AN ANALYSIS OF THE INTEGRATION OF SERVICE LEARNING IN UNDERGRADUATE SPANISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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Introduction

The world market has become a borderless, continuous playing field for businesses and travelers, and multilingualism and multiculturalism are necessary qualifications for the global citizen. However, unlike in most other countries, the United States does not have a unified national foreign language policy or a consistent K-12 or higher education curricular integration. To compensate for this lack of governmental engagement, professional language organizations such as the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP), American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), and the Modern Language Association (MLA) have taken a proactive and advocacy approach with nation-wide initiatives that propose a pressing need to revise foreign language curricula to better meet the needs of students and society. Fortunately, many university programs in the United States have been responding to these recent demands by adapting existing language programs or developing totally new ones. As a consequence, we have observed a recent multiplication of prescriptive and descriptive publications regarding curricular changes in foreign languages nationally and internationally, urging institutions of higher education to revise their foreign language curricula and the traditional undergraduate major to meet the new societal demands (Barajas; Doyle; Jorge; Lafford 96, 1; M. Long; Sánchez-López 93, 1; Spaine Long; among many others). Similarly, ACTFL published a volume in which renowned scholars discussed timely topics such as the need of a national language policy, community engagement in foreign language education, or the future in language learning assessment, just to name a few (Heining-Boynton). What is undeniable is that one current and prominent national debate in education revolves around new trends that
incorporate innovative curricular modifications to meet the needs of societal changes and demands.

Because of these new societal demands, experiential learning (EL), service learning (SL), community engagement (CE), internships, study abroad programs, or transnational classrooms are models of prevailing concepts of learning that are becoming widespread educational tools in higher education. Although EL and SL are not new concepts in education (Dewey introduced the notion of SL in the early 20th century), it has only been since the 1990s that they have found a significant place in the curriculum. Given the established prominence that practical learning has gained in all areas of the educational arena in the United States, there exists a strong body of literature in the fields of SL and EL for general education (Battistoni; Canada and Speck; Dewey; Eyler and Dwight; Holland et al; Jacoby; Jacoby and Mutascio; Shapiro; among many others). There is also a considerable body of literature focusing on SL for the different professions or disciplines such as health-related, engineering, economics, education, sociology, etc. (Borges and Hartung; Brubaker et al.; Godfrey et al.; McGoldrick; Tsang; Rama; among others). Publications regarding EL or SL specific to foreign languages have also multiplied significantly in recent years (Abbot and Lear; Burke; Cadwell; Doyle; Elorriaga; Jorge; Hellebrandt et al; Hellebrandt and Wurr; Lafford; Lear and Abbot; D. Long; Nelson and Scott; Oates and Leavitt; Spaine Long; Tilley-Lubbs; Sánchez-López; Rabin; just to name a few). However, an important publication area that is still emerging is the one that directly connects SL to languages for specific purposes (Lear; Lafford; M. K. Long; Sánchez-López 96, 2; Sánchez-López 5, 319-5, 326). As programs of languages for specific purposes proliferate around the world, the integration of an experiential learning component is essential for the overall success of these programs (Sánchez-López 96, 2: 386). This article intends to contribute to this last area mentioned with a general analysis of the state of service learning in undergraduate SSP programs in colleges and universities in the United States. Although relatively small, as this study only scratches the surface with headcounts of SL course offerings, our principal intentions are (1) to present preliminary data that could help SSP scholars and practitioners and their departments understand the composition and direction of SSP programs nationwide better and more accurately, and (2) to revive an emerging national dialogue about the complementary and essential role of SL in LSP programs.

Languages for Specific Purposes and Service Learning

The evolution of languages for specific purposes (LSP) practice in higher education in the United States has been significant for more than
two decades. In 1990 Grosse and Voght conducted a well-known survey study (The Evolution of Languages for Specific Purposes in the United States) on the state and future of LSP which yielded critical information about the state of LSP at that time. The focus of their study was to “trace the development of LSP in the United States, present a rationale for its place within the foreign language curriculum, and offer an assessment of its research base” (Grosse and Voght 181). Following their results, the authors augured exponentially positive predictions about the evolution and development of LSP. Unfortunately, in the second decade of the 21st century Gross and Voght’s optimistic predictions have not fully materialized yet due to a variety of contributing factors discussed by recognized LSP scholars in a Modern Language Journal Special Focus Issue titled Languages for Specific Purposes in the United States in a Global Context: Update on Grosse and Voght (1991) (Lafford 1-202).

As a follow up to Grosse and Voght’s study, twenty years later Long and Uscinski conducted another survey study which concluded that although the percentage of higher education institutions that offer LSP courses remains more or less the same (62%), “the sophistication and variety of offerings have become deeper and more focused in response to broader needs” (Long & Uscinski 173). Additionally, based on their overall results, Long & Uscinski concluded that “LSP is a permanent aspect of the foreign language curriculum in US higher education” (187). Although Grosse and Voght’s study did not include community service learning (CSL), Long & Uscinski’s survey did contain it as one important additional question. Drawing from the work of Long & Uscinski and others (Lafford; Lear; M. Long; Sánchez-López) as a focal point for our investigation, this article further explores the overall state of service learning within established undergraduate SSP programs in higher education in the United States.

Long & Uscinski’s study in 2012 concluded that 51% of the participating institutions arranged internships with a language focus, while 37% did not (12% did not answer this question). Their results also indicate that 30% of these internships were in Spanish for business, 25% in Spanish for education, 13% in Spanish for medicine, and 6% in Spanish for translation. In addition, this study found that 48% of these institutions arrange internships abroad. These results mirror the current state of CSL in American higher education institutions, where there exists an increasing importance in community engagement as a critical part of a college education. Long & Uscinski’s study also gathered new information about the type of LSP programs offered in American colleges and universities. The authors found that 27% of the departments that participated in their study offer a minor, a major track or concentration, or a certificate in LSP, while 73% do not offer any LSP program (Long & Uscinski).
Spanish for Specific Purposes and Service Learning: Study

Methodology

The study was conducted during the fall 2013 semester via multiple Internet searches. The objectives were to find: (1) the number, (2) the types (minors, major concentrations or tracks and certificates), and (3) the field of study (business, medicine, translation, interpretation, tourism, social work, law, etc.) of undergraduate SSP programs in higher education in the United States. The searches were done in a tri-fold manner: (1) investigating established LSP programs in the U.S. known by the author; (2) investigating the programs of LSP scholars and practitioners known by the author; and (3) via a general search entering LSP program related terminology. The key words and phrases entered in the search box included the following with multiple variations: Spanish for Specific Purposes + program, Spanish for the professions + program, Spanish for business + program, Spanish for health + program, minor in [area], major in [area], certificate in [area], and business /medical/ translation/ interpretation/ area + Spanish. The findings were recorded manually by the author. Because the majority of the information gathered was Internet based, the information was not always completely clear, therefore requiring clarification from a member of the related department. Examples of unclear information are whether or not a particular course had a service-learning or community engagement focus (not specified by the course title or course description) or whether or not the service-learning course was required or optional for the LSP program. When clarification could not been obtained, these courses and programs were put aside into a separate category marked as “Don’t know.” The data gathering stage was a long and meticulous process that required numerous Internet searches, many of which, in turn, necessitated further clarification. Because of how the data was compiled (mainly manual Internet searches), we recognize that there may exist unintentional errors. We also acknowledge that the list of SSP programs used for this small study is not exhaustive, and this factor is taken into consideration to draw results. However, we do believe that the group of programs consulted for the study is a fair representation of the nation as a whole.

Results and Discussion

Our analysis is based on a total of 46 undergraduate SSP programs from 37 different departments in colleges and universities in the United States. The majority of these programs are housed in language departments, although a few are housed in professional schools such as Business or Public Health. Continuing or extension education programs are not part of this study. These
46 programs are minors (17), majors/major tracks (10), and certificates (23). Many of these programs include a community engagement (service learning or internship) component, whether it is required (15) or optional (12). Many of these programs do not include a service learning or internship component in their curriculum (19). The following table represents a breakdown of the overall raw numbers and percentages:

**Table 1:** Undergraduate SSP programs and SL in numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Major Track/concentration</th>
<th>Certificate</th>
<th>Minor</th>
<th>Required SL</th>
<th>Optional SL</th>
<th>No SL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate SSP programs</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=46

**Table 2:** Undergraduate SSP programs and SL in percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Major Track/concentration</th>
<th>Certificate</th>
<th>Minor</th>
<th>Required SL</th>
<th>Optional SL</th>
<th>No SL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate SSP programs</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=46

The facts that stand out the most from these numbers are the large percentage of certificate programs (50% of all programs in SSP) along with the visibly increasing number of majors and major track programs (10% of all SSP programs). These are positive numbers for the emerging SSP sub-field in American higher education. The other piece that stands out, which is the main focus of our study, is the integration of a community engagement (service learning or internship) component in these programs. More than half (58%) of the undergraduate SSP programs offer a service learning or internship component, and 32.6% require it for the completion of the program. This is a surprisingly positive piece of data, which we did not predict from the onset. When we set off to conduct this analysis, we anticipated a lower percentage of SSP programs with a required service learning/internship component. The large majority of these service learning and internship courses are 3 credit-hour courses, although we recorded just a few of 1 or 2 credit-hour courses. The variety of SSP programs that we found during our investigations is also rich and represents well the diversity of demands and needs of
today’s global citizen. Many of these program areas have been part of the American university curriculum for at least the last two decades (minors and certificates in Spanish for business, Spanish for health professions, Spanish translation and Spanish interpretation). However, we are now starting to see some creative variations that reflect the necessity to address student’s and community’s needs on a larger and wider scale (ie. Bachelor of Arts in International Language and Culture for the Professions, Certificate in Languages and Cultures for the Professions, Spanish for Specific Purposes Certificate, and Spanish/Latino Culture for the Health Professions) (see a list of all the program areas compiled for this study in the appendix).

The Hispanic community is the largest minority group in the United States with 57 million (18% of the country) and a projection of 129 million (30%) by 2060 (Unites States Census Bureau). Therefore, it seems logical that the implementation of SL within Spanish programs may be more feasible in many parts of the country as opposed to other language programs with smaller communities and fewer opportunities for professional language-related immersions. Hence, both practice and scholarship of community engagement in Spanish programs have escalated exponentially within the last decade. Due to the wide interest and recent developments in theory and practice of community engagement in Spanish programs, *Hispania* published a special focus volume entirely devoted to scholarship and practice of community engagement as “[T]he benefit of emphasizing community engagement is irrefutable because it provides linguistic relevance and cultural context” (Spaine Long 201). The volume includes a solid overview of the main ideas presently debated at the programmatic level, the role of language learning and community engagement (CE) as part of the humanities tradition, the variety of CE models applied to teacher education programs, heritage speakers, national and transnational/international programs, translation, and CE course designed for Spanish programs. Co-editors of the special focus issue, Josef Hellebrandt and Ethel Jorge emphasize “how far we have come since Edward Zlotkowski, former senior scholar at the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), challenged us in 1999 to consider incorporating community partnerships into our language teaching” (Hellebrandt and Jorge 203). In a 2012 study, Hellebrandt and Jorge concluded that although 75% of Spanish language teachers in the United States claim that community engagement should be an important component of language teaching, only 55% incorporate some type of CE experience into their classes. They perceive these numbers as a clear indication of the “discrepancy between the way we think languages should be taught and the way they are currently being taught” (203). The authors use the special focus volume as a powerful tool to encourage more Spanish teachers to break through the fear barrier and bring their classrooms and communities closer together.
As previously indicated, it has not been until recently that service learning has been formally proposed as an essential piece of SSP and LSP in general (Lafford; Lear; M. K. Long; King and Lafford; Sánchez-López). The new Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics (Chapelle) includes experiential learning as one of the principal characteristics of the Spanish for Specific Purposes curriculum, one that presents the students with meaningful opportunities to engage in real-life and professional tasks, which in turn facilitate the language learning process (Sánchez-López). Furthermore, Lear has been one of the first scholars to make a formal connection between service learning to a long-established academic discipline, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, to support the argument that connects SL and LSP as naturally complementary. For almost four decades sociocultural theory has acknowledged the critical role of communities in learning. Because of its evolutionary nature, the sociocultural perspective defends that language learning is shaped by culture, context, personal experience, social behavior, and identity. If these are critical elements that affect language learning then, as Lear and other scholars suggest, SL seems to be an optimal way of learning languages. Lear rightly asserts: “By combining CSL with LSP, language education can remain at the forefront of the changing needs of students and society while achieving community outreach” (159). Lafford is another scholar who strongly supports the notion that LSP and CSL should go hand in hand due to complementary nature of their main objectives. To this end, she asserts that “[K]eeping in mind that the ultimate aim of LSP is to facilitate students’ appropriate application of their knowledge of the target language and culture to professional contexts and to prepare students for lifelong/experiential learning[…], LSP students need exposure to the target language beyond the classroom” (21). Lafford also suggested that LSP programs that integrate community service learning, or internships “optimize students’ real-world exposure to the use of the target language in workplace settings and facilitate their entry into their profession’s community of practice” (22). Sánchez-López claimed that “[B]ecause experiential learning does not always connect to a student’s area of interest, the course frequently seems a disengaged ‘addition’ rather than a meaningful and logical extension of the curriculum” (96, 2: 383). This is the main reason why a meaningful connection between LSP, or SSP in our case, and SL is critical. Sánchez-López proposed an 18-point guiding model for incorporating meaningful experiential learning in LSP programs to facilitate course design—frequently a daunting task—and implementation processes for faculty, students, and community partners, and to maximize the linguistic and educational learning outcomes of the students and the professional needs of the community. King and Lafford propose a Spanish internship capstone course as an integral component of an SSP program, one that clearly shapes the learning outcomes of the program by integrating presentational,
interpretive, and interpersonal communicative modes, and sociolinguistic and intercultural competencies (King and Lafford 37).

Even though the theory presents clearly that CSL should be an essential component of the LSP and SSP curriculum, our small analysis of the current national state suggests that we are not there just yet. Although many established undergraduate SSP programs in higher education in the United States include a SL component (58%), only 32% make it a requirement, that is, view it as an essential part of the curriculum. For 68% of the SSP programs, SL is peripheral or altogether absent.

Although it would require a complementary study to identify the exact reasons why SL is not viewed as critical component of established undergraduate SSP programs across the board in colleges and universities in the United States, our experience as a SL practitioner supported by the work of many other reputable scholars suggests that SL courses come paired with certain challenges, such as resistance to interdisciplinary work, increasing departmental dependence on income-generating models, and historical lack of campus-community collaboration (Lear 158). Other documented challenges include the frequent disconnection between the service learning project and the student’s area of interest, the lack of strong collaborations between faculty, student, and community partner (“three-way team”) to develop learning outcomes, the absence of guided and meaningful reflection (both written and oral) throughout the course, inappropriate or insufficient supervision of the student while at work, and the absence of an institutional office of service-learning which can facilitate the organization, the implementation, and the faculty training process (Sánchez-López 96, 2: 387-389). These are some of the most common challenges that we face today in SL and LSP, which may be a clear indication of why SL is still completely absent from almost half of SSP programs in American higher education as indicated in our results. These challenges must be investigated carefully by faculty and administrations to make the SL process and implementation less daunting for faculty and more meaningful and beneficial for students.

Conclusion

This article has presented the results of a small analysis on the state of community engagement and service learning in relation to established undergraduate programs in SSP in higher education in the United States. The results suggest that service learning is available in more than half (58%) of Spanish for specific purposes programs in American higher education, of which in almost one third (32%) of cases it is a requirement for the completion of the program. The absence of a service learning component of any kind in Spanish for specific purposes programs (minors, certificates
and majors or major tracks) is still significant and worrisome (41%). We acknowledge the fact that the study has limitations which affect the results. First, the data was compiled via manual Internet searches conducted by the author during the course of one semester. Therefore, the information used primarily reflects what departments and units publish on their websites, which in some cases may be outdated or incomplete. Second, the number of undergraduate Spanish for specific purposes programs collected for this study is not exhaustive, but it indicates what was available to the author at the time of the data collection stage. Nevertheless, we believe that the numbers yielded by this study are a fair representation of the overall state of SSP and SL in higher education in the United States and should be taken as a solid point of reference for further investigations in this and other related areas. Among the many related areas of research which would be of interest and most beneficial for the field, we propose comparing the development of overall language learning outcomes and intercultural competence in SSP programs with and without a SL component. This type of quantitative study would provide groundbreaking and necessary information to advance and solidify the undergraduate SSP curriculum, and it would help move service learning from the periphery to its core.


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APPENDIX

Areas in Spanish for Specific Purposes programs represented in this study

Minors
Business Language Studies
Spanish for the Professions
Spanish for Business
Spanish Translation
Spanish for the Health Professions
Spanish/Latino Culture for the Health Professions

Certificates
Translation and Interpretation
Certificate in Translation
Business Language Certificate Program
Spanish for Business and the Professions
Business Spanish
Spanish Translation
Spanish Interpreting
Spanish Business Certificate
Professional Language Certificate Program
Professional Spanish Certificate
Spanish for Specific Purposes
Spanish/Latino Culture for the Health Professions
Spanish for the Business Professions
Spanish for Global Business
Spanish for Health Professions
Spanish Translation
Spanish for Business and the Professions
Spanish-English Professions and Translation
Languages and Cultures for the Professions

Major or Major Track
Spanish for the Professions major
International Language and Culture for the Professions
Bachelor of Arts on Spanish for the Professions
Spanish for Health Professions