

Patterns and Policies: The Changing Demographics of Foreign Language Instruction

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Editor

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Basic Assumptions Revisited: Today's French and Spanish Students at a Large Metropolitan University

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An underlying assumption behind the development of this volume is that changes in the demographic characteristics, needs, and interests of today's student population may require corresponding adjustments in program design and direction. Who are today's language students? How much do they differ from their counterparts of previous decades? This chapter compares the demographic characteristics, goals, and preferences of Spanish students in 1985 and 1995, and French and Spanish students in 1995, in a large southwestern public university.

In 1985, Spanish language classes were surveyed for purposes of program evaluation and reform. To make comparisons with today's students, a nearly identical survey was conducted in 1995. The imposition of several new language requirements during the intervening decade was assumed to have resulted in changes in students' needs and preferences. In the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the two-year requirement had been extended in 1987 to include all students pursuing B.S. as well as B.A. degrees, and several other units on campus either had initiated a language requirement or had strongly recommended language study to their majors.

This second survey was extended to French students as well, in order to make comparisons between the students of today in these two most commonly taught languages. While the original questionnaire was not designed with this research in mind, the results clearly show changes over time in Spanish and current contrasts between French and Spanish, as well as some surprising similarities among all three groups.

Literature Review

Although much recent research has been devoted to learning styles and strategies, motivation, anxiety, and learners' beliefs about language learning, relatively little of the professional literature has dealt with students' preferences regarding the content of the curriculum. In 1980, Harlow, Smith, and Garfinkel surveyed French students at Purdue University for their perceptions of their communication needs with regard to functions that they thought were important for them to learn to carry out. This study was then replicated with Spanish students at Iowa State University by Lacasa and Lacasa in 1983. The results of the two studies indicated that the preferences of the two language groups were very similar.

Guntermann (1984) proposed a restructuring of basic courses to allow students to pursue language study for varied purposes. Three groups were identified: language majors, students preparing for international professions, and those "who need to fulfill the expectations implied by a language requirement" (p. 585). Rivers (1985) proposed five directions for upgrading the content of language programs: linking foreign languages with international studies, preparing students for careers, teaching for intercommunity understanding, developing insights into the process of communication, and involving students in humanistic experiences appropriate to their level, through literature.

Nine years later, a study by Harlow and Muyskens (1994) that grew out of their concern for meeting students' needs at the intermediate level demonstrated that curricula still had not changed much. They surveyed 471 intermediate-level French and Spanish students in four midwestern universities to identify their goals for language study. They found that speaking the language for communication in social, travel, and job situations was ranked as most important by both French and Spanish students. Listening placed second, while literature, culture, career applications, and learning more about English trailed behind all others. Students of the two languages differed little in their priorities.

Martin and Laurie (1993) reported that intermediate-level French students at an Australian university placed highest value on developing linguistic skills, especially oral proficiency, and lesser value on studying the culture and literature. The authors attribute this preference to "culture panic" as well as to a perceived lack of usefulness of culture and literature for developing language skills.

The Surveys

The purpose of our 1985 Spanish survey was to elicit information from students that could be used to identify strengths and weaknesses in the language program as a basis for making adjustments. The information that was requested included age, major and profession, grade point average, language background (including the degree to which Spanish was spoken in the home), reasons for studying Spanish, perceptions of potential future use of the language, preferences and priorities for course content, and specialized classes that respondents would take if they were offered. To make comparisons, the second questionnaires in 1995 were designed to mirror sections of the first, while adding questions about students' gender, their views on the importance of language study for all students, and the language-related activities that they would pursue if they were given the opportunity, including technology-assisted interaction with the language and culture. (See Appendix for the full text of the Spanish survey.) In addition, the French questionnaire elicited indications of interest in Francophone cultures outside of France.

In 1985, all students in Spanish language classes were surveyed. In 1995, due to greatly increased enrollments, several sections of each French and Spanish course were selected in such a way as to assure a sampling that represented classes meeting at various times of day—early and midmorning, midday, and evening. It was thought that the time of day might be a confounding variable, if students who select classes at particular times of day represented different populations. All questionnaires were administered during class time to assure the highest rate of return, although students could choose not to participate. Unfortunately, information is not available for those who either were absent or who declined to participate.

On the basis of experience and informal observation, certain changes were expected from 1985 to 1995. First, students in 1995 were expected to be older on the average and more career-oriented in both languages. Because of the imposition of the language requirement on science majors, who were presumed to be less interested in language study in general, it was assumed that results would show a belief on the part of many students that language study for all students was not very important. Therefore, there would be a lower proportion of students with previous language study, less interest in using the language in the future, and a change in reasons for studying it, from "I like it" to "It is required for my major" and "Spanish/French is the easiest language to learn." We also expected to find

less interest in communicating orally or pursuing specialized courses or immersion. Furthermore, we expected significant numbers of students to show little interest in language-related outside activities such as conversation groups, e-mail with native speakers, or television and movies.

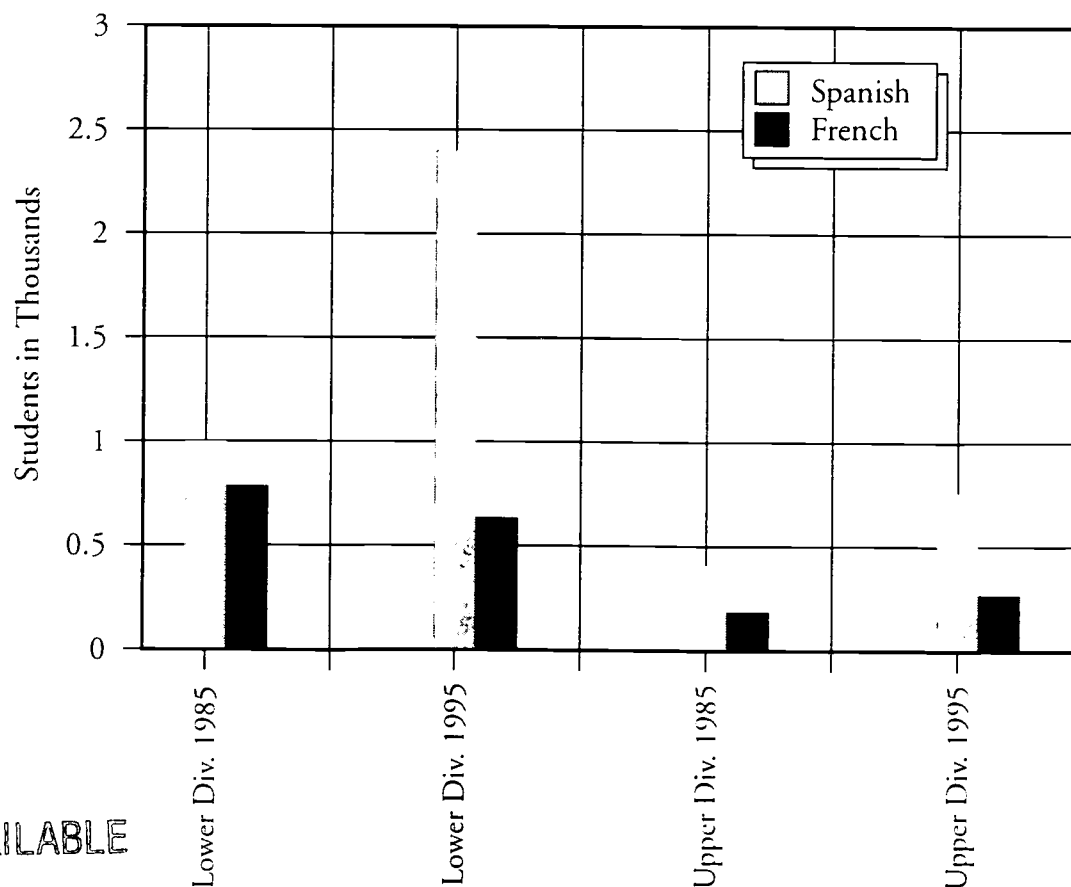
Findings

Enrollments

Enrollment figures for Spanish in 1985 and 1995 reflect the effects of the extension of the language requirement. During that decade the number of Spanish students more than doubled at the lower levels (the first four semesters) and nearly doubled in the upper-division courses (third-year) as well. During the same time French lost more than 100 lower-division students but gained 57 in classes at the third-year level.

Figure 1.

Spanish and French Enrollment



Major Fields of Study

The design of language programs has traditionally been based on assumptions about the needs of language majors, and in large universities with high language enrollments and sizable graduate programs, relatively little attention may be directed to determining undergraduates' needs and interests and, correspondingly, to effecting significant changes in programs. In fact, our survey results indicate that French and Spanish majors actually constitute an extremely small percentage of lower-division students, a situation that was already established by 1985, when no declared Spanish majors were found until the fourth semester, and then there were only six majors out of 137 students. In fact, only in the sixth semester did majors nearly equal non-majors (as 48 percent of the total). In 1995, Spanish and French majors numbered only four each among lower-division students. Language majors became the most numerous only in upper-division courses, and the majority of them began their study of the language in high school or a community college.

Tables 1 and 2 show the most frequently reported major fields. In the category "business" are included accounting, agribusiness, economics, management, international management, and marketing. "Sciences" include biology, biochemistry, botany, chemistry, geology, microbiology, pre-medicine, wildlife conservation, and zoology. Education majors include, in addition to Spanish teachers, majors in bilingual education, elementary education, special education, and English as a second language. Their numbers may be underreported in all three surveys, in that education majors tended to list their majors simply as "French" or "Spanish." (The inclusion of bilingual and ESL teachers in this group makes their numbers much higher in Spanish than in French.)

In 1985, business majors were the most numerous among Spanish students at all levels, followed by education majors, even though most of these students were not required to study a language. On the other hand, broadcasting and English students, for whom two years of a foreign language were required, had high numbers in lower-division courses but did not tend to continue into the upper levels.

In 1985, very few science majors studied Spanish, but ten years later, after the imposition of the two-year requirement, they outnumbered the business majors in lower-division courses in Spanish. They, too, tend to drop out as soon as they meet the requirement. Increases in the categories of psychology and exercise science in Spanish classes may also be due to a combination of new requirements and program expansion. Many of the

Table 1.**Most Common Major Fields of Study, 1985 and 1995: Spanish**

1985			
Lower Division		Upper Division	
Major	N	Major	N
Business	69	Spanish	25
Broadcasting	45	Business	20
English	38	Education	9
Journalism	33		
Education	27		
Psychology	15		
History	12		

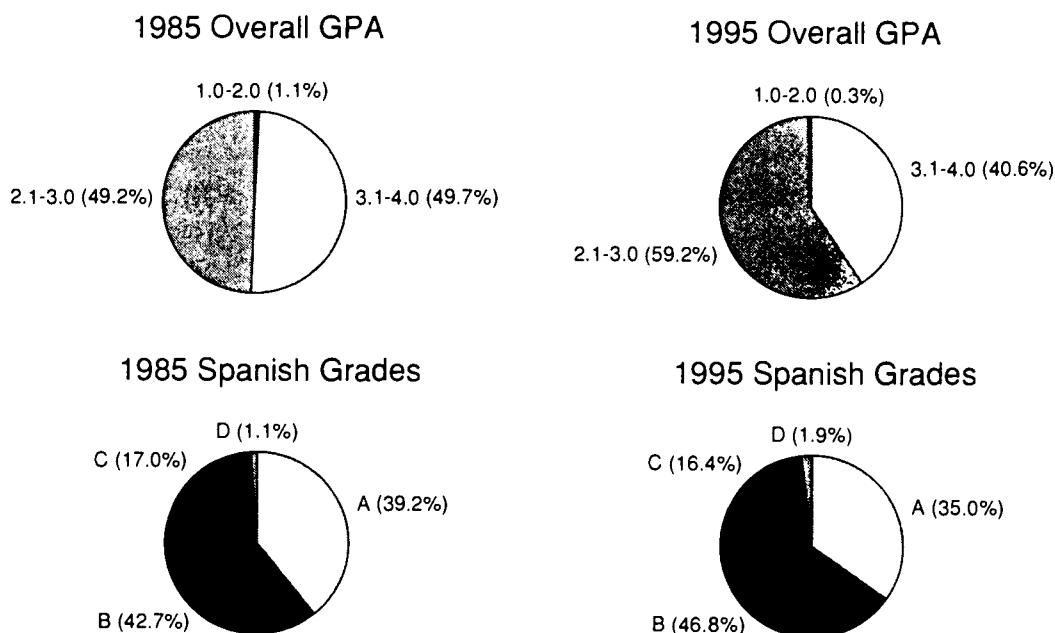
1995			
Lower Division		Upper Division	
Major	N	Major	N
Psychology	50	Spanish	41
Sciences	42	Education	23
Business	33	Business	22
Exercise Science	31	Sciences	13
Education	25	Broadcasting	10
Journalism	24		
Political Science	24		
Broadcasting	22		
English	20		
History	17		
Communication	11		
Sociology	11		

Table 2.**Most Common Major Fields of Study, 1995: French**

1995			
Lower Division		Upper Division	
Major	N	Major	N
Business	19	French	9
Sciences	18	Business	6
Psychology	13	Sciences	5
English	9	Psychology	3
Engineering	8	Political Science	3
History	7	English	3
Communication	7	Communication	3
French	4		
Music	4		
Art	4		
Political Science	4		

exercise science majors are actually preparing to teach physical education or to coach sports in the schools and could be counted as education majors, a fact that might explain their preference for Spanish over French; schools in the Southwest are receiving increasing numbers of students whose first language is Spanish.

For purposes of program redesign it is important to note that non-majors substantially outnumber majors in both languages and at all levels of study. The perseverance of business students, particularly, seems to indicate that they perceive language study to be beneficial for their careers, an assumption that is reinforced by the stated preferences of these and many other non-majors on subsequent sections of the questionnaires. It is therefore appropriate to question once again the degree to which students' professional needs and preferences are met by the traditional language program, which has been based on the assumptions that all students are potential majors and that majors should study literature primarily.

Figure 2.**Reported GPA Compared to Reported Spanish Grades, 1985 and 1995****Age and Sex**

It was expected that students in 1995 would be older on the average than those of 1985, yet no major differences were found to support this expectation. In all surveys, over 85 percent of the students were found to be between 18 and 25 years old, with a preponderance of these 21 and under. Frequencies for all other age groups in 1995 were within three percentage points of their Spanish counterparts ten years earlier. This surprising finding may be explained by the fact that this university has been a large metropolitan commuter institution for longer than ten years; that is, the students in 1985 were perhaps already older than the national average.

The gender distribution of Spanish students was not included in the 1985 survey. In 1995, 40 percent of the Spanish students surveyed were male, 60 percent female. In upper-division courses 44 percent were male, 56 percent female. These numbers differ from those found by Harlow, Smith, and Garfinkel (1980) and Lacasa and Lacasa (1983), in that for both of those studies there were twice as many women as men. The French results in this study also differ greatly from the Spanish in that, overall, 70 percent of French students were female, and an even greater 83 percent in upper-division courses. Perhaps the somewhat higher percentage of males

in the Spanish survey is due in part to the perception that Spanish is useful for the professions, including those outside the humanities.

Reported GPA Compared to Reported Spanish Grades

Because of a widely held perception that grade inflation has been a serious and growing problem, students were asked to report their overall grade point averages (GPAs) and their Spanish or French grades to date.

As Figure 2 demonstrates, overall GPAs were much lower than Spanish grades in both surveys. Because students reported GPAs in numbers and language grades in letters, the contrast may be somewhat difficult to detect immediately, but when GPA numbers are translated to letters, we can see that Spanish students in both surveys reported 40 to 50 percent "A" and "B" overall averages compared to 82 percent "A" and "B" Spanish averages. No major differences were found between the two Spanish surveys; whatever grade inflation there may be in Spanish classes today had already developed more than ten years ago.

As Figure 3 shows, the GPAs of French students as reported in 1995 were much higher than those of their Spanish counterparts: 62 percent of the French students reported GPAs between 3.1 and 4.0, compared to 41 percent of the Spanish students. At the same time, the French students reported lower grades in their target language; 25 percent reported "C" grades, while only 16 percent of the Spanish students admitted to having a "C" average in Spanish. The data seem to indicate that Spanish grades are indeed inflated, in comparison to both their own GPAs and French students' language grades. One might question whether Spanish students'

Figure 3.

Reported GPA Compared to Reported French Grades, 1995

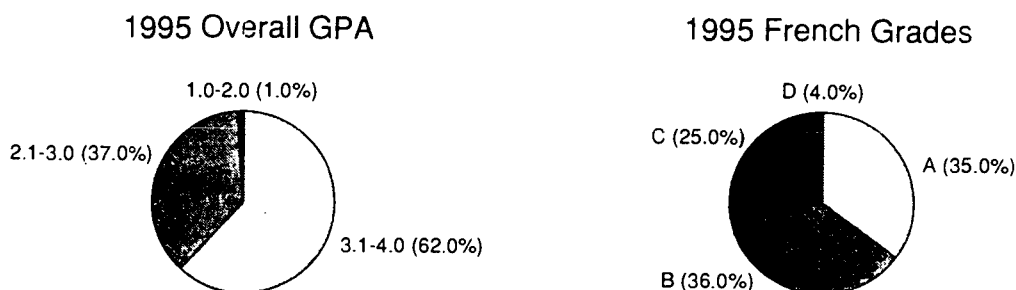
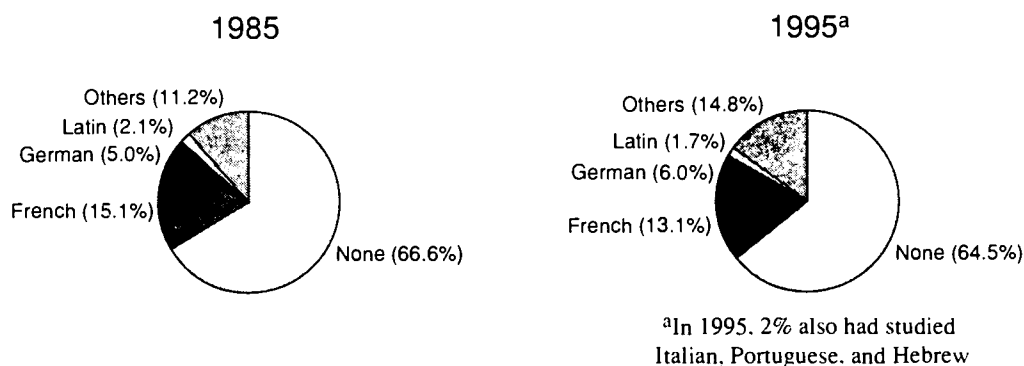
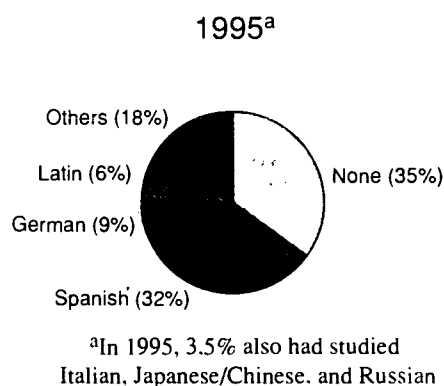


Figure 4.**Other Languages Studied (Spanish), 1985 and 1995****Figure 5.****Other Languages Studied (French), 1995**

GPA's would be even lower if it were not for the grades that they receive in their Spanish courses.

Previous Language Study

Figure 4 shows that the majority of Spanish students in both surveys had studied no other language, and that French, German, and Latin represented the language backgrounds held by the largest numbers of those who had studied another language. The figures remained remarkably constant in the ten years between the two surveys.

The case is considerably different for students of French. Figure 5 demonstrates that French students enter the university having studied

other languages to a much greater extent than Spanish students. In fact, 32 percent of the French students said that they had studied Spanish in high school.

For both language groups the "Other" category included such diverse languages as Greek, Hebrew, Portuguese, Dutch, Norwegian, Polish, Rumanian, Korean, Arabic, Navaho, and sign language. In many cases these were probably the first languages of the students or their parents or spouses.

The Spanish students' previous experience with Spanish consisted of a combination of high school study, courses in other institutions of higher education, travel, and bilingual home life. The largest group of lower-division French and Spanish students studied their languages in high school and then continued their study of them to satisfy the language

Table 3.

Percentage of Students Reporting Previous Study of Target Language, 1985 and 1995

Spanish	1985			1995		
	Total	Students in All Lower-Division Courses	Students in First-Semester Course	Total	Students in All Lower-Division Courses	Students in First-Semester Course
High School	69	68	50	57	63	44
Other Colleges	17	13	0	9	10	4

French	1995				
	Total	Students in All Lower-Division Courses	Students in First-Semester Course		
High School	61	68	50		
Other Colleges	15	19	0		

requirement. Many reported beginning in the third college semester directly from high school, and some began in fifth and sixth semesters.

“True” beginners in the first-semester course have consistently complained about “false” beginners in their classes, and this study supports their contention: as Table 3 shows, 50 percent of Spanish first-semester students in 1985 and 44 percent in 1995 reported that they had studied Spanish in high school, primarily for one or two years. Fifty percent of French first-semester students had also studied French in high school. The French supervisor has attempted to alleviate this situation with the use of a placement test, but it is clear from these data that the issue has not been resolved. In 1998 incoming students will be required to have studied two years of a foreign language in order to enter a university in the state system; if credit for the first-semester course is withdrawn from them, the numbers of “false” beginners may well drop significantly.

Universities in southwestern states boast large numbers of Hispanic students, many of whom study Spanish either as support for their careers, to maintain their heritage, or both. Perhaps because this tradition was well established long ago, little change was found between 1985 and 1995. In the previous study 17 percent of the students reported that their families spoke Spanish at home, compared to 19 percent in 1995. Even among “beginners” the numbers are 13 percent in 1985 and 16 percent in 1995. The percentage of Hispanic students at the upper levels was more than twice as great as at the lower levels in both surveys. A slight decrease was found in the reported amount of Spanish spoken in the home, however: in 1985 the largest group (13 percent) estimated that they spoke Spanish at home between 25 and 75 percent of the time, while in 1995 the largest group (11 percent) spoke it 25 to 50 percent of the time. By comparison, 3 percent of the French students reported that their families spoke French in their homes.

Spanish speakers have always had difficulty deciding where to place themselves in the program. Courses in Spanish for Spanish Speakers consist of two-semester sequences in the second and third years, but only one section per semester is offered at each level. The number of Spanish-speaking students greatly exceeds the capacity of these classes, and many students cannot fit them into their schedules. Clearly, the department needs to address better the needs and interests of this large group of students.

A surprising number of students at all levels have traveled to Spanish- and French-speaking countries, if only briefly in most cases. In 1985, 63 percent of Spanish students had had such an experience, 51 percent in

1995. As might be expected in the Southwest, 42 percent and 30 percent of these totals, respectively, had traveled to Mexico at least once. Spain was in second place, with 11 percent and 8 percent in the two Spanish surveys, respectively. Fifty percent of French students reported brief or extended stays in Francophone countries; of these, 49 percent had visited France, 25 percent Canada, and 18 percent other parts of French-speaking Europe.

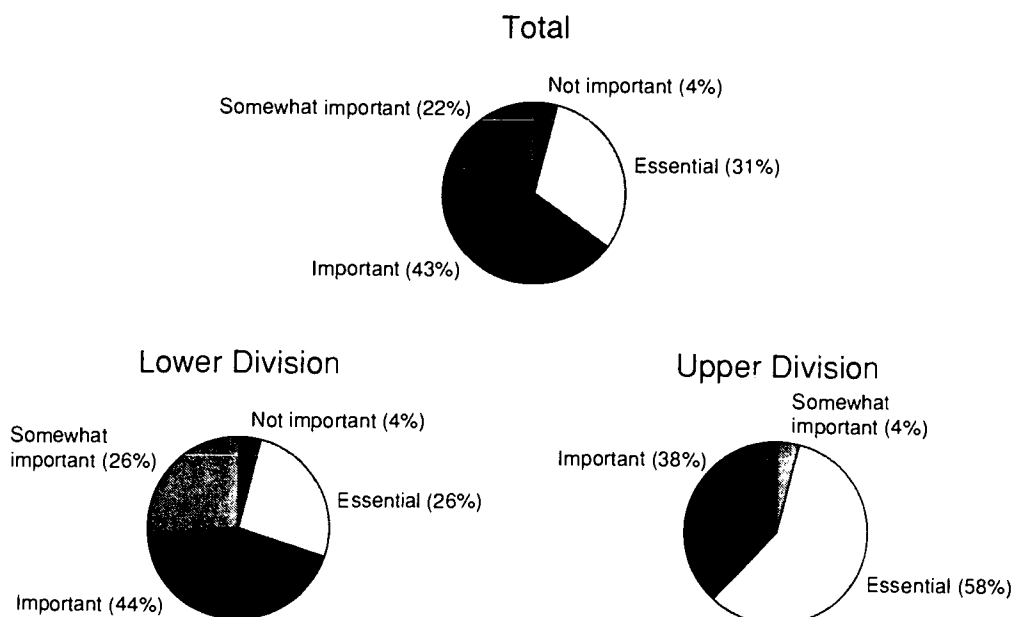
The Value of Language Study

A question was added to the 1995 questionnaire to elicit information on perceptions of the importance of language study for all students. Especially at the upper levels, both French and Spanish students perceived language study to be highly valuable for all students, and French students valued it more than Spanish students did.

As Figure 6 indicates, over half of the upper-division students in both languages rated language study as “essential,” compared to one-fourth to one-third of the lower-division students. Nonetheless, nearly 45 percent of the Spanish students who answered this question saw language study as

Figure 6.

The Importance of Language Study for All Students in 1995



“important,” while fewer than 3 percent rated it as “not at all important.” Furthermore, 69 percent at the lower levels in Spanish and 73 percent in French selected either “essential” or “important.” It would seem, then, that attitudes toward the value of language study are not generally negative, even among the “requirement students.” The next sections consider specific aspects of the endeavor that these students consider to be most valuable.

Plans and Hopes for Using the Language

Given the common perception that today’s students are becoming more oriented toward careers and prefer course content that relates to practical purposes, students were asked in both surveys to list any plans or hopes they had for using the language in the future. Their responses were grouped according to thematic categories. The categories that were most frequently mentioned by Spanish students in both 1985 and 1995 were: 1) career/profession/job, including teaching; 2) conversation with Spanish speakers; and 3) travel/vacation. Other goals included studying and living abroad, becoming bilingual, gaining personal knowledge or satisfaction, and teaching the language to their children. Interestingly enough, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic students listed raising children with two languages as one of their goals.

As was expected, the career/professional category exceeded the second-ranking purpose, conversation with native speakers, by a ratio of 2 to 1 in 1985, and in 1995 it outscored travel/vacation by nearly 3.5 to 1. In both surveys Spanish students listed a wide range of careers, including business, medicine, teaching, law, broadcasting, counseling, law enforcement, social work, speech and hearing, journalism, international affairs, engineering, library work, and nursing. While some hoped to live and work abroad, others expected Spanish to be useful for work-related purposes in the Southwest.

The French students’ plans differed from those of the Spanish students. For the former the order was: 1) travel/live abroad; 2) work abroad; and 3) study abroad. Other plans included being fluent in another language, communicating with people in the street, teaching French to their children, and using the language for graduate study. Careers mentioned by these students included teaching, international business, international law, and international affairs, but professional uses of the language were mentioned slightly less by French students than by Spanish students.

Reasons for Studying Spanish/French

In 1985, Spanish students were asked to read a list of seven reasons for studying the language and to check all that applied to them:

- _____ It is required for my major.
- _____ I like Spanish.
- _____ Spanish is the easiest language to learn.
- _____ It is important in the Southwest.
- _____ I want to use it in my work or profession
(type of work: _____)
- _____ My family speaks Spanish.
- _____ Spanish is my major.
- _____ Other(s): _____

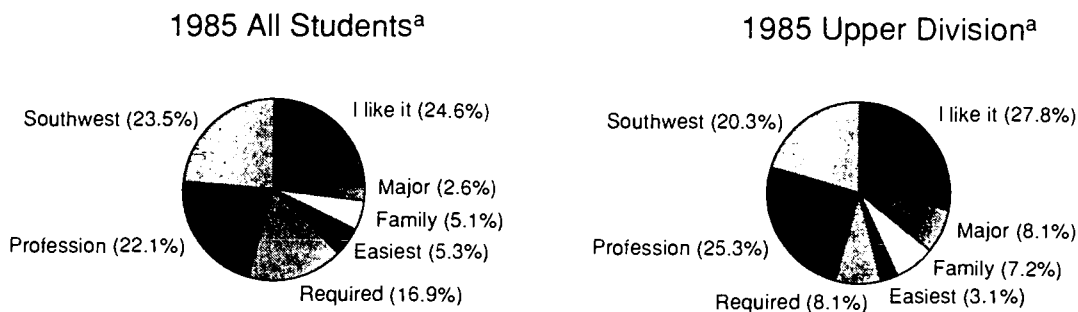
Figure 7 provides the results of this section of the Spanish questionnaire.

Most 1985 respondents selected Spanish because they liked it, because it was important in the Southwest, and because it was useful for their professions. Last among the major reasons pertaining to all students was the perception that Spanish was easy. And although language study was required at that time for all students pursuing a B.A. in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, respondents did not include the requirement among their three most important motivating factors.

The two primary differences between the responses of lower- and upper-division Spanish students in 1985 were: 1) there were more majors

Figure 7.

Reasons for Studying Spanish, 1985



^aCheck any that pertain

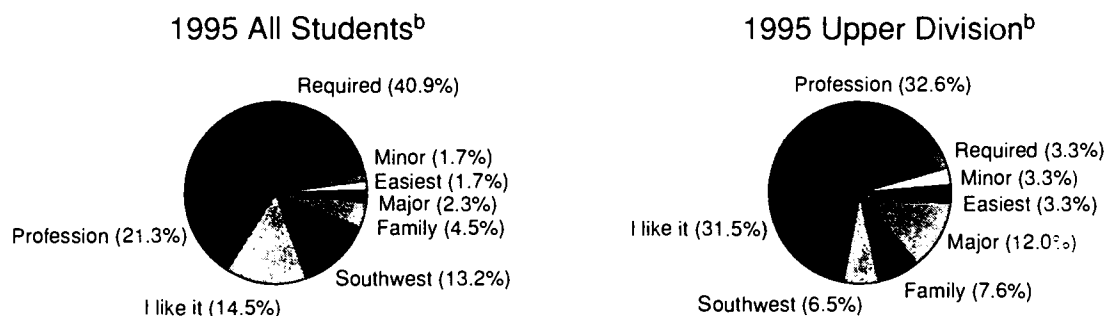
at the upper levels; and 2) ease of learning fell to last place among all upper-division students (even behind “It is my major” and “My family speaks Spanish”).

The reasons for Spanish study reported by students in 1995 are presented in Figure 8. The 1995 questionnaire asked students to select the top three reasons and rank them according to importance for them personally. Many had difficulty following these directions and, consequently, their responses had to be eliminated from the data. Of those who followed the directions, 41 percent considered that they were studying Spanish primarily because a language was required. Interestingly enough, however, they still did not claim that they selected Spanish because it was easy; instead, they still considered it to be important for their professions and in the Southwest in general, and they still selected “I like Spanish” as their third choice. The perception that students who are required to study a language necessarily bear a negative attitude toward it is evidently inaccurate more often than not, at least for these students (unless they simply could not admit to a weakness for “easy” courses).

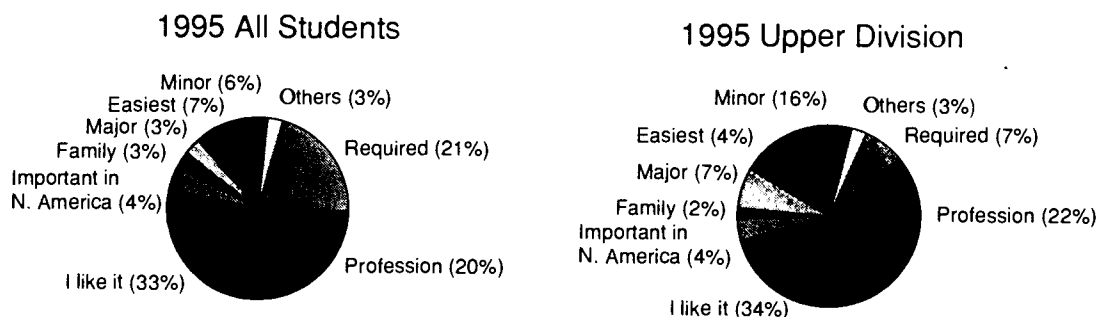
Although the 1985 data showed little variation in the ranking according to the level of study of the respondents, the gap between lower- and upper-division motivations is wide in 1995: For lower-division students the primary motive is the requirement, whereas the more advanced students select pleasure and professional usefulness as their most important reasons for pursuing Spanish study.

Figure 8.

Reasons for Studying Spanish, 1995



^bRank the 3 top reasons

Figure 9.**Reasons for Studying French, 1995**

The 1995 data for French are different. Even after the imposition of the language requirement for science majors, the French students' top motivation was that they *liked* French; in fact, this reason was given more often by the French students in 1995 than by the Spanish students in 1985. Fewer French than Spanish students claimed the requirement motivation, although it seemed to be related to professional aspirations. Like the Spanish students, very few (7 percent) of French students selected "It is the easiest language to learn."

The French questionnaire included the reason "It is important in North America" in order to ascertain the degree to which students perceived the importance of French-speaking Canada in NAFTA. Apparently, that consideration carried little weight for most French students at this large Southwestern university.

"It is my minor" played an important role for upper-division French students, who mentioned that they planned to use it in their careers. Several students volunteered other reasons for studying French: "It's important to know other languages," "It's a beautiful language," and "I like the culture." In general, the French students' motivations seem to be somewhat less practical than those of their Spanish counterparts.

Goals and Preferences

This section of the questionnaires was divided into three parts. The first question, "What do you want/expect to learn from Spanish/French

study?” asked students to rank seven goals in order of importance for them personally:

- _____ to be able to communicate in Spanish/French in real life situations
- _____ to be able to carry out professional/work-related functions
- _____ to know about Hispanic/Francophone cultures: customs, values, way-of-life information
- _____ to be able to function appropriately within Hispanic/Francophone culture
- _____ to read and appreciate the literature of Hispanic peoples/in French
- _____ to know about the Spanish/French language: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc.
- _____ to be informed about Hispanic/French or Francophone formal culture: art, music, literature, history, etc.

Unfortunately in 1985, a printing error inadvertently combined the fourth and fifth options (ability to function appropriately in the culture and reading and appreciation of literature), thus invalidating the results and forcing the elimination of these categories from the data.

For each of the other categories the numbers of students who ranked it first or second were added together, and the resulting sums were ranked.

In 1985, students at all levels most wanted to learn to communicate and to function professionally using the language. In third place was knowledge of the language itself (ironically, this was the aspect most stressed in the courses). “Small c” culture—customs, values, way-of-life information—finished a distant fourth, although it was nearly five times more important to those students than “Big C” culture—art, music, literature, history, etc.

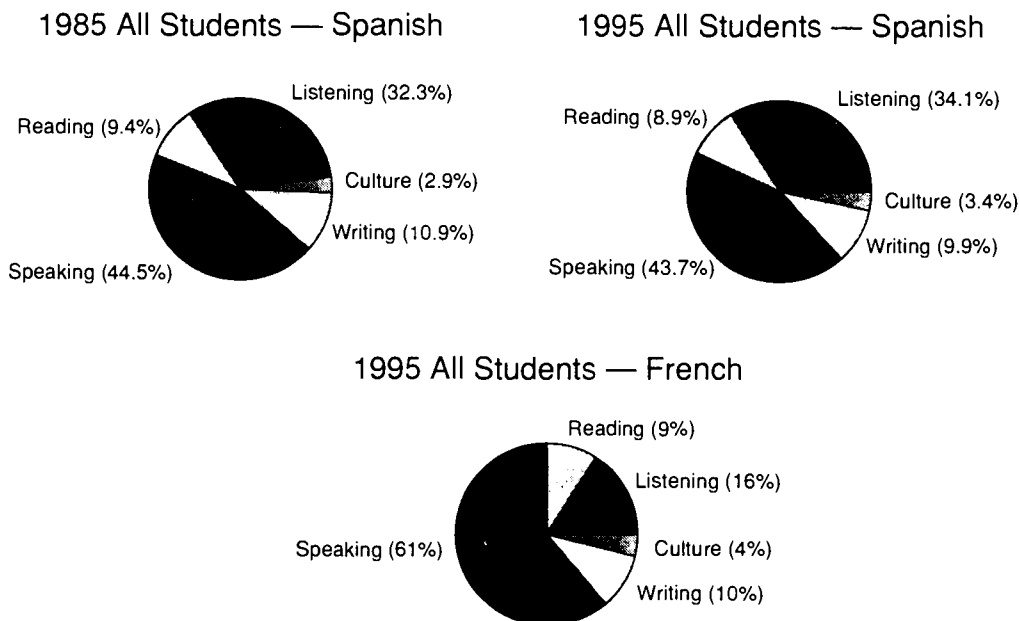
As Table 4 indicates, Spanish students in 1995 overwhelmingly wanted to learn to communicate above all other goals. Literature placed last, and “small c” culture was considered to be only slightly more appropriate for language study than formal culture. This result, while surprising, coincides with the findings of Harlow and Muyskens (1994) for intermediate-level students. One could hypothesize that because the coursework stressed language as divorced from culture, students were unaware of the relationship between the two and assumed that the study of culture was inappropriate for a language class. If this hypothesis is true, it points up the need for culture-based courses as well as for developing awareness of the importance of cultural understanding for effective communication.

Table 4.**Goals: Knowledge and Abilities**

	Spanish 1985		Spanish 1995			French 1995		
	Rank	Total ^c	Rank	Total ^c	%	Rank	Total ^c	%
Communicate	1	458	1	383	38	1	97	26
Work	2	247	2	198	20	4	53	14
Social Situations	NA	NA	3	195	20	2	68	18
Language Knowledge	3	206	4	112	11	3	60	16
culture^a	4	83	5	50	5	7	28	8
Culture^b	5	17	6	37	4	6	31	8
Literature	NA	NA	7	22	2	5	32	9
Totals		1,011		997	100		369	100
^a way-of-life information ^b formal culture ^c Number of subjects who ranked each category 1 or 2 NA: These two categories were inadvertently combined in the 1985 questionnaire; therefore, percentages are not comparable.								

Although French students also rated communication first and functioning in social situations second, their next choice was knowledge of the language (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation), followed closely by its use in the world of work. They also rated formal culture and literature slightly above or equal to way-of-life culture. Again, these French students overall appear to be slightly more culturally oriented and less professionally oriented than the Spanish students in this study.

Figure 10 displays the relative importance of each of the four skills and culture for students in the three surveys. Overall rankings for 1985 and for both languages in 1995 are nearly identical. Again, speaking was perceived to be the most important skill, while culture placed last. It should be noted that in all three surveys many students commented that in reality all skills were equally important and should not be ranked in this forced fashion.

Figure 10.**Goals: Relative Importance of Skills and Culture (Spanish), 1985 and 1995****Preference for Specialized Courses**

Students were then asked to read a list of potential courses and check all that they would take if they were given the opportunity. In the 1985 questionnaire, these included Spanish for several professions; a reading course; Hispanic culture taught in Spanish; professional courses in their majors taught in Spanish; and an immersion program. Table 5 shows the ratings of these courses and programs based on frequency of selection. When professional courses are combined, it is evident that they were most popular among Spanish students at both levels, followed by immersion. Reading and culture then placed last.

In the 1995 questionnaire, all professions were combined into one category, "Spanish for your profession," which placed first for both lower- and upper-division students, followed by immersion and then reading and culture courses. Lower-division students preferred reading, while upper-division students preferred culture.

The French students in general were less extreme in their preferences than the Spanish students. For the lower-division French students, immersion was most popular, with professional courses a close second. For

Table 5.

Courses Students Would Take, 1985 and 1995

Spanish	1985	
	Lower Division	Upper Division
Business	198	49
Medicine	54	14
Law	53	13
Teaching	70	23
Reading	159	35
Culture	113	39
Major	181	51
Immersion	172	47

Spanish	1995	
	Lower Division	Upper Division
Profession	196	93
Reading	85	59
Culture	57	77
Immersion	157	90

French	1995	
	Lower Division	Upper Division
Profession	46	25
Reading	37	27
French Culture	35	32
Immersion	55	39
Francophone Culture	21	20

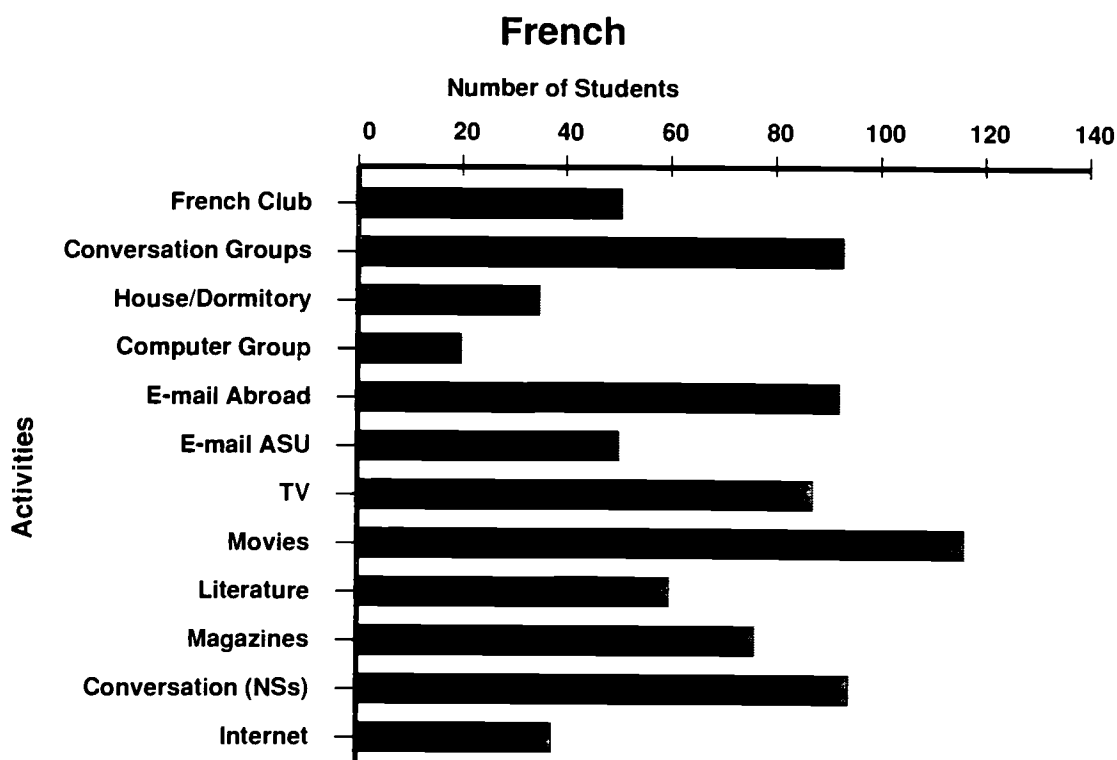
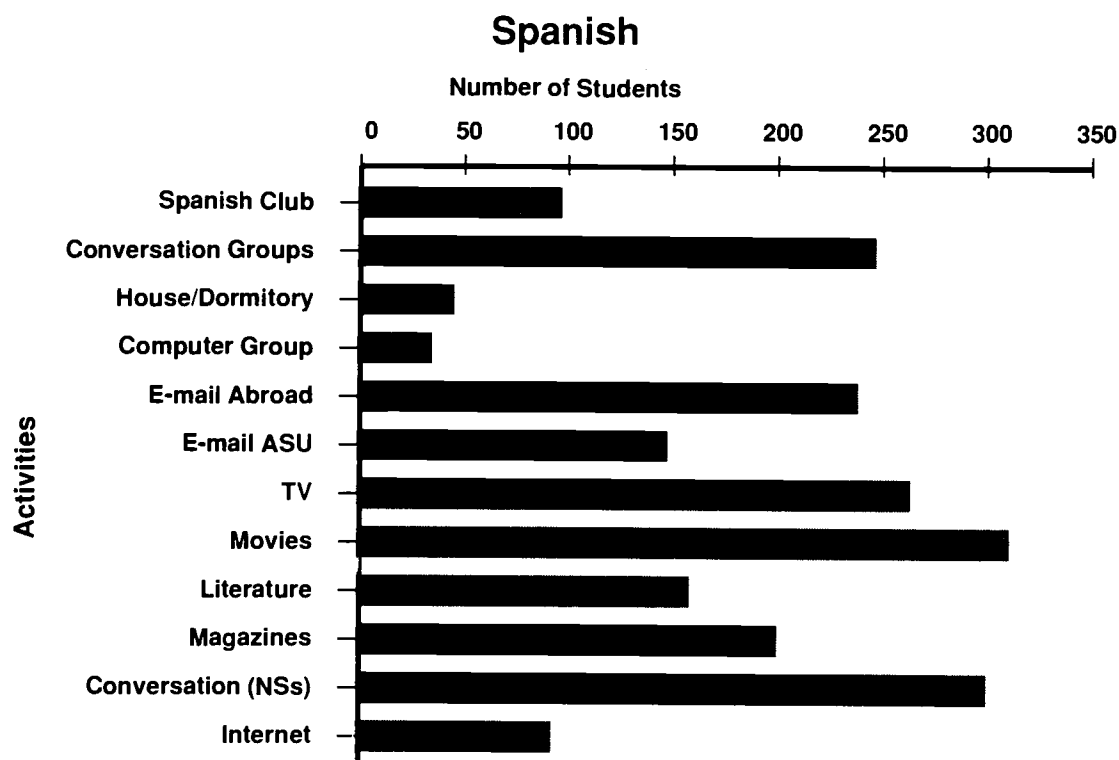
upper-division French students, French culture and reading were preferred over professional courses. Francophone culture trailed all others at both levels. Quebec was the principal Francophone region noted by students in connection with travel, study, and work/living abroad, with some listing also of Martinique and the Caribbean region. No mention was made of French-speaking Africa. It appears that while more advanced students in both languages are somewhat better informed as to the relationship between language and culture, much more remains to be done in this area at all levels.

A major surprise that emerged from all surveys was the interest expressed in an immersion program. In 1985, 33 percent of the respondents checked the immersion option; in 1995, 42 percent selected it. However, as several students suggested in their comments, they might not be free to dedicate the necessary time to immersion language study.

Most surprising in 1995 were the high frequencies with which students checked specialized course options, given the fact that the principal motivation at the lower levels was the language requirement. Perhaps their perception of the languages as important for professional purposes overrides their original lack of motivation, once they begin their language study.

Potential Participation in Out-of-Class Activities

In 1995, French and Spanish students were asked to check all the outside activities out of a list of 12 that they might participate in, given the opportunity. The extremely positive responses to these options, depicted in Figure 11, again came as a surprise, except for the first-place category, "Movies," which students often request in classes. The next three rankings consisted of various types of communication (conversation with native speakers, conversation groups with others on campus, and e-mail interaction with native speakers in other countries), and for Spanish, watching television. Students were less enthusiastic about e-mail with other Spanish or French students on campus, and computer work on the Internet and computer discussion groups were even less popular. Also surprising was the apparent lack of interest in a club, considering the faculty's concern about offering one. Indeed, attendance at meetings has always been problematic and a reason for the demise of the clubs that have been initiated.

*Figure 11.***Activities Students Would Pursue**

Discussion and Conclusions

This study, which was meant to describe today's French and Spanish students at one southwestern university and their curricular preferences, began with two overarching questions: (1) How much and in what significant ways have our Spanish students changed in the past ten years, since a previous survey was conducted? and (2) How do our Spanish and French students compare on these measurements today? The main results of three surveys at this large metropolitan university can be summarized as follows:

1. More "requirement students" opt for Spanish than for French. In fact, Spanish enrollments have more than doubled with the imposition of new language requirements. Lower-level French enrollments have decreased, but at the upper levels they have increased somewhat.
2. Non-language majors, ranging from physical education to law, outnumber language majors in the language courses at all levels in both Spanish and French, a phenomenon that has not changed in the last ten years. While most groups of "requirement students" drop out after completing the first four semesters, business and education majors tend to continue voluntarily to the upper levels. An in-depth study of the needs and interests of students in all languages would seem to be long overdue. While Spanish students are slightly more career-oriented than French students, professional motivations and purposes for language study were cited by large numbers in both groups. What specific knowledge and skills would be most appropriate for these careers? Are there some basic functions as well as linguistic elements that are common to most careers? Should these students, then, complete a common core and then branch into more specialized tracks with major content taught in the language? How would our current specializations—literature, civilization, linguistics, pedagogy—contribute within such a program?
3. Students of French and Spanish are not older today than in 1985, at least at this predominantly commuter university. The largest group of students is still between 18 and 21 years old. Female students outnumber males roughly 60 percent to 40 percent in Spanish, 70 to 30 percent in French.
4. Spanish grades are more inflated than French grades relative to overall grade point averages. Might this apparent benefit account for some of the growth in Spanish enrollments when new requirements are put in place?

5. "False beginners" make up about half of all first-semester students in both languages. In addition to creating a possibly discouraging environment for true beginners, these students are apparently not taking advantage of previous Spanish study to the fullest extent possible. One solution to this problem might be to make the first semester non-credit for those who have previously studied the language, combined with the use of a communication-based placement test and articulation between the schools and the university. In fact, the Ohio Collaborative Articulation/Assessment Project (Stansfield 1994) may be a prototype for such endeavors.
6. Between 13 and 17 percent of Spanish language students at all levels have families who speak Spanish at home. This proportion grew slightly in ten years, although the amount of Spanish spoken in the home declined slightly, according to students' reports. This group of heritage learners has traditionally been neglected, in the sense that little effort has been made to analyze their needs and devise programs that build on their considerable strengths. Only recently has the profession begun to address this issue beyond individual schools and universities (see, for example, Valdés 1980, 1992, 1995).
7. Most French and Spanish students perceive language study to be "essential" or "important" for all students. The language requirement does not seem to alter this view.
8. For Spanish students in 1985 and French students today, "I like it" is the main reason for studying the language; in 1995, however, lower-division Spanish students ranked the language requirement as their first motivation, followed by professional reasons. Neither language group admitted selecting the language because it was the easiest language to learn. Perhaps once they begin the study of a language, they find that it is not particularly easy.
9. Both French and Spanish students selected oral communication goals over all others and rated culture last. For Spanish students, way-of-life culture was preferred almost five times more than formal culture (art, music, literature), and literature as a separate category was ranked far behind all others. French students were less extreme in their choices, although their rankings were similar at the lower levels. Students apparently do not perceive a relationship between their goals and interests and the study of literature and culture, as was found by Martin and Laurie (1993) in Australia, although they also concluded

that students' anxiety about their abilities was a contributing factor. It would seem that literature and culture need to be made more accessible to students, and the value of both for their own lives needs to be made clearer to them.

10. Professional courses taught in the language and immersion courses would be most popular among both French and Spanish groups, although upper-division French students rank culture study in the language higher than professional courses.
11. Outside of class, students claim that they would engage in communicative activities such as conversation and e-mail with native speakers and conversation groups.

Recent technological advances are revolutionizing language teaching. The market offers teachers as well as students a variety of possibilities using CD-ROM, laser discs, cassettes, video programs, computer programs, etc. These new technologies break the boundaries of the classic lecture-centered class. With computers, students can practice the language and check grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation. At the same time, they can broaden their knowledge of the target language culture by involving themselves in specific e-mail groups or navigating the World Wide Web. For teachers, technology-assisted classes become more active and vivid.

The picture of this university's language students that emerges here shows them to be professionally and communicatively oriented, valuing language study as useful for their future lives. Clearly, the faculty should analyze the program in detail to evaluate the degree to which these students' needs and preferences are being met. This recommendation has been made before, both locally and in the professional literature (e.g., Guntermann 1983; Rivers 1985; and Harlow and Muyskens 1994). Indeed in 1981, this university initiated a semi-intensive program in five languages for carefully selected students preparing for international professions, and these courses continue to be taught in Spanish and French and occasionally in Japanese, but only a small group of students is served by this program.

There may be many reasons for the lack of variety in curricular options for students across the nation, including academic values that still reject an emphasis on practical language uses; the loss of faculty due to

years of economic distress; faculty who are ill-prepared to change the program, given their rather narrow specializations and the lack of expertise in curriculum development; and the poverty of rewards for developing and implementing innovative curricula. In addition, there is a lack of textbooks and other learning materials that combine a professional orientation with the development of overall proficiency.

Using integrated curricula is one way to begin to meet the needs of these students with varied interests and goals in our courses. Language proficiency development, cultural knowledge, and literature should be a focus at all levels. More familiarity with the target culture can be developed in language courses, including upper-division conversation and composition courses, through use of authentic oral and written materials—magazines, newspapers, TV programs, and radio broadcasts, as well as resources on the Internet—that deal with current events and daily life in the society. Students can also be introduced to materials treating “Big C” culture—art, music, literature, history, and the politics, economy, and sociology of the target culture—in these courses as well. Knowledge gained through activities working with these materials will better prepare students to live and work in the culture. Traditional upper-division content courses, i.e., period literature and civilization courses, can be reorganized into area studies courses or period studies courses that integrate many manifestations of Culture, including literature, art, historical events, etc., into the course. Conscious attention to development of language proficiency should continue in these content courses through the use of communicative activities appropriate to the students’ proficiency level, small group discussion, individual and group presentations of subject matter, and cooperative learning for planning and problem-solving.

Other areas that need attention are grade inflation, placement of students at levels appropriate to their backgrounds, an expanded program for Spanish speakers, and the creation of extracurricular activities such as conversation groups and e-mail with native speakers.

While these surveys have given us much information about our students, similar information from other types of institutions of higher education is needed, as well as more in-depth studies involving interviews and the collection of data from varied sources, in order to provide a basis for effective curriculum development.

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Appendix

SPANISH STUDENT SURVEY-FALL 1995

Thank you for your participation in this effort to know and understand your preferences and interests. Please take the time to think carefully about each item, and add any other comments of your own at the end. Remember, you need not give your name; your responses will remain anonymous, and this exercise is unrelated to your grade in the course.

General Information

The number of the course you are taking now: _____

The time of day of your class: _____

Your major: _____ Age: _____ Sex: M F

GPA: _____ Spanish Grade Ave.: _____

Other languages you have studied or know: _____

Importance of Language Study

In your opinion, how important is the study of foreign languages for all students today? (Please circle.)

Essential	Important	Somewhat important	Not at all important
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Your Previous Experience with Spanish (Please check all that apply.)

____ I studied Spanish in high school (No. of years: ____)

____ I studied Spanish at another college/university
(No. of quarters/semesters ____)

____ Spanish is spoken in my family 100% ____ ; 75% ____ 50% ____ ;
25% ____ ;
other _____.

____ I have traveled/lived in an Hispanic country/countries

Name of country/countries: _____

____ Other: _____

Your Plans for the Future

What plans or hopes do you have to use Spanish in the future? Please explain.

Your Reasons for Studying Spanish. (Please RANK YOUR TOP three reasons:
1 = MOST IMPORTANT, 3 = LEAST IMPORTANT.)

- _____ It is required for my major.
- _____ I like Spanish.
- _____ Spanish is the easiest language to learn.
- _____ It is important in the Southwest.
- _____ I want to use it in my work or profession (type of work: _____)
- _____ My family speaks Spanish/ It is my heritage.
- _____ Spanish is my major.
- _____ Spanish is my minor.
- _____ Other(s): _____

Where Did You Begin at this University?

If you have studied Spanish previously in high school or in another college or university, at what level did you begin to study Spanish *at this university*? (Please circle.)

SPA 101 102 107 111 201 202 207

SPA 311 312 313 314 412 Literature courses

Goals and Preferences

A. What do you want/expect to learn from Spanish study? Please RANK IN ORDER OF THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR *you* the following goals.

(1 = most important; 7 = least important)

- _____ to be able to communicate in Spanish outside of class
- _____ to be able to carry out professional/work-related functions
- _____ to know about Hispanic cultures: customs, values, way-of-life information
- _____ to be able to read and appreciate literature in Spanish
- _____ to be able to function appropriately in social situations in Spanish
- _____ to know about the Spanish language: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc.
- _____ to be informed about Hispanic formal culture: art, music, literature, history, geography, etc.

Comments:

B. What relative emphasis do you think should be given to culture and language skills in Spanish classes? PLEASE RANK THEM ACCORDING TO YOUR OWN PREFERENCE, 1 = most important; 5 = least important.

___ listening ___ speaking ___ culture ___ reading ___ writing

Comments:

C. Which of the following courses, if any, would you take if they were offered? Please check any that apply.

Spanish for Your Profession _____
(for example, Spanish for Business or for Medical Personnel)

A Spanish reading course _____ Hispanic culture taught in Spanish _____

Spanish/English translation _____

A Spanish immersion program (full time for 1 semester = 4 semesters of study and credit) _____

Other: _____

D. If you had the opportunity, which of the following would you like to participate in outside of class? Please check any that apply.

_____ Spanish Club

_____ Spanish conversation groups

_____ Spanish House group or dormitory _____ Computer discussion

_____ e-mail with Spanish speakers in other countries

_____ e-mail with other Spanish students at this university

_____ Spanish television programs _____ Spanish movies

____ Reading literature in Spanish

_____ Reading magazines and/or newspapers in Spanish

____ Conversation with native speakers

_____ Surfing the Internet for Hispanic sites

Other: _____

Additional Comments. Please provide any further thoughts about your preferences with regard to Spanish study: