

Journal of the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages

Volume 28



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National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages
601 S Woodcrest Dr. Bloomington, IN 47401

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The Journal of the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages, published annually by the Council, is dedicated to the issues and concerns related to the teaching and learning of Less Commonly Taught Languages. The Journal primarily seeks to address the interests of language teachers, administrators, and researchers. Articles that describe innovative and successful teaching methods that are relevant to the concerns or problems of the profession, or that report educational research or experimentation in Less Commonly Taught Languages are welcome. Papers presented at the Council's annual conference will be considered for publication, but additional manuscripts from members of the profession are also welcome.

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Dr. Antonia Schleicher
National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages
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Authors' Contact Information

1. Bruna Sommer-Farias, Ana Carvalho, Adriana Picoral *Portuguese Language Program Evaluation: Implementation, Results and Follow-up Strategies* –
brunasommer@email.arizona.edu;
anac@email.arizona.edu; adrianaps@email.arizona.edu
2. Edvan P. Brito, Rachel Mamiya Hernandez *Perspectives on Reduced Forms Instruction in Portuguese* -
brito@uark.edu; rmamiya@hawaii.edu
3. Ellen Rafferty, Erlin Barnard, Juliana Wijaya *Developing Indonesian Oral Proficiency Guidelines* -
emraffer@wisc.edu
4. Hezi Brosh *The Arabic Writing System: Understanding the Challenges Facing Students and Teachers* -
brosh@usna.edu

National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL)

NCOLCTL is an organization dedicated to the teaching and learning of Less Commonly Taught Languages. Membership is open to individuals and organizations that share this interest.

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NCOLCTL's mission is to increase the number of Americans who choose to learn one or more of the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) as a means of enhancing cross-cultural communication among citizens of the United States. NCOLCTL's work focuses on the less commonly taught languages which are becoming increasingly vital to the economic, social and political welfare of the United States. Furthermore, NCOLCTL seeks to improve the teaching and learning of these languages and to make them more generally available. We are the national voice for organizations and individuals who represent the teaching of these less commonly taught languages.

Both the collegiate and precollegiate level. NCOLCTL also promotes the use of technology, especially computers and the Internet, to enable a new era in cross-cultural understanding, communication, and language education.

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Since its establishment in 1990, the NCOLCTL has carried out a variety of activities to raise awareness about the importance of less commonly taught languages. NCOLCTL achieves its goals through the following activities:

- Annual Conference in conjunction with Delegate Assembly
- Conducting research to promote and facilitate the learning and teaching of the LCTLs
- Planning for and establishing a national policy for building the national capacity for the study of the LCTLs
- Enhancing the capacity of existing LCTL national associations, and organizing new ones
- Establishing a system for networking and communication among member organizations, and facilitating their collective efforts to solve problems in the LCTL field
- Developing language learning frameworks to guide teacher training, curriculum design, materials development, and seek ways to address problems of articulation among different levels of the American educational system
- Working, on behalf of the members, with government agencies, foundations, and the general foreign language community on policy issues and to seek funding to establish effective standards for the less commonly taught language field
- Fostering national and international linkages within and across the various language areas

- Online Teaching Courses designed primarily for new instructors of LCTLs at postsecondary level and a useful resource for experienced instructors.
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Editor's Introduction

Danko Šipka
Arizona State University

The spring 2020 issue features eight papers and one review article, representing various topics of interest to the entire NCOLCTL community and various languages in the field, and it comes in two volumes. In this volume, the first two papers discuss Portuguese, with far-reaching conclusions about program evaluation (*Portuguese Language Program Evaluation: Implementation, Results and Follow-up Strategies*) and reduced forms (*Perspectives on Reduced Forms Instruction in Portuguese*). The paper titled *Developing Indonesian Oral Proficiency Guidelines* addresses the question of standards, which is increasingly of interest to all LCTLs. The issues of teaching writing systems are discussed in the final paper, titled *The Arabic Writing System: Understanding the Challenges Facing Students and Teachers*.

Portuguese Language Program Evaluation: Implementation, Results and Follow-up Strategies

Bruna Sommer-Farias

Ana Carvalho

Adriana Picoral

University of Arizona

Abstract

Oscillation in foreign language enrollment in higher education, especially in less-commonly taught languages, may jeopardize the health and survival of programs. Language program evaluation is a useful tool to identify needs and strengths by informing program directors and instructors about student satisfaction and program accountability. This paper reports on an ongoing language program evaluation conducted in the Portuguese language program at a US Southwest university. Inspired by a utilization-focused approach (Norris, 2006) and Ecke and Ganz's (2015) evaluation model, survey data were collected during five semesters (2016-18) as a student analytics tool to longitudinally map students' profiles and needs. Enrollment trends in this institution were compared with other post-secondary contexts to envision influential trends in Portuguese language programs in the US. Findings informed changes in the program. Both the evaluation tools and the resulting procedures can be duplicated by other foreign language programs, especially less commonly taught languages (LCTLs).

Introduction

Since 2002, several Portuguese language programs in the United States have faced a visible oscillation of enrollment rates (Looney & Lusin, 2018). Even though language program evaluations are a recent practice among all foreign languages, the lack of rigorous evaluation projects in most institutions is also a prevalent phenomenon among the less commonly taught languages (Milleret & Silveira, 2009). Such absence does not only jeopardize the understanding of the reasons behind variation in enrollment rates, but it also thwarts an innovative stance towards curriculum development that can support retention rates. Thus, aligned with a “pragmatic endeavor of crafting and refining a particular, sought-after program reality” (Norris, 2016, p.184), our project describes the implementation of an ongoing evaluation process carried out by the Portuguese Language Program at the University of Arizona built on Ecke and Ganz’ (2015) evaluation model. The current study has both internally driven motivations, such as course delivery assessment and program improvement, and external requirements, such as economic pressure and decrease in enrollment across the US. This is particularly important because of the oscillation of enrollment rates in Portuguese Language programs in the past 15 years, marked by a current expressive drop described by the last MLA report, released in 2016 (Looney & Lusin, 2018). In the hope that other institutions can replicate the evaluation model described here to tackle challenges experienced by small language programs, this article shares both the administration and interpretation of external and internal institutional data, in addition to student data. We also share some programmatic and curricular adaptations based on these results.

Language Program Evaluation

Due to the decrease in enrollment rates in many foreign language (FL) departments, institutions have been compelled to undergo a process of restructuring or even closure of their FL programs (Norris, 2006; Mills & Norris, 2014). Consequently, this scenario has required the development of strategies to increase enrollment rates and improve services and resources for students in order to achieve curriculum improvement and accountability. Language program evaluation is therefore a useful tool to be implemented by Language Program Directors (LPDs) to tackle the economic and political dynamic in which FL programs are involved. Evaluations can be structured to identify the needs of different types, such as curricula and materials design, resource allocation, instruction delivery, and outcomes display (Norris, 2016). To do that, assessment practices are multi-method, address various stakeholders, and serve multiple purposes, such as accountability and accreditation (Davis, 2015).

Previous language program evaluation projects conducted in higher education institutions have demonstrated how assessment projects can lead to internal structural and curricular discoveries and implementation of adjustments. Some of these changes include alignment of first-year courses to address new student learning outcomes (Bualuan & Martin, 2015), restructuring of writing and oral skill performance throughout curricula (Blad & Williams, 2015), and revision of student learning outcomes paired with the creation of opportunities to support TAs' professional development (Sasayama, 2015). The methods utilized in these evaluations are aligned with the mobilization of teachers, language program

administrators (LPDs) or other stakeholders taking the lead or collaborating closely with department peers. While the use of internal program data might seem limited to inform the size of the challenges evaluation projects aim to overcome, Ecke and Ganz (2015) revealed how analysis of student preferences, career trajectories, and enrollment in the program and in the institution over time helped interpret possible external influences on program viability.

Importance of program evaluation for Portuguese

It is imperative that programs are submitted to continuous internal evaluation. This process can systematically inform stakeholders about the aspects that are directly or indirectly impacting students' satisfaction and program quality. Therefore, improvements and programs are more likely to succeed and survive in times of crisis.

Efforts to enhance the visibility of Portuguese on university campuses and other strategies to increase enrollment have been at the center of conference papers (Milleret, 2012) and special issues such as the collection edited by Chamberlain (1979) and a special volume of the *Portuguese Language Journal*, number 4. In fact, since the first efforts to include the Portuguese language among the foreign languages taught in higher education institutions in the United States a century ago (reported in Ellison, 1967), Portuguese enrollment rates continue to be one of the most vital topics among practitioners and researchers in the field. Milleret (2016) reminded us that all Portuguese instructors are program developers. Nonetheless, she pointed out that “Portuguese programs are always ‘under construction’ and that they are never fully built” (Milleret & Silveira, 2009, p. 513). In addition to a great deal of

effort dedicated to program building reported in these venues, the inclusion of classes targeted at teaching Portuguese for heritage speakers (Ferreira, 2009; Jouët-Pastré, 2010; Silva, 2010), as a third language for Spanish speakers (Carvalho, 2010; Carvalho & Child, 2018), and for specific purposes (Kelm, 2002; Risner, 2012; Sommer-Farias, 2018) not only offered Portuguese an opportunity to contribute to important issues in the field of second language acquisition, but informed classroom practices that help programs attract and retain a more diverse group of students.

The lack of a rigorous evaluation program in most institutions, common among the less commonly taught languages (Milleret & Silveira, 2009), represents a challenge for LPDs to propose innovative projects in face of oscillating enrollment rates as well as uncertain course offerings and supporting funding availability that depend on the number of students. As program evaluation is a new endeavor, both lack of training and questions about the scholarly status of such a research field (Norris, 2016) might also act as impediments to the implementation of well-planned evaluations in LCTLs. Nonetheless, evaluations are necessary since, as Milleret and Silveira (2010) argued, “collecting data can lead to changes that increase enrollment, improve student satisfaction, and promote program growth” (p. 1). By administering surveys at the University of New Mexico, the authors showed how assessment practices created a culture of reflection on instructors and students through engagement in proposing and implementing meaningful changes. More specifically, beginning-of-semester surveys were found useful to understand students’ motivations to enroll in Portuguese classes, which resulted in the articulation of course offerings

for Spanish vs non-Spanish speakers, and further verification of the effectiveness of programmatic changes. Most importantly, this type of data was beneficial to understanding enrollment oscillations. Studies by Bateman and de Almeida Oliveira (2014) and Kelm (2002) found important differences between reasons why Spanish speakers and non-Spanish speakers study Portuguese: while personal bonds with Portuguese speakers influenced non-Spanish speakers, the similarity between languages attracted Spanish speakers to Portuguese classes. As a result, the authors proposed specific recruitment strategies, such as emphasizing the economic growth of Brazil among non-Spanish speakers and the tailoring of classes and specific methods for Spanish speakers.

Program evaluation guided by “evidence-based decisions and actions” (Norris, 2016, p. 169) provides more consistent means for LCTL’s programs to reach high-quality delivery of instruction and assessment, thus providing concrete means to tackle the present enrollment and retention issue. Through the discussion of the implementation of our Portuguese language evaluation program and the interpretation of the results, this project seeks mainly to engage in self exploration that may not only inform our program development and explore reasons behind enrollment oscillation but also present a model that can be reproduced by other LCTL programs in general and Portuguese programs in particular. For these aims, we ask:

- 1) What is the enrollment scenario in Portuguese?
How can it be explained by external factors?
- 2) How can internal factors, such as students’ assessment of the program, inform program development?

External factors

The first phase consisted of comparing the enrollment scenario in our institution against other Portuguese language programs in the US. Because this project started in 2016 and the last MLA data available were from 2013, it was difficult to know if enrollment decrease was a local problem or a national trend. After contacting Portuguese language directors of the eight largest Portuguese programs in the country, and getting a low response rate, we accessed updated enrollment data from other institutions from the most recent version of the MLA report (Looney & Lusin, 2018) based on data gathered in 2016. Results will be discussed in depth in the next section.

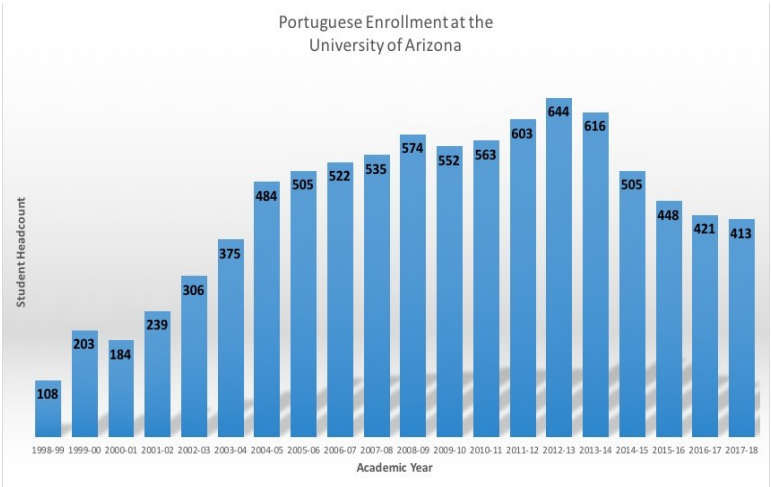
Following Ecke and Ganz (2015), we collected enrollment data for the incoming undergraduate student population in general and other foreign languages in particular. The objective of this first step was to engage in comparisons between Portuguese enrollment and general enrollment trends in our university, between Portuguese and other FL programs at the University of Arizona, and between Spanish and Portuguese within our department.

Portuguese enrollment trends

At the University of Arizona, enrollment increased substantially from 1998 on, when a comprehensive recruitment program was implemented, focusing on the creation and advertisement of a Portuguese course for Spanish speakers. This course had a substantial impact on Portuguese enrollment since it attracted campus-wide speakers of Spanish as their first, second, or heritage language. Also important was the fact that starting in 2001, one year of Portuguese (or another

language) has been required for all Spanish majors. A major in Spanish with a Portuguese concentration was established in the same year, which requires completion of 18 units in each language. All these efforts, in addition to a thorough curricular revision, the implementation of technology-enhanced pedagogies, the hiring of new faculty and grant-funded teaching initiatives, led to a steady increase in enrollment from 108 students in the 1998-99 academic year to 644 students in the 2012-13 academic year (see Figure 1). After Fall of 2014, enrollment started to decrease and reached 413 in the 2017-18 academic year.

Figure 1: Enrollment at Portuguese Program at the University of Arizona 1998-2018



Data from enrollment trends in the university at large shows that both general and undergraduate enrollment showed continuous increase, while Portuguese enrollment decreased during the same period (2016-17).

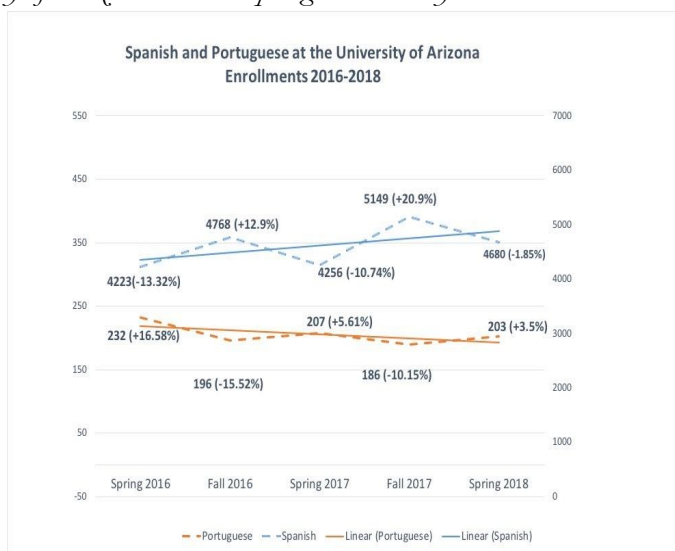
Given the current crisis in the humanities represented by the decreased interest in studying foreign language (Johnson, 2019; Schmidt, 2018), a comparison of enrollment in Portuguese with other foreign languages in the same institution is important to discard a possible general decrease in interest in the foreign language field at large. Numbers provided by the College of Humanities revealed that French, Italian, and German presented enrollment increases, whereas Portuguese and Arabic experienced enrollment decline. In the following year, 2017-18, Italian, Chinese, and German also experienced enrollment decline. The case of Italian and German correlates with the last MLA report (Looney & Lusin, 2018), which revealed a decrease of 20.1% and 7.1% respectively in enrollments in Fall 2016.¹ Therefore, we can discard the hypothesis that decline in Portuguese enrollment is a reflection of a general tendency in foreign language enrollment in the institution, since languages such as French and Arabic remained stable or even increased enrollment rates.

Our next step was to examine departmental data to explore possible correlations between Portuguese and Spanish enrollment. As two semesters of Portuguese are required for Spanish majors, a decrease in Spanish majors could explain the decrease in Portuguese enrollment. Internal data reveals that,

¹ For more specific enrollment numbers, see Carvalho, Sommer and Picoral (2018).

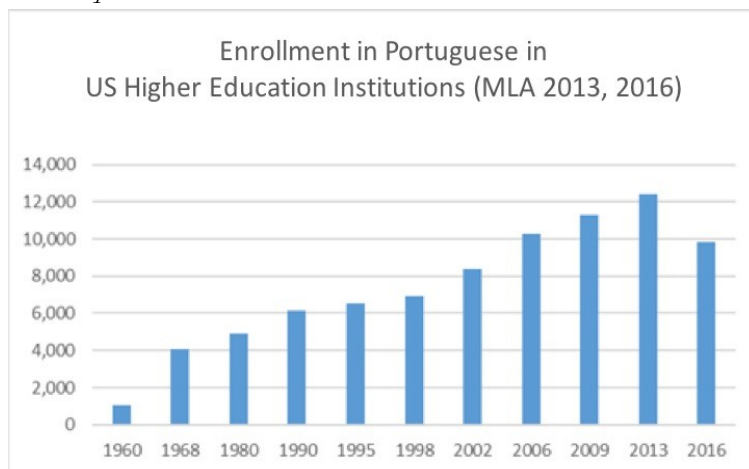
although Portuguese enrollment tends to grow in Spring semesters while Spanish enrollment tends to drop, Spanish data show a slight increase during the period under examination, while Portuguese data show a slight decrease (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Comparison between Portuguese and Spanish enrollments at the University of Arizona between Spring 2016-18 by semester



We now turn to the MLA report to examine whether a decrease in Portuguese enrollment is specific to the University of Arizona or it is representative of a national trend. According to the latest report (2016), Portuguese enrollment in higher education showed a steady increase from the first time it was recorded in 1960, until it started to decrease for the first time in 2013. The decrease from 2013 to 2016 was of 20.8% (Looney & Lusin, 2018).

Figure 3: Enrollment in US Higher Education Institutions according to MLA report 2018



The national trend illustrated in Figure 3 is consistent with enrollment trends at the University of Arizona (Figure 1), which also accords with a sharp and constant decrease in Portuguese majors at the University of Florida from 2014 on (Lord, 2019). These data also corroborate that a decline in Portuguese enrollment is a national trend and responds to external factors. This decline represents a sharp turn of events. According to the previous MLA report published in 2015 (Goldberg, Looney & Lusin, 2015), Portuguese was among the four languages with enrollment increase between 2009 and 2013, aside from Korean, American Sign Language and Chinese, while many other languages such as German, Spanish, French, Arabic, and Japanese declined by a rate of almost 10%. The report concluded that “Portuguese and Korean did very well when one compares 1960 enrollments with those in 2013, and they stand out in this survey because they are two of only

a handful of languages that gained enrollments between 2009 and 2013” (Goldberg, Looney & Lusin, 2015, p.4). By the time the report was published, 238 institutions reported offering Portuguese class in the nation, an increase that amounted to 10% from 2009 and up to 18.4% if graduate programs were included (Goldberg, Looney & Lusin, 2015, p. 77-80).

A Reasonable Explanation: Brazil’s rise and fall

Milleret (2012) argues that the constant increase in enrollment is parallel to increased attention to Brazil. One of the fastest growing economies in 2010, Brazil’s growth rate reached 7.5%, allowing for its inclusion in the BRICs countries. While Brazil enjoyed “a spectacular boom” (de Sainte Croix, 2012), Europe and the United States’ recession worsened, causing students to seek Portuguese classes to prepare for potential job opportunities (Gonçalves, 2012). However, after a decade of growth, Brazil entered its longest recession and the economy began to shrink (RFi Group). As inflation returned, the unemployment rates rose, and with President Rousseff’s impeachment, political and economic instability gained international media headlines. In fact, a quick search of the headlines published by the New York Times during the writing of this article, for which all articles published during the first 12 days in August 2018, about Brazil under “Americas” were selected, showed a clear tendency towards negativity:

*Figure 4**List of headlines published in the “Americas” category in the New York Times website in August 2018*

Headlines	Themes	Date
A Year of Violence Sees Brazil’s Murder Rate Hit Record High	Violence	8/10/2018
Several People Hurt in Blast at Brazil Steelmaker Usiminas’ Plant	Accident	8/10/18
Brazil’s Usiminas Says No Deaths or Critical Injuries in Blast	Accident	8/10/2018
Brazil Slams Venezuela as Measles Spreads Across Border	Epidemic	8/9/2018
Record Homicides in Brazil Underscore Eroding Security	Violence	8/9/2018
Brazil’s Presidential Debate Held-Without Da Silva	Elections	8/9/2018

Brazil Suffers Record Murder Tally in 2017, Ahead of Election	Epidemic	8/9/2018
Domestic Abuse, Shown Blow by Blow, Shocks Brazil Image	Violence	8/8/2018
Brazil's Alckmin to Follow Pragmatic Trade Policy: Running Mate	Elections	8/8/18
Brazil Judge Lifts Border Closure for Venezuelan Immigrants	Border insecurity	8/7/2018
Brazil Rushes to Thwart Measles Outbreak From Venezuelans	Epidemic	8/6/2018
As 'Lula' Sits in Brazil Jail, Party Nominates Him for President	Elections	8/5/2018
Brazil's Supreme Court Considers Decriminalizing Abortion	Law	8/3/2018

Brazil Party Names Jailed Leader as Presidential Nominee	Elections	8/4/2018
Brazil's Top Court Wrestles With Abortion at Special Hearing	Law	8/3/2018
Wanted in Brazil: Some Willing Vice Presidential Candidates	Elections	8/2/2018
Argentina, Brazil Reach Deal to Share Evidence in Corruption Cases	Corruption	8/3/18
Far-Right Presidential Bid Gets Less Play From Brazil Media	Elections	8/3/18
Big Brazil Party Makes 1st Presidential Bid in 24 Years	Elections	8/2/2018
Measles Infects More Than 1,000 in Brazil; 5 Reported Deaths	Epidemics	8/2/2018

Brazil's Odebrecht Sues Colombia for \$1.3 Billion Over Asset Seizure	Corruption	8/2/18
Fields Medal Is Stolen Minutes After It's Given in Brazil	Violence	8/2/2018
Lula's Party Strikes Pact to Keep Socialists Neutral in Brazil Vote	Elections	8/1/2018

The frequency of words such as murder, deaths, and measles contributes to a disadvantageous picture painted by the New York Times headlines, and reflects the negative mood prevalent in Brazil. According to the Brazilian research institute Datafolha, the search for more stability, security, and better jobs led to 62% of young Brazilians to report their desire to emigrate if they could (PR Newswire). The change from a booming economy to a crisis is also reflected on the covers of *The Economist*, in Figure 5. On Nov. 12, 2009, the headline “Brazil takes off” embodies the optimism of a rising economy. Four years later, on September 28, 2013, the headline drastically changes to “Has Brazil blown it?”, coinciding with the start of the decline of Portuguese enrollment both at the University of Arizona (Figure 1) and in the United States (Figure 3).

Figure 5: Covers of "The Economist" in 2009 and 2013 respectively



Although this brief examination of external and institutional factors may shed light on the reasons behind the recent decline in Portuguese enrollment, it is imperative that Portuguese programs engage in self-assessment projects.

Internal factors

Internal factors were explored through the application of a series of student surveys that aimed at exploring (1) students' profiles (motivation to enroll, linguistic background, major and career goals); (2) students' expectations (both short and long term), and (3) students' assessment of the program (both perceptions and suggestions). The Portuguese language program had been administering paper-based surveys in the past, however advancements in technology and big data allow for the documentation and analysis of further longitudinal trends (Norris, 2016). For this reason, the beginning, middle, and final semester questionnaires, plus an exit questionnaire for the major and minor graduates, were adapted to be taken online via Qualtrics (i.e., an institutional survey portal). The surveys are accessed via links distributed by the instructors during class time to be responded via personal computers or phones to increase response rates. A successful response rate of 100% was achieved in classes in which the instructors administered the surveys as advised. Even though most of the graduate student instructors were willing to collaborate with the evaluation project by sparing class time for the surveys, there was sporadic resistance from faculty, a challenge previously reported in the literature (Watanabe, Norris & González-Lloret, 2009). In this sense, the successful implementation of this key stage of the project was contingent upon the collaboration of staff members. Both close- and open-ended questions were revised in light of Milleret and

Silveira's (2009) and Ecke and Ganz's (2015) studies. Since the surveys have been administered since Spring 2016, several revisions have been made throughout the process to validate the surveys and elicit clearer and more useful answers from students. The main topics addressed by each survey remained unchanged and are systematized in Table 1 the diagram below.

Table 1: Structure and rationale of surveys

	Target topics	Rationale
Survey 1 (1 st week of classes)	<p>What is the student profile in each course (linguistic background, academic level, and minor and major)?</p> <p>What are students' learning expectations and career goals?</p> <p>How did they hear about the Portuguese Program?</p>	Placement and course focus appropriateness, recruitment strategies, curriculum and student learning outcomes (SLOs) design.
Survey 2 (after the mid term)	To what extent are students satisfied with the course, instructor, materials, and extra-credit events?	Formative assessment purposes: Course rearrangements for the same semester; improvement of instructors'

	To what extent are the courses addressing students' needs?	commitment to students' learning processes and their own pedagogical practices.
Survey 3 (last week of classes)	How do students notice their progress in specific skills throughout the semester?	Students' perception of skills' improvement and satisfaction; teacher training improvements, and revision of SLOs and content by course.
Exit Survey	<p>How did the course meet students' expectations and needs?</p> <p>To what extent are students satisfied with the program and skills they developed and knowledge they acquired during the program?</p>	Program accreditation and promotion.

Overall, we report the results of five semesters (N is the number of responses): Spring 2016 (N= 521), Fall 2016 (N= 445), Spring 2017 (N= 403), Fall 2017 (N= 314), and Spring 2018 (N=299). While close-ended questions are automatically calculated by Qualtrics and R (R Core Team 2013), open-ended student responses were interpreted through codes of 5 different categories: 1) student profile, 2) textbook insights, 3) suggestions for improvement of pedagogical strategies, 4) suggestions for improvement of topics and program, and 5) career and academic goals. While codes 1 through 4 categorized student satisfaction towards instructor engagement, quality of materials, instruction delivery, and program improvement, code 5 classified students' interest areas.

The coding system was created through interpretive open and axial coding and inductive methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Two researchers coded all the answers independently, and then codes were compared using R (R Core Team). Idiosyncrasies were discussed and rearranged.

Students' Profile

Given the invisibility of LCTLs in society in general and on university campuses in particular, it was important to find out how students learned about Portuguese courses. In addition, given that the program is currently engaged in several recruiting strategies (e.g. ad on the university newspaper, visits to Spanish classes), the answers to this question also offer insights on the most effective practices.

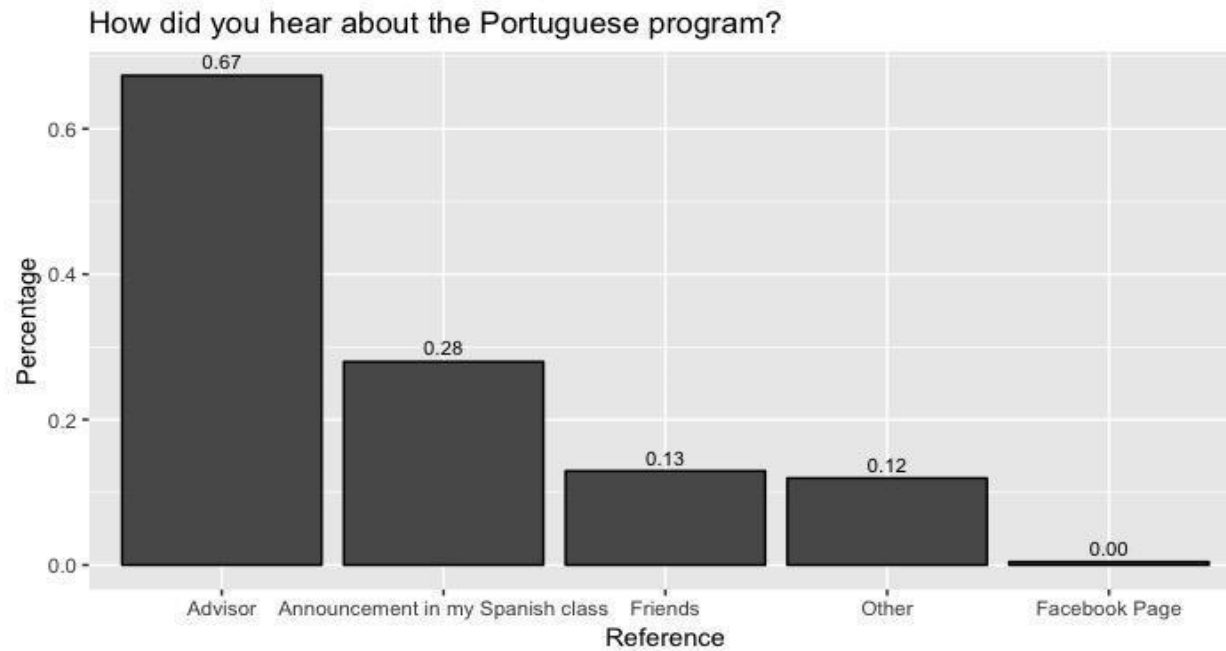


Figure 6: Average of students' responses to the question "How did you hear about the Portuguese program?" (Survey 1, Spring 2016 – Spring 2018) (N=792)

When we examine the student body as a whole, 67% (n=530) reported to have heard about the class from the advisor, which is not surprising given that students enroll in classes under the departmental advisor's guidance. In addition, announcements in Spanish classes have been effective as of 28% (n=221) of the students reported choosing Portuguese after a Portuguese instructor visited their Spanish class. Based on the 13% (n=103) of students who reported friends as a reference, we implemented the 'bring a friend day' to reach out to students' close friends and promote the program.

Student profile

Linguistic Background

Figure 7 shows the percentage of Spanish and English speakers enrolled in the Portuguese program along with their reported competence levels. Whereas most students reported speaking English as a first language (71%, n=562), nearly half of the students (48%, n=380) also reported speaking Spanish as their first language as well. We then conclude that a large portion of these students are Spanish-English bilinguals who grew up speaking both languages.

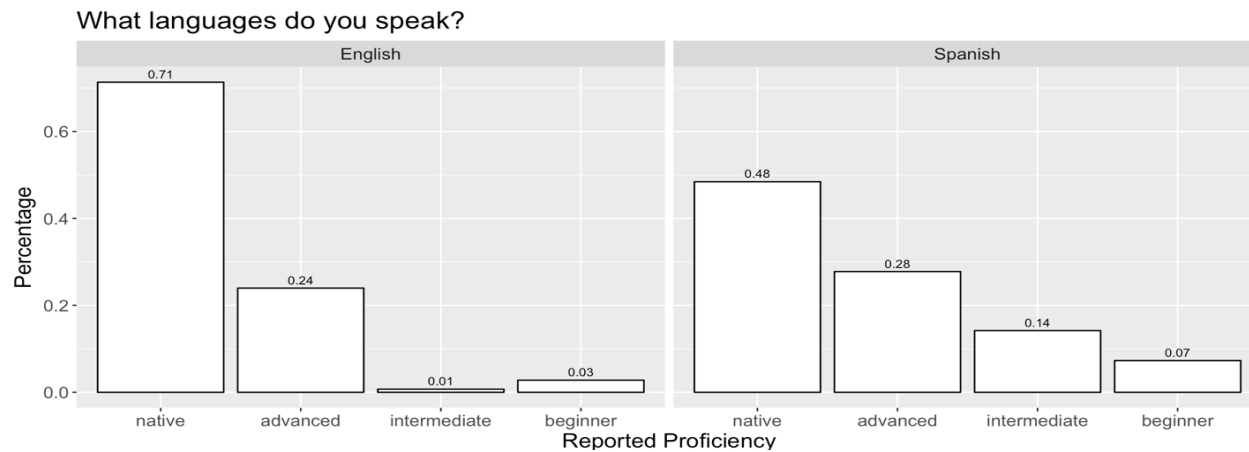


Figure 7: Students' linguistic background: English and Spanish (N=792)

In order to better capture the students' linguistic experience with English and Spanish, in Spring 2018 we added a new question to the first survey that identifies heritage speakers of Spanish more accurately. The results are shown in Figure 8, and clearly indicate that only a very small percentage of our student population does not speak Spanish (4%, $n=9$), while almost half of the student population were exposed to Spanish as a child. As for L2 Spanish speakers, that number represents 28% ($n=65$) of the students enrolled in Portuguese courses in 2018.

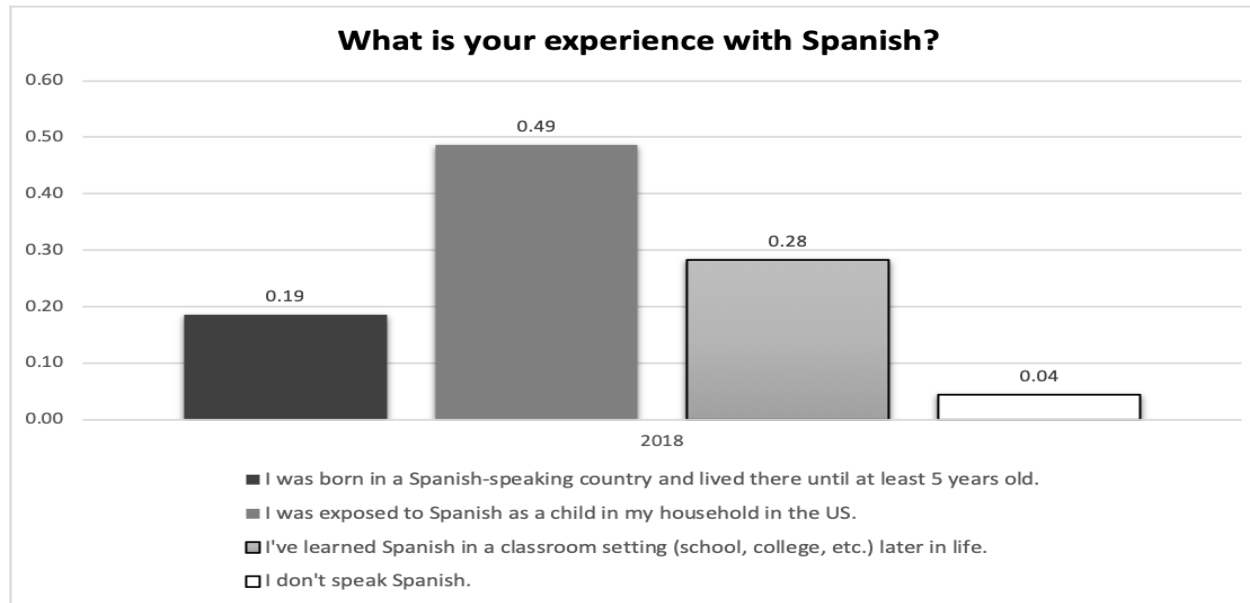


Figure 8: Students' linguistic background: Spanish experience, Spring and Fall 2018 (N=235)

The large Hispanic presence in our program is not surprising since 31.4% of the population of Arizona are Spanish speakers (United States Census Bureau, 2017). Consequently, the University of Arizona undergraduate student body is composed of at least 25% of Spanish speakers. These demographics recently granted the University of Arizona the recognition of Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), increasing our responsibility towards catering our pedagogical efforts towards the Spanish-speaking population. In addition, it is clear that heritage speakers of Spanish comprise the majority of the Spanish speakers enrolled in Portuguese. Previous research on acquisition of cognate languages by Spanish speakers have stressed the importance of the order and context of learners' Spanish acquisition (Carvalho & da Silva, 2008; Carvalho & Child, 2018). These differences reveal that learners undergo distinct learning strategies, e.g. heritage learners rely on implicit, cultural, and pragmatic knowledge, whereas L2 Spanish speakers perform better on tasks requiring metalinguistic awareness (Carvalho & Child, 2018). Therefore, capturing a clearer picture of the Spanish heritage population in our program is essential to create effective pedagogical interventions for both groups. The question targeting students' context of acquisition (Figure 8) added to the first survey in Fall 2017 revealed that 49% of our Spanish-speaking students learned the language in a household in the US, whereas 19% was born in a Spanish-speaking country and lived there at least until 5 years old. Nonetheless, analyzing specificities of reception and intuition of heritage vs L2 Spanish speakers in terms of objectives, satisfaction, preferences, and workload perception still needs to be enabled by additional questions. Thus, based on evidence (Torres, 2013, Zyzik, 2017) that heritage speakers are oriented primarily to the content of the

task rather than analyzing it metalinguistically, at the University of Arizona we increased reading and listening activities of authentic texts that can be comprehended due to one's implicit linguistic repertoire in order to cater to the heritage speakers of Spanish. These results can better inform the development of materials and teaching approaches that address needs and learning styles of this population, thus offering a more balanced teaching of explicit grammar for heritage versus non-heritage speakers.

Majors

Students majoring in Spanish are required to take two semesters of Portuguese to conclude their degree. Although Spanish enrollment helps keep the number of enrollments in Portuguese somewhat stable, maintaining a balance between Spanish majors and non-majors is ideal for relative independence from enrollment trends in Spanish. Figure 9 compares the number of majors and non-majors in Spanish taking Portuguese across semesters to assess the proportion of students enrolled in Portuguese as a requirement (Spanish majors) or as a choice (non-Spanish majors).

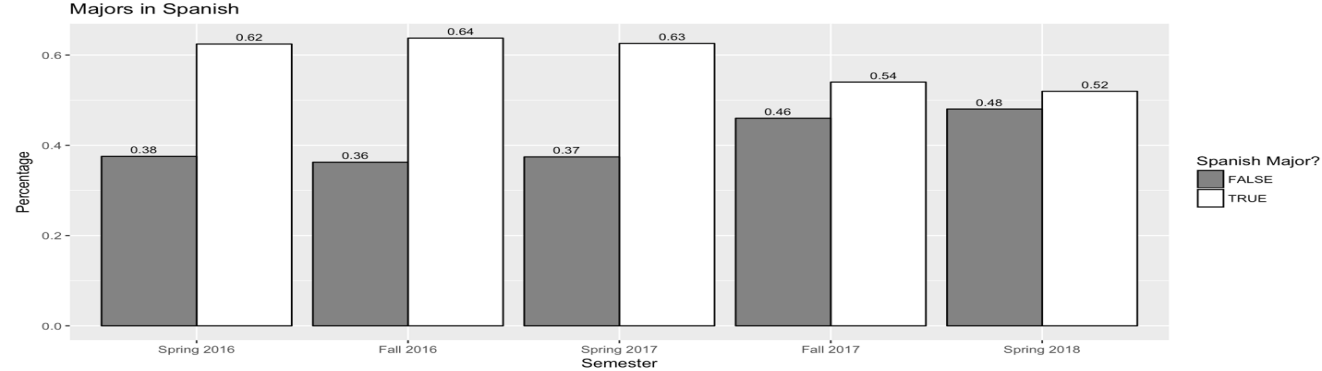


Figure 9: Number of majors in Spanish compared to other majors (Spring 2016-Spring 2018) (N=792)

As can be seen from Spring 2016 to Spring 2018, the number of students majoring in Spanish was greater than non-Spanish majors. In Fall 2017 and Spring 2018, the numbers are well balanced. It is important to maintain the investment in non-Spanish majors so we don't have to rely on the department enrollment and policies.

Career Goals

Information about students' career goals helps us better connect students' academic experience in the Portuguese program with their professional plans.

Figure 10: Fields of study associated with students' career goals in response to the question, "What are your future career goals?" (Survey 2, Spring 2016-Spring 2018) (N=545)



Responses to the question “What are your future career goals?” revealed that 20.2% (n=110) of students are interested in pursuing careers in health (e.g. medicine, nursing, psychology, speech and hearing). This correlates with the most common majors reported in section b, psychology and physiology. The significant general category comprised answers such as “I want to get a job”, “Keep practicing my language skills” or “I haven’t decided yet”, so we consider Teaching as the second most cited career (19.45% (n=106)). Such a category includes translation and interpretation, teaching of Spanish or English in K-12 or contexts abroad. In general, these numbers point to possible skills and content knowledge that can be added to Portuguese courses in order to prepare students to participate in health, education, and business in multilingual contexts, playing roles as interpreters, translators, teachers, physicists, and lawyers.

Students expectations

We divided our analysis of students’ expectations into ‘short term’ and ‘long term.’

Short term students’ expectations

The question “What skills do you hope to develop this semester?” (first survey) gauged students’ short term expectations. Students provided a score (0-100) for each of the skills (Figure 11).

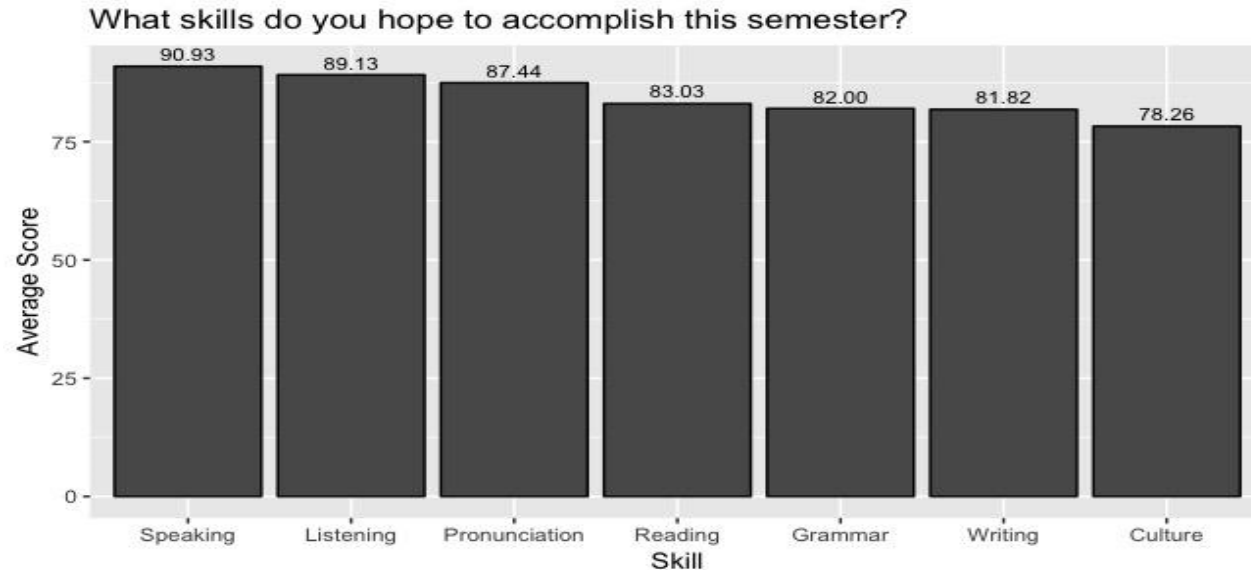


Figure 11: Average of students' responses to the question "What skills do you hope to accomplish this semester?" (Survey 1, Spring 2016 – Spring 2018) (N=792)

Speaking and listening skills were ranked first in all surveys, hovering above 90% (n=786) on average, whereas culture occupied the last position with a score of 78.26% (n=619) on average. On the one hand, such an emphasis on speaking, listening and pronunciation skills might be a consequence of the facilitated transfer of reading and writing from Spanish to Portuguese. On the other hand, the lower interest in culture can be an effect of the two-tiered system in higher education, which divides language, literature and culture courses by posing language course in beginner levels and literature and culture in advanced levels (Zannirato, 2014; Paesani, 2017). In other words, students learn languages by an underlying assumption that learning culture requires advanced linguistic abilities, being addressed only later in the learning process.

Long term students' expectations

When asked about what they hoped to accomplish for the long term (Figure 12), the three most popular categories relate to the development of conversational abilities, while fewer students seem to see themselves using the language for academic purposes (e.g. writing papers or reading novels). A focus on communication with native speakers through writing in digital environments such as social media also became evident, which could be a consequence of an increasing presence of Brazilians on the Internet. A preference by Brazilian history and culture when compared to Portugal and African countries is also demonstrated.

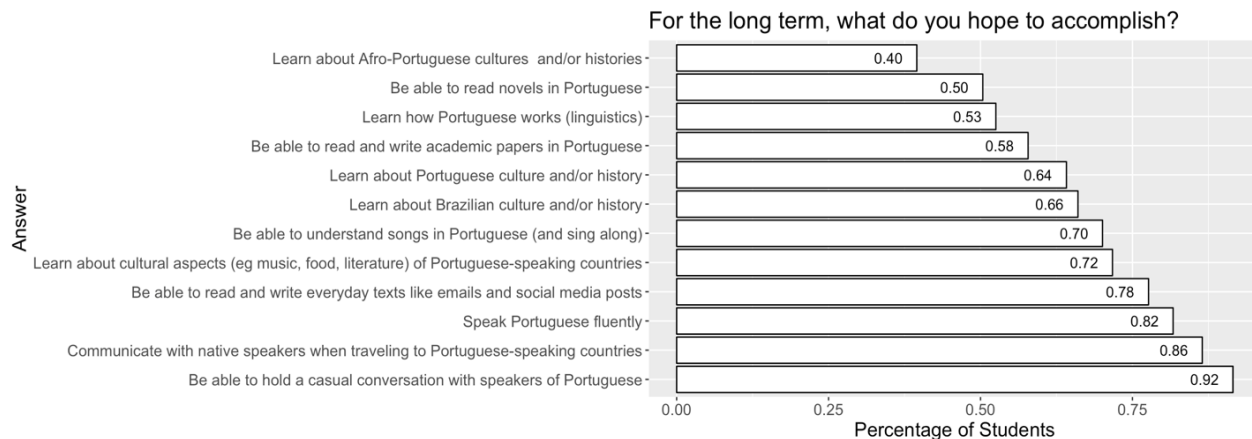


Figure 12: Average of students' responses to the question "For the long term, what do you hope to accomplish?" (Survey 1, Spring 2016 – Spring 2018) (N=792)

Student Assessment

Student Perceptions

This section presents student perceptions about the program's structure, such as instructors and class materials as these are important indicatives of student satisfaction with the program. On average, 51.69% (n=297) of the students were satisfied with the teaching strategies such as fun classes and use of visuals. Instructors' motivational attitude was cited by 28.78% (n=165) of the students, whereas their appreciation for an interactive environment was cited by 33.41% (n=192) of them. These results align with results shown in Figure 12 (long term goals), where students demonstrated interest in enhancing speaking abilities. Improving time management and preparation for video activities were suggested. These aspects were emphasized during teacher orientations and best practices in regard to teaching speaking skills were shared. Specifically, about the textbook, 49.59% (n=285) of students reported there is good use of the textbook, which provides clear content and examples, interesting texts, and resources for oral practice. However, 17.63% (n=101) of students said the textbook presented confusing content organization. The reduced amount of textbook use was negatively mentioned by 11.03% (n=63) of the students. In response to these perspectives, we adopted a new textbook with updated topics and more targeted oral activities and genres.

Students' Suggestions

The third survey included an open-ended question on suggestions for program improvement. Responses from Spring 2016 to Spring 2018 (N=585) were averaged, and the most cited aspects were grouped in culture, linguistics, and conversation. A high interest for culture, in spite of the

reported low expectation to learn culture in the beginning of the semester, figured 36.5% (n=214) of the student responses. Such results might indicate that the courses instilled curiosity on topics such as Brazilian politics, history, and geography, which were included in the frequently mentioned topics. Further study on linguistics, with special attention to language varieties, was suggested by 8.7% (n=51) of the students, whereas 5.3% (n=31) suggested the study of contemporary authors in literature classes (7.2% (n=42) of the responses). This result is also aligned with students' interest in expanding the lexicon to include slang and everyday conversation in more depth (4.6% (n=27). In order to increase students' exposition to Portuguese and opportunities to develop oral skills, the university partnered with a Brazilian institution through the Teletandem program, through which Brazilian students meet synchronously with students in our institution and speak Portuguese for one hour every month.

Implications and Conclusions

Going back to our initial questions, our analysis of external factors showed that enrollment oscillation might be due to external trends and follows national enrollment decline. Even though Portuguese experienced one of the fastest growths among the foreign languages taught in higher education institutions in the United States from 1960 to 2013, it has unequivocally declined since then. It was hypothesized that economic and political instability in Brazil may be behind the decline, which makes it imperative that discussions about these issues are brought up to campus to make students aware of the complexities behind current events.

Our analysis of our students' profiles validated the current recruitment strategies at play, which focus on 1)

Spanish majors, with recruitment in Spanish classes, and 2) non-Spanish majors, with the “bring a friend day” extra-credit activity. The oscillation between Spanish and non-Spanish majors confirms that, although recruitment strategies might have translated into the successful advertisement that attracted enrollment of students from other majors recently, it is extremely important to keep implementing strategies to draw attention of non-majors. Additionally, partnerships with the Center for Latin American Studies have been crucial to offer supporting grants for students to conduct studies on Brazil and Portuguese. Thanks to a UISFL (Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language) Program followed by a Title VI grant acquired by the Center of Latin American Studies at the University of Arizona, several projects to incentivize Portuguese program development have been launched, including online course design, material development and visitors’ sponsorship. Online courses helped address scheduling issues and inserted Portuguese in the crescent online teaching scenario. The presence of Brazilian scholars, writers, filmmakers, and singers through classroom visits, concerts, workshops, and lectures also expanded students’ contact with culture on campus.

Creating more conversation-centered activities based on a variety of registers of both formal and informal genres in all courses, along with an extra-class synchronous conversation program with Brazilian students (Teletandem), can more closely help students expand oral skills. These findings guided the rewriting of student learning outcomes (SLOs) by incorporating specific cultural topics, targeted oral production in each course, and a progressive set of writing assignments across the curriculum. In order to match these adaptations and also address student dissatisfaction with one of the textbooks,

we also adopted new material for one course. After these initial changes, a second round of revisions aligned the SLOs with the ACTFL standards and assessment tools. The most recent version is displayed in the program's syllabi and the university website. Having coherent SLOs has provided solid guidance for instructors, students, and stakeholders during orientations and at the beginning of each course. In the future, becoming an administration site for the Brazilian government-issue proficiency exam Celpe-Bras will provide us with an extra measurement tool to verify and validate the effectiveness of our pedagogical approaches. Such an index will be useful for both recruitment and accreditation purposes.

Some limitations of this study are related to the fact that analysis was carried out through quantitative methods only; a more qualitative batch of data collection methods will provide us with additional insights through focus groups and interviews. In addition, documenting not only students' but also instructors' perceptions and beliefs will enable a more detailed account on instructors' involvement with the evaluation program, and their perceptions of the administration of these surveys. Such data can support situated professional development activities informed by the instructors' most urgent needs. As less commonly taught languages are usually small programs, creating more focused activities is more easily attainable than in bigger programs.

Some of the challenges include encouraging teachers to reserve some time to administer the surveys three times per semester during class. Since some students are enrolled in more than one class, survey takers' exhaustion was reported, which we managed to solve by adding a question that gathers all the courses they are enrolled in at once, not requiring the filing out

of more than one survey. In terms of analysis, differently from Ecke and Ganz (2015), our survey respondents are not identified by their name and email in the second and third surveys, which imposes hurdles to possible correlations between their answers and other characteristics. Finally, the amount of data produced by the three-survey structure of evaluation is monumental. As more surveys are applied and more data are gathered, it becomes more challenging to develop a system where analysis of the most important programmatic aspects can be repeatedly generated.

In sum, the project has certainly shifted the culture in the program towards a more reflective and committed stance. By receiving the responses from the second survey mid-semester, instructors are more aware of student needs, learning preferences, and effectiveness of activities. In this sense, the formative character of the second survey has enabled a more transparent interaction between students and instructors as well as instructors and administrators, since expectations are constantly being checked and (re)aligned. When adaptations are not possible due to constraints (e.g., limited time, mismatch of beliefs and expectations, or curriculum structure), instructors are still able to negotiate possible alternatives or even clarify why certain activities occur in the manner that they do. Such an opportunity to have their voice heard has also affected how students perceive the program: as a community committed with students' learning and with the program's improvement and growth.

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