Editor’s Message:
Birds of Different Feathers
Collaborate in Language Education

Sheri Spaine Long

Hispania 95.2 (2012): 1

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During the past year, I have been honored to serve in the capacity of Distinguished Visiting Professor of Spanish at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). It has been stimulating to learn first-hand about how the Air Force (AF) educates its future officers to become global leaders through language and cultural learning at this distinctive undergraduate institution. Foreign language learning takes place through a variety of opportunities offered to cadets in a diverse and dynamic language department that is headed by Colonel Daniel Uribe, career AF officer and dedicated Professor of Spanish.

In this unique unit that boasts more than fifty faculty members, the language learners are referred to as cadets. The AF cadets are exposed to a variety of perspectives and professional backgrounds, because the faculty members comprise a combination of civilian and military professionals. At the Academy, both enduring and strategic languages are taught as part of an undergraduate curriculum that is a hybrid of traditional liberal education and a technical core for military purposes. Currently, cadets can study Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. As in civilian colleges and universities, it will come as no surprise that Spanish is the language with the largest enrollment. Portuguese is the newest language in the department.

The Division Chief of the Spanish and Portuguese Division is Lieutenant Colonel Richard Dabrowski. Beyond supervising eleven Spanish instructors and four in Portuguese, he also teaches elementary Spanish. Lt. Col. Dabrowski holds a doctorate in Instructional Systems Technology from Indiana University, where he wrote his dissertation titled “Criteria for Assessing Computer-based Simulations for Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language.” Lt. Col. Dabrowski is easily labeled an international citizen and a polyglot with knowledge of—in order of fluency—Spanish, Russian, Polish, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Serbian/Croatian, and Arabic. He has traveled extensively and lived abroad in places as far flung as Russia, Greece, Tunisia, Israel, and Argentina, to name a few.

While working with Lt. Col. Dabrowski this year, I have had many conversations with him, marveling at the two worlds (military and civilian) of foreign language education in the United States and the general lack of communication between the two sectors. For this reason, I invited him to pen the following guest column about this matter. Together we advocate for more exchange and collaboration between the two spheres, with our common cause being language and global education. Despite our military and civilian differences, our shared desire to have a strong curriculum, superior pedagogical practices, and a culture that is rooted in research should motivate us to collaborate and learn from each other. For more on this topic, I invite you to read the following guest editorial.

Sheri Spaine Long
Editor
Hispania