VALENCIACOLLEGE

East Campus
2018-2019

Divisional Strategic Planning Brief – Humanities & Foreign Languages

Campus Outcome:

Research and develop a plan to improve low performing courses by accurately placing Hispanic students in Foreign Language courses.

Department Outcome:

Promote written and oral communication skills in an underserved target audience.

BACKGROUND & DESCRIPTION

Spanish Heritage Courses

At Valencia College's East Campus 36.2% of the student population identify themselves as Hispanic (Valencia College Facts 2017-2018). With such a large population of Hispanic students, many of those students are very likely to fit the description of a Spanish heritage speaker. These Spanish heritage students have the option of taking the Spanish for Heritage Speaker courses (SPAN 1340 (Heritage 1), or SPAN 1341 (Heritage 2)) to fulfill their foreign language requirement. However, even with such a large Hispanic student population, the Spanish Heritage courses suffered from low student enrollment. The full-time Spanish faculty identified three leading contributing factors affecting student enrollment in the Spanish heritage courses. First, heritage students were registering for the wrong Spanish Introductory course (SPAN 1120 vs its Heritage counterpart – SPAN 1340). Second, heritage students were not registering for the Spanish Heritage courses due to a lack of knowledge that these courses were an option for their Foreign Language requirement. Third, there was no diagnostic tool for these heritage students to take, that could help them decide if the Spanish heritage track (SPAN 1340 or SPAN 1341) would be appropriate and a good fit for their learning needs.

INTERVENTION

Foreign Languages professors Juan-Alberto Salto and Yolanda Gonzalez planned a series of interventions to: (1) help place heritage students in the appropriate Spanish introductory course, (2) to increase student enrollment in the Spanish heritage courses; and (3) to help promote student awareness of the Spanish Heritage introductory courses offered and geared towards Spanish heritage speakers.

Spanish Heritage Diagnostic Tool for Student Placement

In the spring 2018 Foreign Languages Professor Juan-Alberto Salto created and implemented a diagnostic tool to help place heritage students in the appropriate Introductory Spanish course, either: SPAN 1120, SPAN 1340 (Heritage 1), or SPAN 1341 (Heritage 2). This diagnostic tool is a fully online exam that evaluates the Spanish proficiency level of a heritage student and (at the end of the exam) recommends which Introductory Spanish course the student should register for according to his/her Spanish proficiency and learning needs.

Increasing enrollment & Promoting Awareness of the Spanish Heritage Courses

The following measures were taken to help increase enrollment in the Spanish Heritage courses and to promote awareness of the Spanish Heritage classes amongst students. First, the full-time Foreign Languages faculty collaborated with the Advisors to help to promote these heritage courses to students in an effort to increase the enrollment of the heritage courses. First, professors Juan-Alberto Salto and Yolanda Gonzalez set up a time to meet with all the Advisors during their weekly department meeting. For this meeting Professor Salto created a presentation where he provided the Advisors with a detailed description of: (1) who are Spanish heritage speakers, (2) what are the differences in the Spanish introductory level courses (heritage vs non-heritage), (3) what a heritage speaker's needs are (versus that of non-heritage students), (4) the importance of identifying our Spanish heritage speaks when students are registering for classes, (5) how advisors can help faculty place students in the appropriate Spanish course, & (6) how the online diagnostic tool works and how it helps place students in the appropriate Spanish introductory level course.

Also, to help improve enrollment, all heritage courses are assigned to and are now taught by one of the full-time faculty to ensure consistency in the delivery of the course content throughout all sections of the heritage courses. The Spanish heritage program was also revamped to reflect the most current teaching practices in Spanish heritage pedagogy. And course-specific material was created for the heritage courses (to supplement the intermediate level Spanish textbook package currently being used) in order to achieve the learning objectives of the heritage courses due to a lack of a solid Spanish heritage book in the market. Currently, publishing material in the market target native speakers not heritage speakers.

STRATEGIC RESULTS

Meeting with and presenting to the advisors improved student enrollment in the Spanish heritage courses. This collaboration with the full-time Foreign Languages faculty and the advisors also helped better promote the Spanish heritage courses. The presentation provided advisors with a wealth of information on Spanish heritage speakers, their learning needs, and how to better advise these students regarding the best way to go about fulfilling their foreign language requirement.

The Spanish heritage diagnostic tool also greatly helped improve enrollment in the heritage courses. It provided a way to assess heritage students' proficiency in Spanish. It also helped the heritage speakers realize that the Spanish heritage classes (SPAN 1340 or SPAN 1341) would be the most appropriate track to help fulfill their learning needs.

REFLECTION

After creating a diagnostic tool that helped assess a heritage speaker's proficiency level in Spanish, we saw a need to change the Course Catalogue description for the fall 2019 semester. The original course description for the Introductory SPAN 1120 course made mention of only 'native' speakers not being able to register for this SPAN 1120 course. However, the Spanish introductory track is specific to 'heritage' speakers and the diagnostic tool identifies the Spanish proficiency level of heritage speakers. For this reason, the new wording on the Course Catalogue description will now include a statement regarding (both 'native' &) 'heritage' students not being allowed to take the SPAN 1120 introductory course.

After meeting with the advisors, advisors now have a more detailed understanding of the Spanish heritage track and of the learning needs of Spanish heritage students. This knowledge helps advisors better inform students on the Spanish heritage track offered and in turn has helped improve enrollment in the Spanish heritage courses. There are now more sections of Spanish heritage classes being offered, at least two SPAN 1340 sections and one SPAN 1341 section offered online every semester.

NEXT STEPS

Some of the Spanish faculty added a description as well as the web link to the Spanish Placement Diagnostic tool to the Orientation Module of their SPAN 1120 online courses in an effort to help identify potential heritage speakers who might have incorrectly registered for the wrong Spanish Introductory course (for SPAN 1120). This same faculty saw students taking the recommended online diagnostic tool for heritage speakers (mentioned in the Orientation Module) and voluntarily changing/switching over to the appropriate online heritage course. In upcoming semesters, a detailed description as well as the web link to the Spanish Placement Diagnostic tool will be added to the Orientation Module of all the SPAN 1120 online & hybrid courses in an effort to inform students and help identify heritage students who might have erroneously registered for the wrong Introductory Spanish 1120 course.

The full-time faculty in charge of the Spanish heritage courses will continue to monitor the results of student's scores of the placement diagnostic exams and compare it to how well these students do in the Spanish heritage courses. The Spanish Heritage Placement Diagnostic will be modified accordingly.

Encourage college wide adoption of current intermediate Spanish book and the course-specific material used in the new revamped heritage program. A Canvas shell will be created for the Spanish heritage courses to share with faculty teaching on other campuses. Professor Juan-Alberto Salto will also provide training for future faculty on how to teach the online heritage courses using the intermediate Spanish book along with the course-specific material that he created for these heritage classes.