

HISPANIC OUTREACH: ANNUAL REPORT 2005-06

INTRODUCTION

The Hispanic Outreach Program is an initiative of the Linguistics Department's ESL Center, supported by the College of Arts and Sciences and administered in cooperation with Catholic Social Services of Oakland County. The mission of the Program is to teach English to native speakers of Spanish so that they can better understand American culture and customs, secure employment or advance in a position, and become fully participating members of American society. Students in the Linguistics Department's Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) Program provide the instruction in English under the guidance of faculty supervisors. The Program was inaugurated in 1998 in response to a growing need for English instruction among residents of the Pontiac area.

Non-native speakers of English are often unable to take advantage of traditional ESL programs offered in the community because of difficulties with childcare for their preschool children, time schedules, cost, and transportation problems. The Hispanic Outreach Program addresses all of these issues. On-site childcare is provided for the participants' preschool children; all classes are offered at a time when the participants' older children are in school; classes, childcare, books, supplies, and transportation are all provided free of charge.

There is no doubt that the Program has helped to improve the lives of its participants by giving them the skills needed to function effectively. Perhaps the best indication of this success is the very frequent request that the participants make to teachers and members of the administrative team to increase the number of hours and days of the English classes.

SPONSORSHIP AND SUPPORT

During its eight years of operation, the Program has received financial support from the College of Arts and Sciences, local corporations, and Michigan government agencies. During the first year, it was entirely supported by the College of Arts and Sciences. In its second year of operation, 1999-2000, funding for the Hispanic Outreach Program came from Haden International with a gift of \$25,000. The gift was used for books and other educational materials, childcare, facility rental fees and the faculty coordinator. General Motors Corporation has also been a major sponsor in recent years, contributing \$20,000 in 2001-2002, and \$25,000 for 2002-2003, 2003-04, and 2004-05. During the 2003-04 and 2004-05 academic years, the Program was also supported by a \$24,999 grant from the Michigan Works Program. As in the past, all deficits have been covered by the College of Arts and Sciences and the Linguistics Department.

For 2005-06, we have again received a grant of \$24,999 from the Michigan Works Program. In addition, we again received generous gifts of \$25,000 from General Motors Corporation and \$5,000 from Citizens Bank. We would like to be able to expand the program and admit more students, especially in the evening, but such expansion will require additional support from donors.

SCOPE OF SERVICE

TRAINING PLAN

The students in the Hispanic Outreach Program all share a first language, a culture and a community. All need to learn English so that they can interact effectively in the community, assimilate into the mainstream, and secure employment. These goals are most effectively accomplished by focusing on oral proficiency, basic reading skills and grammar within the context of conversation and discussion that uses authentic language materials. Hispanic Outreach students are grouped according to their English skills, ranging from beginner to advanced. Since the students have similar needs, classroom activities and materials are built around the situations the students are most likely to encounter for their particular proficiency level.

Periodically, the Linguistics Department administers job surveys to the participants in the Hispanic Outreach Program. The surveys are designed to solicit and track information that will help us provide ESL instruction that is more relevant to the participants' needs, in particular, their efforts to secure employment and become fully integrated members of American society. Three different job surveys are used: a survey for those participants who are currently employed; one for those not currently employed but seeking employment, and one for those not currently employed and not looking for employment. Each survey consists of 16 multiple-choice questions written in Spanish. In addition, demographic information has been collected on the participants. The results of the surveys are summarized below.

The curriculum for each of our classes is designed to be responsive to the immediate needs of the participants and to their goals for the future. Certain activities and lessons have general applicability. For example, survival skills like how to read labels and signs or how to address an envelope are important for all participants. Some aspects of our culture which Americans take for granted also need to be understood, such as the appropriateness of asking questions of teachers and doctors, or even of going to a superior or seeking a second opinion. Many participants say that a lack of understanding of American customs is causing them difficulty; hence, our curriculum is careful to discuss various aspects of American culture and customs. For those looking for jobs, we also provide specific lessons on how to read classified ads and how to fill out applications, and we incorporate useful activities aimed at helping participants feel more secure during appointments and interviews.

The information gathered from the surveys is being used by our teachers to construct lessons, so that class time concentrates on those areas that the participants find most important for their success. Perhaps the greatest challenge in this regard is how to give more students an opportunity in class to engage in conversation. In one way or another, a large number of the participants feel that they need to improve their conversational skills.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND LENGTH OF TRAINING

Classes follow the yearly academic semester schedule of Oakland University for Fall, Winter, and Spring classes. Registration and placement are held during the first week of these semesters during the regular class meeting times. Classes meet twice a week -- on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10-12 and on Mondays and Wednesdays from 6-8 in the evening. There are three classes in each day and evening program, varying in accordance with the proficiency level of the students (beginning, intermediate, and advanced). There is also a GED program in the evening. In the past, all classes meet at the Hispanic Outreach Services of Pontiac, 295 W. Huron Street, Pontiac. In fall 2005, the evening program was moved to the Arts and Technology Academy of Pontiac, a larger facility with more ample parking space.

The childcare and preschool programs follow the day schedule of the ESL classes, overlapping before and after by about 30 minutes. There is no childcare or preschool offered in the evening. The preschool program has just completed its second year. It includes basic language instructions in simple concepts. Activities include story time, fine motor skill activity (color, cut, paste), gross motor skill activity (whole body movement to music or follow direction from teacher), and language development activity (both English and Spanish). The preschool program continues to develop in curriculum content and social skills for kindergarten readiness. The infant child care workers receive training on child development and now follow a routine when caring for the babies to stimulate and develop their cognitive functions.

The GED (General Education Diploma) classes follow the schedule of the evening ESL classes, meeting twice a week, Monday and Wednesday evenings from 6:00 to 8:00. Kathy Cornman, a graduate student in Linguistics at Oakland University, designed the GED curriculum.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS AND STUDENT/TEACHER RATIO

Individual classes ideally have a minimum of ten students and a maximum of thirty-five, with a student/teacher ratio averaging about twenty-five to one. In most cases, the more advanced the student, the more regular the attendance. In an effort to manage the numbers more effectively in the lower levels, attendance and participation is monitored. Students are dropped from the Program if they do not attend class regularly or fail to do homework assignments, after appropriate warning of course. These policies have had a salutary effect on the Program: both attendance and participation have been more consistent than in the past.

METHOD OF MEASURING STUDENTS' PROGRESS

Students are given a placement test during fall registration and placed into one of three academic levels: beginning, intermediate, or advanced. Upon completion of each fall and winter academic semester, the students' teachers submit a grade for each and a recommendation for placement the following semester. At the end of each semester, a final test is given to record each student's progress over the term.

QUALIFICATIONS OF PERSONNEL PROVIDING TRAINING

All teachers in the program are pursuing or have completed a Certificate in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) at Oakland University. The training includes specialized courses in linguistics and methods of teaching English to non-native speakers. All teachers are under the supervision of a full-time faculty member of the Linguistics Department at Oakland University. Lesson plans must be submitted for approval and the teachers are graded on their performance. The entire program is under the supervision of the Director of the ESL Center, who is a full professor with a Ph.D. in Linguistics, 37 years of teaching experience, and 19 years experience in administration.

PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES FOR THE CURRENT PROGRAM

One of the goals for the current year is to continue to raise the level of expectations that we have of the participants in the Program. As noted above, participants are now dropped from the Program if they do not attend class regularly or fail to do homework assignments. These steps are being taken because we have many more people wanting ESL instruction that we can accommodate. Ideally, class size should be kept to no more than thirty-five students. In the past, class size has only been a problem in the class for beginners, where attendance has often been sporadic.

A complete academic curriculum for beginning, intermediate, and advanced learners has been developed. We see marked progress after evaluating the initial placement and the final test scores. With the implementation of our stricter attendance policy and curriculum guidelines, the participants are beginning to value the importance of the program and education as a whole. The staff at Hispanic Outreach Services has been working very cooperatively with the ESL program in the areas of creating the attendance sheets and contacting students that are on the waiting list as new spaces become available as well as monitoring the parking situation and maintenance of the building before and after classes.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS STUDYING ENGLISH AT EACH LEVEL

Each year since its inauguration, the Hispanic Outreach Program has grown. In the first year, the students, who were transported to Oakland University for instruction, included only four regular participants. To increase participation, in the winter of 2000, the Program was moved to the Hispanic Outreach Services in Pontiac, a site that was familiar to the participants. The result of this change was dramatic. Within a four-month period, the Program grew from four to twenty students, and it has grown at an astonishing rate ever since. Over the five year period from the fall of 2001 to the spring of 2006, there were 2201 participants attending ESL classes, with nearly 50% (1051) attending classes on a regular basis. Thus, we have averaged about 440 new participants each year with about 210 participants attending classes regularly each week.

The excellent participation of the Hispanic community continues despite some significant changes in requirements, format and routine. As noted above, we have instituted stricter attendance and homework policies which have meant that only the most committed students are permitted to continue. In addition, the administrative professionals at the Pontiac facility have changed. For many years, Hispanic Outreach Services was directed by Carlos Marcillo. In the fall of 2004, Luz Maria Telleria became the Director, and that change seems to have resulted in a different set of priorities which have impacted enrollment significantly in the following ways.

There is a growing number of women attending the program, and it seems that these women are attending classes not only to improve their English but also to find a social outlet. Ms. Telleria has worked very hard to help women recognize the value of educating themselves and becoming strong and independent. The rate of domestic violence among the population is rather high; thus the women are encouraged to learn English and devise a support system outside of the home environment. Hispanic Outreach Services offers parenting classes, elementary education instruction, and computer classes, as well as other social educational programs. This particular group of women attend classes in an effort to acclimate themselves to the culture and prepare themselves for future work in the US.

The current enrollment also reflects a growing number of young men, ages 16 to 18, that are no longer attending high school. Many of them are attending our English classes and our GED preparation classes to advance their skills. These young men are not yet ready to go into the work force, but are preparing to gain employment in the near future

LEARNING GAINS ACHIEVED

Approximately half of the participants achieve mastery in the advanced level class so that many of them no longer need assistance to function effectively in the English speaking community. The remaining students typically continue until they too reach fluency.

According to the job surveys, among the participants who are already working, an overwhelming 97% say that being able to read and write English better would help them either a lot (74%) or a good deal (23%) in their current job. Equally significant, 91% of the working participants feel that being able to speak and understand English would help them either a lot (69%) or a good deal (22%) in their current job. The areas of English that cause participants difficulty are, in descending order, speaking (33%), writing (24%), understanding (19%), reading (13%), and vocabulary (11%).

Among those currently looking for a job, our survey indicates that deficient skills in English is the major impediment to finding employment: 49% say that their inability to speak and understand English well enough causes them difficulty trying to find a job; 20% cite reading and writing as an impediment. Importantly, lack of education is cited by only 7% of the participants as a cause of difficulty, and lack of experience is cited by only 12%. These statistics are all the more significant because 67% of those looking for work say that finding a job is causing them a lot of difficulty (27%) or a good deal of difficulty (40%).

Among those not working and not looking for a job, better English skills are desired when trying to deal with doctors and other health professionals (36%), teachers and school officials (24%), and merchants (20%). The same group reports that the people they come in contact with the most are merchants (32%), doctors and other health professionals (30%), and teacher and school officials (26%). During such interactions, speaking and understanding cause the greatest difficulty (40%), with reading and writing somewhat less (25%).