

2019

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Carlos M. Coria-Sánchez

University of North Carolina at Charlotte, cmcoria@uncc.edu

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Prior to Vol.4 iss.1, this journal was published under the title *Global Advances in Business Communication*.

Recommended Citation

Coria-Sánchez, Carlos M. (2019) "Spanish for Business: Past, Present, and Future (Opinion)," *Global Advances in Business and Communications Conference & Journal*: Vol. 8, Article 5.

Available at: <https://commons.emich.edu/gabc/vol8/iss1/5>

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Cover Page Footnote

Thank you to Karyn, as always.

Spanish for Business: Past, Present, and Future [Opinion]

Carlos M. Coria-Sánchez, *University of North Carolina at Charlotte*

Spanish for Business stormed into Higher Education over 30 years ago, taking by surprise many traditional professors and Language Departments who were reluctant to view this new trend in the learning of Spanish as something worth research and publication. This opinion was widespread in academia. Nonetheless, Spanish for Business classes became attractive to students who were eager to link both the learning of this specific language, and international business or trade. The purpose of these courses was to teach students not only vocabulary, etiquette, and concepts related to the Hispanic business world, but also to offer knowledge about general culture in Spanish speaking countries. I began teaching Spanish for Business courses many years ago because of my ample experience in the business world in Mexico and the US.

In 1994, Mexico, the United States, and Canada signed one of the most significant trade agreements in the world, NAFTA. As I prepared my classes, I thought it was imperative to teach business culture in the Hispanic World to American students who in the future would be involved in commercial activities with their neighbors south of the border. Thus, it made sense to research literature about Mexican Business Culture. To my dismay, I did not find any reliable sources of information other than articles written in newspapers by former or present businesspeople who had visited Mexico on commercial purposes and wanted to share their experiences in the country. I came across several trade books as well.

On one hand, I realized that in some institutions, many trade books without any real academic research were used to teach business culture in Mexico. This may have contributed to the skepticism about Spanish for Business and Business Culture research and publications. On the other hand, there were also seriously researched textbooks that countered those trade books. Regardless of opinion, Spanish for Business and Business Culture became an important area of research and publishing in the academic world, and they have left a mark, or at least that's how it appears. Based on students' demand for these courses, many Language Departments decided to create majors, minors, or certificates in Spanish for Business. Below is a non-exhaustive list of institutions that offer a major in Spanish and International Business or Trade:

- Clemson University
- Eastern Michigan University
- University of Central Arkansas
- Auburn University
- San Diego State University
- University of Scranton
- Marquette University
- Monmouth University
- Pepperdine University
- North Carolina State University

Other universities offer a Certificate or a Minor in Spanish for Business such as:

- Wisconsin-Madison
- College of Charleston
- Valparaiso University

- University of North Carolina Charlotte
- DePaul University
- Kent State University
- Montclair State University
- Ohio State University
- Rider University
- Bentley University.

The purpose for this article is twofold: to document the gradual lack of growth in the “Spanish for Business” movement in U.S. colleges and universities, and to document the dilemma in which professors hired as “Spanish for Business” faculty members find themselves now as they attempt to validate their research in this area to an administration who, themselves, no longer find value in the field. I find myself in this predicament at UNC Charlotte where I have worked for almost twenty years, hired in 2001 as a “Spanish for Business” and “Latin American Literature” tenure-track faculty member.

When I went up for full-professor promotion in 2018, one problem I ran into is that some previously esteemed “Languages and Business” publications no longer exist. It’s important to link the lack of growth in Spanish for Business programs to the closure of certain publications. This fact was held against me by two high profile administrators at my institution; the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Provost.

The two journals in question are the Global Business Language (GBL) and the Journal of Languages and International Business (JOLIB) published by two of the top higher education institutions in the country: Purdue University and Thunderbird, The Garvin School of International Management. The two journals had a long existence, GLB issued 19 volumes going from 1996 to 2014 (18 years) and JOLIB released 17 volumes from 1984 to 2006 (22 years). As we can see by the number of volumes and years of publishing, these two journals were an important bastion of the academic world while they existed for professors immersed in the research of Languages and International Business and Culture.

Since one of my areas of teaching, research, and publications is precisely in Spanish for Business and Mexican Business Culture, these two top-tier journals were the perfect place for my articles. Who would have known such prestigious journals would be out of business one day? I am certain that all the contributors who published in these two journals thought the same. For my essays related to Latin American and Mexican Literature, I found the appropriate venues. After all, I was hired to teach and publish in both Spanish for Business and Latin American Literature.

It wouldn’t be, however, the first time that a journal ceases to exist after so many years of publications. How many other journals dedicated to the publishing of literature have shut down throughout the years? Too many to count, but to name a couple of well-known and respected publications in the academic world, the “Northwest Review” closed in 2011, and the “Black Clock” closed in 2016.

I have contacted both GBL and JOLIB to try and discover what happened to the journals. I was unable to locate a contact for JOLIB. That journal had several different editors for the last years, and sadly, there is no more available information. For GBL I was able to reach Dr. Allen Wood, the co-editor and editor for many years. This is what he said about the journal’s closing: “I became co-editor and then editor after I had already achieved the rank of full professor. I had already established myself as a scholar in seventeenth-century French literature and could “branch out” to work in business languages without having to worry about my professional future. I think that my situation was kind of rare in that regard. Most colleagues do

not view business language research the same way as they would specialized areas in literature or linguistic research. And editing is usually less recognized and/or rewarded than publishing articles or books. GBL was supported, during its existence from 1996-2014, by CIBER (Center for International Business, Education, and Research) money (covering, editing, and publishing costs). Purdue's last CIBER funding ended in 2014, and campus administrators did not consider the journal to be worth funding."¹

What stands out from Dr. Wood's comments is the fact that he no longer had "to worry about my professional future," and that "many colleagues look down on research and publications in Languages and Business." It is noteworthy that it was up to administrators not to fund the journal, not professors or academics in those areas. Could his comments linking administrator's lack of respect for and not valuing research and publication in this field tell part of the story of why the Spanish for Business major tracks in some institutions have shown a decline? In my personal case at UNC Charlotte, the two administrators who were part of my promotion at UNC Charlotte fell into this category of thought. Fortunately, after some time GBL is back and academics in the teaching and research of Languages and International Business and Culture have another venue for their publications. The return of GBL has been possible to the work of professors who care about this area of inquiry, not administrators, at George Washington University.

Like other Spanish departments throughout the U.S., our department has seen a decrease in the number of students taking the Certificate in Business Spanish over the last five years, as well as a decrease in positions to teach these topics. To see if a similar state of affairs is emerging elsewhere in the U.S., I have reached out to other institutions for information on the subject. In specific, I contacted the previously mentioned universities that offer a major in Spanish for International Business or a similar BA. I also requested data from universities that offer a Certificate or a Minor in Spanish for Business. I have decided not to include University of Colorado-Boulder, University of Colorado-Denver, and University of Nevada, for instance, because they don't offer a BA in Spanish and Business, or Trade. Instead, they offer a major in Spanish for the Professions which include Health, Engineering, Law, and other subjects. I apologize if I have left out other institutions.

I have noticed, too, that the number of positions advertised in the MLA for professors or lecturers to teach Spanish for Business has dwindled over the past five years. If there is a correlation between the closing of two of the most significant journals in academia regarding Languages and Business, and the lack of growth or decrease of students receiving a major or certificate in Spanish for Business, and less positions available we have to look at some numbers.

Data from universities with a BA in Spanish and International Business or Trade as presented by the institution.

Data in columns represent number of majors in Spanish for Business

Institution	2014 or 2013-2014	2015 or 2014-2015	2016 or 2015-2016	2017 or 2016-2017	2018 or 2017-2018
Eastern Michigan University	NIA*	NIA	NIA	NIA	NIA
Auburn University	5	2	2	2	3

¹ Wood, Allen. "Re: Spanish for Business Data." Received by Carlos Coria-Sanchez, 30 January 2019.

University of Central Arkansas	0	1	0	2	1
Clemson University	15	8	10	17	21
San Diego State University	59	40	35	42	42
University of Scranton	0	1	0	0	0
Marquette University	16	11	12	4	8
Montclair State University	3	5	3	6	9
Monmouth University	3	0	0	0	0
Pepperdine University	DAR**	DAR	DAR	DAR	DAR

NIA* (No Information Available) yet responded to my query for this research and explained their lack of numbers to report. On the other hand, those with the acronym DAR** (Didn't Acknowledge Request) unfortunately never attempted to reply to the request.

Universities offering a Certificate or Minor in Spanish for Business.

Data in columns represent number of Certificates or Minors in Spanish for Business

Institution	2014-2015 or 2014	2015-2016 or 2015	2016-2017 or 2016	2017-2018 or 2017	2018
University of Wisconsin-Madison (Certificate)	30	64	72	72	72
College of Charleston (Certificate)	8	18	20	26	35
UNC Charlotte (Certificate)	15	16	12	10	0
DePaul University (Minor)	4	2	?	1	2
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Minor)	1	6	4	3	2
Kent State University (Minor)	3	6	2	4	1

NC State University <i>(Madrid Chamber of Commerce Business Certificate. Students who took the exam, not necessarily passing it)</i>	17	14	9	15	11
Ohio State University (Minor)	DAR	DAR	DAR	DAR	DAR
Bentley University (Minor) <i>(Students Enrolled, not Graduated in the Minor)</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	14
Rider University (Minor)	DAR	DAR	DAR	DAR	DAR
University of Mary Washington <i>(Students Enrolled, not Graduated in the Minor)</i>	9	7	8	5	6
Texas Christian University (Minor Offered since 2015)	N/A	2	2	8	7
University of Houston (Minor)	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	6

Northern Arizona University-Yuma (Minor)	N/A	N/A	1	3	4
Monmouth University (Minor)	2	3	1	5	2

As noted in the tables before, various departments didn't respond to my inquiries. Some other institutions didn't respond as well, nor could I obtain their data from the Office of Institutional Research at their universities and colleges.

It is essential to consider what some of the colleagues who responded to my request disclosed about their programs in order to give more context to their numbers. However, these personal statements to this issue couldn't be requested from Offices of Institutional Research employees, only from Chair programs or professors in charge of Spanish for Business. For instance, Eastern Michigan University didn't report any numbers for the last five years; however, this is what Dr. Popko, Head of the Department of World Languages, responded: "While numbers have dropped over the past 6 years, it is hard to draw any conclusions... It is difficult to put a number on this, because we have programs that intersect, one from the College of Business, one a major in our department minoring in Economics. It is possible for students to be a major without showing up as *our major* in World Languages. **However, it is safe to say that we no longer have a dedicated program in Business Spanish, and our LIT program has changed into Spanish and International Careers. We seldom run a course in Spanish for Business**, instead using our Special Topics courses to combine students sufficient to run a class."² (My emphasis)

Dr. Lynn Burley, from University of Central Arkansas said that they have such low numbers because: "Our track in Spanish Business is not the most popular one."³ From North Carolina State University we have Dr. Ruth Gross who says about a decline in their program: "It could be the cost has gone up, and it could be fewer students enrolled. I don't have one answer."⁴

At DePaul University they also experience low numbers in their program, and this is what Dr. Glenn Carman mentions about this situation: "I am not sure, but I can speculate, for what it is worth. We had a general decline in enrollments at DePaul around 2010. Humanities, including languages were hit hard. But that decline has since leveled off and overall things seem stable. Another possible factor is that lately we have put a lot more emphasis on translation and linguistics, which are newer programs, and so, we are devoting less energy to Commercial

Spanish. I think there will always be some interest in Commercial Spanish, but we will need to revive it. People do suspect that the Business School doesn't encourage or accommodate language study as much as they should, **partly because some of their professors and advisors don't see its benefits**, and partly because some of them want to keep their students taking credit hours in their own school as much as possible. So, competition among schools within the

² Popko, Jeff. "Re: Spanish for Business Data." Received by Carlos Coria-Sanchez, 11 February 2019.

³ Burley, Lynn. "Re: Spanish for Business Data." Received by Carlos Coria-Sanchez, 7 February 2019.

⁴ Gross, Ruth. "Re: Spanish for Business Data." Received by Carlos Coria-Sanchez, 4 Sept. 2019

university may be a factor. But again, this is conjecture.”⁵ (My emphasis) It stands out from Dr. Carman’s comments what Dr. Wood mentioned before, some professors don’t see the value in the teaching and research of Spanish for Business.

In regard to the lack of growth in the program at San Diego State University, Dr. John Putman has an explanation: “It is likely a reflection of two things. First, overall enrollments are largely flat, and the Spanish emphases compete with 12 other language/regional emphases. Also, we try to encourage prospective students to consider other languages and regions because of the career opportunities they offer graduates. Frankly, there are too many students in the two Spanish emphases, especially Western Europe or Spain, since that nation has a challenged economy. If students already have a good deal of background in Spanish, we usually encourage them to take Spanish as a minor if they choose to switch to a different language.”⁶

At Clemson University it seems like the fact that the Language and International Trade program is a dual one, a language and business, makes it hard for students to follow through with the major. Dr. Salvador Oropeza, Chair of the Department of Languages, shares his ideas about what might be the reason for lack of growth in the program: “It is a difficult program because it is a dual one, it is necessary to complete both programs, business and one language, spend one semester in a Hispanic country, Argentina and Spain are our two destinations, plus an internship of 140 hours in an international company.”⁷

With the lack of information from certain institutions it is, indeed, problematic to draw a more conclusive result. Nevertheless, we can see from those who offered data and comments on their programs, that in some instances the number of majors, minors, or certificates has kept a steady stability, and others have seen a decline because the track might not be a popular one or there have been financial cuts in their universities.

In regard to positions posted in the MLA (Modern Language Association) Job List, the numbers are not very encouraging in terms of Spanish for Business. In this table I am including all positions regardless of level (tenure track, non-tenure, lecturer, visiting professor, or other). However, I am not including those ads asking for someone to teach Spanish for the Professions or Spanish for Specific Purposes, the reason being that these ads might look for someone to teach Medical, Legal, Law Enforcement, or Technical Spanish; I am focusing on those ads asking for someone to teach Spanish for Business in specific.

2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
11	2	6	3	2

We might be able to presume that the numbers between students with a major, minor, or certificate in Spanish for Business correlates with the amount of positions offered to teach this subject and the number of closed journals. While some programs keep a balance in their graduates for the last five years, it is obvious that some other departments have seen a lack of growth in the number of students interested in these tracks as well as a decrease in positions advertised. Is there a connection between these numbers, and the journals dedicated to the publishing of Languages and International Business? There are still journals that, if not focusing on this area of research, still publish essays related to the topic. Some of these journals are “Foreign Language Annals,” “Hispania,” “Global Access in Business Communications” (GABC) at Eastern Michigan University, and the recent return of GBL. We have to ask ourselves how all of these factors play

⁵ Carman, Glen. “Re: Spanish for Business Data.” Received by Carlos Coria-Sanchez, 4 Sept. 2019.

⁶ Putman, John. “Re: Spanish for Business Data.” Received by Carlos Coria-Sanchez, 4 Sept. 2019.

⁷ Oropeza, Salvador. “Re: Spanish for Business Data.” Received by Carlos Coria-Sanchez, 4 Sept. 2019.

a part in the lack of growth or decline of the Spanish for Business majors and minors in the U.S. To summarize, these factors are: 1) the lack of respect and value of the field on the part of academics and administrators like those at Purdue and UNC Charlotte; 2) the falling numbers of Spanish for Business majors and minors, and closure of some programs; and 3) the decline of recruitment for specialists in the field.

One thing is certain, there are strategies to preserve and even strengthen Business Spanish programs through interdisciplinary partnerships and external funding. For instance, at some institutions Language Departments have very close relationships with other programs such as Latin American Studies, International Studies, and International Business. Something that is clear from all this data, is that professors teaching and researching Spanish for Business and Business Culture must make an extra effort to recruit more students into their programs. All of us teaching and researching Spanish for Business and Business Culture are the ones responsible for keeping these programs alive and progressing to overcome their stagnant growth; otherwise they are bound for extinction within a few years. Or maybe these subjects have arrived at their life cycle? I hope not, as the opportunities for our graduates who learn about the workings of international business and trade become more and more relevant in today's world. Students who learn Hispanic literature, culture, history as well as economic and international policy, business practices, its history and trade, are far more marketable than those who do not speak the language, and who do not understand the economic relationships between countries.

By the time of submitting this article, my department at UNC Charlotte had awarded four Certificates in Business Spanish in the fall 2019. However, thanks to the group effort of several faculty members, the number of students who have signed up for the certificate has increased dramatically; we hope they continue with it. The MLA job list for 2019 had one position advertised for someone "who could teach Spanish for Business," but the position wasn't actually marketed for a Spanish for Business individual.