

# Incorporating Latinx Studies in the Spanish Major: A Case Study

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## INTRODUCTION

The idea for this article originated with a roundtable panel discussion at the 2021 MIFLC conference. That particular panel was a culmination of seven years of MIFLC panels centered around how to incorporate Latinx Studies into the Spanish major. The first panel was created by Angélica Lozano-Alonso in 2014. We will mention some of the important aspects of the evolution of these panels and will present the content of the 2021 panel with our conclusions.

Furman University hosted the 2014 MIFLC conference.<sup>1</sup> Shortly before the conference, the Modern Languages and Literatures Department at Furman, where the Spanish major is housed, had just undergone an external departmental review. The reviewers suggested that we incorporate more Latinx Studies and culture into our classes.<sup>2</sup> My goal for organizing the 2014 panel was aspirational. I wanted to gather some ideas for how to develop a class for our major.<sup>3</sup> The challenge was how to create a class for the Spanish major when the majority of the texts are written in English. The result led to meaningful professional and teaching opportunities in the following seven years.

As evidenced by the sustained presence of a variety of organized conference sessions at MIFLC, Latinx Studies is a topic that resonates with Spanish professors as there are many opportunities for research, for developing original course offerings, and for service learning.<sup>4</sup> The 2021

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<sup>1</sup> Angélica Lozano-Alonso narrates the evolution of these panels as she has been at the forefront of the organizing effort.

<sup>2</sup> While many of my colleagues at Furman University and I were already incorporating Latinx authors, texts, and visual materials into our classes, and already had established service-learning experiences in our community, we did not have any classes dedicated solely to the Latinx experience. I was already teaching a first-year writing class in English called *Crossing Borders/Rites of Passage* but had not developed any classes for our Spanish major.

<sup>3</sup> For the roundtable in 2014, “Incorporating Latino Culture and Civilization into the Spanish Major,” I invited several scholars whom I knew had expertise in the area. In addition to my participation, the panel included Susan Carvalho, who at the time was interim dean of the Graduate School at the University of Kentucky. It also included Davidson University professor and one of our Furman University Modern Languages and Literatures external reviewers Magdalena Maiz-Peña, and Georgian Court University professor and co-editor of the journal *Label me Latina/o* Professor Kathryn Quinn-Sánchez. It was an excellent conversation that inspired the work that I have done since that meeting.

<sup>4</sup> In the years since the 2014 conference, I have been pleased to see that the panel has been organized by other colleagues at various MIFLC meetings with participants from a variety of institutions. Drs. Kathryn Quinn-Sánchez and Michelle Shaul organized a U.S. Latino Literature panel for the 2015 MIFLC at the College of Charleston with Amrita Das, Betsy Dahms, and Bryan Pearce-Gonzales. At MIFLC 2016, Quinn-Sánchez, Shaul and Das organized two Latinx Studies panels with Eileen Anderson and Bryan Pearce-Gonzales. At the 2017 MIFLC at UNC Wilmington, there were multiple panel discussions on Latinx literature as well as fiction readings by local Latinx authors. Das also organized a MIFLC 2018 panel discussion on Latinx Literature with Naida Saavedra and

MIFLC was also hosted by Furman University, and I proposed revisiting the panel. For the 2021 iteration of the panel, three different colleagues from three other institutions presented on the work that they are doing. Bryan Pearce-Gonzales spoke about his work at Shenandoah University in Virginia, Ana Zapata-Calle and Betsy Dahms discussed their experiences at the University of West Georgia, and I shared about Furman University in South Carolina. We realized that our successes and our challenges vary greatly with the types of institutions where we work, our departments, and the makeup of our local communities. What follows is a case study of our experiences at three different institutions in three very different communities. We hope this article informs colleagues interested in incorporating Latinx Studies into the Spanish major at their institutions.

#### CASE STUDY 1: FURMAN UNIVERSITY

Furman University is a private, top-fifty liberal arts institution in the United States located in Greenville, South Carolina. Furman University was founded in 1826 and prides itself in being the oldest private university in the state (“Our History”). Though the university was originally founded as a men’s academy and theological institute, between 1933 and 1938 it merged with Greenville Women’s College. The original campus was situated downtown until it moved to the suburbs of the city between 1958 and 1961. In 1992 the university severed its ties with the South Carolina Baptist Convention, and since then it is no longer affiliated with any religious institution.

We have an average enrollment of 2,600 students, primarily made up of undergraduate education, with three small graduate programs (Master of Arts and Education Specialists, Master of Science in Chemistry, Master of Science in Community Engaged Medicine and a Master of Arts in Strategic Design). Undergraduate education and liberal arts are at the heart of our mission. Each student has an individualized pathway that is integrated with their professional and academic goals and supported by

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Brenci Patiño. At the 2019 MIFLC hosted by Auburn University, there were several panels that incorporated analyses of the Latinx experience, but there was no panel strictly designed around pedagogical approaches to the Latinx experience. There was no 2020 conference due to the coronavirus pandemic. We would like to give a special thank you to Dr. Das for helping us gather the information about MIFLC Latinx Studies themed panels.

mentoring and various opportunities for engaged learning from study away<sup>5</sup> to research. The strategic vision of the Furman Advantage (TFA) is to “prepare students for lives of purpose and accelerated career and community impact” (“The Furman Advantage”). Another unique aspect of the institution is that its largest student organization is the Heller Service Corps, which places student volunteers with 60 nonprofit organizations. Service is prioritized as a core value of the institution and the student body. The mission statement and student interest in service work have uniquely positioned the Spanish major as students develop a tangible skill to use professionally, cultivate their ability to work in a global world with cultural competency, and participate in meaningful service-learning opportunities with our region’s growing Hispanic community.

All students at Furman University are required to take at least one semester of a language course, but up to three semesters if they have no language experience. If they have studied a particular language, all incoming students are required to take a placement test in that language. Depending on the size of the incoming class, we have 400-500 students take the placement exam in Spanish. On average, about 15% of those students place into conversation and composition, the first required class for the major. Because of the small class sizes and the quality of their experiences, students who take that required class often end up choosing to major in Spanish. On average we have about 25 students graduate with a Spanish major each year. The major is made up of nine required courses, a 36-credit total that allows students to double major in another field. While students have to complete 64 credits of general education requirements, up to twelve of those credits (the equivalent of three classes) can be completed through the major. We have required Spanish major classes that also count for credits in foreign language,<sup>6</sup> textual analysis, world cultures, human behaviors, visual and performing arts, and writing-research intensive courses. In addition, we are supportive of students who want to double major as we find it enriches the liberal arts experience and helps students to set themselves apart in their individualized pathway. We do not offer a minor because at our institution minors are not offered in major fields of study; rather, they are interdisciplinary. We do offer a

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<sup>5</sup> Furman University uses the term *study away* to refer to international education and other off-campus residential opportunities that engage with global cultures.

<sup>6</sup> This only applies to students who place into or above Spanish 215 Intermediate Conversation and Composition.

recently renamed “Latin American and Latinx Studies” minor. The minor is made up of four classes for a total of sixteen credits. All students must complete the Latin American and Latinx Studies capstone seminar and the other three courses must represent Latin American or Latinx Studies designated classes from at least two departments. For many Spanish majors, up to eight of the credits can come from the major. The courses within the major that focus on Latinx Studies are Spanish 260: Hispanics in the United States and Spanish 466: United States Latino/a Studies. Incorporating Latinx Studies into the Latin American Studies minor was an important step in raising the visibility of the field of study on our campus.

Our major is housed within the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, which also offers German and French majors. Japanese, Chinese, Greek, and Latin are also offered as majors and are housed in other departments. We have many colleagues who are tenured or on a tenure-track pathway to teach these languages. Spanish is the most robust section because it serves the bulk of the courses offered for general education requirements and has the most majors. We have twelve tenured or tenure-track faculty with two adjunct positions, and we are currently hiring for two tenure-track positions. We are fortunate in this era, when many humanities departments are struggling to stay afloat on the national stage, that our experiences at Furman University do not reflect those national trends.

Our department is well-respected on campus as is evidenced by our regular leadership positions at the institutional level, on university committees, and various programs that are important to our university. In addition, our current dean of faculty is a Spanish professor and former MIFLC president, which also has raised the visibility of our area of study. Our Spanish majors often win university-wide recognition. For the class of 2021, the two students who won the two most prestigious university awards for exemplifying the values of the institution were Spanish majors, and one of them was a first-generation Mexican-American woman. For the 2021–2022 academic year, the faculty scholarship recipient was a Spanish major. The same student also received the most prestigious university award when he graduated.

Our faculty is made up of seven native speakers, and those who are not native speakers have superior-level language skill in Spanish. In recent years we have hired faculty who have grown up bilingual and bicultural, which also helps to enrich our section. In my twenty years at Furman

University, I have been the only Chicana professor in our department and oftentimes the only one on campus. I was born and raised in Colorado when the Chicano student movement was thriving in the 1970s. My father was Chicano and my mother was Mexican, so I grew up bilingual and bicultural. I share my personal background because my Chicano history and identity were an important part of my education both in the home and in college. My father was one of the first Chicano professors at the University of Colorado, and my mother has dedicated much of her professional life to improving the graduation rate of high-risk Mexican-immigrant and Mexican-American high school students and to helping those graduates pursue their college educations. Both of my parents became experts in heritage-language learners.<sup>7</sup> I also pursued my graduate studies in New York, where I had the opportunity to work with the Northeastern Latinx community, but moving to South Carolina was the first time that I lived somewhere that the Latinx presence was new to the history of the region.

Teaching Latinx Studies in a private institution is very different from my experiences as an undergraduate student at the University of Colorado, where the student union had murals of Chicano leaders and students held a hunger strike demanding an Ethnic Studies department when I was in college. In contrast, for many Furman University students, the Latinx experience is not part of their lived realities. While this could be disheartening, I love exposing my students to this field of study and teaching them about the people that surround them. I often tell stories about my own family and my own experiences to help them to connect with the material. Many of our Anglo students come from affluent backgrounds, and I appreciate the opportunity to teach them about an aspect of the United States that they do not know and to help them become advocates for the Spanish-speaking community. While many of them love the idea of using their language in a Spanish-speaking country, and we have several faculty-led study abroad programs for them to do so, teaching them about the Latinx community in the US and introducing them Latinx Studies is a reminder that they can find experiences to practice their language in their very own communities

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<sup>7</sup> My father, Anthony G. Lozano, co-edited *Teaching Spanish to the Hispanic Bilingual: Issues, Aims and Methods*. Both he and my mother, Leticia Alonso de Lozano, contributed chapters to the book.

As in many other places in the Southeast, the Latinx community is growing in the Greenville County area. According to 2020 census data, 19% of the population in the US is Hispanic. In Greenville County, 11% of census respondents identified as Hispanic. While this is less than the national average, since the last census, there has been a 59% increase in Hispanic and Latino residents in Greenville County. White Horse Road, which is near Furman University, has a large number of Hispanic residents and, according to the 2020 census, an 82% diversity index (“Quick Facts: Greenville”). At Furman there has also been an increase in Latinx students. In the incoming classes between 2018 and 2020, there has been incremental growth each year: 4.4%, 6%, and 7.6% of the incoming classes identified as Hispanic. In the fall of 2021, we had 68 Spanish majors, nine of whom identified as Hispanic, which accounted for 13% of our majors. While our overall enrollment is below the regional average for the Hispanic community, the number of majors who identify as Hispanic is proportionally greater than the regional average. While we do not have enough heritage learners to have a dedicated heritage-learners’ course, we welcome our heritage learners in our Spanish classes. We find that including these students in our classes models our institution’s goals of inclusiveness. In addition, our classes are often a space where many of these first-generation students feel welcomed and understood and where they can build their confidence. As a department, we also appreciate the ways that their particular regional accents, linguistic registers, cultural knowledge, and lived experiences enrich the classroom experience for everyone.

For many of our Latinx students, in particular if they are first-generation college students, undocumented students, or DACA students, Furman’s student body, made up primarily of Anglo students from privileged backgrounds, can be intimidating and surprising when compared to their previous experiences. Though we offer need-based tuition discounts and a multitude of free resources for academic support, Latinx students report sometimes feeling isolated because the majority of their classmates come from very different socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, South Carolina is one of three states that prohibits undocumented students from attending their public universities. DACA students can attend state universities but do not receive in-state tuition or state financial aid; thus, they often look to private institutions to be able to attend college since they can often receive more scholarship funding. Oftentimes, these DACA and undocumented students will share their citizenship status with

their classmates, but if they are not comfortable doing so, this also adds to their sense of isolation. I see my role in the classroom as a way to help create relationships between students of different backgrounds. My students who are US citizens are often surprised to learn about South Carolina's restrictive rules for undocumented and DACA students at our public universities and are outraged on behalf of their classmates because they value and esteem them as their peers.

In the years since that first roundtable, I developed a 200-level course called Spanish 260: Hispanics in the United States that can count as one of two civilization courses required for the Spanish major. This class has been offered every third semester since 2018; in two of those semesters, the demand has been such that we had to offer a second section in the same term. Since its creation, a total of 75 students have taken the course. Another course that contributes to Latinx Studies in the Spanish major is Spanish 466: United States Latino/a Studies. This offering received Humanities Development Funds to be developed by one of my colleagues and was approved as a course for many years, but because of staffing demands, we were not able to offer it for the first time until I taught it in the spring of 2020. This course is a 400-level culture class that can count towards the major. Our department sees the value in these courses, and making them part of the major requirement options has led to their success.

The 200-level course focuses solely on the Hispanics in the United States. The decision of whether or not to call the course Latinos in the United States or Hispanics came down ultimately to the decision that we offer a Spanish major, so we wanted to focus on Spanish-speaking communities in the US. The challenge was how to set up a course that was focused on civilization in a field where there aren't any dedicated textbooks. The other challenge was that the majority of primary texts about the Latinx experience are written in English. Thankfully, my colleagues were supportive of offering a class where many of our readings are in English but our class discussions and writing assignments are in Spanish. As I explain to our students, in our field as literary scholars we are often reading primary texts in Spanish and using critical texts in English, and many of us write in English about Spanish-language texts, so translating back and forth between languages is quite common.

My class is divided into four units. We focus on the three largest US Hispanic communities (Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans and Cuban Americans) and we study the local Hispanic community for the fourth unit. For their textbook students use *The Latino Reader* and Ilan Stavans's *Latino*



*USA: A Cartoon History*. Class is a combination of discussing historical events that have shaped and impacted each particular group and then discussing a text that is representative of that era. I also regularly use images from the era to help students visualize what was happening. I rely on images to help my students to practice their Spanish by having them describe in great detail what they see and then pushing them to analyze its significance. For example, after reading about the *soldaderas* in an excerpt from Leonor Villegas de Magón's *The Rebel*, we study the contrasting political images of Rosie the Riveter and Chicano Artist Robert Valadez's "Rosita" which is a painting of a *soldadera* in the same pose as Rosie and with the text "Sí Se Puede."

For the unit focusing on our local community, I invite community leaders that in some way serve the Latinx population to share their stories and to tell us about how they serve. In addition to these four units, my students complete 20 hours of service learning. The bulk of students work with an aftercare program that serves Hispanic children along the White Horse corridor that is near our university, but a few students work with ESL students in our local public schools or with nonprofits, such as an organization called Spanish Writers. An important part of the success of service-learning experiences is regular reflection essays on the work that they are doing. Students must go beyond summarizing the work they have done. A successful reflection asks questions and is thoughtful about the significance of their observations. One of the big themes is that the children they tutor often struggle in their reading skills, so as a class we consider what social factors may contribute to literacy and what consequences a lower literacy rate may have for the Spanish-speaking community. As their final project, students prepare a pitch where they imagine that they are requesting funding from the Greenville Chamber of Commerce to fund a social entrepreneurship project that serves a need they have identified in the local Latinx community. Students must think about how they might use what they are learning in a real-world setting. The goal is for them to see themselves as leaders and to use the knowledge they have acquired from learning about history and local community to address a need. Our invited community partners all share potential professional paths that students may pursue, but the final social entrepreneur-focused project helps them to see themselves as possible changemakers. If there are any standout projects, students have the opportunity to participate in our Paladin Pitch Competition, where students compete for \$10,000 to secure funding and support to make their entrepreneurial plans a reality.

Community engagement is a way for students to study and learn from the community. While we may not have a text to teach us about the present-day community, we have a living and breathing context all around us. Service learning and community engagement are also important in Spanish 305: Advanced Composition and Conversation. Students have assignments to go out into the community and do four ethnographic studies about four types of spaces occupied by the Hispanic community, such as a grocery store, a public park, a flea market, and a restaurant. This forces them to consider how Spanish may be used in public spaces and to look carefully at how we construct meaning, and it leads to thoughtful conversations about who occupies which spaces and what that tells us about our communities. Figuring out how to complete service learning during our university-imposed COVID-19 restrictions was a big challenge. While the class was offered in a hybrid form (some students were physically in the classroom while some attended online), we were not allowed to send students into our community. In lieu of site visits, students attended virtual events (a museum in a Spanish-speaking country, a Mexican play, and Day of the Dead celebrations). For their fourth community engagement experience, students used video technology to interview employees of organizations that serve the Spanish-speaking community and published articles written in Spanish about those leaders on a news site for Spanish speakers.

Another way that students engaged with the community beyond service learning is that from April to October of 2021, the city of Greenville hosted the “Wings of the City” exhibit. It is a public art installation of nine sculptures made by world-renowned Mexican artist Jorge Marin that has been traveling to cities around the world since 2013. The artist, the Mexican Consulate in Raleigh, NC, and the Hispanic Alliance sponsored an Instagram competition for community members to interact with the art. As a community engagement assignment for my 200-level course, students went to downtown Greenville. They explored the exhibit, wrote a reflection about the experience, and participated in the Instagram competition. Imagine our surprise when all three of the winners were Furman University Spanish majors who had participated in the competition because it was a class assignment. Not only was this a great opportunity for the students, but it also allowed them to be featured on a larger stage when their photos were posted on Jorge Marin’s Instagram page, and when the Furman University website and *SC Greenville Digital* published stories about their win.

In the fall of 2021, I again taught two sections of Spanish 260. The national conversations about the Black Lives Matter movement and the role of systemic injustices in the lived experiences of non-white communities, in conjunction with Furman University's Seeking Abraham Project, have added a new depth to our class conversations. As explained on the Furman University webpage, "Inspired by Abraham, a former slave of James C. Furman (the university's first president), the 'Seeking Abraham' project investigates Furman University's historical connections with slavery . . . As Furman grows to become an even more public-serving community partner, we move away from ignorance or indifference, to put truth, understanding, and repair as our preeminent values" ("Seeking Abraham Project"). This work towards acknowledging painful truths has added greatly to students' willingness to face difficult parts of the Latinx community's experiences in US history and in the present.

Working with the community is time-consuming because we do not have a support system on campus to sort out all of the logistics. It also requires a big network of contacts that I did not have when I first moved to the area twenty years ago. Much of the additional work includes communicating and coordinating with students and our stakeholders to make certain that students and community partners understand their responsibilities and are fulfilling them well. That said, it has led to some of the most meaningful and impactful teaching experiences for me and learning experiences for my students.

In the spring of 2020, I taught the upper-level course titled Spanish 466: United States Latino/a and Studies to 16 students. One of the challenges we face in our department is that students are not as passionate about literature classes as those of us who are trained as literary scholars. In response to that we have developed advanced level culture and cultural studies classes. For this 400-level course, we focused on Latinos in television. We traced the representation of Latinx characters from the 1950s to the present. For sitcoms, we began with *I Love Lucy* and ended with the 2017 remake of *One Day at a Time*. We read Gustavo Pérez Firmat's *Life on the Hyphen's* analysis of the show. We also used Isabel Molina-Guzmán's *Latinas & Latinos on TV: Colorblind Comedy in the Post-racial Network Era* as required reading. We found that the history of these shows also paralleled important historical events for the Latinx community and served as a type of cultural artifact that documented the era that was represented in the shows. The class allowed us to see the evolution of how the Latinx community has been represented in the

popular medium of television, but it also allowed us to study the evolution of sitcoms and dramas. We discussed the role of laugh tracks and what happens when we get rid of a laugh track. We learned how to read a visual text critically and often took time to deconstruct a character's appearance or analyze stills from the shows we were studying. We considered how the critical text discussed a view of President Barack Obama's presidency ushering in an era of a post-racial world as defined by our course reading of *Latinas and Latinos on TV*, and how that idea of a post-racial world was changed by Donald Trump's presidency. Students were responsible for leading class discussion and finding critical readings of their television show to post on our course website, summarizing for their classmates, and helping them lead their class discussion. This assignment also helped to build a class bibliography of resources for students to consult for their final projects and provided a theoretical framework for class discussions.

As a certified ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interviewer, one of the things that I try to keep in mind as I develop class assignments is how to provide multiple ways for students to practice their Spanish. In order to help my students reflect on the material we are studying and grow in their linguistic abilities, there are a variety of assignments that allow them to practice their intermediate, advanced, and superior skills. I may show a promotional photograph of the series, have them describe in great detail everything that they see, and then encourage them to move from that description to analysis. So, while one goal is covering the course content, we also seek ways to develop activities where the content helps students to progress in their language abilities. We found that sitcoms and dramas often address important social issues of their era and this allowed us to consider those issues with a gaze from the present, to connect those issues with present-day values, and to have more profound analytical questions and discussions that are representative of an advanced- or superior-level speaker.

Furman University has been able to incorporate the study of the Latinx community into the Spanish major due to the university's strategic vision that values community engagement and as a result of the Spanish language faculty's support for adding the field Latinx Studies to our major. We see its value as an academic field and as a way to welcome the experiences of our heritage learners. It also allows us to study and support our local community and permits our students to use their Spanish locally in real settings. Our large department and plentiful course offerings also helped us as we created these courses.

## CASE STUDY 2: SHENANDOAH UNIVERSITY

Shenandoah University is a private institution of higher education located in the Northern Shenandoah Valley in Winchester, Virginia. Founded in 1877 as a seminary in Dayton, Virginia, the institution has gone through several designations, such as Shenandoah College, Shenandoah College and Conservatory, and finally Shenandoah University beginning in 1991. The institution relocated to Winchester, Virginia, in 1960 and remains there to this day.

Winchester is an exurb of the greater Washington D.C. metropolitan area. A thriving small city, Winchester is located about 70 miles northwest of Washington D.C. and is considered to be one of the more racially diverse communities in the Commonwealth of Virginia. According to the 2020 census, non-Hispanic Whites made up 66% of the population, while Hispanics made up 17.8% and Blacks/African Americans made up 10.1% of the population (“Quick Facts: Winchester city”).

Currently Shenandoah University is considered to be a predominantly white institution (PWI), a designation that is reflected in both the faculty and student body. According to Shenandoah University’s Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, in the fall of 2020 the racial/ethnic makeup of its student body was 53% White, 9% Black/African-American, 5% Asian and 1% Hispanic/Latino. Surprisingly, the percentage of “Unknown” is identified as 28% (“Quick Statistics,” Shenandoah University). It is unlike most other private universities of its size (it counts a little over 4,000 students) as it comprises six distinct colleges, most of which are professionally oriented. The Department of Languages and Cultural Studies, in which all language courses are held, is housed in the College of Arts and Sciences, which counts some 900+ students. Within our department, we offer courses in Spanish, French, German, American Sign Language, and Mandarin. Spanish is the only language in which students are able to earn a Bachelor’s degree or a minor area of study.

Ethnic studies programs have not existed traditionally at Shenandoah University. The African-American and Global Black Studies (AAG) program was only launched in 2021, and beyond that, there are no other academic programs that focus on a particular ethnic heritage or background. Rigorous approaches to Latinx Studies exist within the curriculum of the Spanish major, but there is nothing formalized at the level of the basic language program. At this level, which comprises the

first four semesters of language study, if Latinx experiences, voices, and issues are highlighted, they are done so at the sole discretion of the professor. This lack of institutional structure requires a certain level of creativity on the part of faculty who wish to highlight Latinx issues and/or voices. This happens regularly among the Spanish faculty at Shenandoah University, but there is a lack of cohesion in terms of what is taught and how it is taught.

There is strong support at the university for certain initiatives that focus on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), however. Highlighting traditionally marginalized experiences and voices in the basic language classroom is a feasible and, in my experience, productive method to foster inclusion and equity. Simply asking students the uncomplicated question, “¿Quién es tu persona favorita, y por qué?” or “¿Cómo será tu vida en diez años?” can foster some very dynamic conversations and highlight the lived experiences and future aspirations of all students in the class.

In the advanced Spanish curriculum at Shenandoah University, there exists the possibility to make the Latinx experience the centerpiece of the course. Most advanced courses, be it a course on conversation, composition, literature, film studies, or even a senior capstone project, will incorporate at least one unit (if not more) on the Latinx experience. As the only (to my knowledge) self-identifying Chicana citizen at my institution, I actively design lesson plans that incorporate marginalized experiences and voices. In addition, I have designed a course for the Spanish major and minor titled “Readings in Chicana Literature and Culture.” In this course, the Chicana experience is not only highlighted but serves as the main focus of study. Most recent iterations of this course have been cross-listed with other departments, making it possible for students to take the course for English credit or Gender and Women’s Studies credit. The course description from the syllabus reads as follows:

This course will focus on specific major socio-historical developments that fostered various and varying conceptualizations of Chicano masculinity and the ways in which each writer gives a voice to those conceptualizations. Issues of ethnicity, gender, race and sexual orientation will be analyzed at length from a critical thinking perspective in order to gain an insight into the role of this literature as part of the United States’ multicultural literary canon.

Instruction will be bilingual. Though all of the readings are mostly in English, each novel will incorporate the structure, syntax and

vocabulary unique to the Chicanx experience, thus reflecting the linguistic reality of this particular cultural group. In order to promote critical thinking and foster an understanding of major components of Chicanx literature and the theories of Masculinities Studies, the class will commit to a daily discussion regarding the information studied.

This is a Literary/Cultural Studies/Gender Studies course that will focus on the writings of an important group of American citizens—Chicano/as. This particular cultural experience is formed from particular perceptions of the conflict and confluence of U.S. Anglo and Mexican Hispanic cultures. While this course focuses mainly on the genre of the novel, we will discuss writings by this community that cover all the major literary genres: essay, poetry, short story, novel and drama, as well as folk literature.

In my experience teaching this course, students are highly motivated by and engaged with the readings. This is demonstrated when thinking critically about issues of race, gender, culture, and sexual orientation, among others. I have received anecdotal feedback from students that this is their favorite class because it is the only one at Shenandoah University in which they are encouraged to engage with these types of issues on a daily basis. One student remarked that she would have never met a Chicanx citizen or learned about Chicanx culture had it not been for taking this class.

As I am writing this article, I am preparing for a meeting with the Director of the African-American and Global Black Studies program to design a course offering focusing on Afro-Cuban and Afro-Cuban-American literature and culture. By taking part in the interdisciplinary design of these types of courses, I am actively creating a curricular experience that will serve to introduce some students at Shenandoah University to Latinx experiences and voices without ever taking a Spanish course or receiving Spanish credit.

Service learning is also a curricular requirement for Spanish majors and minors at Shenandoah University. Minors require four credit hours of service-learning activity while majors require six credit hours. These courses are designated by the generic title “Internship in Spanish,” which allows students to be creative and design their own service-learning activities. While in the past the main focus of these activities has been on advancing the linguistic capacities of the majors and minors, a corollary objective of these courses is to expose students to the greater Latinx

population of Winchester, Virginia, through service. In this way students come to have real-world interactions with and knowledge of the Latinx community here, and many form lasting friendships with members of that community that endure beyond their years of study at Shenandoah.

Some of the local institutions where students are placed for their service learning courses are the Kids Club (formerly known as the Boys and Girls Club), the local public school system (fortunately for the community, Winchester Public Schools offers a dual-language program at the primary education level), Literacy Volunteers (a non-profit organization that promotes literacy for underserved populations) and Sinclair Health Clinic (a low-cost, high-quality healthcare clinic that seeks to remove obstacles to quality healthcare for marginalized communities). Anecdotally, many students report that their most rewarding experiences as a Shenandoah University student stem from their service-learning activities at these institutions, and several students have continued working with these organizations after graduation.

Another approach to incorporating Latinx experiences and voices into the classroom is to design a course plan that purposefully draws on the voices of those students who identify as Latinx. As an example, when teaching the previously mentioned course on Chicana literature and Masculinity Studies, I often will encourage my Latinx students to share their lived experiences and cultural insights with the rest of the class. In my experience, it is invaluable to the class dynamic to have these students share what cultural lessons they are taught by their communities in terms of what it means to be a man or a woman. It is my hope that highlighting the experiences of Latinx students in class will also contribute to these students developing a deeper sense of belonging on a college campus, a higher level of self-esteem, and a stronger sense of self-confidence. While I have no formal data or metrics to share to support this claim, I do recognize a tangible sense of engagement on the part of Latinx students who recognize that their lived experiences are valued within the curriculum.

More often than not, the shared experiences that are revealed during these classroom discussions create bonds between students and, I believe, even serve a therapeutic service for Latinx students who might not identify with the issues that face members of other communities. These bonds seem to be quite strong, as students who choose to major or minor in Spanish tend to become a close-knit cohort of learners who socialize frequently with each other outside of class. In this way, the study of Spanish becomes



a catalyst for building lasting relationships and community within the student body, and particularly so for those students who identify as Latinx. These students typically keep in touch with and support each other even after they have graduated.

It is curious to note, however, that the Latinx students who make up these cohorts of Spanish majors and minors are almost all women learners. Currently, Latinx male learners make up only a small percentage (less than 10%) of all the majors and minors of Spanish. This leads one to conclude that Latinx male learners at Shenandoah University are enrolled in programs that likely have no offerings that highlight the Latinx experience. I have no data that reveals whether or not the perspectives and voices of these students are highlighted in the course offerings of other disciplines.

At Shenandoah University, as is likely the case at most universities, there are conversations taking place at the curricular level regarding what the future might hold for Latinx studies on this campus. One idea that has been shared recently is that perhaps Latinx Studies and African-American and Global Black Studies might join together to offer more courses under an “Ethnic Studies” banner. I am currently conceptualizing a class about being Black in Latin America that could meet the needs of both Spanish students and of those enrolled in the AAG program. The creation of this course would amplify the scope of those students who might be introduced to Latinx Studies before they graduate, adding to the already existing offerings in history, gender studies, and English. The likelihood that such an endeavor would be long-lasting is minimal, however, as the existence of these courses is heavily dependent on my presence as a professor willing to design and teach such courses here. Upon my departure from Shenandoah University, whether that be as a result of another opportunity elsewhere or retirement, these particular courses might not be taught again.

While Shenandoah University has welcomed my initiatives to incorporate Latinx Studies into the Spanish major and into the Gender and Women’s Studies curriculum, there exists a real lack of institutional support that would perpetuate these curricular offerings. Perhaps, in the present moment, we are beginning to have conversations that will lead to a more permanent status for Latinx Studies at Shenandoah University.

### CASE STUDY 3: UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA

Founded in 1906, the University of West Georgia is a comprehensive regional state university that, in 2021, boasts more than 13,400 students and 85 degree programs. The University of West Georgia (UWG) has campuses in Carrollton, Douglasville, and Newnan, Georgia. UWG's main campus is located in Carrollton, GA, a town of approximately 26,570 residents that is 45 minutes west of Atlanta. According to data from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment, in 2020, the student body was 68% female, 35% Black or African American, 13% Hispanic/Latino, 50% Caucasian/White and 2% two or more races or unknown/not reported ("Quick Facts: Georgia"). Admissions at UWG employs a dedicated Hispanic recruiter who organizes a Hispanic/Latino Ambassador program. Students identifying as Hispanic/Latino made up 8% of the first-time full-time freshman class in Fall 2020 (up from 6.7% in Fall 2016) ("Composition"). This increase mirrors an increase in the Latinx population in the state of Georgia. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, 8.1% of Georgians speak Spanish at home (more than 800,000 speakers across the state), up from 7.4% in 2010 (650,000 speakers) ("Language Spoken at Home"). Georgia is another of the few states that do not allow DACA students to enroll with in-state tuition, which affects the Latinx population at our university. The university is able to issue in-state tuition waivers to some individuals, but the state policy limits higher education for DACA recipients. Once enrolled at UWG, Latinx students are supported by a multicultural achievement program that provides a Latino student outreach initiative and awards the Goizueta Scholarship to first year Hispanic/Latino students. UWG also houses two Greek organizations geared towards Latinx students, the Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority and the Lambda Theta Phi Latin Fraternity.

After the 2020–2021 reorganization by the current UWG administration, the Spanish major and minor on campus are housed in the International Languages and Cultures program that is part of the Department of English, Film, Languages and Performing Arts. The International Languages and Cultures program offers majors and minors in Spanish, French, and German, as well as a Global Language and Cultures certificate and a K-12 teaching certification in Spanish and French. Language requirements have been reduced at UWG in recent years as some programs (Anthropology, Psychology) have added a Bachelor of

Science option to their offerings, requiring only three semesters of language study instead of four. Other programs such as Mass Communications have reduced their language requirements to two semesters and do not require that the two classes be in the same language. There are also ongoing discussions about reducing language requirements in the core curriculum for all majors, as well as reducing language requirements in other traditional humanities disciplines such as history and English. Needless to say, this trend is alarming, both for the longevity of the International Languages and Cultures program and for students who benefit from language study.

The International Languages and Cultures program allows students to take placement exams in each language and offers a credit-by-examination process to buy back credit at a significantly reduced rate for classes students are able to place out of, as a means of validating previous language experience and proficiency. The International Languages and Cultures program also actively recruits double majors and waives some requirements to make this option attractive to students.

The Spanish degree requires eleven classes beyond core area requirements. This major includes discipline-specific courses and three semesters of a second language (French or German). Students are required to take Spanish Composition, Introduction to Hispanic Literature, either Spanish or Latin American Culture and Civilization, Advanced Language Skills and a senior capstone course. All other major courses are electives; however, they are required to take two discipline-specific writing courses. This program also offers a teaching certification track for students with different requirements for certification.

In terms of incorporating Latinx Studies into the curriculum, special topics courses have been offered at various times (SPAN 4785: Curanderismo in Spring 2021, SPAN 4785: Latinx Carrollton in Spring 2020, SPAN 4205: Gloria Anzaldúa: Theories, Politics and Transformation in Spring 2018, and SPAN 4785: Latino/Chicano Literatures: Negotiating Identity in Fall 2013). These courses have received positive student evaluations but can only be offered irregularly within the faculty rotation of teaching required courses and special topics courses as well as staffing the language sequence that supports the core curriculum.

While the city of Carrollton is predominantly Caucasian/White, the town does boast anywhere from 10-15 Hispanic-owned businesses (restaurants, stores, taquerías, pupuserías, etc.). In an effort to have UWG

Spanish students engage with the local Latinx community, we organized a weekly Spanish class for Latinx youth at the local Neva Lomason Memorial Library in the fall of 2016. Students in upper-level Spanish classes had an extracurricular requirement built into their class syllabi, where one option was to attend the Spanish classes at the library twice during the semester. This endeavor was supported by the chair of the department, who allocated funds to purchase materials, but was met with some skepticism by other Spanish faculty members. Due to varying Spanish-language abilities, the local Latinx youth that attended these sessions required one-to-one or small group instruction. This was complicated by the lack of consistency in the university students, as they would attend two sessions to complete the requirement and then two other students would appear. Additionally, most of the Latinx youth came from the same extended family, and if one had to miss a session, they all missed the session that week. In terms of positive outcomes, the Latinx youth did start incorporating more spoken Spanish into daily use. One UWG student, who was also pursuing teaching certification, used her experience at the library to write a research paper for her senior capstone project on the difficulties of language acquisition for people on the autism spectrum and later presented this research at the Undergraduate Research Symposium.

Taking the lesson learned from the extracurricular activity approach for all upper-level Spanish classes, we applied to be Faculty Fellows with the Center for Diversity and Inclusion in 2019. This support allowed the faculty to develop a course entitled “Latinx Carrollton,” which was offered as a pilot course accommodating only four students with a community-based learning component. The Faculty Fellow support also allowed the faculty to solidify community contacts and develop a weekly Spanish class for Latinx youth and a weekly English as a second-language class at a local Hispanic church. We thought having a dedicated community partner would facilitate more Latinx participation in the classes.<sup>8</sup> While this endeavor did elicit departmental support, this course was taught as an overload for both professors. We had one meeting on campus to discuss readings related to the Latinx experience in Spanish, specifically *El libro de los americanos desconocidos* by Christina Henríquez, taught in Spanish translation to satisfy our colleagues’ need that the class be taught in

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<sup>8</sup> Even though church leaders were willing to help with retention efforts, several factors, including weather, the slow learning process, and the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic, impacted the retention of community members.

Spanish with Spanish-language materials. We also had one meeting a week at the church where half the students would teach Spanish and the other half would teach English; the two groups would then switch at midterm to give all students the experience of teaching both English to mostly Latinx adults and Spanish to mostly Latinx youth. The number of participants and the participants themselves varied every week. In general, there were more children than adults. Sometimes we would have 10-12 children and 6-9 adults in attendance before the project was cut short by the global coronavirus pandemic.

Efforts to include community-based learning have been met with obstacles, both within the department and due to community logistics and student availability. A survey among Spanish majors and minors gauging interest in a community-based learning summer course only garnered one response, as many students commute to class or go home on the weekends. We understand that Latinx Studies does not necessarily have to include interactions with the local Latinx community, but collaboration would be beneficial. Recruitment efforts are underway to encourage more of our Latinx students to take Spanish courses. Traditionally, at UWG, most heritage/native speakers tend to place at the intermediate level and could help fill our fourth semester language course that has seen lower enrollments due to the reduction in language requirements across campus. Publicizing the benefits of the placement exam to already-enrolled Latinx students can benefit them in helping them graduate sooner and may serve as a recruitment tool in having them declare Spanish minors/majors or double majors. We are also restructuring the fourth-semester language course to make it more attractive to Latinx students by designing it thematically to align with other degrees offered at our institution. The class will have topical chapters that highlight different applications of Spanish: health (nursing, biology, health and community wellness, etc.), criminal justice, management, real estate, and art (film, theater, etc.). Culture and grammar will be included in each chapter of this in-house textbook, as well as local applications in the Carrollton community. Having more Latinx students in our Spanish classes could be one way to show the necessity and benefit of offering Latinx courses more regularly, either as special topic courses or by making these courses permanent and offering them on the same rotation as other courses.

One positive development that has come from the MIFLC roundtables and continued collaboration is the proposal of a new certificate in Latin American, Caribbean and Latinx Studies. Certificates at UWG are less

rigorous than minors and allow students to count required courses in both the certificate program, their major or minor, and toward the core requirement, making certificates an attractive option for students who have interest in an area but do not have time in their schedules for a double major or minor. This certificate will draw on faculty expertise in these areas and will require one interdisciplinary introductory course, three semesters of French or Spanish, and one other course focusing on Latin America, the Caribbean or Latinx Studies. We have colleagues who teach about these areas in our program and the programs of history, anthropology, political science and interdisciplinary studies.

## CONCLUSIONS

The MIFLC roundtables on incorporating Latinx Studies into the Spanish major have provided necessary support and inspiration for many faculty members who are the sole Chicanx or Latinx faculty member in their department or institution, or are one of the few faculty members championing the benefits of Latinx Studies. It is evident from these discussions that individual efforts are most effective on campuses that offer institutional support for ethnic studies and service learning, and those campuses that actively recruit and retain a diverse student body in response to national demographic shifts. Departmental support is also a factor in when and how Latinx Studies can be woven into the curriculum and in what languages these courses are taught. Foreign language requirements for all students play a role in incorporating Latinx Studies into the Spanish major as required courses often serve as an active arena to recruit students into the major course of study (or minor, if applicable). Colleges and universities whose missions align with experiential and community-based learning often offer greater institutional support for these kinds of courses and projects than institutions that tend to focus on professional programs.

Institutions that value the liberal arts are also more inclined to do the work of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), as evidenced in the Furman programs mentioned above. Regardless of the size of the Latinx student population, Latinx Studies courses teach students about intersectional identities and assist them in their own formation work. What's more, these classes help Latinx students build a sense of belonging, which increases their self-esteem without being the "token" Latinx person in the room. Additionally, Latinx Studies helps students develop a sense of place as they live and study in the south of the United States. This in turn increases

retention rates for students who see themselves and their families reflected in their coursework. In short, Latinx Studies is DEI work. Many classes connect Latinx Studies with the Civil Rights Movement in the US, making the classes relevant to the students and allowing them to embrace the space and place where we teach and learn. Although Latinx immigration to the US is not new, it may be new in one specific geographic area. Studying Latinx history can help contextualize current demographics and account for shifts in local areas. Latinx Studies courses help teach students the history of our country from a perspective they may not have learned in high school and may not be exposed to in other university courses.

In this article, we have presented three different types of institutions, located in different areas of the country and with differing support infrastructures, in hopes that our readers can see what has worked at these universities as they contemplate what might be feasible at their own institutions. We believe that the benefits of including Latinx Studies in the Spanish major outweigh any obstacles that might impede this inclusion. Much of what has been presented here consists of individual faculty efforts, championed by faculty willing to put in the work to make Latinx Studies happen on campus, insofar as they are able, given institutional and departmental support and limitations. From our observations, it seems obvious to suggest that the more institutional and departmental support for Latinx Studies, the easier it will be to implement a program. Additionally, it would seem that the key to successful service learning is to work with existing organizations and partners within one's own community, recognizing the likelihood that much of the groundwork may already exist, thereby eliminating the unnecessary task of "reinventing the wheel." As a group, we suggest that institutions hire more faculty willing to make the effort to include service learning in their courses and to teach Latinx classes.

Finally, we suggest networking with colleagues at different institutions who are attempting to achieve similar goals. The benefits of networking at MIFLC, where we have been able to share our respective efforts to incorporate Latinx Studies in the Spanish major, have been enlightening and encouraging. We have each benefited from the continued conversation about Latinx studies on different campuses after the conference ended as we collectively prepared this article. Being the sole champion of Latinx Studies on your campus can be hard and isolating work; we found it comforting to share our efforts and successes with like-minded individuals across the South. This article offered us the space to

reflect upon our efforts at the conference while continuing the conversation via Zoom, where the idea for this article was born. We are hopeful that this article will encourage others in the field to explore the ways in which they might incorporate Latinx Studies into their own curricula, and we look forward to engaging in conversations regarding these efforts with our colleagues at future conferences and presentations.



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