



Heritage Voices: Program

Spanish for Heritage Learners Program

The University of Arizona
Department of Spanish and Portuguese

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About the Program Director



Dr. Sara Beaudrie was born and raised in Buenos Aires, Argentina, but has been living in Tucson, Arizona for the past 12 years. She is an assistant professor in the Spanish and Portuguese Department, where she has been the director of the Spanish for heritage learners program for 5 years.

She also teaches Spanish applied linguistics, bilingualism, and pedagogy in the undergraduate and graduate linguistics programs. She is an affiliate faculty in the Second-Language Acquisition and Teaching (SLAT) program.

Dr. Beaudrie received her Ph.D. in SLAT with a major in pedagogy and program administration and a minor in Spanish linguistics from the University of Arizona. Her research interests include heritage language development and classroom instruction, language program development, and literacy development. Her dream is to help speakers of Spanish in the United States to develop and maintain their heritage language and culture and feel proud of their heritage.

About the Program

The Spanish for Heritage Learners (SHL) Program in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Arizona is among the oldest and most comprehensive programs in the nation. It is also one of the largest programs in the country, with close to 600 students per semester, six different course levels, and 22 sections as of the fall 2011.

The primary aim of the program is to build on the cultural and linguistic resources that bilingual students bring to the classroom in a confidence-building and nurturing environment.

More specifically, the Spanish for Heritage Learners Program aims to help students

- Expand their bilingual skills in a wide range of contexts
- Learn more about Spanish-speaking cultural heritages in the United States and Latin American cultures
- Broaden their personal histories with cultural experiences of U.S. Latinos
- Obtain extensive practice in oral and written skills in the Spanish language
- Develop critical awareness of the sociopolitical context of bilingualism in the United States
- Become prepared to enroll in upper-division courses leading to a major or minor in Spanish

Program Instructors

The Spanish for Heritage Learners Program is especially proud of the instructors that teach the courses. Instructors in the program hold Ph.D.s or master's degrees in Latin American Studies, Border Studies, Spanish Linguistics, Second Language Acquisition, and Mexican-American Literature. They are deeply committed to the learning of the students in the program and to their own excellence in teaching. They all have ample knowledge about teaching both heritage and foreign language learners of Spanish and bring years of experience to the classroom.

Courses

The program offers six different courses at elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels in order to satisfy the language needs of the diverse population at the University of Arizona.

- **Spanish 103:** For students who have receptive skills in Spanish but have difficulty speaking. Focuses on developing fluent conversation and listening skills in a positive and culturally rich environment. It also covers basic grammar structures.
- **Spanish 203:** Focuses mainly on written and oral language development, but reading and listening skills are also practiced in a dynamic cultural context. Grammar and spelling are also covered based on student needs.
- **Spanish 253:** For students who understand and speak Spanish fluently. Focuses on differences between formal and informal uses of Spanish and develops both in the areas of writing, reading, speaking, listening, grammar, and vocabulary in a dynamic cultural context focused on Hispanics in the United States.
- **Spanish 323:** Focuses on expanding learners' oral and written academic proficiency and promotes their critical thinking skills in a dynamic cultural context focused on Latin America. Reviews advanced grammar and spelling to strengthen students' writing.
- **Spanish 333:** Develops oral and written Spanish for academic and professional purposes. Emphasizes different genres of writing, focusing on rhetorical strategies for analytical and argumentative writing, and culminates in a research paper.

Courses (continued)

- **Spanish 343:** Introduces learners to Spanish phonology and phonetics. Students learn about the differences between spoken and written language as the basis for advancing their Spanish proficiency. Students are also exposed to the different varieties of Spanish spoken in the Spanish-speaking world.

Student Voices: Comments on the program from the perspective of students

- ***Diana:*** "Growing up in Idaho, I rarely had the opportunity to speak Spanish with native speakers and only practiced with my Mom. I was enrolled in Spanish courses in high school, but they were really easy. I felt like I was on a different playing field, since I had learned Spanish at such a young age while others had not. It was easy to outshine the rest of the students in the class who were learning it as their second language. However, when I participated in the Spanish for Heritage Learners program, it was a completely different story. For the first time, I was surrounded by students who had grown up speaking Spanish, and I felt as though for once I had something to learn. Though the class was more difficult than regular Spanish classes, I thoroughly enjoyed it. I liked how students were similar to me; for example, sharing stories about childhood and laughing about those stories, because we could all relate to having grown up in Hispanic/Mexican homes. It was a great classroom environment that contributed to the learning environment as well.

I learned quite a bit! I was challenged a lot more than I would have been in another Spanish course. I learned how to memorize a monologue completely in Spanish and present to the class. I finally learned the location of accent marks, and I learned how to write essays. Above all, I learned how much I appreciated the Spanish language and how proud I was about all that I had accomplished in the short semester.

The program was one of the steps in my Spanish minor. I really hope to be able to use the skills I learned in the Heritage class and in other Spanish courses in my future job. I believe it will help set me apart and make me a more competitive candidate in the business world."

Student Voices (continued)

- ***Carmen:*** "I love being able to participate in a Spanish language class with students who have similar backgrounds to mine. Spanish was my first language, but I grew up in the U.S. and attended schools that were held in English. It was definitely an experience taking Spanish classes through elementary and high school with peers who didn't speak the language and (no offense to them) butchered the syllables. Studying Spanish with people who already know how to speak it allows the class to delve further into the language and culture and to fully converse about life and our experiences as Spanish speakers. Also, it is interesting to see the similarities in the diverse range of people who end up in the classes.

I learned a lot about the Chicano and Mexican-American cultures, as well as the general culture of Spanish speakers or Hispanic people in the U.S. I never considered myself to be Chicana, mostly because I didn't really know what it meant, and it seemed to carry a negative connotation. I think a very important part of the Heritage Learners program at the University of Arizona is the attitude and pride that students adopt after learning about the Chicano culture. I am so happy to have learned about this culture, and so proud to associate myself with it.

I feel that, because of this program, I am so much more proud of my heritage. I'm not ashamed to consider myself Chicana, and I've really embraced that I'm part of two cultures combined into one. As a result, I'm even more excited to continue through my Spanish Translation and Interpretation major."

- ***Danny:*** "Speaking was the most important skill I acquired in class. I had actually "lost" the Spanish language in my childhood and had to relearn it. Writing was easy, but speaking proved to be significantly more difficult. Thinking about what to say, how to conjugate verbs, and then providing the appropriate supporting vocabulary can be difficult in speech, and thus I feel that this was my most beneficial gain in the heritage learner program.

I can write and speak Spanish very fluently and effectively now. This allows me to communicate effectively with my family and efficiently convey my thoughts in Spanish, which I feel many Hispanics cannot do in contemporary American society without the use of Spanglish."

Student Voices (continued)

- ***Ivonne:*** "What I liked about the SHL program was the fact that they test how much you know at the beginning of the semester and then help you improve as best they can during its entirety. At the end, I felt that not only had I been brought back to loving my first language, but also communicating effectively in Spanish is a process that takes time to master. I learned a lot from the readings and films/documentaries that were assigned. It also taught me a valuable lesson about racism and how it doesn't just affect Latinos with a Mexican heritage, but also people who are Cuban, Puerto Rican, etc. This class counts toward my minor in Spanish, which is the step I am taking to become more attuned with my heritage and to be able to communicate in Spanish more effectively in a professional setting."

- ***Bernardo:*** "The SHL program teaches Spanish from a unique perspective. The classes focus less on learning and understanding the language and more on culture and developing our communication skills. I like to call it "English class but in Spanish." I learned many life lessons in the class, especially from one of my instructors. He opened our eyes to the reality of the world and the challenges that Hispanics face. The program has shown me not only the importance of speaking two languages but also the true meaning of being bilingual."

- ***Fabiola:*** "The main contributions of this program to my educational goals are that it has given me essential tools to be successful. I am more confident in my abilities to read, write, and present in Spanish. Although the program was challenging, I felt that I learned many new skills, and it brought out the best in me."

- ***Maria:*** "My experience in the Heritage Learners program has been great. So far I've learned more than I expected to learn or ever could have imagined. Since Spanish is my first language, I didn't think there could be much more to learn, but I was definitely surprised to know that there is much more to my language than I realized. I am really grateful for the program, because it is definitely a better experience to learn with the people who already know your language than with people who are trying to learn it. What I like the most about the program is learning with people who are at the same level as I am; that way we can learn better and faster. The most valuable things I've learned would be spelling and grammar. It may not sound like something that important but, in Spanish, it makes a great difference if you write accents or not. The program is contributing a lot to my future. Since Translation and Interpretation is my major, I definitely have to know how to speak and write Spanish close to perfection, and this program has been what has helped me the most."

Conclusion

The SHL program at the University of Arizona has many success stories like these from students who regained their confidence, expanded their bilingual skills, and gained a new sense of pride in their cultural and linguistic heritage. Through the use of an individualized approach to instruction, an innovative curriculum, and a deep understanding of students' needs, the SHL program hopes to continue growing and benefitting many of the students who choose to complete their education in Tucson, Arizona.

To learn more about the Spanish for Heritage Learners Program, [read the program profile.](#)

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The Heritage Voices Program Profile on the Spanish for Heritage Learners Program at the University of Arizona was prepared by Sara Beaudrie for the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages, Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), Washington, DC.

The Heritage Voices Collection is designed to spotlight individual heritage language speakers and programs. The information presented does not necessarily represent the views of the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages or the Center for Applied Linguistics.



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