

On the Background and Motivation of Students in a Beginning Spanish Program

Paul B. Mandell
University of Houston

Abstract: *A number of recent articles have examined the motivation, purpose of study, and demographics of first- and second-year language learners of French or Spanish (see, e.g., Ossipov, 2000; Rava, 2000; Voght, 2000; Wen, 1997) This study surveyed the make-up of a sample of first- and second-year university-level Spanish learners at a major postsecondary institution in a city with a substantial, growing population of monolingual and bilingual Spanish speakers. The results of the survey were used to address questions about learner preparation prior to entering a four-year university course of study, preferred and desired activities in the current curriculum, and motivations for the study of Spanish. Generalizations about the nature of the typical learner in this context and the implications of the appreciation of and desire for grammar-related and communicative activities — as expressed by the respondents — in the contemporary liberal arts curriculum are discussed.*

Introduction

A number of surveys have reported on the ongoing changes in the constituency of students enrolled in university-level foreign language courses in the United States (see, e.g., Ossipov, 2000; Voght, 2000; Watzke, 2000). The overall number of students enrolling in beginning Spanish classes, for example, is increasing, whereas the relative percentage of students enrolling in beginning French and German classes is declining (Brod & Wells, 2000). The observed changes in enrollment are partially attributable to the growing population of heritage and native speakers of Spanish in the United States. As the size of this population increases, so does the perceived importance of the individual to be able to successfully communicate in Spanish (i.e., to comprehend, express, and negotiate meaning, according to Savignon, 1997).

In addition to the changing demographics of the U.S. population in general and the university-level student body in particular, the focus and purpose of the second language curriculum itself is in a state of evolution. As Rava (2000) points out, addressing all aspects of the beginning and intermediate language program is becoming more and more challenging, not only because of the changing student body, but also because of varied levels of experience held by instructional staff and differences in language program goals and available resources. Nevertheless, decisions about curricular design ought to reflect the motivations, interests, and purposes of the students in the language program.

A number of studies have examined the interests, motivations, and preparatory levels of university-level second-language learners. Ossipov (2000), for example, surveyed 279 first- and fourth-semester learners of French about “who is taking French and why.” The majority of Ossipov’s subjects had previously studied French at the secondary level. The two reasons that these learners gave for studying French were that they liked the language in general (90%) and had plans to travel to a place where French was spoken (79%). When asked whether they

Paul B. Mandell (PhD, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign) is Assistant Professor of Spanish at the University of Houston, Houston, Texas.

planned to continue studying French past the fourth-semester level, the majority of respondents were “receptive to the idea of continuing French” (p. 160).

Watzke (2000) reports census results from a sample of 4,691 college-bound students ranging from eighth-grade to second-year college students, addressing questions about the demographics of the typical “college-bound student population enrolling in foreign language study” (p. 47). This survey reveals not surprisingly that the majority of respondents (91.6%) had already studied a second language for at least a year before entering the university. Dividing respondents between nonmajors and majors, however, highlights that nonmajors “as a group average 2.71 years of high school study, significantly less than foreign language majors, who have completed 3.92 years (often including prior requirements in eighth grade)” (p. 50).

Wen (1997) examined the initial motivations that led 77 first- and second-year learners of Chinese to study the language and, subsequently, to continue studying the language. Wen was especially interested in the motivation of learners who had chosen to study Chinese as a representative “less commonly taught language”; her survey results indicate that “intrinsic interest in Chinese culture” and “desire to understand one’s own cultural heritage” were the primary motivations of these students (p. 235).

This article reports the results of a survey conducted at a postsecondary institution during the Fall 1999 semester that was designed to ascertain: (1) the amount of preparation most students have prior to entering a postsecondary level program of Spanish language study; and (2) the average type of motivation driving these students to study Spanish at the postsecondary level. Specifically, the survey aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How many years of Spanish language study at the secondary level has the typical college-level student completed?

Table 1

SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. University level:				
Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Graduate student
2. Age range:				
16–20	21–25	26–30	31–35	36+
3. Number of years of language study (Spanish and/or other) in high school:				
1	2	3	4	4+
4. Number of years of Spanish language study in high school:				
1	2	3	4	4+

Table 2

SAMPLE PREFERRED ACTIVITY AND MOTIVATION QUESTIONS

1. My favorite part of this course is (<i>check all applicable</i>):	
<input type="checkbox"/> Grammar explanations	<input type="checkbox"/> Conversation activities
<input type="checkbox"/> Lectures	<input type="checkbox"/> Homework
<input type="checkbox"/> Compositions	<input type="checkbox"/> Listening activities
<input type="checkbox"/> Opportunities to speak with others	<input type="checkbox"/> Tests
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
2. I feel I need more:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Grammar explanations	<input type="checkbox"/> Conversation activities
<input type="checkbox"/> Lectures	<input type="checkbox"/> Homework
<input type="checkbox"/> Compositions	<input type="checkbox"/> Listening activities
<input type="checkbox"/> Opportunities to speak with others	<input type="checkbox"/> Tests
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
3. I am taking this course because (<i>check all applicable; if checking more than one, please place a number in the blank to indicate order of importance: 1 = most important</i>):	
<input type="checkbox"/> I need to fulfill the language requirement	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> I plan to major or minor in Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> I need to know Spanish for travel, study, or work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> I plan to study Hispanic literature in the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> I plan to study Language in the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> I just think it’s fun.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Table 3

SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANTS BY UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Level of University Study	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Graduate	Totals
	18 (4%)	94 (22%)	135 (32%)	166 (39%)	10 (2%)	423 (100%)

2. Which activities do typical college-level learners of Spanish feel are most beneficial to their continuing L2 development?
3. What are the most common factors motivating learners to pursue the study of Spanish as an L2 at the college level?
4. What percentage of college-level learners plan to continue their study of Spanish beyond the first- and second-year level?

In the following sections, I describe the survey process, present the results, and discuss what the data reveal about these university-level students in particular and how they compare with data from other studies.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were adult learners enrolled in first- and second-year Spanish courses at a major post-

secondary institution during the Fall 1999 semester. Respondents were enrolled in one of the following four course-levels: first semester ($n = 168$), second semester ($n = 59$), third semester ($n = 124$), or fourth semester ($n = 72$), for a total sample size of 423.

Materials

A survey with 14 questions was designed (see Appendix A) to address the aforementioned research questions. Survey questions 1 to 9 were designed to gather demographic information about the participants (see Table 1 for examples of demographic questions).

Responses to questions 2 and 3 provided information about the level of university study and age of the participants. Responses to questions 4 and 5 provided information about the subjects' number of years of secondary-level language study in general and secondary-level study of Spanish in particular. Responses to questions 6 and 7 provided information about the Spanish coursework completed by the learners at the institution in which they were currently enrolled, at other institutions, or both. Finally, responses to questions 8 and 9 were designed to provide insight into the subjects' experiential and linguistic backgrounds.

Questions 10 to 14 were designed to obtain subjects' opinions about and reactions to their current course of Spanish study (see Table 2 for examples of questions designed to measure students' preferences and motivation).

Responses to questions 10 and 11 provided information about the subjects' favorite activities in the current class and activities that they would like to see more of, respectively. Question 12 gathered information about the subjects' motivation(s) for studying Spanish. Responses to question 13 provided information about the subjects' plans to continue their course of Spanish language study beyond the course in which they were currently

Figure 1

GENERAL CONSTITUENCY OF PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS BY UNIVERSITY LEVEL

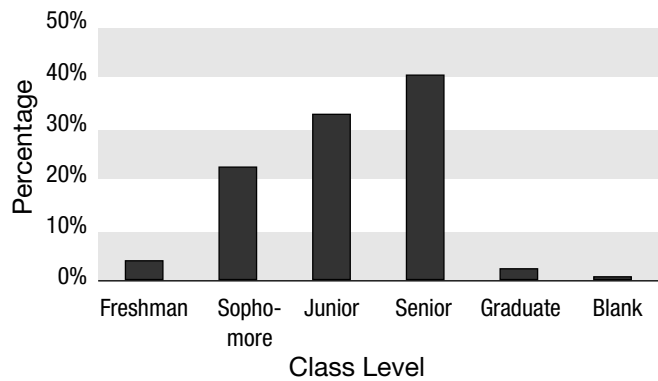


Table 4

SUMMARY OF LEVEL OF STUDY BY UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Level of University Study	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Totals
Freshman	14 (8%)	3 (5%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	18 (4%)
Sophomore	47 (28%)	15 (25%)	24 (19%)	8 (11%)	94 (22%)
Junior	61 (36%)	22 (37%)	34 (27%)	18 (25%)	135 (32%)
Senior	42 (25%)	19 (32%)	60 (48%)	45 (62%)	166 (39%)
Graduate +	4 (2%)	0 (0%)	5 (4%)	1 (1%)	10 (2%)
Total:	168	59	124	72	423

enrolled. Finally, question 14 gave learners an opportunity to share any thoughts and/or comments they had about the language program in general or their present course in particular.

and 13) were tallied and totaled. As a result, data from each respondent fell into only one of the given categories (e.g., only one of the four class rankings) in each question of this

Data Collection

Data were collected in respondents' regular Spanish language classrooms; the surveys were distributed by the respondents' classroom instructors. Respondents were told that participation in the survey was anonymous and voluntary. If they chose to participate, they were asked to complete the survey and hand it in to their instructor. Most surveys were completed within five to ten minutes.

Scoring and Analysis

Responses to each of the categorical questions (i.e., 1–5, 8, 9,

Figure 2

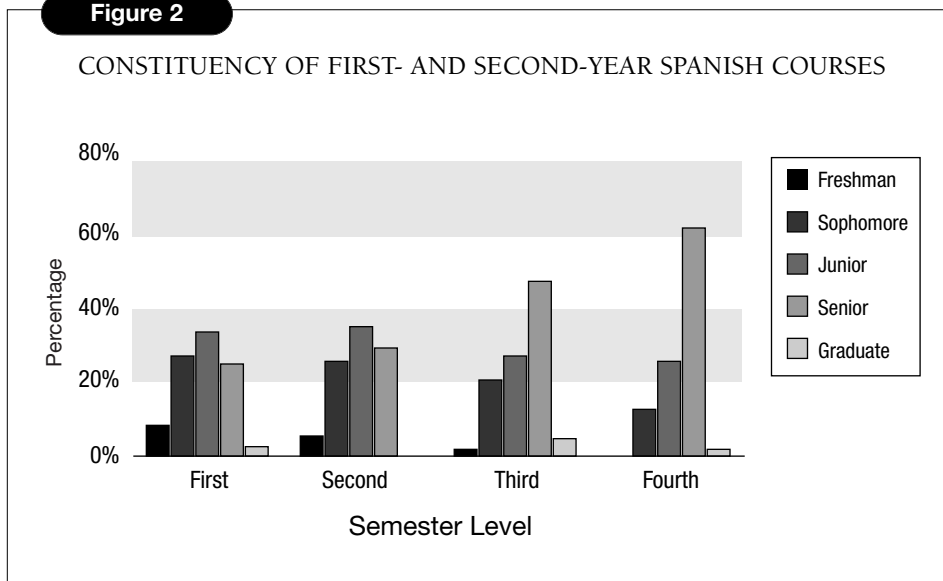


Table 5

Age Group	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Totals
16–20	57 (34%)	24 (41%)	28 (23%)	13 (18%)	122 (29%)
21–25	76 (45%)	28 (47%)	59 (48%)	37 (51%)	200 (47%)
26–30	17 (10%)	3 (5%)	22 (18%)	15 (21%)	57 (13%)
31–35	7 (4%)	1 (2%)	4 (3%)	2 (3%)	14 (3%)
36+	11 (7%)	3 (5%)	11 (8%)	5 (7%)	30 (7%)
Totals	168 (100%)	59 (100%)	124 (100%)	72 (100%)	423

Table 6

Years of Secondary-Level Language Study	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Totals
0	13 (8%)	2 (3%)	5 (4%)	4 (6%)	24 (6%)
1	19 (11%)	6 (10%)	9 (7%)	13 (18%)	47 (11%)
2	92 (55%)	26 (44%)	48 (39%)	20 (28%)	186 (44%)
3	20 (12%)	13 (22%)	24 (19%)	11 (15%)	68 (16%)
4	24 (14%)	12 (20%)	38 (31%)	24 (33%)	98 (23%)
Totals	168 (100%)	59 (100%)	124 (100%)	72 (100%)	423 (100%)

type. Therefore, totaling the percentages of the sample corresponding to each category summed to 100%.

Responses for questions 10 to 11 were scored on a binary scale. Any option marked by a respondent was scored "1"; a blank was scored "0." It was possible for a respondent to place a check beside a number of different given responses in these questions. The totals for these responses, therefore, did not to sum to 100% across all responses but rather for each option. Overall percentages of the responses were subsequently calculated and graphed to address the research questions.

Responses for question 12 were scored according to the level of importance (e.g., 1, 2, 3, ...) that students indicated for the listed motivations (e.g., requirement, major/minor, travel, ...). Prior to scoring, it was decided to focus on the top three motivations (out of a possible six) because an overview of the data revealed that most subjects indicated a maximum of three motivations. The numbers of each of the listed motivations rated "1," "2," and "3," respectively, were tallied across all subjects. Percentages for the most favored motivation were calculated by summing all of the options rated "1" across all subjects (423) and

then dividing the total of each indicated option (e.g., requirement, major, travel) by the total sum of responses marked "1" ($\times/423$). The same procedure was followed for the options rated "2" and the options rated "3" — corresponding to second and third most-favored motivations. The resulting percentages were subsequently used to represent the subjects' overall average first, second, and third ranked motivations for studying Spanish.

Results

The results for each question are summarized in the sections that follow. The data are reported in the Tables both as raw data and percentages, the latter indicated in parentheses.

University Level

Table 3 summarizes the participants in this survey by overall level of postsecondary study or general class rank (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior). These data are also presented graphically in Figure 1. Table 4 summarizes the respondents by class rank and level of language study (e.g., first-, second-, third-, and fourth-semester). The same data

Table 7

SUMMARY OF SECONDARY SPANISH STUDY EXPERIENCE

Years of Secondary-Level Spanish Study	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Totals
0	61 (36%)	15 (25%)	23 (19%)	13 (18%)	112 (26%)
1	16 (10%)	7 (12%)	15 (12%)	17 (24%)	55 (13%)
2	69 (41%)	23 (39%)	48 (39%)	20 (28%)	160 (38%)
3	20 (12%)	11 (19%)	27 (22%)	12 (17%)	70 (17%)
4	2 (1%)	3 (5%)	11 (9%)	10 (14%)	26 (6%)
Totals	168 (100%)	59 (100%)	124 (100%)	72 (100%)	423 (100%)

Table 8

SUMMARY OF HIGHEST-RATED MOTIVATION FOR STUDY

Semester	Motivation 1							Totals
	Requirement	Major/Minor	Travel/Study	Fun	Language	Literature	None	
First	92 (55%)	29 (17%)	32 (19%)	13 (9%)	1 (0%)	0	1 (0%)	168
Second	24 (41%)	16 (27%)	11 (19%)	6 (10%)	2 (3%)	0	0	59
Third	90 (73%)	13 (11%)	14 (11%)	3 (2%)	1 (0%)	0	3 (2%)	124
Fourth	42 (58%)	15 (21%)	8 (11%)	6 (8%)	1 (1%)	0	0	72
Average	59%	17%	15%	6%	1%	0%	1%	

are represented graphically in Figure 2. Of particular interest is the fact that on average, juniors and seniors comprise approximately 71% overall of each of the four semester levels. Sophomores comprise 22% on average of the four levels and freshmen comprise the remaining 4% of the constituency of the four levels.

In summary, a cursory comparison of the data reveal that the majority of the students enrolled in these four classes were juniors and seniors (first semester, 61%; second semester, 69%; third semester, 75%; fourth semester, 87%).

Age

Table 5 summarizes the respondents by level of Spanish study (first, second, third, and fourth semester) and age. As can be seen, the majority (approximately 76%) of these learners fall into the age range customarily associated with the traditional college-level student (16–25). The remaining 24% fall in the age range of the nontraditional college student (26–36+).

Secondary Level Language

Table 6 summarizes the respondents by mean number of years of secondary-level (precollege) study of any second language (e.g., French, German, Italian, Spanish) and current course-level of Spanish study. Table 7 summarizes the respondents by number of years of secondary-level (precollege) study of Spanish in particular and current course level. Whereas in the case of the first three levels of Spanish, the highest percentage of the learners report two years

of foreign language study at the secondary level, the majority of the fourth-semester Spanish learners had studied three years or more of foreign language at the secondary level.

Motivation for Studying Spanish

Table 8 summarizes the average first motivation for Spanish study indicated by the respondents. These statistics are represented graphically in Figure 3. (In comparison with previous tables, percentages are totaled from left to right, with the total representing the number of respondents by semester of study). The first choice or Motivation 1 for each level was determined by the highest number/percentage of responses selected from the options given. As shown in Table 8, the highest percentage of respondents in all four levels indicated that Requirement was the most important motivation for language study. Table 9 summarizes the

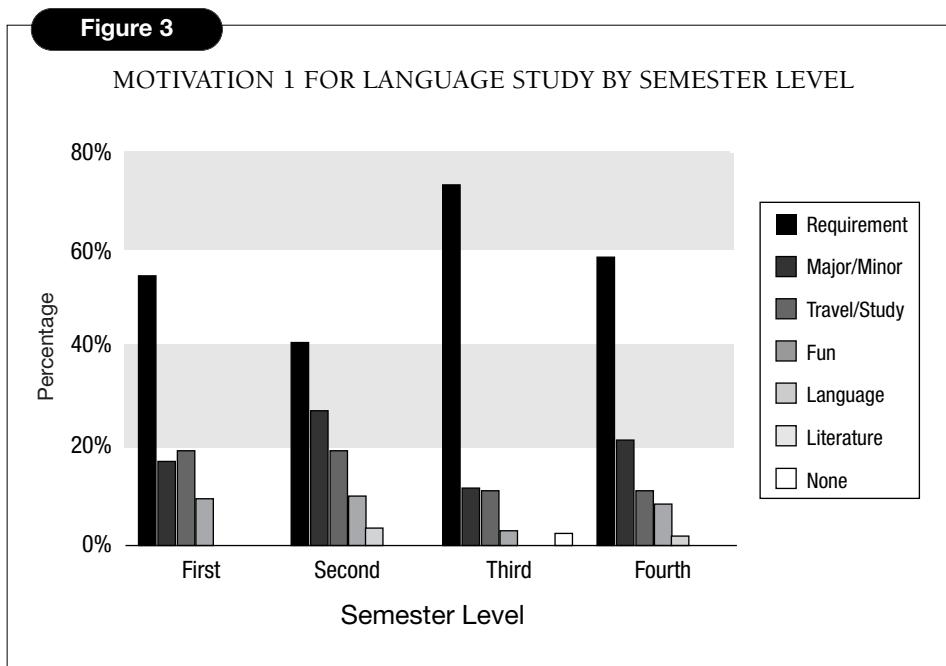


Table 9

SUMMARY OF SECOND-RATED MOTIVATION FOR STUDY

Semester	Motivation 2							Totals
	Requirement	Major/Minor	Travel/Study	Fun	Language	Literature	None	
First	21 (13%)	10 (6%)	35 (21%)	25 (15%)	11 (7%)	0 (0%)	66 (39%)	168
Second	5 (8%)	9 (15%)	18 (31%)	7 (12%)	3 (5%)	0 (0%)	17 (29%)	59
Third	13 (10%)	8 (6%)	30 (24%)	18 (15%)	5 (4%)	1 (0%)	49 (40%)	124
Fourth	5 (7%)	7 (10%)	15 (21%)	7 (10%)	3 (4%)	1 (1%)	34 (47%)	72
Average	10%	8%	23%	13%	5%	0%	39%	

average second choice or Motivation 2 indicated by the respondents and is illustrated graphically in Figure 4.

It is noteworthy that the majority of first-, third-, and fourth-semester respondents indicated no second choice of motivation for language study. Many of the second-semester learners also indicated no second choice; however, more of them indicated that they were motivated by desire to travel or study (29% vs. 31%, respectively). Finally, Table 10 summarizes the average third choice or Motivation 3, illustrated graphically in Figure 5. The majority of respondents from all four levels left this option blank.

In short, taken together the results of these three comparisons indicate that the majority of these beginning Spanish learners were enrolled in these classes to satisfy the institutional requirement.

Favorite and Desired Activities

Table 11 summarizes the percentages corresponding to the subjects' reported favorite activities in their current Spanish class by semester level. These opinions are represented graphically in Figure 6. Table 12 summarizes the subjects' opinions about the types of activities that they would like to see more of. These opinions are also shown in Figure 7.

A review of these statistics reveals a number of patterns in the reported favored activities. In the first-semester group, the highest percentage of respondents indicated that grammar-related activities (50%) were among their favorite activities, followed by speaking, conver-

sation, and listening activities (each 48%). The third highest percentage of respondents indicated that lecture-related activities (44%) were among their favorite activities.

In the second-semester group, the highest percentage of respondents indicated that speaking- and conversation-related activities (each 64%) were among their favorite activities, followed by listening activities (45%). The third highest percentage of respondents indicated that grammar-related activities (39%) were among their favorite activities.

In the third-semester group, as was the case with the first-semester level, the highest percentage of respondents indicated that grammar-related activities (48%) were among their favorite activities. The second highest percentage of respondents indicated that speaking activities (39%) were among their favorite activities, followed by listening activities (36%) and conversation activities (35%).

Finally, in the fourth-semester group, the highest percentage of respondents indicated that grammar-related activities (38%) were among their favorite activities, fol-

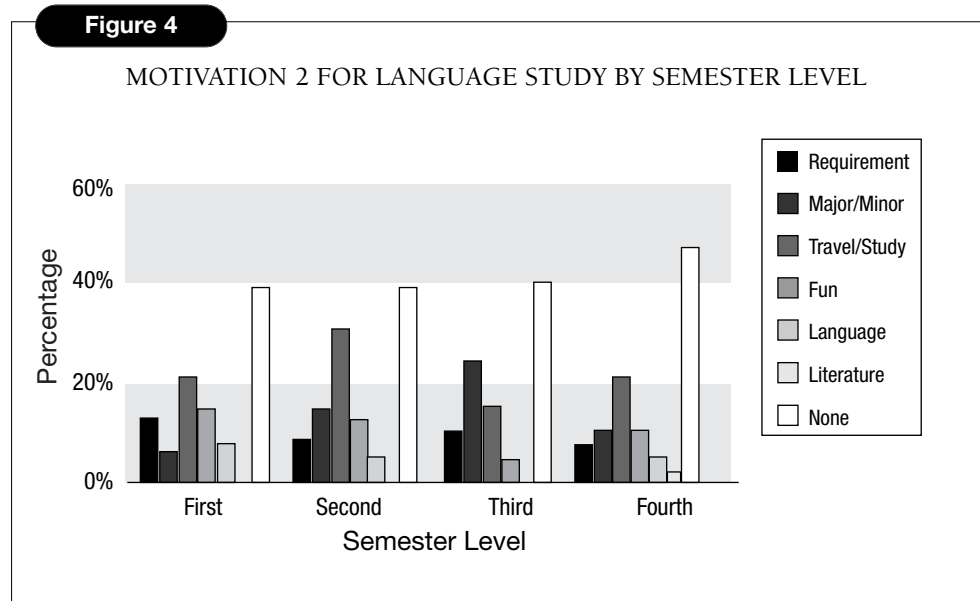


Table 10

SUMMARY OF THIRD-RATED MOTIVATION FOR STUDY

Semester	Motivation 3							Totals
	Requirement	Major/Minor	Travel/Study	Fun	Language	Literature	None	
First	5 (3%)	7 (4%)	13 (8%)	23 (14%)	7 (4%)	1 (0%)	112 (67%)	168
Second	2 (4%)	2 (3%)	3 (5%)	12 (20%)	3 (5%)	0 (0%)	37 (63%)	59
Third	5 (4%)	1 (0%)	9 (7%)	20 (16%)	6 (5%)	3 (2%)	80 (65%)	124
Fourth	4 (6%)	0 (0%)	3 (4%)	3 (4%)	4 (6%)	4 (6%)	54 (75%)	72
Average	3%	2%	7%	14%	5%	2%	67%	

lowed by listening activities (37%) and conversation activities (34%).

Overall, it appears that the two most favored categories of activities are related to grammar and oral communication in Spanish.

As is shown in Table 12, in the first-semester group, the highest percentage of respondents desired more grammar-related activities (49%), followed by listening activities (48%) and conversation activities (46%). In the second-semester group, the highest percentage of respondents

desired more grammar-related activities (49%), followed by conversation activities (44%) and speaking activities (37%). In the third-semester group, the highest percentage of respondents desired more conversation activities (52%), followed by listening activities (42%) and grammar-related activities (33%). Finally, in the fourth-semester group, the highest percentage of respondents desired more conversation activities (48%), followed by listening activities (41%) and grammar-related activities (40%). These findings mirror the results about favorite activities indicated above.

Table 11

SUMMARY OF PREFERRED ACTIVITIES BY SEMESTER LEVEL

	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Average
Grammar	50%	39%	48%	38%	44%
Lectures	44%	25%	31%	8%	27%
Compositions	28%	17%	7%	19%	18%
Speaking	48%	64%	39%	26%	44%
Conversation	48%	64%	35%	34%	45%
Homework	36%	9%	11%	3%	15%
Listening	48%	45%	36%	37%	42%
Tests	27%	10%	7%	8%	13%
Other	19%	10%	15%	15%	15%

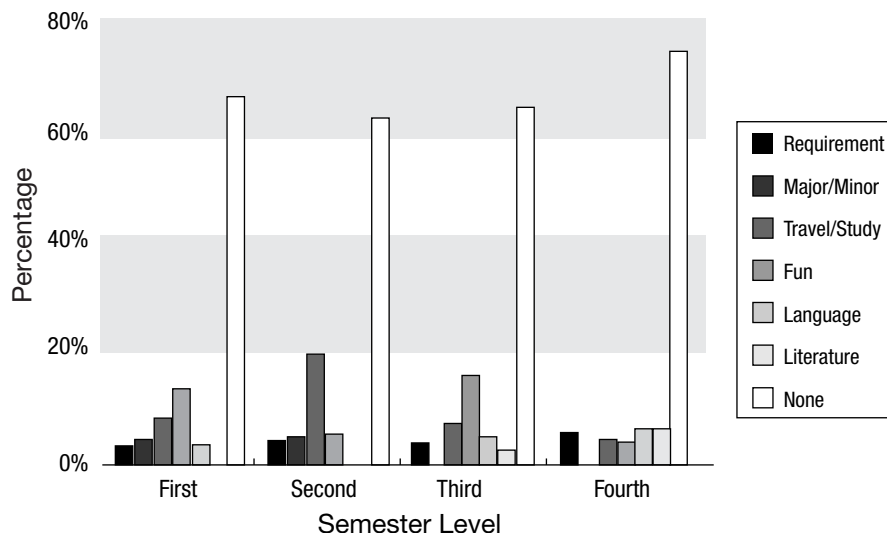
Plans to Continue Studying Spanish

Table 13 summarizes the subjects' reported plans to continue studying Spanish upon completion of the course in which they were currently enrolled. On average, the majority of the first- through third-semester participants in the survey plan to continue studying Spanish (88%, 90%, and 95%, respectively). By way of comparison, however, the results of this survey reveal a large increase in the percentage of fourth-semester learners indicating that they do not plan to continue studying Spanish upon completion of the course in which they are enrolled. This marked increase in the number of respondents indicating that the fourth semester course is their last language course (in comparison with the other three semesters) is paralleled by the marked decrease in the percentage of respondents indicating that they plan to continue their

language studies. Of particular interest is the relative homogeneity of responses in the first- through third-semester responses in comparison with the responses from the fourth-semester respondents.

Figure 5

MOTIVATION 3 FOR LANGUAGE STUDY BY SEMESTER LEVEL



Discussion

The results of the current survey reveal a number of interesting findings. The first surprising discovery was that on average, the majority of the learners in these beginning Spanish classes were juniors and seniors. There are two possible explanations for this observation. As is the case in many postsecondary institutions, enrollment procedures prior to each semes-

ter tend to favor upper classmen, in that seniors register first, juniors second, and so forth. This practice in itself would result in a higher proportion of upper classmen compared with lower classmen.

This situation is exacerbated, however, by the second explanation, as observed by a colleague: The College of Business at the institution requires majors to select between two minors, that is, foreign language or mathematics. Many of these students do not declare this major until the end of their sophomore year. As a consequence, many of these students do not begin the program of study until they are upper classmen and thus find themselves entering beginning language classes during the second half of their undergraduate careers. With regard to the average age of the respondents to this survey, approximately 75% of these students fall into the category of traditional students as defined by age (i.e., 18–25) with the remaining 25% falling into the category of non-traditional students (i.e., 26+).

Addressing the first research question about how much secondary-level language preparation these students have, it was not surprising that the majority of the subjects reported having studied at least two years of foreign language at the secondary level. These findings are similar to those of a study by Ossipov (2000) in which the majority of postsecondary students of French had studied the language at either the primary or secondary level.

Many college-preparatory secondary cur-

ricula now assume that foreign language study will either be a prerequisite to entering a postsecondary program or will be part of the postsecondary curriculum. It was surprising, however, to find that there did not seem to be a uniform and regular relationship between the number of years of Spanish studied at the secondary level and the level of study (first, second, third, or fourth semester) in the program from which these data were gathered. This finding may be attributable to any of a number of variables from differences in prior language learning settings to individual differences as language learners.

In the case of all four semester levels, the respondents

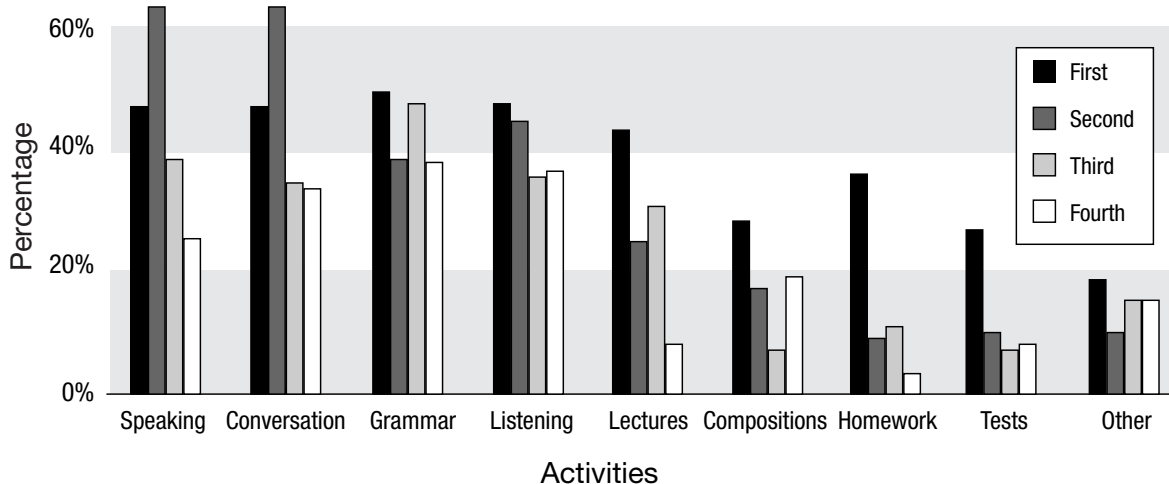
Table 12

SUMMARY OF DESIRED ACTIVITIES BY SEMESTER LEVEL

	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Average
Grammar	49%	49%	33%	40%	43%
Lectures	35%	22%	13%	7%	19%
Compositions	31%	10%	11%	15%	17%
Speaking	37%	37%	31%	27%	33%
Conversation	46%	44%	52%	48%	48%
Homework	30%	3%	2%	4%	10%
Listening	48%	34%	42%	41%	41%
Tests	35%	0%	2%	3%	10%
Other	29%	9%	4%	10%	13%

Figure 6

FAVORITE ACTIVITIES BY SEMESTER LEVEL



reported having studied at least two years of a foreign language at the secondary level (first semester, 81%; second semester, 86%; third-semester, 89%; and fourth-semester, 76%) in general. It was not surprising to find that the majority of the respondents also reported having studied at least two years of Spanish at the secondary level as well (first semester, 54%; second semester, 63%; third semester, 70%; and fourth semester, 59%).

The second research question concerned the activities that these college-level learners feel are most beneficial to their continuing L2 development. The data in the current study indicate that two categories of activities are favored: activities related to grammar and activities related to oral communication (speaking and listening). In the case of the second-semester learners, communication activities on average were reported to be preferred more than activities focusing on form. These same types of activities (oral com-

munication and grammar-focused), not surprisingly, were the ones reported to be most desired on average among all four levels of learners. It should be added, as pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, that these two categories of activities are not mutually exclusive.

The third research question was what common factors motivated most learners to pursue the study of Spanish as an L2 at the postsecondary level. It was not surprising that the primary motivation reported by students was that language study was an institutional requirement. The second most popular motivation — travel, work, or study — was also not surprising due to the fact that the institution where the data were gathered is located relatively close to Mexico and in a city with a fairly large number of Hispanic inhabitants.

These results differ notably from other research in the literature. Wen (1997), for example, found that the most

Figure 7

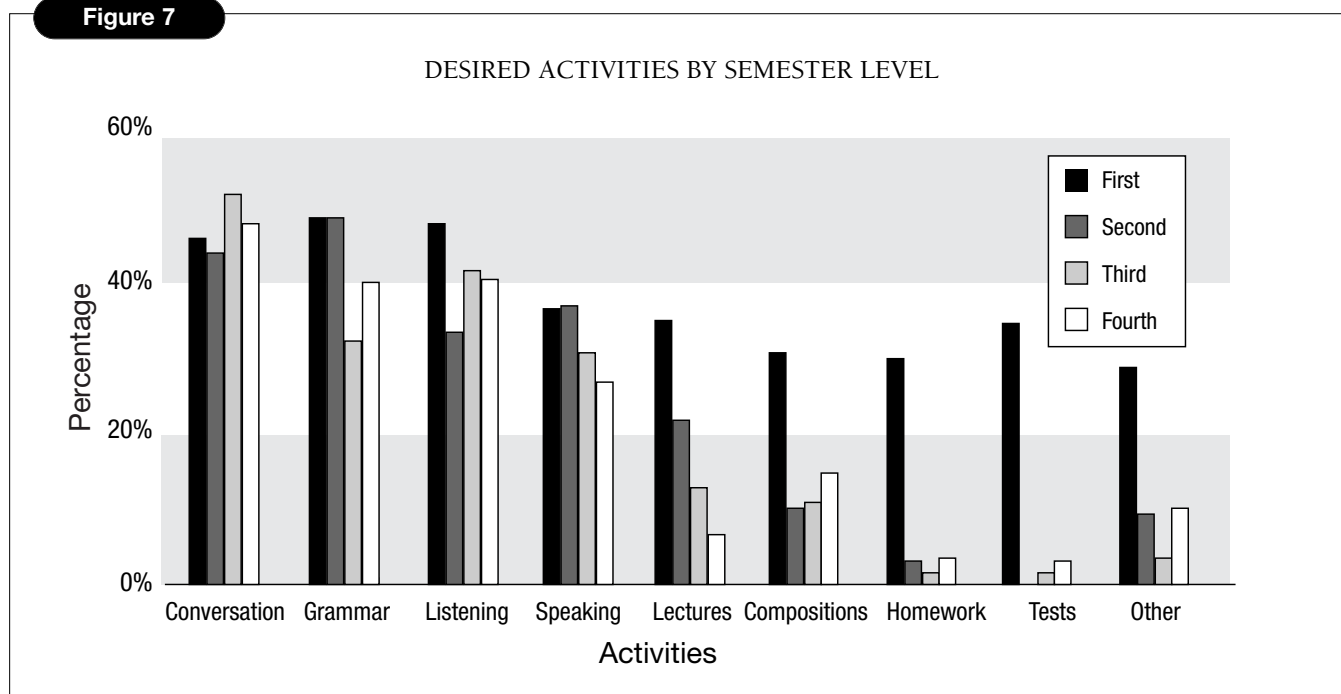


Table 13

Semester	Plan to Continue Study of Spanish	Plan Not to Continue Study of Spanish	No Answer	Total
First	147 (88%)	17 (10%)	4 (2%)	168
Second	53 (90%)	5 (8%)	1 (2%)	59
Third	118 (95%)	4 (3%)	2 (2%)	124
Fourth	35 (49%)	37 (51%)	0 (0%)	72

popular motivations for L2 language study in her sample were “intrinsic interest in the L2 culture and the desire to understand one’s own culture” (p. 235). Wen associated these findings with Gardner and Lambert’s (1972) distinction between instrumental and integrative types of motivation, associating her findings with the latter. Ossipov (2000), on the other hand, discovered that the majority of her respondents were studying French because they planned to travel to a place where the language was spoken. In comparison with Wen’s data, the respondents in the current census appear to be more similar to Ossipov’s subjects, in that the reported motivation of these students is much more instrumental (desire to travel, work, or study in the L2 setting or to complete a language requirement) than integrative.

These results on motivation, however, address an issue raised by some modern language faculty about the purpose of beginning-level language courses. It is popularly assumed by some language faculty that one of the purposes of the beginning-level language course is to prepare students for the study of literature in the foreign language. Two insights provided by the current data counter that assumption: the university level of the subjects and the motivations for study reported by the same.

As noted above, the majority of the subjects (71%) were juniors and seniors. According to that classification and due to the fact that courses in a language major usually begin at the second-year level or higher, there is not sufficient time for most of these students to complete a typical major in a language. Reinforcing this observation, on average, fewer than 5% of these learners indicate any motivation to study either literature or language.

Further support for these insights is found in the final data type. The majority of the learners in the first- through third-semester classes (88%, 90%, and 95%, respectively) reported that they planned to continue studying Spanish upon completion of the course in which they were currently enrolled. The one group that differed dramatically from the others was the fourth-semester group, in which approximately half the subjects (49%) indicated that they planned to continue and a little more than half (51%) indicated that they did not. Although data are not directly available to explain this difference definitively, the explanation may lie in the type of student taking this level course: Some are completing the language requirement and some are actually using this course to begin their upper-level studies of Spanish.

Finally, the fourth research question that motivated this project concerned the percentage of beginning college-level learners who planned to continue their studies of Spanish beyond the first- and second-year levels. While the overwhelming majority of the first-, second-, and third-semester learners indicated that they planned to continue

studying Spanish (88%, 90%, and 95%, respectively), this number dropped notably in the case of the fourth-semester learners (49%).

The results of the present survey suggest that the respondents in the Beginning Language Program constitute a population distinct from the population concentrating their studies in Spanish language or literature. Those students majoring in the language presumably begin their course of study earlier in their university career, before the junior or senior year. Furthermore, those students would be expected to report types of motivation for language study other than that of completing a college requirement (e.g., having always wanted to learn the language, love of culture, desire to become bilingual, interest in heritage, etc.). Assuming that it is not possible to become fluent in a language at the end of a four-semester course of study (even though students may believe mastery of a language is possible in such a relatively short period of time), questions arise as to the purpose and subsequent goals of a meaningful two-year course of study in Spanish.

The present survey was conducted as a change in the academic program in Beginning Spanish language instruction was initiated. While the focus of each semester of the two-year Beginning Language Program had previously followed primarily a grammatical syllabus (Knorre et al., 1997), during the semester that the data were gathered, a shift in focus towards a syllabus based on the premise of communicative language teaching (e.g., Ballman, 1998; Ballman et al., 2001; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Lee & VanPatten, 1995; VanPatten, 1991) was underway. With the new approach, instead of being taught primarily how to identify, analyze, and describe form-related points of grammar in Spanish, (i.e., fill in the blank with the correct form of the verb), learners are taught how to communicate orally and in writing with grammar instruction focused on the meaning of specific forms in structured input activities (VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993; VanPatten et al., 2000). In comparison with a syllabus driven by form-focused activities, learners’ attention is focused on accurately interpreting form and expressing specific concepts by accessing specific form–meaning associations (Terrell, 1986).

This change in curricular focus towards an increased emphasis on conversational, oral, and listening activities incorporates the types of oral communication activities that the respondents reported that they favored and desired. This redirection of the curriculum, however, does not abandon the presentation and discussion of grammatical elements in the second language classroom but rather includes grammatical activities designed to support and develop the learners’ communicative abilities — an integrative approach to grammar instruction as advocated by contemporary authors in second language methodology

(see, e.g., Ballman, et al., 2001; Lee & VanPatten, 1995). The change of focus incorporates both the types of activities and the pedagogical support that the learners desire (i.e., those activities that develop grammatical knowledge about the language and learners' communicative abilities) and is also rooted in current research about second language acquisition (Lee & VanPatten, 1995; Savignon, 1997; Lightbown & Spada, 1993).

To facilitate the development of communicative competencies, the focus shifts from predominantly teacher-fronted lectures about form-focused grammar points to student-centered pair and group activities in which learners poll classmates and gather information from one another, the Web, magazine articles, and the like to address topic-driven questions (Ballman, 1998; Ballman, et al., 2001; Lee, 2000; Lee & VanPatten, 1995; Rava, 2000). The latter goals and outcomes will most likely be of greater service to this group of language learners who are not and will not be majors in the language but who are located in a geographic location with a large and growing population of Hispanics. As has been noted by others, these communicative interactions are precisely the kinds of activities that they may have opportunities to undertake with bilingual and/or Spanish-dominant speakers both at home and abroad (Voght, 2000).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As is always the case, the findings of this project are limited to the types of students who participated in the described context. It bears repeating that this survey was the beginning of a project designed to track the types of students studying language at this metropolitan postsecondary institution, their needs, and their motivations for studying language. Future and continued data gathering in subsequent semesters will address whether the changes in focus and syllabus described here will be reflected by changes in motivation and patterns of continued language study. Plans are underway to also address questions related to gender and language study and the variety of academic majors and minors represented in the student body served by this language program.

As noted above, the Beginning Spanish Program in which the respondents were enrolled is in flux in terms of its primary focus. Until the semester in which the study data were gathered, the program had been focused on a grammatical syllabus. Although only in the beginning stage, changes towards a communicative syllabus had begun to take place to. Future research will reveal how this change in syllabus and focus of instruction affects the attitudes of beginning learners of Spanish in this program.

Conclusion

Data from this survey indicate that, for this sample, the

majority of students enrolled in the lower-division Spanish classes (first through fourth semesters) are upper classmen with an expressed desire not to study the literature or structure of the language per se, but rather to complete a university language requirement. Consequently, it is proposed that this population has needs distinct from students pursuing a major or minor in language, that is, needs best addressed by teaching the student to communicate in the L2 or, as defined by Savignon (1997), "to express, interpret, and negotiate meaning" in Spanish. Such needs are addressed by a syllabus that incorporates a high percentage of interactive activities in the second language and grammar instruction in the service of communication.

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Appendix A

The Department of Modern and Classical Languages is conducting an informal, voluntary, anonymous survey of the students in the Spanish program in order to identify how to best serve these students. You are under no obligation to complete this survey. However, your participation is sincerely appreciated!

Please take a few minutes to complete the following questionnaire. Circle or check the answer to each question that best describes your personal experience. Your instructor will collect the completed surveys. The results will then be tallied and used for future plans in program design.

1. Spanish course in which you are currently enrolled:
1501 1502 1505 2301 2302 Other: _____
2. Level at the University:
freshman sophomore junior senior graduate student
3. Age range:
16–20 21–25 26–30 31–35 36+
4. Number of years of language study (Spanish and/or other) in high school:
1 2 3 4 4+
5. Number of years of Spanish language study in high school
1 2 3 4 4+
6. Spanish courses completed at the University of Houston
1501 1502 1505 2301 2302 Other: _____
7. Spanish courses (or equivalents) completed at other colleges or universities
1501 1502 1505 2301 2302 Other: _____ Where: _____
8. I graduated from high school in the United States.
 yes no
9. I speak Spanish as much or more than English with friends and family regularly outside of class.
 yes no
10. My favorite part of this course is: (check all applicable)
 grammar explanation/exercises conversation activities lectures homework compositions
 listening activities opportunities to speak with others in class tests other: _____
11. I feel I need more: (check all applicable)
 grammar explanation/exercises conversation activities lectures homework compositions
 listening activities opportunities to speak with others in class tests other: _____
12. I am taking this course because: (check all applicable; if checking more than one, please place a number indicating order of importance: 1 = most important)
 I need to fulfill the language requirement _____
 I plan to major or minor in Spanish _____
 I need to know Spanish for travel, study, or work. _____
 I plan to study Hispanic literature in the future. _____
 I plan to study Language in the future. _____
 I just think it's fun. _____
13. This is the last Spanish course I plan on taking at the University of Houston.
 yes no
14. Any other comment you might like to add: _____

Thank you again for your participation!