Hispania Guest Editorial:
Hybrid Spanish Programs:
A Challenging and Successful Endeavor

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Editor’s Message: 
_Hispania’s New Look, the National Spanish Examinations, and Hybrid Education_

We hope that you enjoy _Hispania’s_ brand new look! When you open the cover, you will notice several other changes. For almost one hundred years, _Hispania_ has enjoyed a long history of publishing scholarship on literary criticism, linguistics, and pedagogy. Over the last several decades, linguistics, applied linguistics, language science, and pedagogy articles have gained an ever-growing presence in the journal. As the fields of language and literature evolve, so will _Hispania_. Beginning in 2014, _Hispania’s_ content appears in a slightly different order. In the March and September issues, the section on Linguistics, Language Science, and Pedagogy will appear first, and the June and December issues of _Hispania_ will begin with articles devoted to the study of Literature, Film, and Culture. We have revamped the order to reflect the interests of our many and diverse constituents and to call attention to our varied scope. From the Editor’s vantage point, I feel it is important to note that we publish many more articles in literary studies because this subcategory leads other areas in the number of submissions that we receive.

In this current issue, the lead article features Pete Swanson’s research on the National Spanish Examinations (NSE), student performance, and Spanish teacher efficacy, for which he collaborated with Kevin Cessna-Buscemi, Director of the NSE. Swanson’s study has implications for teacher preparation and development. Cessna-Buscemi reports that close to 158,000 students took one of the National Spanish Examinations in 2013. Beyond the diagnostic benefits of these exams, the NSE also offers teachers and students access to scholarships and awards. Additional information about the NSE may be found at www.nationalspanishexam.org. I remind our readers that the AATSP also hosts the National Portuguese Examinations (NPE) (see www.aatsp.org for more information).

The second featured article in this issue highlights the hybrid revolution in Spanish-language learning that is taking place in introductory Spanish courses in colleges and universities throughout the United States. Concepción B. Godev’s article takes a unique look at the role of instructors in hybrid education. To introduce this article and further inform about the role of hybrid education in Spanish classes, I invited Luis Hermosilla (see bio below) of Kent State University to pen a guest column about hybrid courses. In his column, he offers an overview of hybrid education, discusses benefits and challenges, and includes references to key publications on the hybrid movement. I encourage you to read about the evolution of delivery formats for beginning Spanish that has occurred in many colleges and universities. I also invite you to enjoy the other articles and reviews in this issue, and I hope that you are pleased with the fresh look of the journal.

_Sheri Spaine Long_
Editor
_Hispania_

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Guest Editorial

Hybrid Spanish Programs: A Challenging and Successful Endeavor

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Abstract: Several types of hybrid Spanish programs have been developed in US colleges and universities for more than ten years, but the most common structure consists of a course in which the instruction combines face-to-face time with an instructor and the use of an online platform. Studies have demonstrated that a well-developed hybrid Spanish program can be very successful in creating the opportunities for the students to become producers of their own learning outcome. In addition to cultivating a sense of autonomy in the students for their learning, there lies the challenge for the instructors to relinquish their complete instructional control in the classroom to allow students to develop or strengthen autonomy over their own learning process. Moreover, in addition to the intensive and extensive logistical work necessary to make the program run smoothly, the coordinating individual (or team) needs to continually create the most effective strategies to provide instructors with the best training plan.

Keywords: blended/combinado, face-to-face/en sala, hybrid/híbrido, lab instructor/instructor de laboratorio, learning outcomes/resultados de aprendizaje, Spanish/español

Colleges and universities in the United States have been offering hybrid Spanish programs using computer-assisted technology for more than a decade. The most common structure of a hybrid language course combines face-to-face (F2F) time with an instructor and the use of an online platform; it may also incorporate experiential learning in a language lab or in a real or virtual community of native speakers. Research studies demonstrate that a well-planned hybrid course in which teachers spend less time lecturing and in which the students are more engaged in activities conducive to accomplishing communicative tasks has more effective learning results than a traditional all F2F instruction format (Caulfield 2011; Ng 2009; Rubio and Thoms 2012). Instructors and coordinators of hybrid Spanish courses enable their students to develop their self-discipline and become producers of their own learning outcomes.

In 1997, the Sloan Center for Asynchronous Learning Environment Efficiency Projects funded the first known proposal to implement the initial electronic online version of a workbook, called “Activity Manual,” at the University of Illinois. That project became a groundbreaking endeavor for the creation of hybrid programs. Nowadays, all basic Spanish-language textbooks have electronic components and online resources that permit us to flip the classroom easily for students to prepare for their F2F classes in advance or review the material for practice at their own pace. A well-designed and efficiently coordinated hybrid Spanish program enables students to work independently in preparing for their F2F classes and to develop autonomy in their own learning. Setting aside the economic reasons for developing a hybrid Spanish curriculum, we cannot deny that it is becoming more apparent that blended teaching and learning have a clear advantage over the traditional format because they provide students with diverse communicative tools to make the target language more meaningful. Rubio and Thoms state that "it is important..."
for our profession to understand the power of different technologies to provide a solid foundation for the design of BL [blended learning] contexts and the theoretical underpinnings that may justify their integration” (1).

A pending task is to gather accurate data on existing hybrid Spanish programs in US colleges and universities in order to carry out comparative studies about them. This could occur in a similar way to how Ng (2009) compiled contributions from several countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Spain, Australia, China, and others, in the anthology titled *Comparative Blended Learning Practices and Environments*. Most hybrid Spanish programs follow the format of two weekly online hours with computer-assisted technology provided by the adopted textbook and by the home institution’s virtual learning environment (e.g., Blackboard, Desire2Learn, Moodle) in preparation for two F2F hours with an instructor. One institution following this model is the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, currently in its third year of hybrid implementation. A second type of hybrid Spanish program consists of a two-hour F2F session once a week, complemented by a thirty-minute visit to the language lab to work with specialized Spanish software and videos exclusively available on the lab servers, and completion of online activities at least four times a week. One example following this format is the hybrid Spanish program at Santa Monica Community College in California. Beginning in Fall 2011, I was invited to develop a pilot project of a third type of hybrid Spanish program at Kent State University (KSU) that consists of one online hour in preparation for a weekly two-hour F2F session led by an instructor, followed by a one lab-hour session given on the next day. The latter is conducted by a Spanish lab instructor with whom the students, through detailed guidelines given on Blackboard, apply the contents covered in the online hour and the F2F class. This Hybrid Spanish program was fully implemented at KSU in Fall 2012 serving approximately 600 students taking Elementary Spanish I and II. Taking into consideration one of the questions from the survey administered every semester (‘Would you recommend this program to others?’), and based on 80% of the students answering the assessment instrument, we can say that it has been a successful endeavor.

Currently, there is a variety of hybrid models in practice, and there is a need for more research to determine the most effective elements of hybrid programs. Adair-Hauck, Willingham-McLain, and Earnest Youngs (2000) have laid the foundation for large-scale research on blended language instruction with their article “Evaluating the Integration of Technology and Second Language Learning.” This was a result of a study that began in 1997 with the goal of evaluating the effectiveness of incorporating technology into a second semester French course at Carnegie Mellon University (Rubio and Thoms 2012: 2; Goertler 2012: 94). Since then, several scholars have undertaken research and published articles on the topic of hybrid instruction, especially in the last three years. To name a few, they include volumes by Caulfield (2011), Rubio and Thoms (2012), and Snart (2010).

Even if well designed, a hybrid program may still present challenges for some instructors. One difficulty is the relinquishing of complete instructional control in the classroom and allowing students to develop or strengthen autonomy over their own learning process. In addition to the intensive and extensive logistical work necessary to make the program run smoothly, the coordinating individual (or team) needs to continually create the most effective strategies to provide instructors with the best training plan. In spite of the challenges, most instructors have discovered numerous benefits in hybrid language instruction. Hannelore Gómez, a KSU graduate assistant with fifteen years of experience teaching traditional sections and now in her second year of teaching hybrid courses, describes her experience with this new teaching format in context: “As an experienced Spanish instructor in the traditional method, I can clearly see the advantages of this program for students as well as for teachers. In this system, students can advance at their own pace with the support of F2F instruction and the needed interaction with classmates for oral proficiency. As for teachers, the student comes to the class already knowing the basics of the material; the instructor’s job is to clarify some concepts and reinforce them through
practice. In addition, the lab session gives the students the opportunity to develop their verbal skills through well-designed scenarios where they can interact with their classmates in real-life.”

In my experience as a hybrid Spanish program coordinator at Kent State University, I have seen firsthand that a well-designed hybrid program can offer students concrete opportunities to appreciate language learning by helping them realize that they can produce their own learning outcomes and become autonomous learners of the Spanish language.

WORKS CITED