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# Integrated or Isolated Experiences? Considering the Role of Service-Learning in the Spanish Language Curriculum

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**Abstract:** The principal aim of this project is to examine whether academic service-learning deserves a more intentional place in foreign language programs, given its success on the individual course level. The focus will be on Spanish language programs, since they teach the most commonly learned foreign language in the United States and have proven to be on the vanguard of service-learning and language instruction. Following a careful evaluation of the theoretical frameworks of service-learning pedagogy on the whole and in the realm of language instruction, we will explore national trends in the implementation of service-learning on the curricular level of language programs. Finally, this paper will discuss the future of implementing service-learning in language program curricula by examining the conditions necessary for the successful institutionalization of service-learning in the Spanish curriculum as well as potential drawbacks and obstacles to this increased presence in the language curriculum.

**Keywords:** curriculum/currículo, faculty development/desarrollo profesional de profesores, pedagogy/pedagogía, service-learning/aprendizaje-servicio, Spanish/español

As the research in the field of service-learning and community-based learning has increased in both its legitimacy and scope across the higher education landscape, colleges and universities are exploring ways to institutionalize these practices and formalize the learning outcomes for their students. The number of service-learning courses and faculty members implementing this experiential pedagogy has proliferated nationwide, as have the academic journals and books dedicated to quantifying and qualifying the educational advancement achieved through service-learning. Institutions have also embraced the increased community engagement and citizenship education that service-learning pedagogy brings, establishing centers for community-based research as well as offices dedicated to enhancing community engagement across their campuses.

Over the past decade, foreign language programs have also joined the growing wave of service-learning in higher education, integrating this pedagogy in numerous courses to enhance their intercultural and linguistic learning objectives. Consequently, foreign language faculty across the nation have evolved from solely being practitioners of service-learning pedagogy to becoming respected researchers in the field who have validated the merits of this pedagogy and have documented best practices in community-based language instruction. The field of service-learning in language instruction would therefore seem to be moving in a direction of increased acceptance and implementation across the discipline. As a result of this shift, it is important for research in the field to define the role of this teaching approach in the broader language curriculum and to demonstrate the learning outcomes of community-based academic service-learning.

The principal aim of this project is to examine whether academic service-learning deserves a more intentional place in foreign language programs, given its success on the individual course level. The focus will be on Spanish language programs, since they teach the most commonly learned foreign language in the United States and have proven to be on the vanguard of service-learning and language instruction. Following a careful evaluation of the theoretical frameworks of service-learning pedagogy on the whole and in the realm of language instruction, we will explore national trends in the implementation of service-learning on the curricular level of language programs. Finally, this paper will discuss the future of implementing service-learning in language program curricula by examining the conditions necessary for the successful institutionalization of service-learning in the Spanish curriculum as well as potential drawbacks and obstacles to this increased presence.

## 1. Review of the Literature

### 1.1 Service-Learning Theory and Praxis

Service-learning pedagogy, which finds its roots in the theories of engaged learning developed by John Dewey (1942) and Paolo Freire (1970), is a method of integrating community outreach initiatives into academic courses, and differs from volunteerism in its intentional link to and reinforcement of the academic learning objectives of a particular course. Bringle and Hatcher (1995) define service-learning as follows:

We consider service-learning to be a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. This is in contrast to co-curricular and extracurricular service, from which learning may occur, but for which there is no formal evaluation and documentation of academic learning. (112)

Eyler and Giles (1999) further distinguish the various levels of integration of the service and learning objectives, providing examples where the service outcomes are primary to the learning outcomes, and vice versa, as well as where the service and learning goals are separate from one another. For Eyler and Giles, in the ideal service-learning experience, both the service and learning goals are primary in the course, and are clearly linked to one another.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to enhancing course-specific learning objectives, service-learning also serves as an effective vehicle for teaching students about citizenship and civic engagement, an increasingly prominent learning objective in higher education. Boyer (1987: 67–68) argues that higher education has the obligation to teach students a sense of responsibility to their community beyond their career goals and personal interests, and that colleges and universities have a duty to connect their vast resources with social issues to transform the campus into “staging grounds for action” for solving these problems (1996: 32). More recently, the 2007 report of the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise, titled *College Learning for the New Global Century*, states that one of the four Essential Learning Outcomes for students is “Personal and Social Responsibility, including civic knowledge and engagement—local and global, intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning and action, and foundations and skills for lifelong learning (anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges)” (3). Service-learning can be a means to achieve these learning outcomes. In its definition of service-learning, the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse describes the civic engagement goals of this pedagogical approach as “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.” Finally, research has demonstrated the effectiveness of service-learning in achieving the goal of

educating for citizenship and community engagement. According to Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee (2000), among the numerous outcomes for students in service-learning courses are a heightened sense of civic responsibility and an increased likelihood that he or she will pursue a career in a service field. Similarly, Eyler and Giles (1999: 157) note that, although few students demonstrate a radical change in perspective or life mission as a result of service-learning, many do experience a transformation of their worldview and are more likely to be able to identify the locus of social problems and find solutions in comparison to their peers who did not participate in service-learning. They further argue that service-learning experiences lead to engagement, connection, and active citizenship.

The increasing corpus of service-learning research has also revealed additional learning outcomes beyond civic awareness and engagement. Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee (2000) claim that students participating in service-learning and community-engaged research demonstrate improvements in writing. Service-learning also results in an increased development of students' cognitive skills and academic motivation (Bingle, Phillips, and Hudson 2004) as well as improved academic performance in the classroom (Fredericksen 2000). Eyler and Giles (1999) note increased motivation to learn the course material because of its direct connection to the service-learning project, improved problem solving skills, and higher levels of complex thinking (75), in addition to the development of critical thinking skills through high-level service-learning experiences (101). However, Eyler and Giles caution that these gains can depend greatly upon the student's level of cognitive development.

## 1.2 Using Service-Learning in Language Instruction

Over the past decade, practitioners and researchers in the field of foreign language instruction have examined the effectiveness of service-learning as a tool for achieving the linguistic and cross-cultural goals of their language courses. Numerous studies on the integration of Spanish language instruction and service-learning can be found in the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) publication *Construyendo Puentes (Building Bridges): Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Spanish* (Hellebrandt and Varona 1999), the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) Professional Development Series Handbook *Juntos: Community Partnerships in Spanish and Portuguese* (Hellebrandt, Arries, and Varona 2004), and, most recently, Wurr and Hellebrandt's *Learning the Language of Global Citizenship: Service-Learning in Applied Linguistics* (2007), which also includes research on English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. Additionally, numerous articles on service-learning and language instruction have been published in peer-reviewed journals such as *Hispania*, *Foreign Language Annals*, and the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*.

Research has shown that using the target language in a rich and meaningful way with native speakers in a service setting can increase student motivation for language study. Hale (1999: 9) posits that, in addition to developing students' critical thinking skills, service-learning pedagogy increases student motivation for language learning. Pellettieri's (2011) study at Santa Clara University suggests that "community-based learning integrated into a language skills program can help learners generate a greater willingness to communicate in Spanish outside of the classroom, an outcome that will support their language acquisition process" (296). Pak (2007: 44) examines the numerous motivational strategies for language learning that are found throughout a service-learning course, such as the students' need to improve their Spanish in order to provide service, direct contact with native speakers, and collaboration with classmates on service-learning projects, among others. This increased motivation may persist beyond the service-learning course. For example, Nelson and Scott (2008: 455) demonstrate that community-based service-learning increases student motivation to continue language study.

Service-learning pedagogy has also been shown to be effective in achieving the National Standards (1996) established by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

(ACTFL), also known as the “five C’s” (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities). Long (2003) links a community-based experiential course to the Cultures and Communities standards of the five C’s and found that the students who chose service activities to fulfill their out-of-class language contact hours were more reflective in their journal writing and demonstrated more cultural empathy than their peers who did not. Lear and Abbott (2008) use the framework of the five C’s to demonstrate that community service-learning can achieve these standards in ways that traditional language courses cannot. They also suggest that other disciplines look to service-learning as a vehicle for achieving their own national standards.

Along with facilitating the achievement of ACTFL’s National Standards for students, service-learning can also address new approaches to language instruction for a twenty-first-century education. A 2007 report published by the Modern Language Association (MLA) Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages notes that, traditionally, there have been two approaches to teaching foreign languages: 1) instruct language learners to become as competent in the language as a native speaker or 2) teach language in relation to the culture, literature, and history of the language studied. This report suggests that language major programs adapt to the changed global landscape in a post-9/11 world by teaching beyond linguistic competence and focusing on translingual and transcultural competence.

In addition to conventional study abroad immersion experiences, service-learning projects in local Hispanic communities provide opportunities for students to engage with native speakers, reflect on and understand cultural differences, and relate to the largest linguistic minority group in the United States. Students without the resources or the ability to participate in a semester-long or summer immersion program can partake of this valuable language-learning experience in their own region or community and gain the translingual and transcultural experiences that the MLA report advocates. Varona (1999), Jorge (2006), and Plann (2002) all present examples of community-based learning that allows for intralingual exchange through engagement with local Spanish-speaking communities.

## 2. Methodology

In order to address the question of whether language programs should look to make service-learning an integral and intentional component of their major programs, the authors of this study examined the curricula of over forty colleges and universities across the country. The authors chose a representative sample of institutions based upon previous knowledge of their activity in service-learning and tried to include a cross-section of large public institutions, medium-sized private universities, and small private liberal arts colleges in different regions across the nation. While some programs demonstrate a high level of integration of service-learning in their Spanish programs, others list no service-learning course offerings, even though they are located in regions or states with large Spanish-speaking populations, such as Florida.<sup>2</sup> The findings of this study are based solely on information made publicly available via the institutions’ websites during the summer of 2010, and, as such, the authors recognize that curricula and course offerings constantly change and that the information listed below may no longer be accurate at the time of publication. Nonetheless, the models and programs discussed serve to inform our analysis of future directions for the integration of service-learning in foreign language curricula.

## 3. Results: Trends in Service-Learning Integration

The authors have classified the Spanish major programs examined in this study into the three categories listed below, followed by a summary of each.

1. Major programs where service-learning is a mandatory and integrated component of the major for all students.

2. Major programs offering a special major track with a significant community engagement component.
3. Major programs where service-learning courses are offered as an elective component of the major.

### 3.1 Mandatory and Integrated Service Components

At one extreme on the continuum of integration of service-learning in the Spanish major program stands East Tennessee State University (ETSU). For all majors in Spanish at ETSU, there is a requirement of one Applied Spanish course, with a choice of one of the following courses: Spanish 3123 (“Applied Spanish: Introduction to Translation”), Spanish 4127 (“Applied Spanish: Introduction to the Spanish-speaking Communities”), Spanish 4137 (“Applied Spanish: Translation and Community Outreach”), Spanish 4147 (“Applied Spanish: Interpretation and Community Outreach”), or Spanish 4957 (“Topics in Spanish: Migrant Experience”). According to the ETSU course catalog descriptions, all of these courses are either “community-based” or have a service-learning requirement integrated into them. In their 2008 article, Nelson and Scott (both from ETSU) describe the genesis and objectives of their department’s Applied Spanish: Community Studies minor program, which requires three community-based and/or service-learning courses from the list above. This minor program’s mission “was to promote meaningful and supportive relationships between the university and Hispanic communities in Northeast Tennessee and to prepare students to be bilingual and bicultural participants in an increasingly diverse world” (Nelson and Scott 2008: 449). According to their study, a majority of the students who took one or more of the Applied Spanish courses listed above “identified direct experience with the Hispanic community as the most important benefit of taking the Applied Spanish classes” (453). Whereas the Applied Spanish: Community Studies minor requires three courses from the list above, the traditional minor program, an alternative still offered to students who may not wish to be a part of the Applied Spanish: Community Studies program, requires only one of the courses listed above. In effect, through these curricular structures, any student with a major or minor in Spanish at ETSU will by default participate in at least one community-based or service-learning experience.

### 3.2 Optional Major Tracks with Imbedded Service-Learning Requirements

Another structure for making service and community engagement integral components of a major program is the special major track. The Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of California–Los Angeles (UCLA) offers a major in Spanish and Community and Culture. This major sequence makes up one of the three major tracks in Spanish at UCLA, including majors in Spanish and Spanish Linguistics. The Spanish and Community and Culture major, which began in 2007, requires two community-based learning courses from the following list: Chicana/o Studies 100SL (“Barrio Service-Learning”), Spanish M164SL (“Spanish/English Exchange”), Spanish M165SL (“Taking it to the Streets: Spanish in the Community”), Spanish M172 (“Latinos, Linguistics, and Literacy”), and Spanish 195 (“Community Internship”). The rest of the 15-course major is comprised of a combination of language, linguistics, culture, and literature courses, similar to the Spanish and Spanish Linguistics major tracks. According to Plann (2007): “The classes that form the core of the major put students in contact with the Latino community in a variety of ways. The service and community-based learning that takes place in these core courses occurs within a structured academic framework, which fosters analysis and critical thinking” (3). Plann further underscores the goals and objectives of this major program, stating that “it will also prepare students to succeed in a variety of fields and afford them an excellent foundation for life in the multicultural 21st century” (6).

Similar to ETSU in its mandatory service-learning course requirement for a major program, but not required for all Spanish majors, are Marquette University's Spanish for the Health Professions major and minor programs. One of the required courses for both the major and minor programs, Spanish 3715 ("Advanced Spanish for the Health Professions"), has a built-in service-learning requirement. A traditional major track (Spanish Language, Literature, and Culture) also exists at Marquette, in addition to a Spanish for the Business Professions track, neither of which has a service-learning component imbedded in any of the required courses. In effect, students majoring in Spanish at Marquette do not necessarily have to take a service-learning course unless they are part of the Spanish for Health Professions major or minor programs. In other words, the Marquette model offers students an option, in the same way as UCLA's special major track.

### 3.3 Service-Learning Courses as Electives in Major

A majority of college and university Spanish programs examined in this study offer courses with service-learning components that are not required for successful completion of the major. For the most part, service-learning remains an elective component of Spanish major programs. However, although it may seem obvious, it is important to note that courses with service-learning components "count" towards completion of major programs as elective credit in the major, underscoring the academic nature of these experiences. In other words, these service experiences were not considered co-curricular but rather curricular learning activities with academic value for the program. As we shall see, a number of patterns emerged in the types of courses that include service-learning, demonstrating the importance of closely linking course goals with service activities, as illustrated in the earlier literature discussion.

First of all, Spanish programs across the country offer service-learning, intermediate-level language courses, and advanced language courses with a focus on conversation and composition. For example, Rollins College offers Spanish 302 ("Spanish for Advanced Communication") with a service-learning partnership with Junior Achievement of Central Florida, in which students translate and teach the Junior Achievement curriculum in Spanish to ESOL students in local elementary schools (Barreneche 2011). Santa Clara University offers all of its intermediate Spanish language students the option to enhance their language learning by enrolling concurrently in Spanish 97, a community-based learning practicum with a placement at a community agency, coupled with written reflection on the service experience.

Secondly, service-learning is also found in content-focused seminars, such as courses on Hispanics in the United States and immigration issues. For example, the University of Minnesota offers Spanish 3401 ("Latino Immigration and Community Service"), which integrates service experiences with learning about the Latino community and the issues that the immigrant community faces. Students at Duke University can participate in a series of community-based learning activities integrated into topics courses, including Spanish 106a ("Health, Culture, and the Latino Community"), Spanish 106cs ("Issues of Education and Immigration"), and Spanish 106es ("Latino/a Voices in Duke, Durham, and Beyond").

In addition, Spanish programs that have access to university medical outreach programs and/or research hospitals have been able to partner with health services departments to offer Spanish for the medical profession courses with service-learning components. Some examples include the University of Notre Dame's ROSP 20460 ("Spanish for Medical Profession") course, Marquette's Spanish 3715 ("Advanced Spanish for the Health Professions"), and the University of North Carolina's Spanish 321 ("Spanish for Health Care").

Another innovative use of service-learning is in senior capstone/practicum courses. The College of William and Mary, for example, requires majors to complete a mentored field research project, which can be completed in a variety of ways, including through service-learning, study abroad, or an internship. Portland State University offers a senior capstone project with

a service-learning program linked to a Spanish/English dual immersion elementary school in the area. Similarly, the University of Georgia lists Spanish (LACS) 4090 ("Practicum in Service-Learning") among its course offerings.

#### 4. Discussion: The Limits and Challenges of Service-Learning

Although the benefits of service-learning in higher education have been well documented in recent years and an increasing number of institutions across the nation have integrated academic service-learning into their curricula, there are certain limits that cast doubt on the feasibility of universalizing this pedagogy in the language curriculum. A single, optional service-learning course may not prove overly difficult or cumbersome to implement in a Spanish program. However, an expansion of the use of this teaching method throughout a curriculum requires a critical examination of its limitations. As such, the issues that this section will discuss include the changing demographic landscape of higher education, institutional obstacles, faculty development, the question of multiple service-learning experiences, and measuring language gains in the service-learning course.

##### 4.1 Demographic Shifts

Recent studies show that minority groups will make up a majority of US citizens by 2042 and that minorities will comprise the majority of school-age students by 2020 (Roberts 2008). As the number of minorities entering higher education increases, so too does the number of students who are not the traditional 18–24 years of age. Although service-learning is an excellent way to educate students about other cultures and civic engagement, new questions arise as to what happens when the people entering colleges and universities come from the same communities that are being studied and tutored in the service project. In other words, can service-learning still be used to help students achieve multicultural awareness when multicultural students are the very pupils that institutions are teaching? Once in college, many minority students tend to shy away from courses with service-learning. For instance, according to Coles (1999), from Marquette University, students of color would avoid enrolling in a course with a service-learning component because they already had access to service-learning in their home environment, and they also felt that they were already well educated about the socioeconomic problems of the community. Students also were discouraged by the additional time commitment service-learning requires, given their need to focus on grades and make professional and scholastic connections that white students had already acquired (Coles 1999). Data from the National Center of Educational Statistics (Snyder, Tan, and Hoffman 2003) indicates that over 37% of college students are over the age of 25. As such, many students are entering college with other significant time commitments, such as children or a full-time job, and may not have time to participate in a time-consuming service-learning course.

With the profile of the average college student changing in terms of age and race, the effects on service-learning in Spanish courses are profound. Since 15% of higher education students in the United States report that they are Hispanic, the type of student that enters the college Spanish course is also changing (Fry 2010). No longer are professors only having monolingual students that are learning a second language, but rather students from varied backgrounds of Spanish exposure ranging from basic Spanish to highly proficient heritage speakers and fluent native speakers. For those students who are fluent in the language, will participating in a service-learning project with the Hispanic community actually help them make raw linguistic gains? Measuring the linguistic impacts of service-learning on native and heritage speakers remains a field that can benefit from additional research. Given these demographic shifts in higher education, service-learning becomes increasingly difficult to universalize. Service-learning courses need to be adapted in order to accommodate these non-traditional and non-white students that

are entering the courses. The potential to create a scenario where only a privileged few are being exposed to service-learning counters the ideals that service-learning advocates. In sum, making service-learning mandatory at all levels of the curriculum becomes increasingly difficult as it can create obstacles for many students.

#### 4.2 Institutional Obstacles and Faculty Development

The institution plays a major role in promoting service-learning and ensuring the success of this pedagogical tool. A college or university needs to provide for an effective and successful service-learning experience for both the community partner and the participating students. Resources, such as money and staff, must be available in order to forge effective partnerships, which are of critical importance since a community voice and strong connections with the institution are vital for successful collaborations (Eyler and Giles 1999). An organized office of community engagement within the institution has the charge of coordinating multiple aspects of campus–community partnerships, including community partner development and allocation of monetary resources, and strengthens the validity of service-learning throughout the institution by visibly demonstrating that it is a respected tool within the mission of the college (Abes, Jackson, and Jones 2002: 16). Furthermore, these centralized offices can make connections between Spanish programs and departments across campus that have been longtime practitioners in community engagement and service-learning, such as anthropology, sociology, and teacher education, providing a mentoring component for Spanish faculty who are new to the field. Bringle and Hatcher (2000: 284) argue that these centralized offices can assist in the critical recruitment of second-generation, service-learning faculty through their technical and logistical support, in addition to providing monetary incentives and recognition. In sum, in order to expand the accessibility of service-learning, institutions need to address any lack of structural support and encourage faculty to develop service-learning experiences for their students.

Although institutional structures and lack of support can be impediments to the further development and institutionalization of service-learning, Furco (2002) insists that “faculty involvement, acceptance, and participation become more important as service-learning advances on a campus over time” (54). If Spanish programs are to look into expanding the range and number of service-learning courses, a number of faculty-specific considerations must be examined. They include faculty motivation and buy-in, mentorship and professional development, tenure and reward structures, and departmental support for service-learning research. According to an extensive survey and study of faculty motivation conducted by Abes, Jackson, and Jones (2002), there are several key motivators and deterrents to faculty participation in service-learning. The authors note that faculty were most encouraged to participate in service-learning by their students, and most motivated to use service-learning pedagogy by student learning outcomes, especially increased student understanding of course material (9). The same study concludes that the two strongest deterrents to continued use of service-learning regard time commitment and the coordination of logistical aspects surrounding the service project. Both of these issues point to the need for a supportive community outreach office at the institution to coordinate and facilitate logistics, transportation, and community partner development, as discussed earlier. The other important finding of this study is that faculty are less deterred from participation in service-learning by issues of tenure and promotion, and that “internal motivation rather than external rewards drives their use of service-learning” (11).

An important question, then, is how to develop faculty competency in service-learning pedagogy in order to create what Campus Compact calls an “engaged campus.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, since junior faculty members tend not to be service-learning practitioners upon completion of their graduate studies, there is a great need for professional development in this arena.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, national organizations such as Campus Compact readily offer faculty development resources, including publications, sample syllabi, toolkits, and service-learning workshops and seminars.

Bringle and Hatcher (1995) provide a model for the implementation of a faculty development workshop in service-learning. A crucial bridge between service-learning practitioners and Spanish programs has also been built by the AATSP, at whose annual conference service-learning researchers and practitioners in the field consistently present their projects and findings. Furthermore, discipline-specific journals, such as *Hispania* and *Foreign Language Annals*, have regularly published articles in service-learning research, which can provide new practitioners with models for implementing service-learning in their own departments and programs. For departments and programs to encourage new lines of faculty development in service-learning, adequate reward and compensation structures must be in place. For example, administrators at the departmental and institutional level should make funds available for faculty inexperienced in service-learning to attend workshops and conferences in the field, in addition to their regular professional development funds. Another effective motivational tool would be service-learning course development grants or offering release time to develop service-learning partnerships, which Abes, Jackson, and Jones (2002: 11) point to as a way to address the deterrence of not having enough time to dedicate to service-learning initiatives.

With the proliferation of literature and research in service-learning pedagogy in respected disciplinary journals such as *Hispania* and *Foreign Language Annals*, the field of service-learning research has gained legitimacy in its own right in the context of Spanish programs. The next state of professional development, then, would be to move faculty from service-learning practitioners to researchers. Hellebrandt's (2006) study on service-learning research and its effects on faculty development suggests that, because of the relative newness of the field and general unfamiliarity about service-learning research, there is a need for a discussion of the scholarship of engagement before candidates who have published in the field are evaluated for tenure and/or promotion. His survey notes that Spanish faculty who have published in service-learning research have not necessarily advanced their case for tenure/promotion as a direct result of this research. Hellebrandt (2006) concludes: "While service-learning scholarship is important for advancing teaching, service-learning class projects, and departments' visibility of their service-learning efforts, it has yet to receive adequate attention and recognition from tenure-and-promotion committees" (924). This may be due to a perceived lack of academic rigor in the field of service-learning research because early studies tended to focus more on narratives on community-based and service-learning projects rather than on the linguistic gains experienced by students (Lear and Abbott 2008). However, one of the positive outcomes of this line of research has been increased individual faculty member motivation in promoting discussions on service-learning in the context of higher education (Hellebrandt 2006: 924). Furthermore, the promotion and dissemination of service-learning research in Spanish programs addresses another of the deterrents identified by Abes, Jackson, and Jones (2002), namely a lack of evidence in support of academic learning outcomes resulting from service-learning. In other words, a robust and respected corpus of scholarship demonstrating increased student learning would encourage Spanish faculty to support and participate in service-learning initiatives in their departments. Finally, Hellebrandt (2006: 924) suggests that institutional leadership is crucial because, if the institution on the whole does not recognize service-learning scholarship's validity, departments may be less likely to continue with engagement efforts.

### 4.3 Multiple Experiences and Developmental Frameworks

One of the difficulties of implementing service-learning in any curriculum is providing students with multiple service opportunities. Often, students' positive service experiences stop at the end of the semester, and they are unable to see the fruits of their labor because they do not return to continue working with the community partner. Eyler and Giles (1999) explain: "The principle of continuity was central to Dewey's thinking; learning is never finished but is a lifelong process of understanding" (183). Multiple and continuous experiences with

service-learning offer students a variety of benefits that one-time experiences cannot achieve. To that end, Eyler and Giles (1999: 125) argue that, although high-level service-learning contributes to the development of critical thinking skills, multiple experiences are necessary for students to develop more significant cognitive development. Therefore, Tulane University has instituted a campus-wide public service graduation requirement for all of its students that is developmental in its structure and comprised of two tiers. In the first tier, students must complete one service-learning course at the 100, 200, or 300 level before the end of his/her second year or fourth semester. During the junior or senior year, students must complete the second tier of service through a course at the 300 level or above.

The benefits of a sequential service-learning program can also translate to Spanish curricula. According to our research, while most colleges and universities only offer a handful of service-learning courses, even fewer offer sequential service-learning courses in Spanish, which could provide students with consistent exposure to the language, enriching their language-learning experience through even more sustained contact with native speakers outside of class. For example, given their university-wide, two-tiered service requirement, Tulane's Spanish program offers a variety of service-learning courses at both the first and second tier. For a Spanish major at Tulane, the assortment and number of Spanish service-learning courses offered allow for the possibility of having multiple service-learning experiences and increasing the student's cognitive development as a result, as Eyler and Giles (1999) suggest. Another example of sequential, repeated service-learning experiences can be found in DePaul University's Spanish program, which offers multiple community engagement opportunities through a year-long intermediate language course sequence: Spanish 124, 125, and 126. Their "Intercambio" program "integrates a social justice-based curriculum and critical reflection through popular education to raise awareness of social issues while providing students the opportunity to exchange their language and cultural values." DePaul students work with community members who are studying ESL, and are given the opportunity to participate in a meaningful language exchange throughout the entire academic year. The benefits to this approach include both stability with the community partnership and the increased cognitive development that results from multiple service-learning experiences.

The numerous obstacles to integrating and mandating these experiences broadly across the Spanish major curricula make the programs at DePaul and Tulane more exceptions than the norm. These obstacles include increased time commitments for both the student and the faculty member, a proliferation of service-learning courses to be offered and developed by the particular program or department, and a significant commitment of resources to assessment and quality control of the community agency placement, in addition to logistics and transportation issues. Finally, although the benefits of a sequential service-learning experience have been demonstrated by the research discussed earlier, quantifying the linguistic gains achieved through these sequential experiences is an area that would benefit from additional research.

#### 4.4 Measuring Gains in Language Acquisition

Although measuring the positive linguistic outcomes from service-learning can be problematic, there has been plenty of documentation of an increase in the level of confidence that students gain in speaking the language as a result of these experiences (Hellebrandt and Varona 1999; Hellebrandt, Arries, and Varona 2004; Wurr and Hellebrandt 2007). Surveys indicate that students who participate in a service-learning experience tend to want to continue language study and they feel more confident because of perceived gains in their Spanish abilities (Hale 1999). On the other hand, a student's confidence is not the only measure of language acquisition, as raw language gains should also be assessed. According to Lear and Abbott (2008), most of the current literature on service-learning in language instruction deals with "how-to's" and not enough has been done to measure the student language improvements resulting from

service-learning instruction. Butin (2006) notes that quantifying service-learning's effectiveness generally in terms of the gains in knowledge demonstrated by students is complicated by the numerous variables in any service-learning course. These variables limit the ability to pinpoint if these gains are a direct result of the service-learning component of the course. Similarly, in language instruction, it becomes nearly impossible to determine whether or not a student is making specific linguistic gains due to the service-learning experience or as a result of the other elements of the course, such as classroom instruction and assignments. For example, a student's past experience with first, second, and perhaps third language instruction, his or her family context, the effectiveness of the course materials, frequent contact with native speakers outside of class, and the student's motivational levels, among many other factors, can all contribute to a particular language learner's progress, independent of the service-learning experience. Without hard data pointing to a direct correlation between linguistic gains and service-learning courses, programs and departments will be hard pressed to justify an expansion of service-learning across the curriculum, especially in these times of shrinking budgets and limited resources in higher education. However, as Pellettieri (2011) notes, the ability of service-learning to motivate students to interact with native speakers of Spanish should not be overlooked nor undervalued.

## 5. Conclusion

This study recognizes the diversity of institutional and departmental structures, cultures, and objectives. As such, there can be no one-size-fits-all approach to the implementation of service-learning in Spanish language programs. Furthermore, colleges and universities nationwide are at different places along the continuum of service-learning program development at their campuses. In other words, it would be impractical for a university that is in the nascent stages of service-learning institutionalization to expect its Spanish program to immediately mandate this pedagogy for its students.

Given the enhancements to learning that service-learning pedagogy offers, specifically in the context of language instruction, the research suggests that, at the very least, Spanish programs and departments should begin to examine the intentionality of their service-learning offerings. Service-learning pedagogy facilitates the acquisition of the cross-cultural and intralingual skills that the MLA report (2007) suggests twenty-first-century students need. Additionally, this experiential teaching approach allows language programs to participate in the community engagement and applied learning movements currently gaining ground in higher education. Furthermore, with intentional and well-crafted service-learning experiences, Spanish programs can bridge the divide between "town and gown" and provide valuable services to the local Hispanic communities in our nation.

There are some major caveats, however, to increasing the size and scope of curricular offerings in service-learning. If an institution meets the conditions necessary for promoting and sustaining quality service-learning programs (e.g., faculty reward systems, faculty development grants, close ties to institutional mission, administrative support, departmental support, scholarship-of-teaching resources and support, a strong and well-established office of community engagement, department faculty trained in service-learning pedagogy, etc.), only then should it consider expanding its service-learning programs to form an integral part of the major programs. Also, institutions must ensure that community partnerships are reciprocal in their benefit for both the students and the partner, and should follow a principle of "do no harm" to the community members. In service-learning, there is a risk of perpetuating paternalistic relationships between students of privilege and the local community. Campus centers for community engagement and institutional review boards are instrumental in ensuring that the relationships between community partners and academic programs are mutually beneficial and can structure ethical experiences for students that avoid harmful stereotyping and unintended harm to the community partner.<sup>5</sup> If these conditions are not present on the institutional level,

then a given Spanish program is not ready for an expanded service-learning component in its curriculum and should wait until the situation is more favorable.

Another factor for consideration is the size and scope of a particular Spanish program. Large-scale programs with broad course offerings and sizeable instructional staffs have the capacity to offer differentiated major tracks, as the MLA report (2007) recommends, including a community-focused track, such as UCLA's, or an applied Spanish major, like Marquette's Spanish for Health Professions. In these types of settings, an expanded offering of service-learning courses is more feasible. On the other hand, in a small college or university setting, an increase in service-learning offerings can be problematic for several reasons. First of all, with a smaller faculty and fewer courses taught, departmental and program priorities tend to focus on the needs of the traditional language, literature, and culture curriculum. In other words, with fewer spaces available for experimental course offerings and fewer faculty trained in the pedagogy, expansion beyond perhaps one or two service-learning courses is less practical for smaller programs. Dependence on one or two faculty members who are experienced service-learning practitioners can be problematic with sabbaticals, staff turnover, or higher demand for courses in other areas. Additionally, smaller institutions tend not to have the resources dedicated to maintaining extensive community engagement initiatives, and without a major on-campus medical or clinical facility, they have fewer opportunities for service placements nearby, thus contributing to more logistical difficulties in the development of community partnerships. This is not to say that it is not possible for small colleges and universities to make more intentional service-learning initiatives, so long as a number of the other conditions for effective service-learning institutionalization listed above are met.

Although the fields of service-learning and language instruction have made great strides over the past decade, there is still room for continued expansion and growth, and the effects of today's initiatives will manifest themselves in tomorrow's students, faculty, and curriculum. For example, many institutions have yet to make service-learning a part of their course offerings, while others have not moved beyond offering only one course or co-curricular experience. The issue of service-learning teaching capacity can be addressed as more and more faculty and instructors begin to experiment with service-learning pedagogy as a result of recruitment, mentoring, and reward systems. With the right support and faculty development structures in place departmentally and institutionally, new service-learning practitioners will have the potential to become researchers in the field and contribute to a wider understanding of this pedagogy's advantages and drawbacks in the context of Spanish programs. Additionally, one of the long-term effects of increasing the presence of service-learning in undergraduate programs is that some of these undergraduate Spanish majors who participate in service-learning as students will become the future faculty who will implement their first-hand understanding of service-learning in their own courses.

As programs with embedded service-learning experiences and courses begin to produce graduates, it remains to be seen whether participants in these programs will demonstrate any noticeable difference in linguistic, cross-cultural, and critical thinking skills in comparison with their peers in traditional major programs. This is one of the fertile areas for future research in the field. It is possible that students will not exhibit these characteristics until later in their personal and academic development, perhaps even years after graduation. Nonetheless, Spanish programs throughout the United States are better positioned than other language programs to have students attain the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in a global society through participation in service-learning projects with the nation's largest linguistic minority group.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>A broader term used frequently to identify academic activities that engage students outside of the classroom is community-based learning. In contrast to service-learning, where students generally

are working to address a specific need identified by the community partner, community-based learning activities are not necessarily directly related to service. For the purposes of this article, we will be closely examining the narrower field of service-learning rather than community-based learning.

<sup>2</sup>The impact of international service-learning on language students is an area needing further study and research, but it is not included in the present study on service-learning in Spanish major and minor curricula. For a more in-depth discussion of international service-learning, see Bringle, Hatcher, and Jones (2011).

<sup>3</sup>According to their website: "Campus Compact is a national coalition of more than 1,100 college and university presidents—representing some 6 million students—who are committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education. As the only national higher education association dedicated solely to campus-based civic engagement, Campus Compact promotes public and community service that develops students' citizenship skills, helps campuses forge effective community partnerships, and provides resources and training for faculty seeking to integrate civic and community-based learning into the curriculum."

<sup>4</sup>As the field of service-learning gains more legitimacy as an effective second-language teaching practice, graduate programs with an interest in preparing their students for the classroom may begin to introduce this technique in pedagogy-focused seminars. However, one must be realistic in looking at how graduate programs train students and for what types of academic positions. With the current emphasis on literary and cultural studies at the graduate level, service-learning and community-based learning pedagogy will most likely remain on the margins of the graduate studies curriculum.

<sup>5</sup>For more on the ethics of building sustainable and responsible campus–community partnerships, see Scheibel, Bowley, and Jones (2005).

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