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Outsourcing the Future: Career Development in the Spanish and Portuguese Classroom

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Every fall semester, I look forward to the Mindset Lists of things the incoming class does not remember or has always known, a reminder of how swiftly time passes and how many years have been added to the tally since I began my own post-secondary education. While much has been said to describe the current generation of students (growing up with helicopter parenting, the most service-oriented generation, or belittling characterizations that they want it all right now) and the changes we language educators must make to keep up with the latest trends in pedagogy or with our students' particular needs, there is at least one constant about our world on campus: our students will not always be our students. They will succeed, fail, graduate, drop out, or merely move on to the next course, but they are not static. What happens after college may be on the mind of seniors ready to graduate, but unfortunately, many of our students are simply not prepared or are just too busy to consider the next steps. As teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, we have an opportunity to prepare our students in a manner that does more than address their needs immediately following commencement. We can also answer existential questions about why the humanities are valuable. I propose that we are positioned almost uniquely on campus to engage students in the classroom by incorporating career development as an approach to the teaching of foreign languages, not only offering students a place in which to create meaningful language, but also providing an impetus to become familiar with on-campus resources during their short time with us.

In addition to the millennial label applied to the current generation of students, university campuses are as diverse as ever with non-traditional students, military veterans, athletes, and differently abled students filling lecture halls and classrooms (*Digest* 2013). Encouraging community through social media (Clarke and Nelson 2012), educating students in the best possible environment (Shemoff 2013), and promoting learning outcomes via cross-cultural understanding (Gurin et al. 2002) are among the many facets of current pedagogy. In speaking with students and reading their essays and compositions, I continually observe that they are busier than ever with multiple majors and plans to undertake internships; study abroad enrollment and the shift toward semester-only or shorter duration programs only underscores these trends (Dwyer 2004). Many student comments in class and in essays, however, reveal a

lack of long-term planning on their part beyond the next semester or completion of major requirements. In the last two semesters, I have assigned an essay that corresponds to a chapter on the office and workplace in second-year Spanish as well as first-year Portuguese. Students must explore some avenue of career development, summarize their findings, and create a plan for the following years, including the first two years following graduation. Some students have attended panels and workshops on résumé writing while others have met with career counselors and even conducted informational interviews with experts in their fields of interest.

For second language acquisition, this type of assignment covers nearly all grammatical components as students use reported speech and employ various tenses and moods (preterit, imperfect, future, and future perfect tenses as well as indicative and subjunctive moods in Spanish; the same plus future subjunctive are used in Portuguese). Furthermore, I have found that these essays are among the best work my students do all semester. Even simple “I’m not sure what I want to do” responses become longer explorations of possibilities. It serves as a starting point not only for the next semester, but also the next phase of life. And that is where our position is paramount to success as a university: in the humanities, particularly in Spanish and Portuguese, we can discuss nearly any subject under the sun and still fit within the realm of our mission to enhance language learning.

Discourse on career development in the Spanish and Portuguese classroom provides students the understanding that foreign languages are invaluable not only as a means to satisfy university requirements or to enhance prospects on the job market, but also as a process. In this age of budget cuts and justification for funding, we enhance our position on campus by collaborating to develop the whole student, thus encouraging a life-time of development personally and professionally. For many students, especially athletes and those whose time is limited, the way we will push them through the door of campus resources is to require it. Due to their scholastic, extracurricular, and other daily obligations, these students simply do not find time to develop their careers on campus. By incorporating career development strategies into simple classroom tasks and written assignments, we leave a profound impact on our students and ensure that they begin the process of thinking about what comes next.

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