

**(2018-2019)**

**To be considered for funding, your research proposal must align with the following definition of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, SoTL, endorsed by the University Faculty Council in January of 2014:**

*"The rigorous investigation of student learning, with the purpose of developing novel teaching methodologies and practices that can lead to the measurable enhancement of student learning. The results of the investigation are made public through quality scholarly outlets and widely-accepted conferences and general or discipline-specific journals."*

Proposals are due to the Office for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment by **Friday, September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018** and should be [submitted online](#). Award recipients will be notified by **Friday, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018**. Selected recipients will need to submit a final report for the grant project to TLA by **September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019**.

**I. Basic Information**

Title of Project: Assessing performance, proficiency and student satisfaction after implementing Can-Do statements and VLI

**Investigator(s) Information**

**Principal Investigator:**

Name: Carolina Barrera-Tobón  
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**Other Investigators (Co-Pi):**

Name	College	Department
Bradley Hoot	LAS	Modern Languages

For each investigator, please include an abbreviated CV using the SoTL grant CV template.

Will your project involve human subjects? **Yes**  - we submitted IRB application 9/14/18  
If Yes, you must include evidence of IRB approval or exemption, or of having applied for IRB approval or exemption. Please note that before any granted funding can be made available, you will be required to provide evidence of IRB approval or exemption.

**Requested Funds**

Amount Requested (up to \$2,500): \$2,500

**II. Project Abstract (250 words or less)**

The Basic Language Committee in the Department of Modern Languages, will be performing an assessment of various changes in their pedagogy. Namely, we will be aligning our learning outcomes, which are communicative in nature, with our assessments in the form of “can-do” statements. These can-do statements will replace our high stakes non-communicative exams. Research suggests that there are no statistical differences in scores on high stakes exams regardless of whether they are given in class or at home (VanPatten, Hopkins, & Trego, 2015). The evaluation of a new course component is essential for measuring its success, and thus the committee overseeing intermediate Spanish courses intends to conduct an internal evaluation of the program by measuring student outcomes in a number of ways. The purpose of the research study and the request for funding is to use that data to contribute to generalizable knowledge about language learning, teaching, and assessment outside of the department. We are choosing to pilot this assessment in one class (the smallest section of Intermediate Spanish) because we want to work out any quirks in administration of such a different assessment in a small group before we extend it to our larger sections. We will also be incorporating virtual language immersion and will be assessing the effectiveness of this tool for language learning.

### III. Project Description

#### Purpose of Project and Theoretical Framework (994 words)

The increasing mobility of human populations, which has resulted in increasingly diverse workplaces and urban spaces, has led to a growing recognition that the goal of second language acquisition must include not only proficiency in the written mode, but also the ability to negotiate meaning in context and in real-time spoken interactions. Indeed, a goal of learning language for many university level students, especially among learners of Spanish in the U.S., is to gain mastery in interpersonal oral communication. Over half a century of language acquisition research has indicated that essential to obtaining oral proficiency, both in first and second languages, a learner must receive ample amounts of input, especially aural input (Gass & Selinker 2001, Saville Troike 2012, Mitchell, Myles & Marsden 2013). Further, acquiring oral proficiency, or oral *communicative competence* (Hymes 1966), includes mastering not only sentence structure and basic vocabulary (a subcomponent of communicative competence called *linguistic competence*), but also developing familiarity with linguistic routines and cultural knowledge (*sociocultural competence*) and negotiating interactions, especially when obstacles to communication present themselves (*strategic competence*) (see Celce-Murcia 1995, Canale & Swain 1980, Savignon 1997). Research suggests that such competences, rather than being acquired in piecemeal fashion and/or independently of one another, are most effectively acquired simultaneously in ‘authentic’, social interactions (see e.g. Hall 2001 on Vygotsky’s Sociocultural model of learning). It is not unsurprising then that language instructors and students alike recognize that immersion, which combines ample opportunities for aural input in ‘authentic’ communicative contexts (see Carrell 1984, Oller 1983, Galloway 1998), is one of the most effective ways to learn a new language.

In language courses at all levels, Modern Language faculty seek to foster language acquisition, focusing on student outcomes related to communicative proficiency in using the target language (as well as knowledge of its literature, culture, and linguistic structure). That is, courses (especially at the 100 and 200 level) are largely focused on students developing the knowledge and skills needed to communicate in the target language in a wide range of communicative contexts and via multiple media. This pedagogy is based on the extensive research literature on the advantages of communicative language teaching for language acquisition (see VanPatten, 2002, 2017, for an overview), and the department has previously embraced a number of pedagogical innovations in order to more effectively structure our courses around real language proficiency, including leveraging technology to focus class time on communication and adopting innovative classroom materials.

However, one area in which traditional methods often still dominate is in assessment of student learning. Many textbooks and language programs hold fast to traditional methods of assessment, focusing on explicit knowledge and high-stakes grammar and vocabulary tests, which are ultimately inadequate to assess student progress in acquiring communicative competence, instead often assessing merely memorization and test-taking skills.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the national organization for language professionals, has recognized that classroom assessment should be aligned with learning outcomes, and that if learning outcomes center on real language acquisition and the ability to communicate, so should assessments. In this regard, the ACTFL has established a novel metric for guiding students towards increasing language proficiency from the novice through the distinguished levels. These metrics appear in the form of “can-do” statements.

“Can-do” statements provide a description, appropriate to a learner's level, of what communicative goals a language learner can accomplish using their language skills. For example, at the novice level, one such statement might be “I can describe my family and friends,” while at the advanced level one might be “I can understand a detailed account of a unique travel or cultural experience.” These statements can be presented to learners as a method of self-guided assessment, but they can also be used in the classroom context by instructors to assess student progress. By structuring courses around what students can do, these guidelines provide educators with a way to plan curriculum, units of instruction, and learning outcomes.

Implementing this cutting-edge approach to language teaching in MOL courses (especially at the 100 and 200 level) has several benefits. First, it allows us to align our assessment methods with our pedagogy, which focuses on communication and real language proficiency. Second, in comparison to traditional assessments, it provides students with positive, affirming feedback, de-emphasizing the grammar points students can't use properly in favor of celebrating the functions they can perform --what they “can do” --with their newly-acquired language, while still evenhandedly evaluating their progress. Finally, it would put MOL among only a handful of universities in the United States that have structured their curriculum according to national standards.

The Spanish program will pilot this new assessment methodology in one section of its Intermediate Spanish Sequence (SPN 104/124, SPN 105/125, and SPN 106/126) this academic year. In order to evaluate the success of the new assessment method, we will examine whether changes in assessment have an impact on class performance, proficiency outcomes, and student satisfaction.

The evaluation of a new course component is essential for measuring its success, and thus the committee overseeing intermediate Spanish courses intends to conduct an internal evaluation of the program by measuring student outcomes in a number of ways. The purpose of the research study is to use that data to contribute to generalizable knowledge about language learning, teaching, and assessment.

Specifically, we seek to answer the following questions:

1. Does class performance change when we change our assessment methods to can-do statements?
2. Do proficiency outcomes (as measured by standardized proficiency tests) change when we change our assessment methods to can-do statements?
3. Does subjective student satisfaction change when we change our assessment methods to can-do statements?
4. Does oral proficiency increase more among students that participated in the eTandem sections?
5. Does oral proficiency increase more among students that participate in the service-learning sections?

#### Research Methodology and Impact of Project

The Basic and Intermediate Language Committee will be undertaking a study of educational strategies and design in the Intermediate Spanish Language Classes during the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years. This project will be

referred to as the 'assessment project'. In short, we want to determine what the consequences are regarding the changes we will implement in these courses (described above in the background section of the application form). We expect that the assessment changes will result in no changes in proficiency outcomes and measurement but that student satisfaction will increase as we align our assessment with our pedagogy. We also expect that students enrolled in the sections with eTandem will have greater increases in their oral proficiency than those not enrolled in the sections with eTandem.

This study of educational strategies and design will be conducted internally and will include all students enrolled in the Intermediate Spanish sequence, but we applied for IRB approval in order to be able to use the data that we collect in our assessment project for research purposes. The project is longitudinal. We would like to compare the outcomes of the students enrolled in classes this academic year with those enrolled in classes next academic year. We also want to compare students enrolled in classes this year who have been exposed to various course components (service learning and eTandem).

All of the data collected will be collected in class or via D2L/Qualtrics.

The target population for this project is students who are enrolled in the intermediate Spanish sequence (SPN 104/124 in the Autumn Quarter, SPN 105/125 in the Winter Quarter, and SPN 106/126 in the Spring Quarter). Since we are looking to document student improvement and outcomes longitudinally and assess a specific pedagogical model, the students enrolled in Intermediate Spanish 106 in Autumn quarter are not eligible because they have a completely different pedagogical model than students in the Intermediate Sequence.

The recruitment process will happen in the first and second week of classes. During the first week of classes the PI will send a recruitment email with all the information about the study to each intermediate Spanish instructor to pass along to their class (using the BCC function or D2L's Email Classlist function, which obscures email addresses), which will include an explanation of the study and an announcement of the upcoming class visit. Then, with the permission of instructors, the PI or co-PI will visit Spanish classes during the second week of classes (after the drop period) to announce the opportunity to participate. All students in any given class will have the opportunity to participate. The PI or co-PI will pass out copies of the consent form, which students will read and can choose to participate or not.

The consent process will occur at the same time as recruitment. Consent forms will be circulated and those who wish to participate may sign them, while those who do not wish to participate may simply choose not to sign them. The PI, co-PIs, or KRP will obtain consent. Consent will be obtained prior to the research procedures. In order to minimize the possibility of coercion, the consent documents and the classroom announcement will make clear that participation is truly voluntary and that there is an alternative way to earn the extra credit. Students who wish to do the alternative extra credit assignment can simply write that on the consent form. Students will sign the consent form to document consent. To ensure students understand what is involved, they will receive an email prior to the class visit so that they have time to read and understand the material.

All of the components listed below are part of the requirements for Intermediate Spanish students and the measures will be used for our internal assessment of educational strategies and design.

**Chapter exams** - students typically take four chapter exams throughout the quarter. Students are given 60 minutes to complete all the chapter exams, though most students do not use all of the allotted time. In one section of Intermediate Spanish, this academic year, these high-stakes non-communicative assessments will be eliminated and we will pilot can-do statements in their place. Students in this one section of Intermediate Spanish will be asked to complete the exam online at home in a low-stakes environment. Research suggests that there are no statistical differences in scores on these types of assessments regardless of whether they are given in class or at home (VanPatten, Hopkins, & Trego, 2015). We are choosing to pilot this assessment in one class (the smallest section of Intermediate Spanish) because we want to work out any quirks in administration of such a different assessment in a small group before we extend it to our

larger sections. The following academic year we hope to do this in all of our Intermediate Spanish sections. As such, we would like to compare the scores on the four chapter exams when they were given as high-stakes assessments versus low-stakes assessments to see whether our experience lines up with the extant literature. These data will be used to answer research questions 1 and 2.

The exams will not be collected from the individual instructors until the end of the academic term so as not to disrupt their access to student course materials. The exams will be kept by Jennifer Whitelaw who is the coordinator of the Basic and Intermediate Spanish courses. In the event a student wants to discuss his or her exam after the term, they are directed to the coordinator.

**Final Exam** - The final exam in Intermediate Spanish is administered during the final exam period and consists of two subsections of the *Diploma del español como lengua extranjera*, ('Diploma of Spanish as a Foreign Language', DELE), the exam that is issued by the Instituto Cervantes on behalf of the Spanish government. It is a certification of Spanish proficiency that is recognized internationally. Students in the Intermediate Spanish Sequence take the exam during their final exam period. Students receive full credit (100% score) on the exam if they score within 60% of the highest scoring student on the exam. There are four sections in the DELE: listening comprehension, reading comprehension, written expression, and oral expression. The two subsections of the DELE that make up the final exam are the reading comprehension and listening comprehension. These two sections take up between 95-110 minutes of the final exam period depending on the level of the exam. There are six levels: A1 (Novice High), A2 (Intermediate Low), B1 (Intermediate Mid/High), B2 (Advanced Low/Mid), C1 (Advanced High), C2 (Superior). The sections that will be used in the Intermediate Spanish sequence are A2, B1 and B2.

In addition to giving students an idea of where they would test on an internationally recognized standardized test, these data will be used to track student outcomes and improvement across the academic year. These data will be used to answer research questions 1 and 2.

**Oral exam** - The oral exams in the Intermediate Spanish Sequence are given outside of class during the last two weeks of classes. Students are given a broad schema of topics and then schedule a time to meet with a Spanish instructor to take the oral exam. Oral exams are recorded to ensure uniformity in grading across various sections. The oral exam takes 5-8 minutes. Oral exams are graded on a four-point scale and are recorded to ensure reliability in grading across instructors. Oral exams recordings will be transcribed by the KRP and various metrics of oral proficiency (average length of utterances, words per minute, accent rating). In the case of accent ratings, we will need the audio to be rated by those beyond the KRP, however, the audio clips for accent rating will not be identifiable and completely anonymous.

Since students have an oral exam each quarter we will be able to measure oral proficiency across an entire academic year for students that are enrolled in all three courses in the sequence. These data will be used to answer research questions 1, 2, 4 and 5.

**Lexical Decision Task** - In a lexical decision task, participants see a word-like arrangement of letters on a computer screen and are asked to decide whether it is a real word. Roughly half the items presented are real words including both relatively common (e.g., 'discipline', 'house', 'wildly') and relatively uncommon words (e.g., 'skein,' 'caltrop', 'bezoar'), while the other half are plausible but invented words (e.g., 'wugs', 'truddling').

Students will complete a Spanish lexical decision task called the LexTale\_Esp, which includes 90 items. It takes about five minutes to complete. They will complete the task twice, once near the beginning of the quarter and once near the end of the quarter. Scores on the LexTale\_Esp have been shown to correlate with overall Spanish proficiency (Izura, Cuetos, & Brysbaert, 2014), and so it is a useful way to measure students' progress during the quarter without taking much time.

This task will be completed online using Qualtrics. A link to the task will be included in one of the homework modules students complete.

**Elicited Imitation Task** - Students will also be given an elicited imitation task (EIT) twice per quarter as a pre and post measure of proficiency. In an elicited imitation task, participants hear a sentence spoken aloud and are asked to repeat it word for word. Sentences start out relatively short (7 syllables long) and increase in length during the test (to 17 syllables long). This test has been widely used among children and adult learners of a second language and is considered a measure of general language skills. The idea is that in order for students to repeat a language stimulus (a sentence that is spoken), the student needs to possess the grammatical knowledge necessary to accurately produce that stimulus. The stimulus needs to be long enough to prevent memory-based repetition. Students in intermediate Spanish will complete an elicited imitation task near the beginning and the end of the quarter. The task consists of 30 items and takes about 15 minutes to administer. Students will complete the task in class. Instructors play a sound file that has all the instructions and items in it. After hearing instructions, participants hear the sentences one by one, followed by a three-second pause, followed by a tone indicating that they should repeat what they heard. Each student will record their repetition aloud of the sentences individually using recording software available in DePaul computer labs.

This task will be audio recorded and later transcribed by KRP. It will be scored by the KRP for overall proficiency, and it may also be used to get foreign accent ratings. In the case of accent ratings, we will need the audio to be rated by those beyond the KRP, however, the audio clips for accent rating will not be identifiable and completely anonymous.

As with the lexical decision task, an elicited imitation task correlates well to overall learner proficiency but is completed rather quickly (Bowden, 2016). It is thus a useful measure of student progress across a single quarter. Since students have two EIT's each quarter we will also be able to measure general proficiency across an entire academic year for students that are enrolled in all three courses in the sequence. These data will be used to answer research questions 1, 2, 4 and 5.

**Compositions** - Students write two high stakes in-class compositions as part of their course requirements. Students are given sixty minutes to write approximately 200 words relating to a topic in class. The class topic and prompt are known to the students prior to coming to class but students cannot use any resources (except a chapter vocabulary list that is projected on the board) in writing their compositions. Students turn in their compositions and instructors grade them and provide feedback on them using a key for the types of errors. For example, if a student misspells a word, the instructor might underline the word to signal 'misspelling'. The student is then handed back the first draft of the composition and is given about a week to revise it using a key for the correction symbols. The second draft of the composition is later turned into the instructors. The first draft of the composition will be used as a metric of authentic written expression since students have to produce spontaneous written language without any external resources (dictionaries, the textbook, online translators). Since students write two compositions we will have two samples of authentic written expression per quarter that we can analyze to answer research questions 1 and 2.

**Questionnaires** - Finally, two questionnaires will be given to the students (an entrance and exit questionnaire). The entrance questionnaire will collect demographic information as well as information about the students' experience studying Spanish (how long, how many classes, where, etc.). Additionally, there will be a few questions about the students' motivations for studying the language, as well as their opinions/attitudes toward language learning. The exit questionnaire will also collect information about any Spanish classes they took throughout the academic year, as well as a questions about their intentions for future study of the language (if any) as well as opinions/attitudes about the courses and their experience language learning at DePaul. The questionnaires should take no more than 15 minutes to complete and since there are two questionnaires (entry and exit) it will involve approximately 30 minutes of their time. The questionnaires will be given online as part of the modules the students do at home as part of their preparation work.

In total, all the tasks will take 8.5 hours of the students' time. However, all of these tasks are course components for Intermediate Spanish and do not require any additional time outside of time spent on course-related activities.

The purpose of giving students some of the metrics and questionnaires twice throughout the quarter is to collect information about their general language skills in Spanish as well as change in Spanish skills and attitudes over time, both across a quarter and within a quarter.

A comparison of data from students across sections and across years will either support or reject the predictions above. The answer to these questions will not only benefit the department, to help determine whether we should expand these instructional tools and assessments to all sections of intermediate Spanish, but also inform the extant literature about its implementation and outcomes.

### Dissemination of Results

We predict that the outcomes of this project will be two-fold. First from a pedagogical perspective, we plan to use the knowledge gathered from the study to make pedagogical decisions about our courses. Secondly, a series of scholarly presentations and publications available to society can be expected as a result of this research. Scholarly meetings at which results can be presented include venues such as the Hispanic Linguistics Symposium, Linguistic Society of America Annual Meeting, Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages, the Madison Distance Learning Conference and others. Publications will minimally include:

- A paper on Spanish language development of Spanish learners. Possible publication venues include journals such as *Probus*, *Spanish in Context*, *Language*, *Hispania*, *Studies in Hispanic and Lusophone Linguistics*, *Lingua*, *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, *Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism*, *the International Journal of Bilingualism*, *Second Language Research*, or *Language Learning*.
- A paper focused on the qualitative use of communicative strategies in VLI sessions. Possible publication venues including the above-named journals as well as journals related to language pedagogy
- A paper addressing 'best' and effective practices for the implementation of and curricular development including VLI and Can-Do.

Additionally, this project will present opportunities for follow-up studies examining the nature and extent of language development with VLI and Can-Do over longer periods of time. Such expanding domains of inquiry provide increased possibilities for disseminating findings within society.

## **IV. Project Plan and Timeline**

IRB materials were submitted and we expect to begin collecting data in week 3 of the academic year.

Data collection will continue throughout the academic year. The funds for this grant will be used to pay a student research assistant to code and begin analyzing this tremendous amount of data. We hope to apply for a QIC grant to fund a research assistant in the second year of the project.

## **V. Budget**

Provide a detailed, itemized budget of how proposed funds will be used. If applicable, provide information about any external funds you have secured for this project and/or matching funds from DePaul University (including in-kind contributions).

A research assistant will be paid \$12.00 for work on the project. The majority of the funds will be used for this purpose.

We may need to purchase books with the DELE practice exams and some funds will go to that. If not, all of the funds will be used for a student research assistant.

We also would like to present our results at the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages. Any funds not used for the above named costs can be used to help offset this conference travel.

