

PROPOSAL
Language-specific Living Situations
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Given Smith's commitment to international education, our fine language departments and our pioneering and continuing efforts in Study Abroad, we in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese feel that there is a missing component that would be easy to achieve, cost nothing, and complement to existing co-curriculum.

Specifically, we are referring to a house, or a floor of a house, or several floors, to be set up as language-specific areas. In the case of Spanish, we would love to be able to welcome heritage speakers, native speakers and learners of Spanish all in one space. We envision that the American Studies Diploma scholarship student from Córdoba (and later the one from Mexico, if we get to that stage) would also be able to reside in the house in order to provide a native fluency context.

We should not stop with Spanish; rather all languages that have enough people to populate such a living arrangement should do so if the corresponding departments so desire. In this manner, students who are preparing to go abroad could practice beforehand and those who return could find a place to continue to speak the language of the country they have visited. (For example, this year some 57 students have returned from Spanish-speaking countries this fall.) For some of the more difficult languages, this may prove to be a useful step in bringing them to fluency faster.

We hope that you will give this proposal serious thought. It has been put forward to the college in the past, specifically in our 1997 Self-Study, which we append. At that time, the college did not see fit to move forward on such an idea. Now, we are re-introducing the concept of a Spanish House, and if there are enough students, we would consider a Portuguese component.

Today, the statistics cited in this study are even more compelling than they were nearly a decade ago. For example, we now teach more than double the number cited each semester. The number of Spanish speakers in the U.S. alone is now 40 million. We are confident that this move would involve very little in terms of financial outlay for the college and could be achieved as quickly as next semester. We look forward to your favorable response.

From 1997 Department of Spanish and Portuguese Self-Study:

"A Proposal for a Spanish and Portuguese House"

Spanish is the official language, not only of Spain, but also of Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean islands of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic and a sizable portion of South America. In all, 320 million people speak it, out of which 25 million live in the United States. Moreover, 200 million people speak Portuguese worldwide.

Given the importance of these languages and the fact that Smith's course enrollments in Spanish and Portuguese have steadily increased (in the last two years, they have averaged 370 students—13% of Smith's students), the Department of Spanish and Portuguese requests the allocation of a pre-existing house to be designated as the Spanish/Portuguese House.

Specifications:

1. The language of the house will be exclusively Spanish or Portuguese. Anyone who studies or speaks either language can live in the house. Residents may include native speakers, bilingual students, those taking courses at all levels, those returning from the Junior Year Abroad.
2. A central place in the house could be turned into a café trying to reproduce a Spanish, Spanish American, Portuguese, Brazilian or Latino reading café with kitchen access. It could include: art reproductions from those cultures on the walls; subscriptions to a sampling of Spanish and Portuguese magazines that focus on pop culture, news or academics; a set of "Destinos" tapes and a VCR (all dorms already have televisions); access to "Scola," the multi-language cable service; and a whole range of Spanish and Portuguese books donated by professors, alumni, etc.
3. This house could also be used to host cultural events, speakers, musicians, exhibits, readings, etc. For example, popular Spanish and Portuguese films could be shown thus opening the house up to students from outside the house.
4. In theory, a Spanish and Portuguese house will:
 - a) promote the use of Spanish and Portuguese on campus.
 - b) draw more prospective Spanish and Portuguese majors to Smith.
 - c) increase the rate and level of students' language acquisition.
 - d) centralize students' communicative network and facilitate tutoring.
 - e) help the retention of first-year students.
 - f) promote relationships between students and professors in an informal environment in the manner of a "micro-plaza."
 - g) provide a much-needed space for campus organizations interested in or associated with the cultures promoted by the house.
 - h) help to bridge the gap between Smith and the local Latino community by offering collaborative events of common interest."