Redesigning GE Language:
Promoting Racial Consciousness in Beginning Spanish

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study delineates changes enacted in the cultural program for beginning-level Spanish language students at a private, faith-based university. Given the restrictions of the pandemic insofar as virtual teaching and learning, as well as the national and international context of racial strife and inequities, the instructors took the opportunity to utilize antiracist pedagogy in order to reach the goals of meaningful content and measurable student outcomes. One of the General Education learning outcomes demonstrates how well students understand the "complex issues faced by diverse groups in global and/ or cross-cultural contexts." Within the context of Latin America and the Latina/Latino experience in the United States, the assignments focus on the intersections of race and gender as they relate to cultural expressions, ensuring that the approach does not obfuscate contributions nor realities of people of color.

INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAM CONTEXT

According to the fall 2020 Institutional data, the Traditional Undergraduate Student Body at PLNU is 59.4% non-diverse. In this predominantly non-diverse (read white) environment, the need to increase representation is critical for all students. In her book *Antiracist Education: From Theory to Practice*, Julie Kailin recognizes that "efforts at multicultural education are also a recognition of a demographic imperative that is impacting on education at all levels" (2002, p. 66). However, Kailin also points out how the multicultural approach has fallen under heavy criticism for being disturbingly superficial, often implemented in one day or a single session, and with token slogans such as "celebrate diversity," which are generic and market-driven in nature. In the private university context of this case study, the

demographic matches these projections for public education, with diverse students comprising 40% of the student body. The aim of the curriculum change is to raise consciousness in order to create visibility, understanding of the history and struggles of people of color, and appreciation of the contributions of various cultures and racial groups to society. Guest speakers and other figures studied come from a variety of racial and geographical backgrounds, including Afro-Mexican, Chinese, Latina/Latino, Japanese-Peruvian, Afro-Brazilian, and Chicana/Chicano. Greater representation empowers students of color and provides all students with the opportunity to connect to the content and with one another, dispelling biases and racial prejudices. While the professors aim to measure learning outcomes with "high-impact learning practices (*HIP*s)," they realize that their work forms part of a current institution-wide effort to address racial equity (McNair et al., 2020, p. 8). For starters, disaggregating the university data from the categories of "diverse" and "non-diverse" into specific racial and ethnic groups (African-American, Latinx, Native American, Korean, Chinese, Middle Eastern, etc) is necessary in order to identify which students suffer the consequences of inequities that exist. The professors know their current work will form part of a university-wide effort to humanize the "underrepresented", "nonwhite", "minority" students, by being able to use specific identifying terms, since "lumping all minoritized populations into a single category is another way of avoiding honest race talk" (McNair et al., 2020, p. 26).

The worldwide pandemic and the varying ways in which it affects different people groups, coupled with the racial reckoning that the United States was facing throughout 2020 (and continues to face in 2021), emphasizes the need to address issues of social justice and racial tensions. In response to the violence against people of color and the evidence of the "brokenness of our human condition", a letter was sent from the President of the university (Point Loma Nazarene), a "Call to Act," inviting collaboration and practical ways to work towards real change and to "stand alongside" the underrepresented students, faculty, staff and alumni (B. Brower, personal communication, June 5, 2020). The context of teaching remotely during the Covid pandemic posed many challenges for higher education, especially when the focus of in-person instruction is to build community, allow for student discussion, and find authentic ways for students to engage in the material inside and outside the classroom. The Anti-racist Collective was also formed in December, 2020, and working groups of faculty and staff provide updates on this ongoing journey, which includes practical measures such as handling incidents on social media, hiring and training practices, and publishing a "statement of inclusivity and commitment to anti-racism" (Point Loma Nazarene University,n.d.a). For faculty well aware of the inequities and pain suffered by minoritized members of the campus community, the challenge is to bring about real change in the curriculum, so that students feel represented, learn about representation outside of whiteness, and finally, find ways to self-reflect on their roles in our racially-divided society so that they can become change agents.

Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU) is a Christian liberal arts institution, and as such aims to equip "…students with a broad range of knowledge and skills within and across disciplines to enrich major study, lifelong learning, and vocational service as Christ-like participants in the world's diverse societies and cultures" (Point Loma University, n.d. b). Consequently, the General Education requirement, or as PLNU calls it, Foundational Explorations (FE) is a robust and integral part of the curriculum. Elementary language classes comprise eight units of the FE requirement, and are taught over two semesters. These courses respond to the *Foundational Explorations Learning Outcome 2c*: "Students will demonstrate an understanding of the complex issues faced by diverse groups in global and/or cross-cultural contexts."

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