

## Special Feature

### Where Are We Headed? The Future of the Undergraduate Spanish Curriculum in U.S. Higher Education

Special Session of the 66<sup>th</sup>-Annual Meeting of the  
Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Conference  
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#### Introduction

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The current state of the undergraduate Spanish curriculum in Hispanic Studies offers a complex, challenging, and changing landscape. At the 2015 Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Conference, a special session was convened to assess the state of Hispanic Studies and consider where it is headed. Presenters and audience members worked together to explore curricular and structural issues, business models for language departments, matters related to faculty status and training, student enrollment patterns, directions in scholarly publication, as well as innovative models for instructional materials. The overarching goal was to contribute to the discipline-wide dialogue about the transformation of the Spanish major and Hispanic Studies.

It has been almost a decade since the report from the Modern Language Association (MLA) titled "Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World" that recommended a reevaluation of the language major (2007). The report's goal was (1) to promote an integrated, interdisciplinary curriculum and structure in higher education, and (2) to offer multiple paths to the major that develop translingual and transcultural competence within the context of humanistic learning. The report points to the disassociation between language and literature/culture. In response, many Hispanic Studies

programs are (or have been) reexamining the intersection between language, literature/culture, and disciplines beyond.

This essay collection was also inspired by the upcoming centenary celebration of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) to be held in 2017-18. The AATSP's scholarly journal, *Hispania*, will publish a special centenary issue of "visionary essays" on the future of Spanish and Portuguese. Among the topics to be tackled are: What will the future Spanish major look like? What will it mean to be a Hispanist in the future? How will the discipline define itself in fifty years?

Therefore, in the spirit of reexamination, reevaluation, renewal, and reinvention, Ronald J. Friis of Furman University and I co-organized the MIFLC panel. It included a select group of academics with experience teaching Spanish in different contexts such as community colleges, small liberal arts colleges, U.S. service academies, large state institutions, and large private universities. The panelists were professors both tenured and non-tenure track, textbook authors, and department administrators to deliver a variety of viewpoints. Each panelist presented a position paper on one aspect of the futuristic subject matter. Seven roundtable participants delivered short papers.<sup>1</sup> Five members contributed and expanded their contributions for this special essay collection on the future of Hispanic Studies and, in particular, the undergraduate Spanish major.

Benjamin Fraser of Eastern Carolina University began by deliberating on the essential redefinition of the discipline and the need for structural reforms to ensure the future of Hispanic Studies. Shannon Polchow of the University of South Carolina Upstate explored the current state of literary studies within the Spanish language major. Alán José of Duke University analyzed the common business model in language departments and suggested sustainable approaches to support the humanities. Ron Friis argued for the development of locally authored instructional materials in place of corporate textbooks to create meaningful classroom experiences for future language learners and faculty members alike. Lastly I shared information about recent

<sup>1</sup> The original panel also included MaryAnn Blitt of the College of Charleston and Salvador Oropesa of Clemson University. Blitt presented a paper on the textbook and its role in basic Spanish language instruction, and Oropesa discussed Clemson's two Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) undergraduate degree models that propose pathways to curricular reform.

submission patterns to *Hispania* that provided additional evidence of the subject matter transformation in Hispanic Studies. The second portion of the special session was reserved for discussion. The audience of about fifty ranged from graduate students to distinguished professors, and their contributions were both intriguing and diverse. Audience participation allowed other experts to weigh in on different aspects of our field's future. A major strand of discussion raised the question of students' interests and implied that student input had not been sufficiently explored to date.

The essays presented here are revised versions of the panelists' papers. The essays will carry the timely discussion forward about the future of Hispanic Studies and the Spanish major.

## On the Future of Hispanic Studies: Disciplinary Challenges

### Benjamin Fraser

*East Carolina University*

The field of Hispanic Studies will increasingly have to deal with challenges I would refer to as 'disciplinary'. These are long-standing and ongoing challenges that stem from the way in which Hispanic Studies has traditionally conceived itself as a discipline. How do linguistics and literature cohere into a single program? Do we specialize only in traditional literary analysis, or are we open to other forms of cultural production: films, graphic novels, visual culture, popular music, digital media? Are we supportive of other methods (cultural studies and digital humanities come quickly to mind)? Do we embrace the role of Hispanic Studies researchers as contributors to interdisciplinary fields such as disability studies, studies of gender and sexuality, science fiction studies, and urban studies? And most importantly, do we allow our Hispanic Studies colleagues to delve fully into other disciplinary formations—that is, to actually do work that has been more traditionally carried out by researchers anchored in departments of anthropology, history, geography, psychology, sociology, and so on?

At the most basic level, the way our field deals with these issues will determine its relationship with a full range of other disciplines: not