN 343: The Spanish-speaking World through Text - SPAN 345: Latin America: Reflections of the Past - SPAN 347: Sustainability and Environment - SPAN 349: The Spanish-speaking World through Image

Table S2: Spanish program course offerings at Simpson College,

academic year 2020-21

The intercultural student experience for Spanish majors and minors is only complete with a substantial study abroad experience of at least four credits for minors and eight credits for majors. Majors are also required to take the core World Language and Culture Studies course called “Decoding Cultures,” as well as the study abroad and senior capstones, where they culminate their learnings through presentations on cultural analysis in the Spanish-speaking world. Although justifying the benefits of studying abroad is beyond the scope of this paper, it is safe to say that the CBI courses taken prior to study abroad, along with the travel preparation course, position students to maximize their time abroad in the target language community. Their interactions reflect increased awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity and differ starkly from those carried out with a mindset of a savior, consumer, or tourist.

This content-based approach has proven effective for a small college setting where the number of course offerings each semester is limited. By focusing on content, classes are more inclusive. They accommodate students with a large range of language abilities since students are able to engage and comment on course content according to their individual abilities and the instructor can differentiate instruction according to the needs and interests of each student. Precisely in this context, community is built between students of diverse backgrounds with a focus on cultural traditions and practices, norms, contexts, and comparisons. Everyone is encouraged to speak from their own experience, allowing a variety of students of diverse backgrounds to engage in the conversation.

While each student benefits from working with the professor one-on-one to customize their own learning plan, this CBI approach does not require a separation between second-language learners, heritage students, or even native speakers in the classroom, but on the contrary, thrives on such diversity. We have had native speakers in our first-semester Spanish courses who have been engaged, interested, and appreciative of (finally) being able to learn something of value regarding their own cultural context and perspectives; many have mentioned that although they have taken Spanish courses in high school, they have never done it this way or learned so much about intercultural connections. A focus on content leads to more in-depth

knowledge of Spanish-speaking cultures as opposed to simplified characterizations of cultural practices:

Content-based language teaching has many advantages. In general, it increases the amount of time for learners to be exposed to the new language. It creates a genuine need to communicate, motivating students to acquire language in order to understand the content. For older students, there is the advantage of content that is cognitively challenging and interesting in a way that is often missing in foreign language instruction, especially where lessons are designed around particular grammatical forms (Lightbown and Spada 176).

The classes were thus envisioned and designed for a community of learners who each contribute to the experience and knowledge building. They are spaces where issues of DEI are not just talked about, but actually experienced.

With inclusivity and diversity in mind, the Spanish program has sought ways to link its own course offerings and requirements to reach more of the student body. We participate in interdisciplinary endeavors by teaching courses in the Latin American Studies and the Continuing and Graduate programs, as well as piloting some English-language courses on similar topics (in this case, the topic of Crossing Borders) in conjunction with the Honors program. As an outreach initiative, the authors even offered a one-credit graduate course for high school language teachers who participated in the 2019 Iowa World Language Association Conference and completed course requirements related to the implementation of intercultural course content in their own high school language classes. They also provided lessons on IC to Simpson faculty members through the Inclusive Teaching, Living, and Learning Series organized by Faculty Development, where Molly Tun presented “Strategies and Tools for an Inclusive Campus Environment”¹⁰ (August 26, 2020) and Laura Cesarco Eglin presented “Approaching the Latinx Communities” (November 4, 2020). Previous departmental initiatives include the “Encuentros en Español” course that Cesarco Eglin co-designed and taught to introduce faculty and staff to Spanish expressions and cultural dimensions of the Spanish-speaking community as a way of fostering inclusivity. In these ways, the objectives of the CBI Spanish classroom permeate and complement teaching and learning initiatives on a larger scale.

Strategies for Implementing IC beyond the Classroom

The departmental initiative that has had the greatest impact on students' access to and development of IC in recent years is its commitment to working with Fulbright Teaching Assistants (TAs) who engage consistently with students in conversation in the target language. For Spanish, we worked closely with the TAs to organize weekly conversation opportunities for students in every Spanish class. Beginning-level students meet with the TA weekly in small groups to talk about the cultural and linguistic topics covered in the course. Intermediate and advanced students attend regular open conversation tables where they can engage in conversation with the TAs, students from other courses, and Spanish-speakers from across campus. Since the TAs live on campus, attend and assist with the beginning and intermediate level courses, are students themselves (taking two classes each semester), and contribute to other campus programming and club activities, they become vital members of the campus community and provide students with ample opportunities to develop genuine relationships and intercultural understanding. Beginning-level students (who are not taking the course as part of the Spanish major or minor) have been surprised to see how much they have gained through this connection with a native Spanish speaker.¹¹ Some observations students made regarding their interactions with the 2019-20 Fulbright TAs from Argentina, as submitted in a reflection paper on the value of IC at the end of the course, are summarized here:

Summary of Observations Made by First-Year Simpson College Spanish Students Regarding the Main Benefits of IC Courses:	
Expansion of cultural viewpoints	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consideration of viewpoints different from one's own• Interactions with someone that lives and works outside the U.S.• Personal lessons about culture that go beyond readings and videos

Confidence in Spanish-language abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Communication with native speakers which increased students' effective use of language and feelings of success · Positive interactions and activities that helped build confidence in Spanish skills · Inspiration to travel to a Spanish-speaking country or immerse oneself in the target language, given the newly attained skills to interact with native speakers · Regular communication with native speakers in the classroom that dispelled misconceptions about one's inability to engage with native speakers in the target language
Feedback on Spanish-language production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Confirmation of whether or not you understand certain aspects of the target language · Deeper understanding of how to speak the language to avoid sounding unnatural or awkward · Constructive criticism · Smaller group settings to practice Spanish and receive immediate feedback
Increased motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Tips to stay motivated and keep practicing · The realization that the TAs had to go through a similar language learning experience in order to learn English served as motivation for students to continue in their own language learning journey · Memorable and positive moments with the TAs served as opportunities to continue learning
Nuanced & experiential learning experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Specific answers regarding pronunciation, spelling, context, and culture · Knowledge exchange that goes beyond textbook information and internet searches. · Experiential and hands-on learning
Development of intercultural relationships and empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Opportunity for students to reflect on and talk about their own culture · Witnessing the TA's excitement to learn about U.S. culture, share ideas, and establish connections; for some, this might be the only relationship with a target language speaker they have
Consideration of cultural comparisons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Exploration of real-world traditions, values, and country comparisons · Contact with a diversity of cultural products, practices, and perspectives

Questioning of pre-conceived notions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Ability to withhold judgement of people of distinct backgrounds and accents · Newly gained appreciation of the diversity of cultures within the target language context
--------------------------------------	--

Table S3: IC Benefits of Integrating Native-Speaking Fulbright TAs into College-Level Spanish Coursework

Note that, depending on program circumstances and goals, it is possible to incorporate interactions with native-speakers in many different ways, although the exact benefits will differ according to the precise connection. One initiative we started in connection with travel preparation courses for Study Abroad was to put students in virtual conversations (in the target language) with native-speaking participants from the location they will be traveling to, thus expanding the students’ linguistic and cultural competency prior to Study Abroad. In these cultural exchanges, we provide both participants with a list of questions related to the cultural products, practices, and perspectives of the target cultural context.

To further extend the opportunities and benefits of IC for students, the authors were awarded grant funds through the Simpson Urban Studies Institute (SUSI) to carry out the project titled “Simpson Meets the Spanish-Speaking Community of Des Moines.” This project’s aim was to create more service-learning and experiential-learning opportunities for Spanish majors and minors. Funds were requested to establish contacts with the Spanish-speaking community of the metro area nearby the college in order to connect students with volunteer, internship, and community-building opportunities. In this way, Spanish students and the Spanish-speaking community used Spanish to work together towards positive change and contributing to the community, while at the same time exchanging cultural knowledge and developing intercultural competency.

By doing this, we sought to offer students in our World Language and Culture Studies Department experiential learning opportunities and create and foster strong connections between Simpson and the Latinx community in the larger Des Moines area. Through the intercultural approach, our students gained intercultural competence and language skills while also engaging in urban improvement projects and community outreach. As stated on the SUSI website,

a main objective of this institute is to “serve the larger Des Moines metropolitan area and amplify experiential learning for students under the guidance of Simpson faculty in our research center, where teams and scholars identify critical urban problems.” By collaborating with SUSI, our department demonstrated that the college community should not be antagonistic to the community within which it thrives, but rather, that students need to understand their role within their own community and work together in positive ways.

Service-learning provides students with authentic needs to use the target language:

One of the foremost goals in the Spanish classroom is to allow students to practice their Spanish and to create an authentic need to use the language. Many teachers attempt to artificially create this need in the classroom by developing information gap activities with elaborate prompts and contrived situations in an attempt to replicate realistic settings... The integration of service-learning projects provides an authentic, communicative way for speakers not only to use the language but also to address the larger social, economic, and political realities found in the Spanish-speaking world... In pedagogical terms, service learning may be the most realistic and motivating information gap activity there is! The communication standard stresses the use of language for communication in real-life situations, emphasizing ‘what students can do with language’ rather than ‘what they know about language.’ (Brown et al. 239)

In addition to linguistic gains, “experiential learning may serve as a powerful vehicle for attitude change, promoting positive perspectives among students toward the target culture” (Brown et al. 73). Such initiatives have to do with “achieving attitudinal learning goals, encouraging development of positive Latin identities [so much needed in our current political climate], and effecting increased engagement with the Latino communities” (Brown et al 82). Research has shown that service learning helps students acquire factual knowledge of cultural practices, which in turn has led to a reduction in the quality and quantity of students’ stereotypes. In addition, service learning promotes community diversity, a general tolerance for differences (within their own and the target population), respect for others’ viewpoints, reduced ethnocentrism, increased global understanding, higher probabilities of

interacting with people who they found different, cultural knowledge and sensibility, and even higher student retention on college campuses (Brown et al. 82).

The SUSI grant project was carried out in two phases. Spanish program students were interviewed and selected to participate. During Spring semester 2020, the authors met weekly with student Research Assistants Shelby Chavez Chun and Colbee Cunningham to identify companies, organizations, and individuals working with the Des Moines Spanish-speaking community and began communications with these potential partners. The group attended Latino heritage cultural events and organized excursions with students.¹² Tun and Cesarco Eglin worked actively to communicate news about the project and partner with the college newspaper to share information about grant initiatives. The rationale behind informing others of our work was to bring to the forefront the importance of working with the larger community and establishing partnerships as part of our transformed departmental mission. Coby Berg, student reporter covering a story related to the department in Fall 2019¹³ mentioned that this story was note-worthy since the department had not been portrayed this way previously. It is vital that Spanish programs actively work on promoting their reputation as serious areas of study that develop critical thinking skills and perform roles essential to the larger mission and vision of the colleges or universities to which they belong. This advocacy helps communicate to institutions of higher education how language and culture programs operate, contribute to mission and vision, advance DEI, and foster collaborations across disciplines. Such an understanding is necessary for maintaining and upholding the relevance of these programs in higher education.

An important publishable artefact that resulted from these efforts was an internal webpage that listed historical information, news articles, and statistics related to the Iowa Latinx community, volunteer and internship opportunities, guidelines and questions for conducting community interviews, events, and scholarships. The website 1) highlights the Spanish-speaking and Latinx communities in Des Moines area, and 2) identifies service-learning and intercultural opportunities for Simpson students. The website compiles different aspects of the research process and its results on embedded pages, including separate pages for: a description of Spanish-speaking sites,

a brief history of Spanish-speaking immigration to Des Moines, a collection of personal stories of Spanish-speakers from the community, a calendar of upcoming events related to the Spanish-speaking/Latinx community, and more. The website serves as both a database of already established contacts, as well as an initial approach to learning about the history of the Latinx community in Iowa. It can be used in the future to help organize experiential learning opportunities in our courses (Latinx Communities, Spanish for the Professions, and others); the website can also be used as a platform to continue highlighting community collaborations. Spanish minors and majors will have access to the website to pursue internships, volunteer opportunities, research opportunities, or extracurricular involvement.

With this foundation, we continued grant work during Fall semester 2020 with student Research Assistants Laura Meza and Patricia Telthorst. The students actively conducted interviews with local leaders, activists, and community members and also identified numerous ways our students could engage with the metro-area Spanish-speaking community. Because COVID-19 limited our possibilities of making in-person connections, we launched the (virtual) “Latinx Communities in Iowa: Conversations Series.” Each session features a prominent leader, expert, or collaborator working in connection with the Latinx community of Iowa followed by Q&A. The student research assistants played an active role in organizing the series, including selecting speakers and coordinating dates and times for each event (Ann Naffier on October 13, Sonia Reyes on October 21, and Joe Henry on November 12). In an Iowa Public Radio News report the day after the first session, Cassidy Arena writes: “The immigration lawyer for Justice for Our Neighbors said even if Iowans aren’t a lawyer or concerned about their citizenship status, it is a responsibility for all Iowans to understand the basics. ‘I do think that how immigrants are treated is just a sign of how all of us are going to be treated. And I think it affects every one of us personally, eventually,’ Naffier said.” Spanish major Colbee Cunningham also wrote an article for the event in the school newspaper and mentions, “Naffier made it a point to share how her acquisition of the Spanish language supplemented her career as an immigration lawyer.” These events allow students to envision how Spanish could help them engage in the community as

well as how communities can help teach students the basics of topics of shared interest. Another intended objective is that students learn what it means to be responsible citizens and how important it is to participate fully in the society they live in.

At the conclusion of the two-semester grant period, we were excited with the results, and more positioned to provide our students with genuine opportunities to use Spanish in meaningful ways in connection with the larger community. After establishing partnerships with main activists, leaders, and experts in the community, we could better advise students on ways to get involved, help place them in volunteer and internship positions, and be a reference to community members interested in setting up new collaborations. The teamwork, professional development, Spanish-language acquisition and practice, and connections gained by the first Research Assistants has helped connect them to lifelong-learning opportunities and employment.

Challenges Facing the Future of IC

In the context of small colleges, persistence in language and culture studies programs is a constant challenge. Former French and German professors at Simpson College, and Simpson, respectively, have addressed this challenge in a recent article titled “Redesigning the Curriculum for Student Persistence in Small Language Programs,” which outlines strategies for maintaining enrollment despite limited course offerings and understaffing. Some of these strategies include de-sequencing language courses (so that students can take intermediate-level courses in any order, for example) and providing a wide breadth of coursework (often resulting in longer course rotations) to ensure that students always have access to new courses and are not prevented from registering for the courses offered each semester.

Nonetheless, and despite the recognized need for greater cultural awareness and diversity, language and culture studies programs are constantly under threat in institutional “prioritization” and budget cuts. In 2018 this process led to a discontinuation of the French and German programs, thus making the Department of World Language and Culture Studies Department vulnerable to further cuts, and forced to build enrollment while working with only half the number of full-time faculty. In addition, revisions to the General Education curriculum at Simpson College were voted into place by a small margin, which

effectively eliminated the IC embedded skill requirement outlined in the first part of this article, to be phased out by 2024. This is very telling about the administration's perceptions and interests, and those of faculty colleagues serving in leadership positions and influential committees, who did not see the value of supporting the fundamental importance of language and culture programs to the college's mission, and who would rather design the general education curriculum around policies of staffing reductions in the Humanities division.

While the new general education structure includes coursework in Diversity, Civic Engagement, and Global Studies, this framework shows complete disregard for the role of Language and Culture Studies within these fields of study and in connection with the college mission and vision. Without giving students opportunities to place themselves in non-U.S. English-speaking spaces or to explore non-normative cultural perspectives, it will be challenging to meaningfully achieve the goals of the newly mandated general education curriculum. Students will be left with fewer opportunities to explore language and culture, an issue they have already raised in the school newspaper in an article titled "Lack of seats in intercultural communication courses causes frustration" (see Fletcher). Without a one-course requirement in IC, the entire Spanish Program is extremely vulnerable to future prioritization and program cuts, while it is one of the programs that most leads the conversations, training, and college policies related to DEI. In response to the new curriculum, the authors submitted an amendment to help ensure the possibility of offering Spanish language and culture courses throughout the curriculum. This amendment, later approved by the faculty, states: "Courses delivered that satisfy the requirements, scope, expertise, discipline and content of the General Education Curriculum (courses #1-11), but taught in a language other than English, should count towards General Education course requirements." Opportunities to reach out to new students to join the program or explore language and culture at Simpson will soon be more limited. Going forward, the Spanish program will need to work actively to promote "Language and Culture Across the Disciplines" in order to foster colleagues' understanding of the relevance of language and culture studies in the general education curriculum and the first-year program.

At a time in which the U.S. Census Bureau reports an increase in U.S. Hispanic Population Growth every year for the past 10 years or more, it is alarming that coursework in Spanish and language and culture studies is required less than before, and that the institutional place of these courses in connection with DEI is under question. These decisions are directly related to decisions made regarding high school curriculum, requirements, and funding. As programs are cut at the high school level or challenged by federal and local education budgets and policies, college programs will not have the levels of interest and ability to fully support their curriculum, and will be left vulnerable. If we truly understand, value, and prioritize intercultural awareness, diversity, and communication, we need to support the educational courses, experiences, and connections that lead students to become lifelong learners of language and culture. It is crucial that students understand that their culture is not the norm, or the best, or the only valid possibility of operating in this world.

Notes

¹ For more on heritage language learning and curriculum see Beaudrie, Ducar, and Relaño-Pastor (2009) as quoted in (Brown, Alan V., et al, 63): “The teaching of culture within the curriculum of the heritage language learning classroom warrants further study as well. Beaudrie, Ducar, and Relaño-Pastor (2009) found that heritage learners were much more interested in learning about culture and assert that its role should be prominent in the heritage language classroom. The students in their study expressed the desire to learn more about the perspectives and practices of the culture with less interest in the products of any given culture. The study of culture in the classroom also will lead these students to greater self-awareness and help them develop an understanding of the Hispanic community around them as well as their own role in it.”

² The fact that this embedded skill can be completed with a one-course requirement instead of a four-credit requirement reveals a contradiction: on the one hand there is a progressive move to include culture and IC as part of the core requirements, but on the other hand, this requirement is not seen as important as other requirements since it can be completed with a two-credit course.

³ Note that this description and the general education

requirement were written and designed before the authors of this article were employed at Simpson College.

⁴ It is important to note that the language being used here (i.e. “non-native language”) assumes that there are no bilingual people in the U.S., or monolingual Spanish speakers, or at least at Simpson College. This is problematic on a variety of levels because not only does it evidence a lack of understanding of the complexity of the Latinxs’ identity and relationship to language, but also leads to the College’s subsequent decisions such as that of cutting the French and German programs, despite the Department’s efforts to warn the Board of Trustees that this would leave the bilingual (at varying degrees) of Spanish-English- speaking students with no option with regards to studying a language and culture that they might not be familiar with. Granted, this is a general issue of concern to all Spanish language and culture programs that offer classes or topical lessons focused on different aspects of Spanish-speaking countries. The program revisions to the Spanish major and minor of Simpson College, carried out by the authors during the 2019-2020 academic year, and outlined later in the article, were designed to challenge this country-based focus by being inclusive of diverse contexts of the Spanish-speaking world (including Spanish-speakers in the U.S.) across the program.

⁵ A name that automatically assumes that English is the only language spoken in the U.S. and relegates Spanish-speakers to the status of other and outsider. This othering of the Spanish-speaking community in the U.S. has reverberations in the way that the U.S. society is understood and who gets marginalized and who is centered. Such a name for a department inadvertently supports a status quo that tells their heritage and native speaker students that they are other and that their experiences and cultures are not “American,” a dynamic visible in cases, for example, of monolingual English speakers telling bilingual people or monolingual Spanish-speakers to “go back where they came from” or to “speak American.”

⁶ Textbook language learning can actually promote inaccurate comparisons between representations of target culture and native culture: “Though Herman (2007, 131) concedes that the cultural content of Spanish-language textbooks has evolved from the use of rather blatant racial stereotypes (Arizpe and Aguirre 1987; Elissondo

2001), she argues that the primary objective of many textbooks is to help students travel and shop in exotic places. She finds a conspicuous lack of language that would enable students to ‘describe societal structures, intergroup relations or conflicts, and ethnic or indigenous issues [...] Indeed, there is no portrayal of a society beyond the atomized level of the individual.’ Equally disturbing is the tendency to depict school life and educational systems as similar to what most white middle-class students experience in the United States. Throughout their classroom textbooks, students are led to believe that a large majority of teenagers in other cultures have equal access to high-quality-low- or no-cost secondary education, that they do not need to work, and that they have plenty of free time to shop and socialize in cafés and restaurants. They see themselves reflected in the pages of Spanish, confirming Kramsch’s (1988) concern that the foreign culture is presented as nearly the same as the native culture. Herman points out that this skewed perspective is largely the fault of the publishing houses and their self-censorship as they protect their bottom line, but she also blames language teachers for not demanding more substantive content and for not being willing to take on difficult issues in their classes” (Brown 166).

⁷Nonetheless, content development is a skill that can and should be exercised to best serve our students. Strategies to design content-based materials for the Spanish classroom were presented by the authors at the 2019 IWLA (Iowa World Language Association) conference in Iowa City in a presentation titled “Culture in the Classroom: Products, Practices, and Perspectives.”

⁸Mark Pleiss, Patrick McNamara, Brad Sigal, Alberto Velázquez Solís, Heider Tun Tun, and Daniel Chacón spoke with our classes in 2019-20, for example.

⁹ Following Dr. Patrick McNamara’s presentation “Political Refugees from El Salvador: Gang Politics, The State & Asylum Claims” to Molly Tun’s SPAN 222 Immigration to the U.S. course, one student even commented: “Can he stay and talk with us for 10 more hours? I have so many questions!” When Chicano writer Daniel Chacón visited Laura Cesarco Eglin’s SPAN 340 Latinx Communities, students commented how positive it had been to hear someone like Chacón and his experiences, to see someone with his background and what his trajectory has been.

^{10.} This presentation was developed by Noro Andriamanalina in conversation with Molly Tun and originally presented as a faculty training workshop at St. Olaf College in 2017 as part of a grant received by Tun in connection with this college's Mellon-funded project "To Include is to Excel."

^{11.} Note that Cesarco Eglin is a native speaker. However, the interactions with the TAs gave the students further opportunities to interact with other native speakers from cultures and experiences different than Cesarco Eglin's.

^{12.} Some of the events included a fundraiser for Al Éxito (an organization that works towards higher education attainment for Latinx youth), a classroom trip to "Latino Day on the Hill" (an event sponsored by the Office of Latino Affairs to introduce Latinx youth to issues of civic engagement) and participating in "Climate March" alongside other Latinx and Latin American organizations. An article published by the college newspaper features information about the "Climate March"; see Schafer article: "Simpson Community Members Take a Stand for Climate."

^{13.} See Berg for full story.

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The 2020 grant project, "Simpson Meets the Spanish-Speaking Community of Des Moines," was funded by the Simpson Urban Studies Institute. This founding sponsor had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

Much of the authors' teaching pedagogy and CBI approach to the Spanish-Language Classroom has been influenced by their time teaching at St. Olaf College and lessons learned from colleagues at this institution including Maggie Broner, Gwen Barnes-Karol, Kristina Medina-Vilariño, and Kris Cropsy. We thank the acting Chair of the World Language and Culture Studies Department during academic years 2018-19, 2019-20, and 2020-21, Professor of Philosophy John Pauley, for his unwavering support and dedication to the issues addressed in this article, as well as our 2019-20 and 2020-21 Fulbright TAs, and previous TAs, for all that they did for and with our students. Our work would also be impossible without the involvement of our

student Research Assistants Colbee Cunningham, Shelby Chavez Chun, Patricia Telthorst, and Laura Meza, and our 2020-21 Undergraduate Research Assistant Korie Torres. Finally, we would like to express our greatest appreciation for our community contacts and collaborators who have kindly shared their time and talent with our students and who have made our World Language and Culture Studies Department a more inclusive and engaging space.

Works Cited

- Arena, Kassidy. "Simpson College Hosts Conversations about Immigration Issues in Des Moines." *Iowa Public Radio News*, 14 Oct. 2020, www.iowapublicradio.org/ipr-news/2020-10-14/simpson-college-hosts-conversations-about-immigration-issues-in-des-moines.
- Berg, Coby. "Spanish Department Travels to Educate." *Simpsonian*, 9 Oct. 2019. <https://thesimpsonian.com/29586/lifestyles/spanish-department-travels-to-educate/>.
- Brown, Alan V., et al. *The Changing Landscape of Spanish Language Curricula: Designing Higher Education Programs for Diverse Students*. Georgetown UP, 2018.
- Calkins, Patricia, and Sharon Wilkinson. "Redesigning the Curriculum for Student Persistence in Small Language Programs." *ADFL Bulletin*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2020, pp. 9-25.
- Cunningham, Colbee. "Immigration Issues Brought to Light in WLCS Webinar." *Simpsonian*, 14 Oct. 2020. <https://thesimpsonian.com/30861/lifestyles/features/immigration-issues-brought-to-light-in-wlcs-webinar/#photo>.
- Fletcher, Riley. "Lack of Seats in Intercultural Communication Courses Causes Frustration." *Simpsonian*, 8 Oct. 2021. <https://thesimpsonian.com/32660/news/lack-of-seats-in-intercultural-communication-courses-causes-frustration/>.
- Klee, Carol, and Gwen Barnes-Karol. "A Content-Based Approach to a Spanish Language Study: Foreign Languages across the Curriculum." *The Art of Teaching Spanish: Second Language Acquisition from Research to Praxis*, edited by B. Lafford and R. Salaberry, Georgetown UP, 2006, pp. 23-38.

-
- Lightbown, Patsy, and Nina M. Spada. *How Languages Are Learned*. Oxford UP, 2006.
- Méndez Seijas, Jorge, and María Luisa Parra. “Engaging Students with Social, Cultural, and Environmental Sustainability Topics in the Spanish-Speaking World: A Reimagined Beginner Spanish Curriculum.” *Education for Sustainable Development in Foreign Language Learning*, edited by María de la Fuente, Routledge, 2021, pp. 87-104.
- “The New Curriculum Proposal for Simpson College: Brief Document.” The Members of the Learning Program Working Group, 10 Dec. 2008.
- Peart, Silvia, et al. “Content-Based Instruction in a Spanish Language Classroom: Climate, Identity, and Historical Patterns of Latin American Migration to the United States.” *Education for Sustainable Development in Foreign Language Learning*, edited by María de la Fuente, Routledge, 2021, pp. 179-96.
- Schafer, Amelia. “Simpson Community Members Take a Stand for Climate.” *Simpsonian*, 19 Feb. 2020, <https://thesimpsonian.com/30223/news/simpson-community-members-take-a-stand-for-climate/>.