Hispania Guest Editor’s Column:
The Spanish and Portuguese Curriculum:
Transition, Expansion, and (R)evolution

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Sheri Spaine Long and I began work on the centenary issue of Hispania in July of 2014. It has been an honor and a pleasure to work with her as a Guest Editor during the development of this special issue, which is, in reality, an extra, or fifth issue, of AATSP’s outstanding quarterly journal. The contents will serve as a record that provides future members of our organization with a clear picture of the state of Hispanic studies and Luso-Brazilian studies 100 years after the founding of our organization. Moreover, the combination of essays and responses provides an educated forecast of future developments in a wide variety of subfields in Spanish and Portuguese. Each essay offers a succinct overview of the extant research in a particular area as well as a clear notion of what researchers are doing now. The focus of this volume, however, is on the visionary aspect of where we are headed as a profession.

We cast the widest possible net to seek contributions to this volume, namely, established academics, teachers, researchers, practitioners, and administrators of all levels and types of instruction. The intent was to produce a special issue of Hispania that reflected the diverse nature of our membership that includes more than 10,000 professionals and allied organizations.

The first official “Call for Abstracts” for the Centenary Issue of Hispania appeared online in September 2014 with a submission deadline of January 15, 2015. The instructions to potential contributors stated that:

The special issue is intended to provide readers of the journal with overview essays that contain both a succinct historical perspective and a forward-thinking vision of the future of a particular segment of our field. Most of the issue will address matters that will be of importance as Hispania enters its second century of publication. To that end, consistent with Hispania’s broad scope, we are soliciting papers in a wide variety of areas identified in this separate call for abstracts. Abstracts can be written in English, Portuguese, or Spanish.

By the January 2015 deadline, we received a total of 133 abstracts. Sheri Spaine Long and I then proceeded to evaluate separately the quality and the appropriateness of the abstracts for
inclusion in the centenary volume. We ultimately selected 31 abstracts for development into articles of 3,500 words. Subsequently, these essays underwent evaluation by a minimum of two anonymous reviewers. We then sent the completed essays to one or two scholar-teachers to prepare a response. We defined responses in the following way “An academic response involves the preparation of a careful and reasonable response to an original draft essay in which the author provides an alternate and collegial viewpoint on the topic.” The responses were also subject to evaluation by at least two anonymous evaluators. There are 43 responses that provide differing perspectives on the original essay.

The articles and the responses in this special issue of *Hispania* represent the work of active and productive scholars and practitioners in Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian studies. Their well-informed projections of what our endeavors will look like present a guardedly optimistic vision of the future. To be sure, there will be new challenges and unforeseen concerns for new generations of scholars and teachers. Nevertheless, the current cohort of students, instructors and scholars reinforces our belief that they will address opportunity and adversity with exceptional resourcefulness, dedication, and professionalism.

In very general terms, the essays and responses address certain overarching themes that link the topics of these essays and their responses, which we address briefly below. They include technology, instructional materials, cultural studies, enrollment, demography, teacher education, and community engagement.

Technology will continue to have a profound impact on what language teachers and researchers do inside and outside the classroom. We can already see its effect in terms of the ever-increasing implementation of distance education and blended and flipped classes. The continuously evolving and rapidly changing nature of technology enables us to engage in ever more innovative manifestations of synchronous and asynchronous communication with students, teachers, and researchers worldwide. Online only degrees at both the undergraduate and graduate levels are expanding significantly and exponentially. The web already provides students and teachers with instantaneous portals to diverse manifestations of ACTFL’s three Ps (products, practices, and perspectives) without traveling to a target language destination, yet simultaneously providing a stimulus to visit countries where Spanish and Portuguese are official languages. Furthermore, language apps, computer-mediated communication, social networking, and language games are but a few of the manifestations of technology’s burgeoning purview. Finally, significant linguistic databases allow researchers to access huge amounts of information and to determine language change and emerging sociolinguistic phenomena.

Instructional materials are undergoing rapid change. Most now have a dual system (traditional bound books and digital format). The trend to digital texts facilitates content change and expands and enhances virtual reality experiences online. These changes will place new demands on teachers, students, textbook authors, and publishers alike, while offering appealing novel options. Linguists will play a crucial role in the content of textbooks (e.g., through the inclusion of dialect forms, pragmatic competence, new approaches to literary analysis, and other domains).

Cultural studies, in general terms, is the interdisciplinary area of research that examines the interrelationship and the interaction of cultural symbols within a community or between communities as a way of signaling power relations in society (ideology, class, ethnicity, gender, nationhood, sexual orientation, and so forth), and it seeks to explain and comprehend the complex nature of cultural representations. This approach to teaching culture appears in various forms (e.g., cinema, literary texts, and an expansive notion of cultural textual manifestations beyond traditional high cultural expressions, language variation, and other cultural signs). This area of critical inquiry will continue to be a significant part of the curriculum because it provides a framework for explaining the covert meaning of cultural practices. New ways of integrating literature within this framework continue to appear.
Enrollments in Spanish and Portuguese influence pedagogical decision making both positively and negatively. The most recent MLA web publication (Goldberg, Looney, and Lusin 2015) provides information about language enrollment trends in the United States. For the five-year period 2009–13, Spanish retains its position as the most studied second language in the United States. Nevertheless, enrollments declined by 8.2%. At the graduate level, Spanish enrollments shrank by 20.5%, while undergraduate enrollments decreased by 5.7%, and two-year college enrollments diminished by 14.1%. Portuguese, on the other hand, the thirteenth most commonly studied language in 2013, had an overall increase of 10.1%. These most recent MLA enrollment figures indicate a need to address the twin issues of decrease (Spanish) and nuanced increase (Portuguese). Third-language acquisition, especially in the case of Portuguese, has now become a promising curricular option. Portuguese will continue to expand as a world language because of its economic and cultural importance as well as the increasing demographic presence of Luso-Brazilians in the United States.

Demographic change will have a major impact on the teaching of Spanish and Portuguese. Heritage language speakers will increase in number in both languages over the next 50 years. The presence of these groups and their corresponding cultures will need to be recognized in our curriculum in an inclusive way. The United States Census Bureau projects that the US Hispanic population will comprise 28.6% of the population in 2060 (Colby and Ortman 2015: 9). Approximately two thirds of the US Hispanic population consists of people of Mexican heritage, and this will affect curricular content. Nevertheless, recognition of the rich cultural mosaic of Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian nationalities must always be respected.

Teacher education will undergo ongoing reevaluation and revision in order to provide the best qualified instructors of Spanish and Portuguese for future generations at all levels Pre-K–16 and beyond. The new cadre of teachers must address many emerging changes as well as those that no one can anticipate. Given the rapid demographic transformations noted above, changes in these programs will have to address the needs of Spanish Heritage Language speakers. Moreover, the varieties of Spanish such as Spanglish will require ongoing research. Study abroad programs and Language for Specific Purposes have become significant components of the curricula of many language departments/programs, and these elements will only increase as the profession seeks appropriate ways to modify and strengthen the curriculum. Finally, the teaching of Spanish is a global enterprise, and materials for those whose first language is not English will have to be developed.

“Community engagement,” one of the classifications of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, refers to collaboration between institutions of higher learning and the communities in which they are immersed (local, regional, state, national, global) in order to participate in mutually advantageous opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and resources (see New England Center for Higher Education). This aspect of college and university-wide cooperation with the external communities will continue to increase as colleges and universities seek to receive recognition as “classified campuses,” which requires significant documentary evidence of achievement. Incorporation of a community engagement component in the curriculum offers many novel ways of integrating theory and practice.

The themes included in this overview of the special issue on Visionary Essays: The Future of Spanish and Portuguese encompass many distinct components that need revision and review as the members of our profession regularly engage in curricular re-examination. Nevertheless, fidelity to the three communicative modes (presentational, interpersonal, interpretational) in speaking and writing and the five Cs (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities) will necessarily undergird any sound language curriculum regardless of the transformations that will occur. Change will occur in the language program, and we must embrace the good parts and discard those no longer useful as that we continuously refine and redefine our curriculum and our pedagogy.
WORKS CITED

