



Learning and Teaching Together

Spanish students at Hope are helping transform lives.

As a complement to their time in class, the dozens of students enrolled in Spanish IV each semester serve as tutors with the English as a Second Language (ESL) program coordinated by Latin Americans United for Progress (LAUP), a community organization based in Hope's hometown of Holland, Mich. Along with other Hope students involved with the program simply because they value what it does, they work with émigrés to the area, most of whom are older than the students, who are seeking to learn or improve their English.

The stakes can be high—and the Hope students take their role seriously as a result. For

example, Leroy Hernandez, project coordinator with LAUP, recalls one community member whose job was on the line: learn English, or be out of work.

The Hope students' commitment is technically one evening per week, but in the end that mattered far less than the outcome.

"One of the students took extra time to practice with the ESL student and to speed up the process," Hernandez said.

LAUP has coordinated ESL classes for several years, and Hope students have been involved as volunteers for much of that time, many through their participation in the Phelps Scholars Program. The relationship became more formal, however, a few years ago, when



Hope students are making a lasting difference in the lives of Holland-area community members by serving as tutors and instructors in the English as a Second Language program coordinated by Latin Americans United for Progress. Students in the college's Spanish IV class spend one evening each week tutoring, their work on behalf of others also enriching their own understanding of the language and cultures of those they are helping.

Dr. Daniel Woolsey of the Spanish faculty saw in the program a way for his department's students to learn more while also making a difference in others' lives.

"As soon as I found out about it and what they were doing, I thought, 'This is neat and would be a great opportunity,'" said Dr. Woolsey, an assistant professor of Spanish.

"One approach that we've taken in our fourth-semester Spanish course is to make it more of an introduction to Spanish culture," he said. "We thought it'd be nice if they had authentic encounters with members of our community. It's something that we can't provide in the classroom."

In addition to the time that they spend in Spanish IV itself, every student in the class signs on as a tutor for one of the three nights each week that LAUP offers its ESL program. Hope contributes the space for the sessions, which are held at the Martha Miller Center for Global Communication.

Typically, three ESL classes meet each evening, for beginning, intermediate and advanced English-speakers. The Spanish IV students work with the community members individually, while other students, volunteering independently, serve as classroom instructors/leaders. Not all of the community members in

the classes are from Spanish-speaking countries, but most are, with the majority from Mexico.

Each evening features an hour of instruction and an hour of dialogue, with the students and community members working through lesson packets together, using Spanish and English in combination. Many of the community members attend all three nights.

Community member Jose Arredondo, who moved to the area from Mexico, has appreciated not only the progress that he's made in learning English, but the students he's had a chance to meet.

"I've been coming for a couple years," Arredondo said. "They're awesome people to be around."

The Hope students, Hernandez noted,

"We're very thankful because without Hope College we couldn't do it."

– Leroy Hernandez, project coordinator with Latin Americans United for Progress, regarding LAUP's ESL program based at Hope

are not only helpful but essential, since the program literally could not exist without them.

"It's been a perfect union as far as we're concerned," Hernandez said. "We're glad it's there, and we're very thankful because without Hope College we couldn't do it."

Dr. Woolsey connects the tutoring back to his Spanish IV classes by having the students write about their experience; for example, reporting shortly after starting on the story of a community member they met through the program, and reflecting at the end of the semester on how they felt about their participation.

"Some of the instructors find out that they want to be teachers or serve the community in this way," Dr. Woolsey said.

Junior Zoe Lalo of Holland, Mich., became involved with the program through Spanish IV as a freshman, and appreciated it so much that she has stayed involved. She is now the site coordinator for the entire program, making certain that everything runs smoothly during the three nightly sessions.

Because of her additional level of responsibility she is now paid for her part-time work with the program, but that's not why she does it.

"I absolutely love the LAUP ESL program,"

she said. "It's awesome that I have a paid position, but I would still be involved even if I wasn't getting paid."

"Being able to speak Spanish at least six hours a week has definitely increased my Spanish-speaking abilities," she said. "I also see some of the students around town and am able to speak Spanish to them then, too,"

She has especially valued the connections that she has formed with members of the community.

"It has been great being able to see their progress and form relationships with people that I wouldn't have met otherwise," she said.

Senior Jay VandenBrink, also of Holland, also began with the program as a Spanish IV student and is now back as one of the volunteer classroom leaders.

"I want to be a teacher, so I thought it'd be good practice," he said.

Senior Emily Sicard of South Haven, Mich., was in Spanish IV before the program became integrated into the course, but she was quick to become involved as an instructor after returning to campus following a semester in Queretaro, Mexico, with a deeper understanding of what it's like to be less than familiar with the local language—and what a difference others can make.

"A large part of my motivation for getting involved came from the fantastic experience I had in Mexico studying Spanish," she said.

"When I first arrived in Queretaro, I realized how little Spanish I really knew, despite four years of study in high school and a semester at Hope. Though this was overwhelming at first, the encouragement of my host family and professors kept me from feeling completely lost. In getting involved with LAUP, I hoped to be able to similarly encourage others here in Holland."

She also appreciated what she learned in giving back.

"It gave me a greater respect for immigrants—moving to a new country is such a leap into the unknown, especially when language barriers make communication difficult," she said. "Despite this, my students were always optimistic. They had ambitious goals, which they knew learning English would help them to achieve. Their setting aside two hours three nights a week to dedicate to their learning reveals great self-motivation."

And along the way, she found a new direction.

"As a Spanish and English literature major, I was initially planning further study in literature, but my experience with LAUP's ESL program changed my mind," she said. "I appreciate the way in which teaching ESL is a tangible interaction between language and the world and want to pursue that further." ✍️

