

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Grant Proposal

Spanish Heritage Learners at UNC  
Charlotte: A comparative  
multi-course study of their linguistic  
needs, perceptions, and achievement  
of learning outcomes.

Dr. Javier García León  
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(Lead Principal Investigator)

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(Co-Principal Investigator)

Department of Languages and Culture Studies  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

## II. Abstract

As of Fall 2021, 12% of the UNC Charlotte students identify as Hispanic. UNC Charlotte is also the university with the highest percentage of Hispanic graduates in the state. Language teaching and learning research has shown that these learners have needs that are unique and different from those of non-Heritage learners of Spanish. Addressing these needs has an impact on the retention and successful graduation of these students, which belong to underrepresented groups.

The Spanish program currently offers an advanced class (SPAN 3203) and an intermediate forthcoming course (SPAN 2050) targeted towards Spanish Heritage learners (SHL). While these courses offer many advantages, there are some unanswered questions about students' needs, learning strategies, and teaching effectiveness of the courses. For example, what are the perceptions and needs of SHL at UNC Charlotte? Do these courses meet those needs? Is the performance and the achievement of student learning outcomes (SLOs) of these students in Spanish classes similar to what previous research has established? Therefore, we propose to confirm those needs and determine if the SLOs as well as the courses are effectively addressing them. By answering these questions, we can a) better determine if the teaching approaches we use are the most beneficial to heritage learners and b) continue creating a pathway for these learners that would help close the equity gap in higher education. SHL mainly belongs to communities who have lower access to education and graduation rates. By providing targeted language education, we promote better educational experiences that can positively impact these students' professional lives.

III. Budget

**Budget Request Page**  
**January 15, 2022 to June 30, 2023**

***BUDGET:*** *Request by budget category. Joint proposers must select one PI to be the lead and one department to receive this allocation.*

Lead Principal Investigator: Dr. Javier García León

Principal Investigator 800#: 801136134

Title of Project: Spanish Heritage Learners at UNC Charlotte: A comparative multi-course study of their linguistic needs, perceptions, and achievement o learning outcomes.

Allocate operating budget to Department of: Languages and Culture Studies

<b>Fiscal Year One (January 15, 2022 to June 30, 2022)</b>		
FacultyStipend	Paid directly from Academic Affairs fund on May 15, 2022	\$3850
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	
911300	Special Pay to Faculty other than Grantee	\$3850
915000	Student (Undergraduate or Graduate) Temporary Wages	\$1125
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages	
920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921160	Subject Incentive Fee	
925000	Domestic Travel	
926000	Foreign Travel	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	
930000	Supplies	
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	
951000	Other Contracted Services	
<b>Year One Subtotal</b>		<b>\$8825</b>

Lead Principal Investigator: Dr. Javier García León

<b>Fiscal Year Two (July 1, 2022 to May 30, 2023)</b>		
Faculty Stipend	Paid directly from Academic Affairs fund on May 15, 2023	
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	
911300	Special Pay to Faculty other than Grantee	
915000	Student (Undergraduate or Graduate) Temporary Wages	
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages	
920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921160	Subject Incentive Fee	
925000	Domestic Travel	
926000	Foreign Travel	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	
930000	Supplies	
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	
951000	Other Contracted Services	
<b>Year Two Subtotal</b>		0
<b>TOTAL FUNDS REQUESTED (Year One + Year Two)</b>		\$8825

Budget Narrative

Award	Amount	Justification
<p>Special pay to Faculty other than grantee Summer 2022</p>	<p>\$3850</p>	<p>The budget includes a summer stipend to support two faculty members, both stipends for summer 22.</p> <p>In Summer 2022, Dr. Paloma Fernández Sánchez (#801041229) will complete the IRB process and develop the necessary assessment instruments for SPAN2050 and SPAN3203 courses and will also initiate the data collection process in Fall 2022 (i.e. pre/post-course questionnaires).</p> <p>NOTE: Dr. Fernández Sánchez will be the instructor of record for the course. The funds will not support the development of new course materials.</p>
<p>Faculty Stipend Summer 2022</p>	<p>\$3850</p>	<p>In Summer 2022, Dr. García León (#801136134) will complete the IRB process and develop the necessary instruments to survey the Spanish Heritage Speaker population at UNC Charlotte.</p>
<p>Student (Undergraduate or Graduate) Temporary Wages</p>	<p>\$1125</p>	<p>The student will do further research on work that has already been published regarding Teaching Spanish for Heritage Learners.</p> <p>The student will also help with the distribution of questionnaires and data compilation.</p> <p>15\$ x 5hours x 15 weeks = \$1125</p>

# CHARLOTTE

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES

*Office of the Dean*

Banita W. Brown  
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October 19, 2021

SOTL Grants Committee  
Center for Teaching and Learning  
ctl@uncc.edu

Dear Committee Members:

On behalf of Dean Nancy Gutierrez in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, I am writing this letter in support of the SOTL proposal submitted by Dr. Javier Garcia Leon and Dr. Paloma Fernandez Sanchez from the Department of Languages and Culture Studies which is entitled, "Spanish Heritage Learners at UNC Charlotte: A comparative multi-course study of their linguistic needs, perceptions, and achievement of learning outcomes." This proposal addresses the following area of focus as described on the SoTL Grant RFP website: Equity Gaps. I fully support this proposal. The main objective of the project is to promote better educational experiences for Spanish heritage speakers in order to impact their retention and successful graduation as well as impact their professional lives.

The pilot study proposed aims to evaluate the delivery of two courses that foster best practices of the Spanish language for Spanish Heritage Speakers, SPAN 3203 and SPAN 2050. The students' perceptions of various components of the course as well as the methods of assessment will be evaluated. These measures will be useful in determining if improvements in teaching methodologies are necessary or if the existing student learning outcomes are being achieved.

Sincerely,



Banita W. Brown  
Associate Dean for Academic and Student Success  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
Associate Professor of Chemistry

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## V. Project Narrative

### A. Specific Aims

We propose a pilot study that aims at evaluating the delivery of SPAN 3203 and SPAN2050, courses that foster best practices of Spanish for Heritage Speakers. In particular, we will study the extent to which these courses contents match the students' perception of their linguistic needs and adheres to best practices set by scholarly literature about Spanish heritage speakers. We will also analyze the extent to which students achieve the learning outcomes set for the courses. These classes incorporate hands-on tasks with low-stakes and high-stakes assignments to scaffold individual learning and enhance collaborative learning. *The primary purpose of this project is to compare the achievement of learning outcomes with student perception of learning outcomes in the SPAN3203 and SPAN2050 courses, and to determine how it relates to what has been established by the literature on the topic.* With this project, we also aim to help close the equity gap in higher education, advancing the Provost initiative to improve equity in students' experience through Student Experience Project (SEP). SHL mainly belong to underrepresented communities who have lower access to education and graduation rates. By providing targeted language education, we promote better educational experiences that can positively impact the students' professional lives.

The evaluation plan of the proposed study is as follows:

### A. Specific Aims

1. The overall purpose of the project is to study the relationship between a) Spanish Heritage Learners' linguistic needs established by the literature, b) the actual UNC Charlotte students' perceptions of their own linguistic needs, and c) the achievement of learning outcomes in the Spanish for Heritage Learners course(s) (SPAN3203 and 2050).
2. The specific objectives to be achieved are as follows:
  - a. Determine how students perceive the courses and their assignments, along with their own achievement of learning outcomes in a Spanish for Heritage Speakers course.
  - b. Assess student perceptions of the Student Learning Outcomes of Spanish for Heritage Speakers at UNC Charlotte by comparing student perception with what has been established by the literature on this topic.
  - c. Assess student perceptions of hands-on low-stakes tasks to scaffold individual and collaborative learning, and high-stakes assignments and rubrics to incorporate best practices regarding scaffolded assignments.

- d. Measure the achievement of learning outcomes while identifying challenges associated with the teaching of Spanish for Heritage Learners (in contrast with the teaching of Spanish as a second language).
3. The specific research questions to be answered as a result of the project are as follow:
  - a. What are the UNC Charlotte Spanish Heritage students' perceptions of their language proficiency and linguistic needs?
  - b. Is the performance of Heritage students in the Spanish for Heritage learners' courses (SPAN3203 and SPAN2050) similar to what previous research has established?
  - c. Do the methodology, assessments, and SLOs for SPAN 3203 and SPAN2050 meet those needs?
4. This learning path aims to increase our understanding of how UNC Charlotte Spanish Heritage students further develop their linguistic skills.
5. This study has the potential of affecting an increasing portion of the undergraduate population at UNC Charlotte. The findings from this study will afford us an opportunity to a) gain an insight into best practices for the current Spanish for Heritage Speakers courses and b) create new courses appropriate for Heritage Speakers. This will help recruitment and retention of this growing population. In the long term, we aim to make significant curricular reforms at the program and departmental level.

## B. Literature Review

As stated before, heritage language students (HLS) are a unique cultural and linguistic population in the United States. They present particular challenges for language educators and language programs as their linguistic needs differ from more traditional second language learners. In the case of Spanish heritage learners (SHL), their use of Spanish usually concentrates on home or community domains. As a consequence, previous works have identified that their linguistic competence mainly focuses on linguistic informal registers rather than academic or professional domains (Colombi, 2002; 2009; Valdés, 1997; 2001). Curricula for HLS also face additional challenges as students show considerable variation in language proficiency. Scholars argue that this is because the extent and nature of language use varies depending on factors such as family, community, and even academic contexts in addition to other factors such as immigration, age of arrival, and schooling in the heritage language (Silva-Corvalán, 1994, 2003; Zentella, 1997; Colombi, 2009).



At the acquisition level, research on heritage speakers (Carreira, 2007; Potowski, Jegerski, and Morgan-Short, 2009) has found that these speakers can undergo one or more linguistic processes: incomplete acquisition, attrition, and acquisition of a contact variety. This means that linguistic performance can vary among students enrolled in courses for HLS. Some students, for example, have not completely acquired subtle pragmatic differences. In the case of attrition, it is hard to determine if the language lost is complete or limited to certain abilities. Many SHL later engage in the reacquisition of particular features of the Spanish language. Additionally, some SHL are raised in places where the community language is in contact with other languages, learning or acquiring a contact variety of Spanish. Silva-Corvalan (1994) and Montrul (2002; 2005) have shown evidence of erosion of the tense-aspect system among Spanish heritage speakers. This can be a consequence of semantic features of functional categories affected by incomplete acquisition or attrition. Montrul et al. (2008) has also found that bilingual speakers present difficulty with gender assignment and agreement, at both the lexical assignment or during syntactic processing of agreement between the noun and other elements.

In relation to literacy, Belpoliti and Bermejo (2020) found that, contrary to common ideas, Spanish heritage learners at the beginning level of their language formal education have a good command of the language orthography. On top of that, beginning SHL show command of several syntactic structures at the writing level. Students have acquired basic and sometimes complex grammatical features of Spanish, and they are able to use them in writing long sentences similar to the written production of Spanish monolingual learners at the high-school/pre-college level (Belpoliti and Bermejo, 2020).

In the area of linguistic attitudes, previous works (Colombi, 2009) have also identified that SHL arrive to the classroom with a set of beliefs towards their linguistic performance. Despite being able to converse fluently in Spanish, many students describe their language as “non proper”, “malo”, mocho,” “vulgar” or “incorrect” (Colombi, 2009). Other contributions also acknowledge the importance of employing critical language awareness perspectives as well as sociolinguistic informed methodologies when teaching Spanish as a heritage language in a university program (Colombi 2015). For Colombi (2015; 2009), using social theory on language teaching can center power relations, social practices as well as linguistic beliefs in the classroom (2015). Belpoliti and Bermejo (2020) also argue that raising language awareness can lead to a better sensitivity towards the encoding of meaning in complex linguistic forms. Extensive reading can also serve as a model to advance writing practices (Alarcón, 2010). Other works (Achugar & Colombi, 2008) (Colombi, 2009) argue that SHL also need to construct and negotiate their identities as members of an academic community once they enrolled in formal education, especially at the tertiary level. This process includes expanding their control over academic registers at the written and oral levels.

In order to address student needs and perceptions, we propose to conduct a pilot study that aims at evaluating the delivery of SPAN 3203 and SPAN2050, courses that foster best practices of Spanish for Heritage Speakers . In particular, we will study the extent to which the courses’

contents match the students' perception of their linguistic needs and adheres to best practices set by scholarly literature about Spanish heritage speakers. We will also analyze the extent to which students achieve the learning outcomes set for the course.

### C. Methods

In order to investigate the impact of the SPAN3203 and SPAN2050 content and delivery, our study will evaluate a total of four groups (multi sections) enrolled in the aforementioned courses during Fall 2022 and Spring 2023. The groups will be compared, and the sections will be comprehensively evaluated in its pilot phase.

This pilot study will evaluate the effectiveness of the material presented and assessed in the course (SPAN3203 and SPAN2050) with an oral intensive component to (i) assess student perceptions of hands-on low-stakes tasks to scaffold student learning and collaborative learning, (ii) redesign the high-stakes assignment and rubric to incorporate best practices regarding scaffolded assignments, and (iii) measure the achievement of learning outcomes, (iv) correlate student perceptions and achievement of learning outcomes with what has been established by previous research on this topic. While there are traditional means of direct assessment that can be used to measure the achievement of specific learning outcomes, it is important to comprehend student perceptions about the achievement of these outcomes. We will use an approach combining open-ended mid & post course questions, pre- and post-course questionnaires.

All questionnaires will use five Likert style blocks of questions that focus on (i) student attitude levels, (ii) student confidence in their communication skills, (iii) student perceptions of their ability to communicate in Spanish in different contexts, (iv) student attitudes toward written assignments, (v) student perception of discussion-based activities, and high-stake assignments.

It is particularly helpful to know whether the students themselves believe that the established outcomes are being achieved or not, and also to see the correlation between student perceptions and the assessment data.

### D. Evaluation

The evaluation plan of this proposed study consists of using a performance indicator for each outcome to compare what the literature written on these states and what the students enrolled in these sections perceive. Direct assessment includes summative assessment that uses student performance in multiple writing and oral assignments. For instance, students will complete low-stakes assignments (relatively smaller written and oral tasks, e.g. language quizzes, oral online discussions and debates, paper introduction) on their own to enhance their oral and critical thinking skills. Subsequently, scaffolded assignments will be designed so that students culminate the course with the submission of a formal and polished oral artifact (known as a high-stakes assignment in the literature). Furthermore, we will apply backward design for successful course-module learning objectives alignment and ensure that the objectives are closely aligned with learning activities, materials as well as assignments. We will aim to follow best practices in integrating communication into the curriculum by devising a comprehensive alignment of course objectives with the high-stakes assignment of the course.

The high stakes assignment will be designed to be a culminating experience for the course with a significant portion of the course grade. Specifically, a detailed plan of evaluation will be developed to assess student achievement of learning outcomes in the following mapped assignments:

<b>Assignment &amp; materials</b>	<b>Course Objectives (2050)</b>	<b>Course Objectives (3203)</b>
Research Proposal Oral Presentation	1, 4, 5	5, 4
Response paper on Topics A, and B	1,2,4	1, 2, 4
Contributions to Oral discussions	2,3	1, 2
Final project - Oral Presentation	1,2,3,4	1, 2, 3, 4

Course objectives for SPAN 2050:

1. Use prior knowledge of the language to understand different written and oral documents in Spanish on a variety of social and culturally relevant topics.
2. Deepen your knowledge of a range of Spanish-speaking cultures and their contributions to the Spanish language, which relates to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
3. Build on existing vocabulary while engaging with complex topics related to the Spanish speaking world.
4. Analyze written and oral documents in formal and informal Spanish on a variety of topics.
5. Apply the process approach to construct a variety of written pieces in Spanish.

Course objectives for SPAN 3203(O):

1. Analyze different written and oral documents in formal Spanish on a variety of topics related to the Spanish-speaking world.
2. Understand and apply multiple language registers depending on the context.
3. Deepen your knowledge of a range of Spanish-speaking cultures and their contributions to the Spanish language.
4. Develop your oral communication skills in the interpersonal and representational modes.
5. Apply the process approach to construct a variety of formal and academic oral pieces in Spanish.

A pre- and post-questionnaire instrument will be developed to comprehend student perception of their knowledge and language needs before and after, as well as the effectiveness of the course. Indirect assessment will include questionnaires that address learner perceptions of course effectiveness, assignments, collaborative hands-on tasks, simulations on how to create and deliver a formal speech, peer reviewing, etc.). Additional instruments of data collection will be student self-assessments, and individualized instruction interviews. The SoTL grant will allow us to perform exhaustive data collection and analysis. Both quantitative and qualitative data will be collected, and analysis of the data will consist of t-tests to compare the two groups along with descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The data gathered from the pilot study will afford us the opportunity to identify potential issues vis-à-vis low-stakes and high-stakes assignments and possible issues with student perceptions of learning in a Spanish for Heritage learners courses. Furthermore, assessment of student perceptions allows instructors to evaluate skill growth (Li et al. 2015, 8-9) while providing a valuable tool for the enhancement of the undergraduate curriculum. This study will also allow us to evaluate the teaching methodology, course materials, and the level of attainment of outcomes for the course. More importantly, this study will afford us the opportunity to comprehend the impact of applying a methodology based on the linguistic needs of this type of learners, rather than the Spanish as a second language one. These lessons can be useful for such a teaching methodology for the program in general, as we get more Spanish Heritage Learners. It will also serve to close the educational gap that HLL face as a minority group.

#### E. Knowledge Dissemination

Our findings will be disseminated in a myriad of ways. First, we will share our findings internally among the Spanish faculty as well as the Languages and Culture Studies department staff. Second, the findings will be shared externally through presentations at (inter)national conferences (e.g. AATSP - American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, SCOLT – Southern Conference on Language Teaching) and through publication in relevant peer-review journals (*MIFLC Review*, *Foreign Language Annals*). It is important to note that this project is part of other initiatives created by the researchers to provide better education for underrepresented students. Therefore, preliminary results will be also disseminated at the UNC Charlotte [Heritage Language Learning Symposium](#).

#### F. Human Subjects

All research participants must give their permission (e.g. consent form) to be part of this study. If funded, the author(s) will seek approval of all data collection instruments outlined in this proposal by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UNC Charlotte.

#### G. Extramural funding

N/A.

#### H. Timeline

Semester	Objectives
Summer 2022	Finalize IRB requirements. Design instruments for data collection. Planning and logistics for data collection process in all the sections.
Fall 2022	Data collection in sections of SPAN 3203-SPAN2050 – direct assessment and pre- & mid-course surveys. Train guidance of undergraduate students and data collection.
Spring 2023	Data collection in sections of SPAN 3203 -SPAN2050 – direct assessment and pre- & mid-course surveys.
Summer 2023	Complete data collection process – post-course surveys. Analysis of data (quantitative and qualitative). Prepare findings for dissemination: presentations and publication.

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