Innovative and Creative Undergraduate Teaching Proposal:

*Hybrid First Semester Spanish*

We, Drs. Trimble and Batista, Assistant Professors of Spanish in the Department of Foreign Languages, wish to apply for an Innovative and Creative Undergraduate Teaching fund to aide in the designing, piloting, evaluating, and revising of a Hybrid First Semester Spanish course. When carefully implemented, the hybrid model empowers learners not only by affording them multimodal communication and collaboration opportunities but also by fostering individual language study and practice through online materials, which in turn helps a wider variety of learners achieve learning outcomes.

An increasing body of literature has shown hybrid, or blended, instruction to meaningfully enhance foreign language instruction (e.g., Arispe & Blake, 2006; Rubio, 2012a, 2012b; Scida & Saury, 2006; Strambi & Bouvet, 2003). For instance, research by Dr. Fernando Rubio (2012a, 2012b), Associate Professor and Co-Director of Second Language Teaching and Research Center at the University of Utah, has shown that hybrid language programs can significantly improve student retention. Shortly after the implementation of First Semester Hybrid Spanish in 2008, a mere 8.35% of students in hybrid SPAN 1010 did not complete the course, compared to 19.5% of students in traditional SPAN 1010. Four years after the hybrid program was established a follow up study at the same institution showed similar retention rates.

Amongst the many benefits commonly associated with hybrid instruction, such as time and space flexibility (Scida & Saury, 2006), improved class participation, and increased access to active learning opportunities, the combination of face-to-face instruction and online learning can optimize foreign language instruction by diversifying target language interaction opportunities (Arispe & Blake, 2012). In foreign language education, the successful student depends on frequent effective participation and interaction in the target language. Depending on individual personalities and learning styles, some students are significantly more comfortable with foreign language interactive activities when they are mediated by a computer (2012).
In addition to documenting many potential benefits of the hybrid model for language students, a review of the literature on hybrid language education highlights the importance of careful course design (e.g., Scida & Saury, 2006). The development of hybrid courses is particularly challenging in a foreign language curriculum, where meaningful real time communication is a priority. Opponents of hybrid instruction fear that the online portion of hybrid classes will, either be spent on activities that do not include communication, or that the online communicative activities will be ineffective, or both. Many hybrid language course designers have found out the hard way that the creation of effective materials and collaborative activities for online foreign language communication is extremely time consuming. On top of the time commitment necessary for the initial creation of effective materials, there is a tendency to underestimate the importance and time needed for project evaluation and revision. For these reasons, outside resources are invaluable to the success of innovative hybrid language programs.

In order to overcome such challenges, this Innovative and Creative Undergraduate Teaching funding proposal asks for $13,300. The majority of the funds would be used to allow two faculty members to focus a substantial portion of their time and energy on designing, piloting, evaluating, and revising a Hybrid First Semester Spanish course. The funds would provide a research stipend of $7,400 for Summer 2014. $5,400 of this stipend would go directly to the principal investigators to free them from summer professional endeavors, such as teaching or other scholarly projects. The remaining $2,000 would be used for travel, creation of materials, and/or the acquisition and use of online tools, which are essential to the success of this project. The fund would also provide $5,400 for six credit hours of course release for Spring 2015: three credits per investigator. As it will be used to empirically assess the program’s desired outcomes, the spring semester will be crucial for the long-term sustainability of a hybrid program that could successfully become an integral part of the Department of Foreign Languages’ curriculum. Finally, as a key architect of the hybrid language program established at the University of Utah, we have contacted Dr. Fernando Rubio in order to obtain first hand knowledge of the design and impact of hybrid language courses in higher education. To this end, $500 of the proposed budget would be used to bring Dr. Rubio to Weber State
for a workshop on best practices in hybrid language education. The summary of our proposed budget, as well as a timeline, can be found in the following table:

Table 1. Budget and timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workshop on hybrid language education</td>
<td>$500 presenter honorarium</td>
<td>Late-May 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design of SPAN 1010 hybrid curriculum</td>
<td>$7,400 research stipend</td>
<td>Summer 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental sections (2)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection and program evaluation</td>
<td>$5,400 for six credits of teaching release</td>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
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As previously mentioned, Dr. Rubio’s research has indicated that hybrid language programs have a significant impact on both retention and proficiency when compared to traditional language courses (Rubio, 2012a, 2012b). Consequently, this project would pursue the following two desired outcomes. First, with the implementation of this program we expect to determine whether or not the hybrid course improves student retention. More specifically, we anticipate seeing a higher number of Spanish students who participate in the hybrid First Semester Spanish courses continue on to SPAN 1020. Second, we hope that our study will demonstrate that hybrid language courses encourage participants to make more significant gains in Spanish proficiency over the course of the semester.

In order to implement these outcomes, two experimental SPAN 1010 Hybrid sections will be piloted starting Fall 2014. These two sections will be taught by the principal investigators and will provide an initial opportunity to evaluate and review the hybrid course. We anticipate that each section will have approximately 25 students, since SPAN 1010 courses tend to fill to maximum capacity. Then, after thorough evaluation of the experimental sections and careful revision, during the Spring 2014 semester, each principal investigator will teach one hybrid section and one traditional section in order to collect empirical data and compare the hybrid language learning experience with the traditional model.

Upon successful implementation, the impact of hybrid foreign language education will be both deep and broad, as it would introduce a fresh perspective and environment to
the foreign language curriculum and benefit a large number of students across the entire University. In any given year, the Foreign Language Department typically offers ten sections of SPAN 1010 in the Fall Semester, and roughly nine sections of the same course in the Spring semester. As can be seen in Table 2, over the last three years an average of 426 students per year have completed First Semester Spanish. To extend the impact that this program would have to an even larger portion of the student body, we hope to eventually incorporate all four semesters of Spanish language (SPAN 1020, 2010, and 2020) as well as to other languages taught by the department into the hybrid program.

Table 2. Lower division Spanish enrollment at Weber State University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of students per year</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
<th>2012-13</th>
<th>AVE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPAN 1010-First Semester Spanish</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish 1010-2020</td>
<td>848</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>914</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In order to assess the desired outcomes of this project, and the potential for hybrid language education at Weber State in general, the investigators would collect empirical retention and proficiency data before and after the Spring 2015 semester to compare two sections of the pilot hybrid course with two sections of traditional First Semester Spanish. Retention data would come from the number of students who enroll in SPAN 1020 for Summer and Fall 2014, as well as from a questionnaire administered at the end of Spring 2014. Additionally, proficiency gains would be measured by pre and post assessments of the five basic language skills: Speaking, Listening, Writing, Reading, and Culture.

Since the funding would be used primarily to design and revise the curriculum, once the program has been satisfactorily implemented, hybrid Spanish courses could be seamlessly taught by the rest of the department’s current faculty. Therefore, the department would have the resources and expertise necessary to extend the Hybrid program beyond the funding period, and subsequently to all the language programs. In order to expand the program to as many sections as possible, training for the Hybrid program will be offered to full time faculty and adjuncts in the Department.

This Innovative and Creative Undergraduate Teaching funding will enable the careful implementation of a successful hybrid First Semester Spanish course that will not
only bring the department into the cutting edge of foreign language education, but also meaningfully enhance the undergraduate educational experience for WSU students.

References:


