

Advanced Oral Proficiency: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Preparing Spanish Teachers

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Abstract

Reflecting national trends, approximately half of all UNC Charlotte foreign language teacher candidates since 2010 have been unable to demonstrate advanced oral proficiency on a gatekeeper performance assessment (the Oral Proficiency Interview: OPI), as required by national accreditation standards (see ACTFL, 2002). At a time of declining enrollment in teacher training programs and a critical shortage of qualified foreign language teachers, we cannot afford to lose so many aspiring teachers. In response, the researchers propose to create and evaluate the impact of a convenient and cost-effective online (distance education) course to be taken by all aspiring Spanish teachers at UNC Charlotte. Interdisciplinary and interactive in nature, the course will focus on enhancing students' oral communication skills in Spanish, exposing them to the type of language skills and vocabulary they will need as K-12 Spanish teachers, and familiarizing them with the procedures and expectations of the OPI. The project has the potential to a) enhance teacher candidate preparation to complete licensure tests, b) improve graduation rates among aspiring Spanish teacher candidates, c) help to alleviate the local and national shortage of qualified Spanish teachers, and d) provide a model to other departments across campus of how to work together to enhance candidate outcomes.

Budget Request for SOTL Grant

Year 2018-19

Joint Proposal? X Yes No

Title of Project Advanced Oral Proficiency: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Preparing Spanish Teachers

Duration of Project One year (spring 2018 – spring 2019)

Primary Investigator(s) Dr. Kristin Davin and Dr. Scott Kissau

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UNC Charlotte SOTL Grants Previously Received (please names of project, PIs, and dates) Co-PIs: Kissau, S., & Hart, L. (2014-2015). *Following the Leader: A collaborative training model to develop and sustain best practices for teacher candidates.* \$9,513.05
PI: Kissau, S. (2012-2013). *The best of both worlds: Hybridized second language methodology instruction.* \$4,850

Allocate operating budget to Department of Middle, Secondary, & K-12 Education

		Year One
Account #	Award	January 2018 to June 2018
Faculty Stipend	Transferred directly from Academic Affairs to Grantee on May 15	
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	
911300	Special Pay (Faculty on UNCC payroll other than Grantee)	
915000	Student Temporary Wages	
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages	
920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921150	Participant Stipends	

925000	Travel – Domestic	
926000	Travel – Foreign	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	
930000	Supplies	
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	
951000	Other Current Services	
YEAR 1 TOTAL		\$0

		Year Two
Account #	Award	July 2018 to June 2019
Faculty Stipend	Transferred directly from Academic Affairs to Grantee on May 15	\$ 3,850
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	\$1,800
911300	Special Pay (Faculty on UNCC payroll other than Grantee)	
915000	Student Temporary Wages	
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages	
920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921150	Participant Stipends	
925000	Travel – Domestic	
926000	Travel – Foreign	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	

930000	Supplies	
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	
951000	Other Current Services	\$4,200
	YEAR 2 TOTAL	\$9,850
YEAR 1 and YEAR 2 GRAND TOTAL		\$9,850

Attachments:

1. Attach/provide a narrative that explains how the funds requested will be used.
2. Has funding for the project been requested from other sources? Yes No. If yes, list sources.

A proposal will be submitted by Dr. Davin to the Foreign Language Association of North Carolina (Mini-Grants) in spring 2018 seeking funds to advertise the newly developed course to all aspiring world language teachers in North Carolina.

Budget Narrative

To complete the proposed research study a total of \$9,850 in financial support is requested. Since work related to the evaluation of the project is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2018, Budget Option 2 has been selected.

Faculty Stipend (\$3,850)

A stipend of \$3,850 is requested in May of Fiscal Year 2 (May, 2019) to support Dr. Davin in the evaluation of the project. In May and June of 2019, Drs. Davin and Kissau will analyze the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the OPI and interviews. Once completed, they will begin development of a manuscript describing the results of the project and finalize conference presentations that the GA will help to prepare in spring 2019. They will also use the results of the project to guide and inform and subsequent revisions to the online course. As a 12-month employee, CO-PI, Dr. Kissau, is ineligible to receive a stipend. So that her focus remains on the project, Dr. Davin will not teach more than one course during the summer of 2019.

Graduate Student Salary (\$1,800)

A graduate assistant (GA) will work closely with the research team during fall 2018 and spring 2019 (Fiscal Year 2). At the rate of \$12/hour, the researchers request \$1,800 for approximately 150 hours of GA support (5 hours per week for 15 weeks each semester) in Fiscal Year 2. In fall 2018, the GA will assist students in registering to complete the OPI at both the beginning and end of the semester and begin preparation of a literature review to guide and inform the ensuing manuscript. In spring 2019, the GA will transcribe the interviews conducted by Drs. Kissau and Davin. The GA will also begin preparation of conference presentations to be given in fall 2019.

Other Current Services (\$4,200)

In the pilot implementation of the course, funding is also sought to cover the costs associated with completing the OPI at both the beginning (pre-test) and end (post-test) of the course. Administered electronically via Language Testing International's website (see <http://www.languagetesting.com>), completion of the OPI costs \$105 per student. This fee includes web-based proctoring (via webcam), scoring by trained OPI scorers, and an official certificate indicating the test-taker's score. Given that an anticipated 20 students will complete the course in Fall 2018, and that each student will complete the OPI twice over the span of the semester (pre- and post-tests), the research team is requesting \$4,200 to cover OPI costs.



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October 4, 2017

Dear SoTL Committee Members,

I am pleased to offer my support for the SoTL grant proposal, “Advanced Oral Proficiency: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Preparing Spanish Teachers”, submitted by Dr. Kristin Davin and Dr. Scott Kissau. In the College of Education, we are very interested in initiatives to improve candidate performance on standardized assessments of content knowledge that can serve as a barrier to licensure. The proposed project has not only the potential to enhance teacher candidate preparation to complete licensure tests, but may also improve graduation rates among aspiring Spanish teacher candidates, and help to alleviate the local and national shortage of qualified Spanish teachers. Further, the project involves collaboration between the College of Education and the Department of Languages and Culture Studies in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. While research has consistently called for interdisciplinary collaboration in both the fields of foreign language education and teacher training, such collaboration remains rare. This project thus serves as a model for others to follow.

I would also like to add that the proposed project has been informed by both Dr. Davin’s and Dr. Kissau’s research focusing on foreign language assessment and teacher proficiency levels, which has been published in top journals in their field. Both faculty members also have a history of using data to expertly guide programmatic decision-making. I expect nothing less of this current initiative, and look forward to reading the results in future publications.



Dr. Ellen McIntyre
Dean, College of Education
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September 11, 2017

Dear SoTL Committee Members,

I am pleased to offer my support for the SoTL grant proposal, “Advanced Oral Proficiency: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Preparing Spanish Teachers”, submitted by Dr. Kristin Davin and Dr. Scott Kissau. In the proposed project, the researchers aim to create a convenient and cost-effective online course to be taken by upper-level Spanish candidates, and in particular current and aspiring Spanish teachers. Interdisciplinary and interactive in nature, the course will focus on enhancing students’ oral communication skills in Spanish, exposing them to the type of language skills and vocabulary they will need as K-12 Spanish teachers, and familiarizing them with the procedures and expectations of the Oral Proficiency Interview. In the Department of Languages and Culture Studies, we are very interested in initiatives to improve the oral proficiency of our students. We are also excited about the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues in the College of Education to develop a mutually beneficial online course that should attract students, enhance oral communication skills, and better prepare aspiring teachers. I believe the proposed course, focusing on oral proficiency, will be attractive to many students, and could potentially influence the method of delivery of other upper-level language classes in the future. I enthusiastically support this project for SoTL funding.

Ann González

Dr. Ann Gonzalez
Chair, Department of Languages and Culture Studies
UNC Charlotte

Project Narrative

A. Specific Aims

To align with accreditation standards for nationally recognized foreign language teacher training programs (see ACTFL, 2002), since January 1, 2010, all aspiring Spanish, French, and German teachers admitted to the Graduate Certificate in Foreign Language Education (<http://mdsk.uncc.edu/academic-programs/graduate-certificatemat-foreign-language-education-0>) in the College of Education at UNC Charlotte must complete the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) in their intended language of instruction and demonstrate Advanced Low proficiency, or higher, in order to complete their student teaching internship and obtain a K-12 license to teach. Widely utilized across the United States by foreign language teacher training programs (Hammadou Sullivan, 2011; Malone & Montee, 2010), the OPI is a nationally recognized, standardized test that assesses an individual's oral communication skills in a foreign language. It was developed by the American Council on the Teaching Foreign Languages (ACTFL), and is administered through Language Testing International (LTI). The OPI can be administered in-person, via telephone, or by computer. Regardless of the means of testing, a recording of the interview is analyzed by ACTFL raters who assess the candidate's speaking proficiency based on the descriptors in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* (ACTFL, 2012), resulting in one of 11 proficiency level ratings ranging from Novice Low to Distinguished.

Since implementation in 2010, 44% of UNC Charlotte foreign language teacher candidates (primarily Spanish teachers: >70%) have been unsuccessful at meeting the benchmark score of Advanced Low on the OPI, as required by national accreditation standards (see ACTFL, 2002), most falling one level below the standard (Intermediate High). Unfortunately, these troublesome numbers reflect national trends. Approximately half of all foreign language teacher candidates

across the country, struggle to demonstrate such a high degree of proficiency on the OPI (see literature review).

To prepare candidates to successfully complete the OPI, since 2010, foreign language teacher training programs in the College of Education at UNC Charlotte have required all teacher candidates to complete an advanced foreign language course in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Exit surveys of program completers, however, have frequently suggested that while candidates find the advanced content courses, focusing on literature and culture, to be interesting, they are often lecture-based, inconvenient and costly (on-campus courses), and do little to enhance communication skills or to prepare candidates for the reality of K-12 foreign language classrooms.

At a time of declining enrollment in teacher training programs and critical shortage of qualified foreign language teachers (Nerenz, 2014; Rhodes & Pufahl, 2009), we cannot afford to lose so many aspiring foreign language teachers. Research is needed to investigate how to better support teacher candidates in the successful completion of this high stakes assessment. In response, a collaborative team of faculty from both the Cato College of Education (Dr. Kissau) and the Department of Languages and Culture Studies (Dr. Davin) in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences propose to create a convenient and cost-effective online course (distance education) and investigate its impact on candidate performance. Aligned with both the SoTL focus on increasing student retention, progression, and graduation rates, and the mission of the Cato College of Education to prepare highly effective professionals who have a positive impact on children, the course is intended to enhance teacher candidates' content knowledge, and thus increase graduation rates and teaching effectiveness. Interdisciplinary and interactive in nature, the course is to be taken by all aspiring Spanish teachers at UNC Charlotte. The course will

avoid traditional lecture-style instruction, and instead focus on enhancing student oral communication skills in Spanish, exposing them to the type of language skills and vocabulary they will need as K-12 Spanish teachers, and familiarizing them with the procedures and expectations of the OPI. The investigators hypothesize that by completing the course, candidates will 1) feel more confident to successfully complete the OPI and 2) improve their oral proficiency over the course of the semester. More specifically, the investigators seek to answer the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent does completion of the online course affect teacher candidate confidence to communicate orally in Spanish?
- 2) To what extent does completion of the online course affect teacher candidate oral proficiency in Spanish?

In addition to contributing to a much-needed related body of research, the findings could help a greater number of candidates successfully complete the foreign language teacher training program at UNC Charlotte, find employment as a teacher, and help to address the critical shortage of certified foreign language teachers both locally and nationally. Further, implications of the findings could potentially be extended to other foreign language teacher licensure tracks at UNC Charlotte (French and German) and beyond, thus further contributing to the number of qualified foreign language teachers.

B. Literature Review

Candidate Proficiency. Although national standards for foreign language teacher preparation programs have established the Advanced Low rating requirement for commonly taught languages like Spanish, French, and German, numerous studies have demonstrated that this rating is not easily attained by teacher candidates. A study by Swender (2003) analyzed the

official OPI ratings for 501 undergraduate foreign language majors at five American universities in seven different languages. She found that less than half of the test completers (47%) were able to reach Advanced Low. A large-scale study by Swender, Surface, and Hamlyn (2007) reported only slightly higher results, finding that 59.5% of teacher candidates achieved the ACTFL requirement of Advanced Low. More recent research has continued to demonstrate that approximately half of foreign language teacher candidates are able to successfully reach oral proficiency expectations determined by ACTFL. Results of the largest study to date reflected this national trend: Glisan, Swender, and Surface (2013) analyzed the OPI results of 2,881 foreign language teacher candidates of 11 different languages and found that only 54.8% of the test takers met the ACTFL proficiency standard in their language.

Recommendations. Going a step beyond simply reporting teacher candidate performance on the OPI, more recent studies have suggested possible means of improving candidate outcomes. In a study by Kissau (2014) involving 41 teacher candidates who completed the OPI, it was suggested that OPI practice sessions would be helpful in familiarizing candidates with the format of the test as well as the type of questions asked, and would also provide the opportunity to practice interacting in the target language. The researcher suggested the benefits of assessing teacher candidates' proficiency at multiple points across the teacher training program. He argued that completing the OPI only once, and at the end of the program, was too late for several teacher candidates in his study and required two candidates to suspend their studies for an extended period of time while they worked on enhancing their skills. According to Kissau, assessing candidates' knowledge and skills at several points in the program would inform them of their proficiency level, make them aware of areas for improvement, familiarize them with test expectations, possibly reduce related anxiety, and provide further opportunities for interaction.

Research has also recommended that the proficiency-based movement that has been adopted by K-12 language programs in the United States be extended to post-secondary studies, replacing the lecture-based, teacher-centered instruction that is still commonplace in many post-secondary settings. As noted by the Modern Language Association of America (2007), the traditional literature-based curriculum that is commonly found in university foreign language departments may provide cultural insights and hone interpretive reading and presentational writing skills, but does not adequately prepare students to enter the 21st century workforce where they are required to communicate, collaborate, and problem-solve as members of a truly multi-cultural and multilingual society. Comments from foreign language teacher candidates in the previously mentioned study by Kissau (2014) suggested that upper-level language classrooms tend to be lecture-style, where students have little opportunity to interact and hone their oral communication skills. Research in second language teaching and learning has long called for a more interdisciplinary approach to the preparation of foreign language teacher candidates involving collaboration among faculty in post-secondary foreign language and teacher training programs (Kissau, McCullough, Salas, & Pyke, 2011; MLA, 2007). According to Ortega (1999), tension between foreign language faculty with an expertise in literature and faculty in foreign language teacher preparation programs has resulted in the creation of two separate language “camps,” and this tension impedes collaboration.

C. Methods

Informed by the literature described above, and adhering to Quality Matters guidelines, in Spring and Summer 2018 the investigators will work collaboratively to develop an online, interdisciplinary, and interactive course for all aspiring Spanish teachers. To be piloted in Fall 2018, the goals of the course will be to inform students of their current oral language proficiency,

familiarize them with OPI expectations and procedures, and provide iterative opportunities for candidates to enhance their oral communication skills through meaningful and relevant activities for K-12 Spanish teachers. Instruction will avoid the traditional lecture-style, and instead focus on enhancing student oral communication skills in Spanish, exposing them to the type of language skills and vocabulary they will need as K-12 Spanish teachers, and providing them with sustained opportunities to interact in the target language through the use of various forms of technology. Online modules will emphasize opportunities to both hear and speak in the target language through a variety of meaningful collaborative activities that will involve students 1) using authentic Spanish resources (e.g., storybooks, music, newspapers, websites) to co-plan K-12 Spanish lessons with peers that meet the needs of diverse students, 2) delivering lessons to peers and receiving feedback; 3) designing assessments that align with instructional goals, and 4) analyzing samples of student data and discussing trends, student feedback, and next steps with classmates.

D. Evaluation

Participants. All candidates enrolled in the course will be invited to participate in the proposed project. Based on the average number of Spanish teacher candidates enrolled in the College of Education each year, and that Spanish majors both within and outside of UNC Charlotte may be interested in taking a convenient and affordable online course focusing on oral proficiency and teaching methodology, it is estimated that 20 students will enroll in the course. Since the pre- and post-test OPI are course requirements and to be paid via grant funds, it is expected that all 20 candidates will participate. Of the 20, approximately 10 will be randomly selected to participate in follow-up interviews.

Procedures. A mixed methods approach will be used to measure the project's impact. To investigate the extent to which completion of the online course affected 1) teacher candidate confidence to successfully complete the OPI (research question #1), and 2) teacher candidate oral proficiency in Spanish (research question #2), the investigators will collect both quantitative and qualitative data. At the beginning of the course all candidates will complete both the OPI, as a baseline measure of their oral proficiency (pre-test), and an online survey (pre-test) to gauge their confidence to communicate orally in Spanish and successfully complete the OPI. In the final weeks of the course, candidates will once again be asked to complete the OPI and the same online survey to measure change in their oral communication skills and confidence (post-tests). To build upon and possibly explain the quantitative data, qualitative data will also be collected to address Research Question #1 and #2. Once the course has been completed and final grades submitted, the research team will interview a sample of ten candidates who completed it. During the interviews candidates will be asked to describe 1) what impact, if any, the course had on their oral proficiency and confidence in communicating in Spanish, 2) what activities and/or strategies used in the course they found beneficial in enhancing their proficiency and confidence, and 3) what could be done to further enhance their oral proficiency and related confidence.

Data Analysis. In regard to the quantitative data, the investigators will first convert all OPI scores to a numerical rating (i.e., Novice Low = 1, Distinguished = 11) and then calculate and compare total mean OPI and survey item pre- and post-test scores. Simple descriptive statistics will be used when comparing the percentage of course completers who met or exceeded the Advanced Low proficiency expectation with program completers in previous years. With respect to the qualitative data, the researchers will use a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1992) to

examine and compare data collected from the interviews to detect emerging themes that help explain the findings from the quantitative phase of the study.

E. Knowledge Dissemination

The researchers plan to share the findings of this research both locally and internationally. The project's results will first be shared locally with faculty and administration in both the College of Education and the Department of Languages and Culture Studies at UNC Charlotte to inspire future collaborative and interdisciplinary efforts. The investigators will also present project results locally at the 2020 SoTL Showcase and to foreign language teachers and stakeholders from North and South Carolina at the annual fall 2019 conference of the Foreign Language Association of North Carolina (FLANC). In November 2019, the results will also be shared at the national level at the annual conference of the American Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). A manuscript detailing the results of the study will also be developed and submitted to *Foreign Language Annals*, a prestigious, refereed journal with an international readership.

F. Human Subjects

An IRB proposal to conduct this research project will be submitted in January 2018. IRB approval, once granted, will be forwarded.

G. Extramural Funding

The research team plans to submit a grant proposal to the Foreign Language Association of North Carolina (FLANC) in spring 2018 seeking funds to advertise the newly developed course to all aspiring foreign language teachers in North Carolina. FLANC offers small grants to promote and support foreign language instruction in North Carolina. The research team also plans to meet with Denise Bradley-Fluellen, Director of the Office of Research Development and

Management in the College of Education, to explore external funding opportunities for the project to expand this initiative beyond Spanish to other licensure tracks such as French and German.

H. Timeline

Date	Project Task
Spring 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the support of a graduate assistant, collect curriculum resources and investigate online instructional tools
First Summer Session 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend Quality Matter training • Develop the online course
Fall 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot course • Candidates complete pre- and post-OPI and surveys • GA facilitates student registration and completion of OPI • GA begins development of a literature review • Ten candidates participate in semi-structured interviews
Spring 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GA continues to develop literature review. • GA transcribes interviews. • GA begins preparation of conference presentations
Summer 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drs. Davin and Kissau analyze all data, make adjustments to course based on feedback and results, and begin development of manuscript. • Drs. Kissau and Davin finalize conference presentation for FLANC (October) and ACTFL (November) conferences.
Fall 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disseminate results at FLANC (October) and ACTFL (November) conferences

References

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