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## Communicative Online Language Teaching in Disruptive Times: A Redesign of the Introductory Spanish Curriculum

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### *Abstract*

*In this article, the authors describe the redesign of a first-semester Spanish course at the United States Air Force Academy due to the COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent transition from traditional, face-to-face instruction to fully online language teaching during the fall of 2020. More than 200 learners were enrolled across 11 course sections that were taught by eight different instructors who were required to use the same syllabus, learning platforms, lesson plans, and assessments under the supervision of a course director. The developers integrated a series of pedagogical interventions—such as online integrated performance assessments, lessons and content that were infused with open-access, authentic materials, and a digital storytelling project—to ensure that students engaged in three modes of communication within a meaningful cultural context. The instruction of culture, intercultural communicative competence, and pragmatics figured predominantly into the course design, which could be replicated by instructors who wish to teach language communicatively online.*

**Keywords:** *authentic materials, instructional design, online language pedagogy, open access materials, pandemic*

### **Background**

While an empirical study, this article focuses on practice and provides a conceptual framework for designing and delivering an online language class rapidly. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, instructors were forced into online teaching with no lead time to obtain the knowledge and skills that are necessary to design effective and efficient online language courses. However, over the summer of 2020, instructors had a short period of time to receive training in online pedagogy and instructional design and to develop their online classes prior to the start of the fall of 2020, where most of the instruction that took place across the world was delivered online. The purpose of this article is to provide a framework that other language educators could follow if they need to transition their courses online rapidly due to pandemics, natural disasters, or other unforeseen circumstances.

## **Introduction**

Over the past several decades, a paradigm shift has taken place in the teaching of world languages. Formerly known as learning the four skills in the target language (i.e., listening, reading, speaking, and writing), the teaching and assessing of second language acquisition is now conceptualized in communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches (Nunan, 1991; VanPatten, 2016) that place emphasis on intertwining the three modes of communication: interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational (The Standards Collaborative Board, 2015). Such approaches to teaching languages focus on learner proficiency in the target language instead of simply learning about the language one skill at a time. First conceptualized theoretically as the difference between learning and acquiring the target language (Krashen, 1982), the goal of second language acquisition is for learners to be able to use the language for specific purposes. Thus, the assessment of acquiring a second language is best measured through performance-based assessments. Via such assessments, students either work individually or collaboratively, using their abilities and knowledge of the language and culture(s) in order to create responses to prompts (i.e., complex questions or situations) that usually have more than one correct response (Liskin-Gasparro, 1996; Wiggins, 1998). Rubrics are generated and used to gauge learner performance that reflect the tasks and challenges language learners will face in real world scenarios.

### ***Institutional Background***

At the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) in Colorado, faculty in the Department of Foreign Languages and International Programs (DFF) offer eight world languages: Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. Each year the new class of admitted cadets take placement exams in the language(s) of their choice to determine the language and level that they will study their first year at USAFA. Based on the scores from the placement exam in each language, cadets are placed into the eight languages and all cadets must take one year of the same world language.

The course sequence for all languages starts at the 100-level and progresses to the 400-level. For example, in Spanish, some learners may begin in Spanish 131/132 the first year as a requirement. Upon successful completion, they may choose to enroll in Spanish 221/222 the second year and then 321/322 their third year. In their final year at USAFA, as all cadets must graduate in four years, they may enroll in Spanish 365/410 and even take additional classes at the 400-level. USAFA does not offer a major in a language; however, they may select the Foreign Area Studies major, add a language to the course of study, and take at least five courses at the 200-level or higher of the same language. The same five-course requirement is part of all language minors. Introductory class sizes vary, but the DFF strives to cap these courses at approximately 24 students per section.

In the case of Spanish, which is the focus on this article, the lower division courses (levels 100-200) focus on learning the basics of the Spanish language and Hispanic culture(s). Each level of Spanish, which is true of the eight languages taught at USAFA, has a course director who develops the entire course (e.g., lesson plans, assessments, projects). The Spanish/Portuguese Division Chief designates a course director for each level, which many times are military officers who hold a terminal degree but may lack

specific postgraduate degrees in second language acquisition teaching and learning. In the case of military faculty members, they are typically heritage speakers of the target language and have at least Advanced-Low proficiency in the target language. However, some of the officers have studied a second language, lived abroad, and have an advanced level of target language proficiency. As for civilian faculty, they must demonstrate proficiency and have postgraduate degrees in the target language. The number of fulltime civilian and military instructors varies each year ( $N=7-8$ ), but usually 10-11 sections of Spanish 131/132 are taught because it has the largest enrollment at the academy due to being a core requirement to graduate; each cadet must take two semesters of the same language or must validate the credit via approved measures (e.g., a satisfactory score on the USAFA Placement Test, AP scores, previous college credit).

Prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the Spanish 131/132 sequence was taught in-person with what could best be described as explicit instruction, which Wong and VanPatten (2003) claim does not lead to second language acquisition. Assessments mainly included objective test items (e.g., multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank) for both linguistic and cultural knowledge along with two in-class writing assignments and two brief in-person conversations with the instructor.

During March of 2020, the USAFA Dean of Faculty instructed all faculty to begin teaching remotely from home, and the DFF Department Chair requested at least two faculty learning workshops every two weeks beginning immediately following the end of the spring semester in May through the summer that centered on pedagogy and assessment in an online teaching environment. Over the course of the summer, 14 workshops were given via the Blackboard (BB) and the *Microsoft Teams* platforms. Presenters, both nationally-recognized researchers and scholars (e.g., Bill VanPatten, Anne Cummings Hlas), and USAFA faculty gave workshops on important topics such as integrated performance assessments (IPAs), integrating emerging technologies into instruction, high-leverage teaching practices, and best practices in online teaching, and features of the Learning Management Systems (e.g., Blackboard). Theoretically, instructors' sense of efficacy—the belief that they can have a positive effect on student learning (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001)—was strengthened by having participated in the workshops. On many occasions, faculty members met with the department's Director of Faculty Learning (the second author) to discuss the workshops in more detail and made positive comments about the workshop content. In terms of the benefits of instructors having a strong sense of efficacy in teaching languages, research shows that students in classes with highly efficacious Spanish teachers score significantly higher on the National Spanish Exams than their peers in classes with teachers who report a weaker sense of efficacy teaching Spanish (Swanson, 2014). Additionally, language teachers are more likely to find vocational satisfaction in the profession (Swanson, 2008, 2013), which in turn, increases the likelihood of them remaining in the profession (Swanson, 2012, 2013).

### ***Conceptual Framework***

While the majority of the Spanish 131/132 military and civilian instructors at USAFA had little to no experience teaching online, the two course developers—a distinguished visiting professor (DVP) (first author) who is an expert in online language pedagogy and the course director (second author)—designed and devel-

oped the course collaboratively. They employed the ADDIE model—(A)nalysis, (D)esign, (D)evelopment, (I)mplementation, and (E)valuation—which is a systematic approach to course design that is cyclical (Dick & Carey, 2014; Gustafson & Branch, 2002). Each phase of the model is evaluated prior to, during, and after delivering the course; and each time that a course is implemented, changes are made based on evaluations from students, instructors, and course developers. Therefore, each iteration of the online course is improved to better meet the needs of all stakeholders. Because the course had to be created rapidly due to the transition of the entire institution to the online environment, the analysis phase was expedited and mainly consisted of decisions that were made by administrators such as which platform to use (*BB Collaborate* or *Microsoft Teams*), whether the online courses would be synchronous or asynchronous, and how often and when classes would meet. Each of these decisions are presented in further detail below. However, the focus of this article is on the design and development phases of ADDIE, as these are the most crucial for instructors who must transition rapidly to online teaching. Moreover, the evaluation phase is not detailed in this article due to several constraints such as space, time, and the impediments at USAFA in conducting research with cadets.

In addition to using the ADDIE model, the developers grounded the course in the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach and in the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) and *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* (ACTFL, 2012). CLT is a flexible approach to teaching that places the focus of instruction on real world communication across three modes of communication (interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational), with language notions and functions taking precedence over the instruction of grammatical forms and structures. Notions are the real-world settings in which people communicate (e.g., ordering a meal in a restaurant, visiting the doctor's office), while functions consist of the language that is needed to realize communicative tasks in real world settings (Richards, 2006). For example, if the notion is ordering a meal in a restaurant, then some functions include formal commands (e.g., bring me a glass of water) and food-related vocabulary.

Other major tenets of CLT include delivering instruction in the target language at least 90% of the time, providing opportunities for input, output, and interaction (student-student, student-teacher, and student-content), using authentic materials, providing corrective feedback, and most importantly, being tolerant of mistakes and understanding that it is impossible for Novice learners' production to be error-free (Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2021). With the CLT approach, instructors should strive to provide opportunities for students to experiment with and try out the language (Richards, 2006).

Moreover, the course developers incorporated standards-based instruction designed to meet the language learning needs of students at the Novice level of proficiency. While many cadets enrolled in Spanish 131 were false beginners due to having taken Spanish prior to matriculating at USAFA, all cadets were given a placement test prior to the start of the semester and no cadets enrolled in the course had reached the Intermediate Low level of proficiency, even if they had prior exposure to the language. Therefore, all course tasks, activities, and assessments were geared to the Novice level of proficiency.

Civilians and military leaders at USAFA provide “an elite undergraduate educational program, a world-class training program in the profession of arms, a rigorous four-year regimen of physical education classes and competitive athletics, and a continuous grounding in character development” (p. 1). The synergy of these elements works to develop leaders of character who are motivated to lead the United States Air Force in service to the nation. When the cadets graduate and are commissioned as second lieutenants; it is expected that they have acquired a “sophisticated combination of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities that they will need to succeed as airmen and citizens” (p. 1) that are described in the nine USAFA Institutional Outcomes. The work of the DFF faculty falls under Outcome 4 (the Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies), which requires graduates to be able to “interact successfully with a wide range of individuals, to include those representing cultures and societies different from their own” (USAFA, 2021b, p. 1). Such interactions are embedded in a three-phased approach to help cadets (a) know oneself; (b) know others; and (c) have constructive engagement. As part of knowing oneself, the cadets should be able to (1) describe key elements of their own identity as human beings, citizens of a republic, and officer-statesmen in the United States Air Force, (2) explain historical, cultural, societal, and political developments that have shaped their own identity, (3) distinguish between objective (universally true) and subjective (biased) elements of their own identity, and (4) defend or critique both objective and subjective elements of their own identity (USAFA, 2021b).

At USAFA, all departments work toward meeting all nine of the institutional outcomes, but the DFF focuses specifically on Outcome 4, which includes the development of cross-cultural competence in both international and domestic environments. Furthermore, the World-Readiness Standards for Language Learning (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) are tied to the DFF’s Language Roadmaps, which provide a plan for students to begin their language study as a first-year cadet at the Novice level of proficiency and to reach at least the Advanced-Low level by graduation through taking coursework that is sequenced and articulated.

## **Course Redesign for Online Communicative Instruction**

### ***Delivery Mode***

All online language courses at USAFA were required to be delivered synchronously—or in real time—during the fall of 2020. For SPAN 131, instruction took place daily, Monday through Friday, for 53 minutes. Learners also engaged in daily oral and written practice on the textbook platform *MySpanishLab* (MSL) by Pearson, which was used for homework assignments and chapter quizzes. The MSL platform also housed the course textbook, *¡Anda! Curso Elemental 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (Cowell & Heining-Boynton, 2017). Seven chapters from the text were covered in SPAN 131. In addition to the eBook, students had access to other learning materials such as cultural videos, audio files, online flashcards, an online dictionary, and other learning resources. The remaining chapters of the book were covered in the following course (Spanish 132); and in the second-year courses (Spanish 221 and 222), *¡Anda! Curso Intermedio 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (LeLoup, Cowell, & Heining-Boynton, 2017) was used. The continuity in textbooks and the MSL platform helped ensure the smooth articulation of the introductory and intermediate-level course sequence.

## Learning Management System

The course developers utilized Black Board (BB) learning management system (LMS) to deliver all other content. While BB LMS is the main delivery platform at USAFA—as well as for training courses and programs in the wider Air Force—prior to the development of SPAN 131 online, instructors did not regularly employ the LMS because their instruction and assessments took place in traditional brick-and-mortar classrooms with students completing assignments on paper as well as on the MSL platform. Moreover, the version of BB LMS that was used at USAFA prior to the spring of 2020 was outdated and not user friendly.

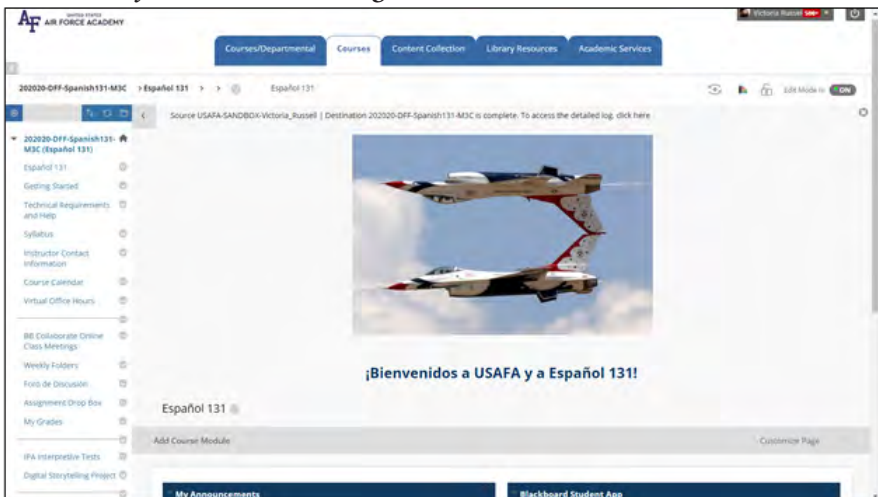
The developers used a master course shell to develop the content, assignments, assessments, discussion boards, grading rubrics, course calendars, etc.; and once the course was developed, it was duplicated and placed in each instructor's BB course shell. *BB Collaborate*, a web conferencing tool, was embedded in the course and accessed through the LMS for all online class meetings. In addition to the synchronous class meeting function, BB Collaborate also has a breakout room function where students could work in pairs or small groups to engage in interpersonal communication in the target language. Moreover, each class meeting was recorded and stored on the LMS for students to review as needed. BB Collaborate was also used for virtual office hours, extra instruction, and peer tutoring.

## Course Layout and Design

The course menu included a *Getting Started* module, a *Technical Help* module, *Weekly Folders*, Discussion Boards (*Foro de Discusión*), *Integrated Performance Assessments*, an *Assignment Drop Box*, *BB Collaborate Online Class Meetings*, *Virtual Office Hours*, a *Digital Storytelling* module, and a *My Grades* module, which included the online grade book where instructors posted grades and feedback. *Instructor Contact Information*, *Course Calendar*, and the *Syllabus* were also modules in the main navigation area. See Figure 1 for a screenshot of the main page of SPAN 131 online.

Figure 1

### Screenshot of SPAN 131's Main Page





From the main page, the first tab on the left navigation bar is the *Getting Started* module, which is a best practice for online course delivery across disciplines (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). The *Getting Started* module is an important resource to orient learners to an online course and to set them up for success by clearly delineating the course design and expectations. This module included an ice breaker activity, information on how to set up an MSL account, a welcome letter from the course director explaining the course expectations, the grading rubric for discussion boards, netiquette guidelines, a technology and language learning survey, and a student biographical sheet (see Appendix A) that was submitted to the course drop box by the end of the first week of classes. The latter two items helped instructors learn about the unique backgrounds, personal interests, and skill levels of each student, both in terms of their readiness to learn language and to utilize course technologies. Instructors used the first virtual class meeting to walk students through the LMS, to explain the course design and layout, and to show students where to locate the required assignments, assessments, and interactions.

The *Technical Requirements and Help* module included information on the hardware that students needed, a BB LMS Quick Start Guide, tutorials on how to use BB LMS, a browser check (to check for compatibility with the LMS), the technical requirements for the BB Collaborate virtual meeting platform, support contacts for MSL, and information on where and how to seek technical help at USAFA.

Given that instructors delivered the course synchronously and students had daily instruction in Spanish, the PowerPoint presentations, videos, links, and other learning resources from the daily synchronous class meetings were available to students in the *Weekly Folders* area on the LMS. Each week, the course developers created a weekly overview file, a weekly assignment checklist, and the PowerPoints and resources that were used in class that week that included audio and video files. The weekly folder was pushed out to the course instructors by the BB administrator at USAFA. The overview file contained the weekly goals, learning objectives, reading assignments, and a detailed list of the assignments due that week. The overview file was always the first item in the *Weekly Folders* area. Instructors were able to post additional resources to personalize their courses in this area.

The developers created ten discussions on BB LMS that were due throughout the course, with students' initial posts due on Tuesdays by the end of the day and their replies to two peers due on Fridays by the end of the day. Each of the 10 discussions were infused with authentic materials and resources to create real-world contexts. The grading rubric for the discussions (see Appendix B) was available to all students from the first day of classes in the *Getting Started* module. The grading rubric delineated the breadth and depth of responses that were expected of them. These discussions were directly tied to USAFA's Learning Outcome 4 (see above) and the materials for the discussion board were curated from the Internet—specifically either from the *Center for Open Educational Resources for Language Learning* (COERLL, 2021), a national language resource center, or from *LangMedia* (Five College Center for World Languages, 2021), a repository of videos of native speakers performing everyday actions. While the present course instructed a commonly taught language (Spanish), it should be noted that both COERLL and LangMedia have numerous resources for both commonly and less commonly taught languages.

An example of a course discussion forum using a video from COERLL and two links from the Internet is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

**Screenshot of a SPAN 131 Discussion Forum**



The video from COERLL is of a native speaker from Mexico who discusses his favorite movies and actors, which is a theme that was covered in the course. The two links on successful Latino actors/actresses in the U.S. were curated from the Internet on a site that was intended for native Spanish speakers.

**Authentic Materials**

A major tenet of CLT is to infuse lessons and assessments with authentic materials (Nunan, 1991), which are beneficial for promoting the acquisition of pragmatics and intercultural competence (see below). Authentic materials are those that were created by and/or for native speakers of the language (Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2021); and by exposing learners to authentic materials, they can see and begin to understand how the language is used in its natural social and cultural context. Conversely, publisher-created materials often present language in a decontextualized fashion, which often seems contrived to native speakers. Given that LMS platforms where online courses are delivered provide a repository for multimedia files, it is not difficult to infuse authentic video clips, commercials, online articles, movies, and other authentic media into an online course. Moreover, when students are exposed to these media, they have a window into how people lead their daily lives in the target language culture(s).

**Pragmatics and Intercultural Competence**

In order for learners to acquire a second language, they must achieve communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972), which takes into account the social context in which language is used. According to Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983), learners must master the following four competencies



to achieve communicative competence—grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic, and discourse. Sociolinguistic competence includes knowledge of pragmatics, or how to use the language appropriately in social situations given specific speakers and contexts. Ishihara (2010) and Pinto (2002) asserted that most second and foreign language textbooks either fail to include pragmatics-focused content or their treatment of pragmatics is inadequate. However, instructors may seek out and incorporate a number of high-quality, open access pragmatics-focused materials that are available on the Internet. For example, having students view authentic videos of native speakers performing everyday actions—such as greeting each other on the street, shopping for food, or purchasing a train ticket—allows them to see how the language is used appropriately in social contexts. Some of the pragmatics-focused resources that were infused into the course include videos from LangMedia and COERLL as well as articles, music, and advertisements on the Internet that were created for native Spanish speakers. Each of these materials and resources are described in greater detail below.

### ***Curated Materials***

The materials that were included in the course were carefully selected to ensure that learners could understand the content given their Novice proficiency level in Spanish. In most cases, glosses were added to facilitate comprehension and to scaffold learners' comprehension of the target language. Moreover, the course developers carefully vetted the materials to ensure that they were appropriate for post-secondary language learners. In other words, the developers examined the content closely to ensure that it was free from political biases and inappropriate language or images, and that the language would be comprehensible for Novice learners when glosses of unfamiliar words were provided.

Some examples of curated materials that were infused into the course include music videos, online articles, and online advertisements, such as the advertisement for *Mercado de San Miguel* (2018) in Madrid, which is presented below in Figure 3. This was an interactive online advertisement where students could explore the various food and beverage stalls in this world-famous market. Students were asked to visit *Mercado de San Miguel* online to select the food and beverages that they wanted to try. They also needed to state why the particular food or beverage appealed to them and how it was similar to or different from the food and beverages that are available in the U.S. Moreover, students compared and contrasted food shopping in Spain and in the U.S. after exploring this resource. This website, which was created for native Spanish-speakers, is extremely visually appealing and its interactive nature gave students a window into the Spanish language and culture in Madrid, which could help them develop intercultural as well as pragmatic competence.

Figure 3

## Screenshot of a Curated Authentic Material Used on the Course Discussion Board



In addition, short articles in Spanish were curated from the Internet and infused into lesson activities, discussion boards, and IPAs, which are described in greater detail below. Learners were provided with sufficient background and cultural information during class as well as glosses to help them understand the content of each article. In other words, instructors went over key background and cultural information prior to having students read or view the curated content. This practice facilitated learners' use of top-down processing—as most Novice learners tend to instead of relying exclusively on bottom-up processing; however, native speakers of a language always use top-down processing first followed by bottom-up processing to check that their predictions about the text were accurate (Johnson, 2018).

At times, students also worked in pairs or in small groups in break out rooms on BB Collaborate to read and perform activities using curated authentic articles. For example, in small groups, learners read an online article about the top Latino singers and actors in the U.S., and then they selected their favorite performer and wrote a paragraph describing that artist. After completing this activity in break out rooms and taking notes on a *Google Jamboard* (2021), they were brought together as a class and a spokesperson from each group was asked to read their description. As the spokesperson read, their classmates attempted to guess who the artist was by typing names into the chat area. The first student to guess correctly won a point.

Moreover, music videos in Spanish from Latinx artists, both from the U.S. and from the Spanish-speaking countries that were covered in the course, were infused into the daily synchronous lessons. At the beginning of each class period, instructors played a music video while taking roll by checking the participant list in BB Collaborate. As students viewed the music video, they also read background and cultural information on each of the Hispanic artists, which instructors posted in the chat at the beginning of each class. This daily activity was intended to set the tone for each class period, relaxed the students, and infused rich cultural content into each lesson.

## Spanish Proficiency Exercises

Developed by Orlando Kelm of the University of Texas for COERLL, Spanish Proficiency Exercises (Kelm, 2021) are a collection of video clips of native speakers from across the Spanish-speaking world executing various language tasks (e.g., talking about their favorite childhood memory, describing their last visit to the doctor, discussing their musical preferences). The videos were not scripted; therefore, they contain the false starts, hesitations, back channels, and repetitions that occur in natural speech—features often lacking in publisher-created videos. Moreover, language learners can see speakers' facial expressions, gestures, gesticulation, and other paralinguistic cues that facilitate comprehension. Since the speakers come from across Latin America and Spain, learners are exposed to dialectal and region differences in accents and vocabulary usage and each speaker uses a natural rate of speech, with some speakers talking more quickly and others more slowly, depending upon their own unique idiolect. The first video on each topic is a simplified version, where the native speaker was asked to speak more slowly, in simpler terms, and without any slang. For all other videos on the topic, the native speakers used natural speech. An example of a video from COERLL's Spanish Proficiency Exercises is presented below in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

### Screenshot of COERLL Video Used for an Interpretive Listening Task

The screenshot displays a web-based interface for a Spanish proficiency exercise. On the left is a navigation menu with categories like 'Assignment Drop Box', 'Course Management', and 'Control Panel'. The main content area is titled 'Completion' and includes a 'Questions Completion Status' bar. Below this, 'QUESTION 1' is presented with a video player showing a woman, Cristina, in a garden. The task instructions are: 'Watch this video of Cristina describing her house in Spain and then answer the five multiple choice items that follow.' Below the video, a list of Spanish words and their English translations is provided: 'os = to you all; fachada = facade; tejado = roof; nos sirve = serves us; cálidos = warm; amplio = large, ample; zona del servicio = service area'. A text box for taking notes is also present. At the bottom right, there are buttons for 'Save All Answers' and 'Save and Submit'.

The videos are broken down by proficiency level, with videos available at the Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior levels. Information on key grammar, vocabulary, and phrases is also available for each video file. If students want to listen to rather than view the clip, they can select the MP3 audio file that is also available on the website. The site index provides an overview of topics, which is beneficial for instructors who wish to employ this resource in their lessons and/or assessments (COERLL, 2021b).

**LangMedia.** Created by the Five College Center for World Languages (2021), LangMedia contains a plethora of authentic videos, study guides, audio samples, and

other materials for the teaching and learning of world languages. Their open access resources convey the everyday life of native speakers of both commonly and less commonly taught languages. Their videos, which were not scripted, are organized by both country and region. Moreover, transcripts for all videos are available in both the target language and in English. Therefore, colloquial expressions and dialectical differences can be understood by both students and instructors alike. Since Spanish is spoken in so many countries around the world, it is impossible for Spanish language instructors to have knowledge of all the various dialects and colloquial expressions that exist. Therefore, instructors can increase their professional knowledge by using this resource. LangMedia videos were infused into the course discussion boards, lesson activities, and IPA assessments. These videos not only helped students learn Spanish pragmatics, but they also helped them learn authentic gestures, gesticulation, and back channels—which are the vocal sounds indicating that one interlocutor is actively listening to another (e.g., uh-huh). Back channels, facial expression, gesture, and other nonverbal communication will vary by language; therefore, video resources are an effective way to teach these social aspects of language. Figure 5 below depicts a LangMedia video on greetings and introductions in Spain from a course discussion board.

**Figure 5**  
**Screenshot of Course Discussion Featuring a LangMedia Video**

Foro de Discusión (FD) 3

Tema: Ustedes v. Vosotros 13

Much like "tu" and "usted," there are plural versions of these words. With whom would you use "ustedes"? With whom would you use "vosotros"? Where in the Spanish speaking world is the "vosotros" form used? What are some possible English translations of the words "vosotros" and "ustedes"?

Watch the following video of greetings/introductions in Spanish.

The transcription of this video in both English and Spanish is available here: [so\\_greetings\\_transcript.docx](#)

Throughout the course, you will be exposed to authentic videos of native speakers performing everyday actions. Therefore, it will be beneficial for you to review the transcript.

Please review La Nota Cultural, *Cómo se saluda la gente*, on p. 7 of your text prior to answering the following questions: Do you find it unusual how many times the speakers kiss? How do you feel about kissing a person that you meet for the first time? Do the people in the video use the besito described on p. 7?

Note: The U.S., Spain, and Mexico were covered extensively in the introductory course, while later weeks and subsequent courses featured other Spanish-speaking countries in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean to give students a wide perspective on the Spanish-speaking world.

**Digital Storytelling Project.** The DVP created the *Digital Storytelling* module and brought in resources and examples from her prior courses at her home institution. Students completed this project individually during class, which took place over one week of the semester. Ten different Spanish-speaking countries were covered in the course and students selected one country for the focus of their digital story. The

instructors ensured that all ten countries were represented by each class. Students were required to give information on the history, culture, and geography of the country. In addition, they were asked to incorporate elements of daily life, which they researched on the Internet from sources such as LangMedia and the *Realia Project*.

The first day was used to go over the project requirements (see Appendix C) and the technology tools that could be used to create the project. Students were given a choice of using either *PhotoStory 3*, *PowerPoint*, or their *iPhone* to create their digital story as a video file. Tutorials, resources, and other support materials for each of these tools were available in the *Digital Storytelling* module on BB LMS. In addition to the resources that were provided by the first author, a student in the course director's intermediate-level Spanish course volunteered to make *how to* videos for the iPhone, which students found helpful.

Students were then given two class days to work on their project while the instructor was available to provide assistance and technical support. On the fourth day of the project, students posted their digital stories to a course discussion board and they evaluated three of their classmates' projects using a Peer Evaluation Sheet (see Appendix D). On day five, the final day of the project, the instructor selected videos of several different countries to show to the class. In addition to being enjoyable, this activity helped students review cultural information for the final exam.

### **Assessments**

The course contained a number of assessments, including chapter quizzes, a comprehensive midterm and final exam, two essays, and two IPAs. Each of these is described in detail below.

**Chapter Quizzes.** The quizzes were created by the course director and pushed out to all eight instructors via the MSL platform. Each quiz contained one or two listening sections, cultural items (focusing on the specific Spanish-speaking countries that were presented in the chapter), vocabulary items, and items that focused on grammar. All items that focused on grammar or vocabulary were presented in context; in other words, students had to decide which vocabulary item or verb form fit within a passage of connected discourse. There were five chapter quizzes that were delivered at regular intervals throughout the course.

**Essays.** Students completed two in-class essays, one prior to midterm and one after midterm. The instructor provided the grading rubric in advance, which was based on the ACTFL Performance Descriptors (ACTFL, 2015), a prompt, which contained an authentic material or resource (e.g., a link that described concerts held in Spain in 2019), and the parameters for the essay, including the word count minimum, line spacing, and the deadline (i.e., students had to complete and submit their essays by the end of class and once they were released to begin, they had approximately 30 minutes to write their essays). Students were allowed to use their books, notes, and a Spanish dictionary, but they were strictly prohibited from using an online translator. While the essays were not proctored, students were asked to adhere to the honor code, which prohibited them from cheating or from obtaining outside assistance.

**Midterm and Final Exams.** Content for these two exams focused directly on the material from the textbook, *¡Anda! Curso Elemental* (Coswell & Heining-Boyn-

ton, 2017). Both assessments consisted of several listening and reading sections with objective test items (e.g., true/false), using images as prompts for multiple choice items (e.g., people doing chores in a high-rise apartment) and contextualized fill-in-the-blank items that integrated different grammatical aspects (e.g., conversations, short scenes) in real life scenarios. Cloze items examined students' ability to use Spanish in culturally appropriate scenarios that were aligned with the textbook content.

**Integrated Performance Assessments (IPA).** Students completed two online IPAs in Spanish 131, one at midterm and one at the end of the course—the IPA is a performance-based assessment that is tied to the ACTFL World Readiness Standards (Adair-Hauck et al., 2006). Because most students had not been exposed to IPA assessments in high school, one class period was devoted to explaining the content and purpose of the IPA, while an additional three days were needed to complete each phase of the IPA. Each of the two IPAs focused on content that was covered and practiced during the synchronous lessons. The topic of the first IPA was *house and home* and the topic of the second IPA was *music and movies*.

Each IPA contained three phases as follows: (1) an interpretive listening and reading test, (2) an interpersonal speaking conversation that was recorded, and (3) a presentational speaking conversation that was recorded. Each of the phases were weighted equally. Since the students were all novice students of Spanish, interpersonal and presentational speaking were emphasized over presentational writing, as suggested by the research on IPAs (Davin et al., 2011; Kissau & Adams, 2016), which found that most introductory language courses place too much emphasis on presentational writing and not enough focus on interpretive listening and interpersonal speaking. Furthermore, the IPA materials used authentic resources such as videos from COERLL and LangMedia as well as authentic articles and advertisements that were curated from the Internet. For example, for the first IPA, students visited an online website to search for an apartment to rent in Cádiz, Spain. After viewing the website and looking at various apartments, students engaged in a spontaneous conversation where they talked about which apartment they would like to rent and why, discussing their specific needs (e.g., parking, an elevator, furnished). This enabled learners to use the course vocabulary and grammar in an authentic way while connecting language instruction with assessments (Adair-Hauck et al., 2006).

### ***Delivery of Instruction***

The online synchronous course delivery was new to both the students and the instructors, which was not without its problems and pitfalls.

**Flipped.** As part of the daily course calendar, students and instructors alike were aware of the daily assignments and events for each of the 80 days of class in the semester. Students were expected to become familiar with course material (e.g., new vocabulary, grammatical elements, and cultural notes) prior to coming to class. Instead of introducing new vocabulary as it appeared in a chapter, for example, the course director developed lesson plans that asked instructors to begin using new vocabulary immediately in contextualized scenarios. By doing so, precious instructional time was saved for more interactive, communicative tasks such as using breakout groups for activities (e.g., peer interviews about class schedules, writing responses to prompts).



**Interaction.** All online classes, regardless of discipline, need to incorporate three types of interaction: learner-instructor, learner-learner, and learner-content (Garrison, 2006). The present course incorporated learner-instructor and learner-learner interaction through daily synchronous class meetings. Break out rooms in *BB Collaborate* facilitated rich, learner-learner interaction synchronously. Students also engaged in asynchronous learner-learner interaction on the course discussion board and they had asynchronous learner-instructor interaction through e-mail communication and Teams messaging. Moreover, students interacted with their content during synchronous class sessions and while working on homework and other course tasks on the MSL textbook platform and on the BB LMS platform where course materials, resources, and assessments were delivered. Instructor-Instructor interaction also took place, as the course director held frequent meetings throughout the semester to gauge progress in the class, discuss new ideas, and provide training on new technologies such as BB LMS, digital storytelling tools, Google Docs, and IPAs among other topics.

### ***Daily Lessons and Lesson Plans***

Each week, the course director developed and posted communicative lessons for instructors on BB as well as on Microsoft Teams, which most faculty members used for instruction once the pandemic forced the pivot to online teaching and learning. Each lesson plan contained the day's standards being addressed, learning objectives, activities, a Spanish song to be played before class begins, and detailed instructions about each activity. Lessons began each day with the instructors sharing the song for day on BB a few minutes before class began. As students entered the digital classroom, the instructor took roll and selected a student to present the class to the instructor, which is a military protocol. After taking roll, the instructor informed students of the daily learning objectives. Then, at least three to four different communicative activities took place throughout each 53-minute class. At times, the course director infused different technologies in class (e.g., Google Docs). It was common to have activities where students were placed into BB's breakout groups in pairs or groups to talk and complete activities. Instructors were encouraged to visit the breakout groups for each activity to guide students or even participate in the activity.

**Lesson Activities.** Learning activities varied each day and were based on the theme of the textbook chapter. Moreover, they focused squarely on the students using the target language for specific purposes. For example, to assimilate new vocabulary, students played the game *Pyramid*, a hybrid version of the 1970s game show where one student had to describe words or phrases to another learner who tried to guess what was being described. Other activities included interviewing and reporting on a learner's interests, (dis)likes, and preferences. In order to practice writing, instructors prompted students to write responses using the BB Whiteboard, Chat function, and/or Google Docs. At present, the course director is examining other technologies (*Google's Jamboard*) for interactive, collaborative learning.

## **Assessment Platforms and Delivery**

Several delivery modes were employed to deliver course assessments, which are outlined below. While most of the assessments were delivered online via the textbook's online accompanying MSL website or BB LMS, the in-person, pencil-and-paper midterm and final exams were requested from USAFA leadership, approved, and planned to take place in large auditoriums per approved COVID-19 spacing guidelines with the instructors serving as proctors.

**Objective Tests.** The course director created chapter quizzes using the MSL test maker. Students were given 35 minutes to complete and submit the quizzes online. Once submitted, the MSL system auto grades a student's quiz and displays a score out of 100 points almost immediately after submission. While the quizzes were directly aligned with the textbook's curriculum, one downside of the system is the time it takes to learn how to use it.

The system is not intuitive, and one major drawback is that students can see the quiz once they have completed it. Thus, once a morning class took the quiz, instructors feared that students might share details about the quiz (or even the quiz itself) to others who had yet to take it. Pearson, the textbook publisher, is aware of the issue and is working on the newly redesigned platform to give instructors a mechanism to choose if learners can see the assessment once it has been taken or to restrict it from students' view. Another drawback is when learners are absent the day the quiz is given. In that case, more time was needed to copy the assessment, place it in the course on MSL, and then set time restrictions so that the quiz could be taken at a later time. If, for example, three students needed to take the quiz at different times/days, a new copy of the quiz had to be made, placed in the appropriate course, and with new restrictions added for when the assessment could be accessed. A final drawback is that Pearson gives instructors two similar types of test activities within each chapter. Thus, there are only two tests for each chapter. With the learners being able to see the test after taking it, it is plausible that learners could share the information; therefore, when a third test is needed, all of the pre-made test activities have already been exhausted. While instructors have the option to create their own test activities, more time is consumed in such endeavors.

For the two in-person assessments, the course director created three versions of the same assessment. The exams consisted of objective test items examining students' ability to listen, read, and write in Spanish. The course director opted to implement an objective testing procedure for several reasons: (1) the date/time for the midterm and final exams were very close to the academy's deadlines for final grade submissions, (2) in addition to academic duties, the military instructors have other duties that consume their days once their teaching obligations are finished, and (3) scantron forms could be graded relatively quickly and students' scores could be input into the USAFA grading software much more swiftly than individually grading each of the 200+ students' exams.

The final exam, which was scheduled for an in-person delivery, had to be quickly shifted to the online environment due to spikes in the number of COVID cases on campus among cadets. Therefore, the course director enlisted the help of the USAFA BB administrator and together they built an online version of the final exam rapidly.

**Proficiency-Based Assessments.** The course developers created two IPAs that were administered via BB LMS over a three-day period. The DVP built the interpretive tests using authentic materials from COERLL and LangMedia and both course developers collaborated to create the speaking prompts and grading rubrics, which were based on the ACTFL Performance Descriptors (ACTFL, 2015).

On the first day of the IPA assessment, students logged on to BB and took the interpretive assessments (listening and reading). They had 20 minutes to view, read, and listen to the authentic videos and reading materials for the interpretive portion of the assessment and answer ten multiple-choice and true/false items. On the second day of the assessment, instructors showed the students a prompt that accompanied an authentic resource (e.g., a website, online article, advertisement), and they had 20 minutes to record a two-minute interpersonal conversation and upload the video to the assignment drop box on BB. Students were discouraged from writing a script, as the course developers wanted to elicit uninterrupted, spontaneous speech in the target language. However, there were a few technical issues using BB Collaborate to create the recordings. Even though the DVP created detailed instructions for both students and instructors (PowerPoints with screenshots) and instructors went over the directions for creating, locating, and downloading a recording using BB Collaborate, some students found the process to be difficult to follow. Moreover, instructors felt that creating so many different BB Collaborate sessions was cumbersome and time consuming. Therefore, for the subsequent IPAs—including for the presentational task videos—learners used Teams to create their recordings. Students were required to submit their interpersonal and presentational MP4 files to the assignment drop box by the end of class and instructors were available throughout the class period for technical support.

### **Implications and Future Directions**

The design, development, and delivery of the online introductory Spanish course that was described in this article have implications for both online language course design and educator preparation programs.

### **Implications for Online Language Courses**

It should be noted that purposeful, planned online instruction is different than emergency remote teaching. While the two course developers worked collaboratively to design and develop the course, it was still a difficult undertaking because there was virtually no lead time between the design/development phase and course delivery. Therefore, all content and assessments were created as the course was being taught. This is not recommended; but in times of emergency, instructors often have no choice but to design, develop, and deliver the course simultaneously. One possible solution is to work in pairs or in teams, as the developers of this course have done. Instructors who must shift quickly to online teaching should reach out to their colleagues who teach the same language and level so that design and development tasks could be divided.

Effective, communicative online language courses are informed by the principles of sound instructional design and incorporate the tenets of CLT. However, many language instructors lack professional development in the pedagogy and appropriate technologies to teach online effectively (Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2021). Therefore, professional development opportunities in online language pedagogy are urgently needed in advance of the next natural disaster or pandemic that disrupts traditional, face-to-face language instruction. Organizations such as ACTFL, COERLL, the Computer-Assisted Language Instruction Consortium, the National Foreign Language Resource Center, the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, and the International Association of Language Learning Technologies, among other language resource centers and professional associations, provide useful professional development for online language teaching at the K-16 level. All language teachers should investigate such opportunities now to be better prepared for future online language teaching in disruptive times.

### **Implications for Educator Preparation Programs**

Research shows that online teaching presents a unique set of challenges compared to traditional face-to-face instruction (Dawson & Dana, 2014; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). A review of the literature regarding educator preparation programs training educators to teach in remote contexts shows that just a few years ago, only four states and the District of Columbia required teachers to participate in training or professional development related to online instruction (Watson et al., 2014). Archambault et al. (2016) reported survey findings where 88.2% of teacher education programs nationally lacked having an online field experience as part of their teacher preparation program. More recently, results from a national survey of more than 1,200 K-12 teachers, mainly elementary public-school teachers, administered in mid-March 2020 affirmed that most teachers were not prepared to teach online and that slightly less than half (42.8%) reported that they alone are responsible for deciding what remote/online tools to use (Newton, 2020). Given such a lack of preparation, the authors call for education preparation programs to include in methods courses and field experiences opportunities to teach world languages online.

### **Conclusion**

This article showcased a communicative, introductory online language course that was developed in response to the global pandemic and the need for social distancing during the fall of 2020 at USAFA. The course adhered to the World-Readiness Standards for Language Learning (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) and ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 2012) and it incorporated research-based pedagogical interventions such as online IPAs, authentic, open-access materials, and daily synchronous instruction that provided practice in three modes of communication. Given that this course was taught across 11 sections by eight instructors and enrolled more than 200 students, it was shown to be scalable and could be replicated by other institutions who may need to shift quickly to remote teaching due to emergencies such as natural disasters or pandemics.

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## Appendix A

### Cadet Biography Sheet

Answer in English if you prefer.

1. ¿Cómo te llamas?
2. ¿Cuándo es tu cumpleaños?
3. ¿De dónde eres?
4. Brevemente describe a tu familia.
5. ¿Por qué estás aquí (en USAFA)?
6. ¿Qué experiencia has tenido con el español?
7. ¿Cuál es tu expectativa (*expectation*) para esta clase?
8. ¿Cuáles son tus pasatiempos favoritos?
9. ¿Qué deportes practicas o te gustan?
10. ¿Cuáles clubes te interesan aquí en la Academia?

## Appendix B

### Rubric for Discussion Board Postings

Discussion boards will be graded on a 10-point scale according to the following rubric:  
Student's Post

(7 points) Fully Acceptable: Demonstrates complete understanding of a concept and its application; links concepts to other course material. A fully acceptable written post should answer all of the question prompts thoroughly and accurately.

(4 points) Partly Acceptable: Demonstrates only partial comprehension of a concept and its application. A partially acceptable written post answers most of the question prompts thoroughly, but may have some errors in grammar, syntax, and/or orthography.

(1 point) Not Acceptable: Does not demonstrate comprehension of a concept. The content and/or ideas presented in the written post are erroneous and/or do not address the question prompts.

Student's Reply

(3 points) Replies thoughtfully to a peer

(1.5 points) Replies superficially to a peer

(0 points) Does not reply to a peer

## Appendix C

### Digital Storytelling Project

You will create a digital story on one of the following Spanish-speaking countries that was covered this semester. Your instructor will assign one of these countries to you:

- México
- España
- Honduras
- Guatemala
- El Salvador
- Nicaragua
- Costa Rica
- Panamá

Include the following information:

- geographical location of the country;
- population of the country;
- country's flag;
- any languages that are spoken in addition to Spanish;
- capital city, its location, and any other major cities and their locations;
- major monuments, landmarks, and/or museums that are located in the country;
- famous citizens (e.g., authors, artists, scientists);
- favorite sports and/or pastimes;
- typical dishes with description;
- typical family size and any information on daily life that you can locate;
- two or three similarities / difference between your assigned country and the U.S.

Technical Requirements

- minimum 3 minutes to a maximum of 5 minutes in length;
- a minimum of 10 photos;
- narrated in Spanish, use the present, past, and future tenses along with object pronouns;
- include a title (using text) on the first slide;
- if possible, include appropriate background music from the target language country Note: Your voice must be audible and much louder than any background music;
- You may use *Photo Story 3*, *iMovie*, or you can simply narrate a *PowerPoint* presentation to create your story, but your final submission must be an .mp4 file;
- Check your final video to make sure it is audible and functional. 10 points will be deducted for such issues.

## Appendix D

### Peer Evaluation Sheet

Name of Cadet Completing the Evaluation: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Cadet Whose Project is Being Evaluated: \_\_\_\_\_

1. The Digital Story is between 3 and 5 minutes in length:      Yes      No
2. The video is narrated entirely in Spanish:      Yes      No
3. What country was the focus of the video?
4. Name three things that you learned about the history, culture, or geography of the country from watching this video.
5. Name two things that you learned about the daily life of people from this country.
6. What could have been improved in this video?
7. What was done well in this video?

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