# Language Courses for Non-Traditional University Students: Hybrid versus Distance*

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## Abstract

This article presents the preliminary results of a comparison of two sections of distance language learning at a large Midwestern university.  Both distance sections of Elementary Spanish I were taught by the same instructor, using the same materials and assignments.  One section was a pure distance class, meeting in person only to take chapter tests, whereas the other section (considered "hybrid") met four times as a class during the semester for face-to-face interaction and language practice.  Participants in both sections completed background and satisfaction questionnaires.  In addition, language gain was measured based on oral production, oral comprehension, written production, reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary.  Quantitative and qualitative data suggest that hybrid students had some advantages over their counterparts. Despite some positive results, students showed strong reluctance to devote the additional class time necessary for the hybrid section.  Results suggest that non-traditional university students with multiple time commitments may be reluctant to devote additional scheduled time despite the advantages to learning outcomes.

Keywords: Distance learning, hybrid learning, blended learning, second language, assessment, comparison study, evaluation, satisfaction

## Introduction

Colleges and universities have long struggled to meet the needs of students who do not fit the traditional age demographic, and as increasing numbers of adults return to school in an effort to pursue a second career or improve their job opportunities, this challenge becomes ever more important to address. As Lambert (2001) suggests, "One of the primary ways of meeting those needs will surely be distance education" (p. 360).

However, for the field of foreign language instruction, the promise of reaching an additional audience of students is tempered by the concern that distance education students will suffer from the lack of regular interaction in the target language (Wang 2004). As Wang points out, interaction is considered a critical part of the communicative process for language learning, "Interaction is both a means and a goal in language learning. Unfortunately, interaction is exactly what is missing in distance language learning, and the urgency in solving this problem is self evident" (p. 375). The Modern Language Association Committee on Information Technology (2003) concurs, emphasizing the critical importance of human contact in the language learning process, and the need for distance language education to prove an ability to enable such interactions (p. 59).

Distance educators struggle to provide this interaction to language students through technological means, such as synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and asynchronous contact such as bulletin boards and email. These solutions do not satisfy all language teachers, however. In his study of feedback in a foreign language distance course, Hyland (2001) points out, "Whilst e-mail, as some students suggested,

might be an alternative way to discuss feedback, there is a need for students to have as many opportunities for 'live' interaction as possible on a language course" (p. 245).

One relatively simple solution to this problem can be found in hybrid (sometimes termed "blended") learning environments. Defined here as a combination of distance learning elements such as online course delivery and limited contact that resembles traditional face-to-face classes, this format may capitalize on the advantages of both distance and traditional classes. Hauck and Stickler (2006) note, "Whether for pragmatic, financial, or pedagogic reasons, many institutions see blending as a solution to the practical problems of university teaching in the 21st century" (p. 467).

The current study addresses the potential for hybrid learning in beginning Spanish courses at a university with a high percentage of non-traditional students. During the fall semester, two sections of first semester elementary Spanish I were offered, one meeting in person only to take tests, and the with additional scheduled in-class instruction. The following spring the next course in the sequence, elementary Spanish II, was offered with the same two choices. Data collected from both semesters include measures of student language gain and learner satisfaction. In addition, qualitative measures including survey results and observations were gathered.

Whereas the low number of students enrolled precluded a rigorous statistical comparison of language gains between the two sections, this article provides a detailed case study of a pilot hybrid Spanish class in an urban university environment. In the following section, the current literature on distance and hybrid education is discussed, including a focus on language learning in these environments. In addition, other results related to technology-enhanced language learning are briefly reviewed.

*Distance Education*

In their 2001 report, the National Center for Education Statistics indicated that the number of post-secondary institutions offering distance courses increased from 33% to 44%, and the number of these courses rose by nearly 100%; many institutions intended to start offering distance education courses between 1998-2001 (2002, p.102). Nearly one tenth of full time faculty reported having taught a non-face-to-face course (either computer- or TV-based) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001); 6.6% of students had taken a non-traditional course, more than half of which made use of the Internet (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). The increase in demand for distance education is expected to continue over the next decade, in no small part due to student interest (Carnevale, 2004).

Sampson (2003) explains that most distance learners choose this mode of study for the convenience and flexibility it offers,

> *Distance learning, like any kind of learning, can serve different ends, but distance learning appears mainly to serve those who cannot or do not want to make use of classroom teaching. Demanding professional commitments and family responsibilities of many adults often make attending a conventional, full-time, face-to-face course with fixed timetables a rather unrealistic proposition (p. 104).*

The adaptability inherent in the format of distance learning allows students the opportunity to adjust their study patterns to their own individual needs.  Indeed, the

highly successful Open University in the United Kingdom was founded to provide a flexible option for part-time and other non-traditional students who could not afford the time and expense of a traditional university program (About the OU: History of the OU).

Allen, Bourhis, Burrell and Mabry (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of comparisons of satisfaction between distance education and traditional classrooms, and once outliers were excluded, concluded that there is no reduction in satisfaction among distance learning students. However, satisfaction measures do not necessarily coincide with learning outcomes. The authors note, "A student may choose a format because it appears to provide an 'easier' or more convenient set of options rather than selecting a format that would maximize the potential success of that student" (p. 92). As few comparison studies of this nature are able to include random assignment of subjects in their research design, the issue of self-selection may influence satisfaction as well.

*Distance Language Learning*

Language educators have increasingly explored the options for distance education as communications technology has evolved over the past decade. As Glisan, Dudt, and Howe (1998) point out, "It would appear that distance education programs are on the increase, while in the foreign language field there remain a lack of consensus and paucity of research regarding their feasibility and effectiveness" (p. 49). These authors, along with Cahill and Catanzaro (1997) and Soo and Ngeow (1998), provided early insight into the uses of technology such as the internet in the learning of languages at a distance. In the latter two cases, learners using an online format were found to outperform their counterparts in traditional classes on measures of grammatical knowledge.

A more recent comparative study examining outcomes by Blake and Delforge (2005) confirmed these early results in their comparison of students using *Spanish without Walls* with a traditional classroom-based class. Much like the previously mentioned studies, the *Spanish without Walls* students (who did not meet as a class in person) outperformed the traditional students on grammar tests. Blake and Delforge mention that the vast majority of distance students in their study were not taking Spanish to fill a requirement, notably different from the traditional classroom cohort. It is quite possible that the distance students were more motivated, which led to their higher performance.

A number of published works have addressed the issues unique to language learning in distance formats, independent of comparisons with traditional formats. Cynthia White's book *Language Learning in Distance Education* (2006) reviews trends in learner contexts (including Computer Mediated Communication or CMC) as well as issues related to learner contexts and dimensions such as affective dimensions and the need for support. She cites two studies that have examined the study of German at a distance, one by Baumann and Shelley conducted at the Open University UK (2003, cited in White, 2006) and another by Barty focused on secondary students (1999, cited in White, 2006). Felix (2001, 2004) has addressed issues related to distance language learning at both the tertiary and secondary levels, respectively. Interestingly, Felix found that at both levels students would rather use web materials in class, versus use them to learn at a distance (with or without a tutor), if given a choice. This preference is echoed in the trend towards creating hybrid environments that combine technology and distance elements with traditional classes, as seen in the next section.

*The Trend towards Hybridization*

Increasingly over the past decade, research has focused on the possibilities inherent in hybrid learning environments that combine aspects of distance learning with traditional, instructor-led classroom instruction. Some authors, such as Presby (2001) and Bärenfänger (2005), believe that hybrid is more beneficial than purely online (i.e. distance) for learning purposes. As Skill and Young observe,

> *Past patterns suggest that the likely future will be neither solely online learning nor solely instructor-led classroom learning. …For many of us who have been working with various learning models, it appears that hybrid or blended models most frequently emerge as the most effective learning strategy. (p. 24)*

One increasingly popular area of study involves the use of CMC (see, for example, *CALICO's* spring 2005 special issue) to address the common concern regarding reduced interaction in distance and hybrid formats. As the potential benefits of CMC come into focus, studies such as Meskill and Anthony (2005) and Sanders (2005) examine its role in hybrid language classes in particular. At issue is whether or not CMC can adequately replace face-to-face contact in distance and hybrid environments. Ng, Yeung and Hon (2006), for example, found that a lack of face-to-face interaction inhibited participation in online discussions.

While special issues dedicated to online teaching and learning (such as CALICO's spring 2006 edition) reveal the search for online pedagogy, emerging empirical studies comparing language gain and satisfaction between online and traditional classrooms suggest that the hybrid format may well provide the advantages

promised by combining these two approaches to language learning. Studies of the

Language Online project at Carnegie Mellon University (Chenoweth & Murday, 2003;

Chenoweth, Ushida & Murday, 2006; Murday, Ushida & Chenoweth, 2008), a series of

hybrid courses developed for beginning Spanish and French, have shown comparable and

sometimes improved language gain and satisfaction among hybrid language students.

However, in contrast, Sanders (2005) found that students in hybrid courses showed lower

written proficiency (cf Chenoweth & Murday 2003). In this case, it is possible that a lack

of experience on the part of both students and instructors (typically graduate student

TA's) in the hybrid group may have influenced results.


*Distance v Hybrid?*

Although recent literature reviews and meta-analyses of technology-enhanced

language learning such as Zhao (2003) and Grgurovic and Chapelle (2007) suggest a

positive tendency for the use of technology in language learning, there are very few

studies that compare results for both distance and hybrid formats, either quantitatively or

qualitatively. One notable exception is the 1999 study by Diones, Spiegel and Flugman

comparing language gains of adult Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students in New

York State. Participants were assigned (most randomly, with a few exceptions) to

distance, hybrid, or control groups. Whereas distance and hybrid students used the same

materials, hybrid students met weekly or biweekly with an instructor; distance students

only had occasional telephone or mail contact with their instructors over the 26-week

cycle. The control group received no English instruction for the duration of the study.

Hybrid and distance students in this study improved equally on all measures except listening comprehension.  In this measure, the authors were surprised to observe that only distance students' scores were significantly higher than the control group. While the distance students may have honed their listening comprehension skills as a result of telephone contact with instructors (which eliminated the use of other compensatory techniques such as interpreting gestures or facial expressions), the authors point out that the hybrid students generally had living conditions which did not require the regular use of English outside of class.  It is unfortunate that the random assignment was not able to eliminate this potentially important extraneous variable.

The present study addresses the gap in the literature by detailing a case study of two sections of the same first-year Spanish courses, one offered purely at a distance and the other a hybrid section with some limited face-to-face contact with the instructor. Similar to Neuhauser (2002), who compares effectiveness of online and face-to-face sections, both sections are taught by the same instructor using the same materials.  This eliminates some potential complications in examining results, for as Burston (2003) points out, many IT studies compare sections taught by different instructors that may even use different materials.

The research questions investigated in the present research study are the following:

1. What differences are observed in student learning and adaptation between the distance section and the hybrid section?

2. Are there differences in satisfaction between the two sections?

3.  Do the data suggest any potential advantages to providing face-to-face

contact in the hybrid section?

The results may be used to provide important feedback for deciding whether or not to

continue to offer both distance and hybrid sections of Elementary Spanish.


## Methodology

This research took place at a Midwestern, urban university, whose student

population largely commutes to campus.  Less than 40% of the total student population

comprises full time, traditional-aged (18-22) students (IUPUI Planning and Institutional

Improvement, 2007), and a majority of students work more than 20 hours per week at an

off-campus job (IUPUI Planning and Institutional Improvement, 2001).  In an effort to

reach those students who were either unwilling or unable to attend traditional classroom-

based elementary language classes, distance sections were created that entailed meeting

in person only for testing.  These meetings were scheduled on Saturdays to avoid

weekday conflicts for students that work full time.

The only Spanish courses available at a distance at this university are two of the

three-semester Elementary language sequence, Spanish I (S117) and II (S118)[1].  Initially,

students in the distance sections met in person only for chapter tests, which occurred

typically every four weeks (four per semester total).  Course materials included the same

textbook used in traditional sections, and videotaped lessons recorded by a full time

university professor.  These lessons were taught to a live audience of three students, and

were made available for viewing on a weekly basis on local cable television.  When a

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[1] The third, Elementary Spanish III (S119), worth an additional credit hour, is only available in traditional
sections

new textbook was adopted for all other sections of Elementary Spanish, it was decided to repurpose the video recordings to match the sequence of the new textbook. The recordings were also made available to students on DVD and via the internet, in addition to the cable broadcasts.

At the same time the new video sequence was adopted, a second section of distance Spanish was created, with a hybrid format. In the hybrid section, in addition to meeting in person for tests, students were required to attend Saturday class sessions. One additional 2-hour face-to-face meeting was scheduled for each chapter (four in total), a week or two before the chapter test. These class sessions were designed to replace the equivalent amount of time students might spend studying on their own in the distance section. During these sessions, the instructor answered questions regarding the materials, provided conversation practice, and reviewed for the upcoming test.

Other than the face-to-face class sessions held between tests, the distance section and hybrid section were essentially the same. Both were taught by the same instructor, used the same text, had the same assignments and self-quizzes, took the same tests, and were required to attend an orientation session at the beginning of the semester. Students were expected to complete workbook assignments, and were provided with web-based practice exercises.

For each semester, participants were informed of the current study the day of the orientation session. A total of 14 students agreed to participate during the fall semester: 9 were in the distance section, and 5 were in the hybrid section. For the spring semester, 17 students volunteered to participate: of these, however, 14 were enrolled in the distance section, and only three (3) in the hybrid section. Students were asked to fill out a

background survey with demographic information such as native language(s), other languages, hours/week worked outside of school, and other distance learning experience (adapted from Chenoweth & Murday, 2003; see Appendix A for the distance version). In addition, students were asked to explain why they chose to take Spanish in a distance section, and to answer questions regarding their motivation. Students also completed a post-semester satisfaction survey with several open-ended questions (see Appendix C). Additional qualitative data included observation of the face-to-face meetings of the hybrid section, and additional focus group discussions during the spring semester.

Quantitative data on language gain were collected from regularly scheduled student tests and assignments; no additional questions or tasks were added to their normal workload as designated by the instructor. The initial plan was to establish baseline and end of semester levels in oral comprehension, oral production, reading comprehension, written production, vocabulary and grammar. The results of both tests were coded to obscure the identity and section of the student, and were rated by the researcher independently of the instructor's grading for all but the oral production section of the first semester tests, due to technical difficulties with data collection. The test items were coded for each measure (largely independent of the instructor's chosen grading scale). For written production, a beginning-level rubric was used to rate the written production tasks (see Appendix B).

These data were collected as planned, but the small number of students enrolled in the hybrid section (particularly in the second semester of the sequence) precludes a rigorous statistical comparison of language gains. The results are included in Appendix D, but are useful only in a descriptive sense for the purposes of this study.

*Descriptive data*

  As mentioned previously, enrollment in the hybrid section both semesters was much lower than the distance section.  Students were free to sign up for either section, but as the Fall 2006 semester was the first time a hybrid option was provided, there was some confusion.  Many students had not seen the posted information specifying that the hybrid section would entail additional class meetings, and were dismayed to learn this at the orientation meeting.  Although students were less surprised by the options in the spring semester, they continued to show reluctance to sign up for the hybrid section.  By the end of the fall semester, there remained a disparity in enrollment, with 17 students completing the distance section, and 11 completing the hybrid.  The spring semester enrollment continued the same trend, with an initial enrollment of 21 students in the distance section and only 8 in the hybrid.  By the end of the semester, only a handful of students remained in the hybrid section, and only one of the participants reported regularly attending the Saturday class meetings.

  In terms of demographics, the average age of the participants in the distance section was 26, versus 28 for the hybrid section.  For the spring semester, the distance participants' average age was 24, versus about 32 for the hybrid students.  All participants shared English as their native language, and most had at least minimal experience learning another language.  About half of both groups had previous experience taking a distance learning class.  The gender distribution for both semesters was uneven; less than half of the participants from the distance section were male (4 of 9

for fall, 4 of 14 for spring), and all participants from the hybrid section were female (5 for the fall, and 3 for the spring).

For both semesters, the hybrid section students reported working outside jobs for longer hours. The fall hybrid students reported an average of 43 hours per week, notably more than the distance section students who worked an average of 25 hours per week; similarly in the spring, the hybrid students reported nearly 34 hours per week at their jobs, but the average for distance students was just over 18 hours. Although the number of participants from the hybrid sections is notably smaller, it is nevertheless interesting to observe that they report working at outside jobs for longer hours, given that they were choosing a course option that provided less flexibility than the alternative.

A large portion (well over half) of the students signed up for Elementary Spanish I or II did so in order to fill some sort of requirement towards graduation. Their reported majors varied widely from those offered at the school, including nursing, finance, anthropology, journalism, computer science, and education among others. In some cases these areas of study require taking classes in a foreign language, although for others, language is simply an option among several to fill graduation requirements. None of the participants reported intent to major in Spanish. Many students also reported that learning Spanish would potentially help their career. [COMMENT ABOUT HOW THESE STUDENTS ARE RELATIVELY PRACTICAL?]


*Quantitative data*

Although the fall semester participant groups were quite small, the quantitative data was compared statistically using t-tests. Initial language levels were determined

using the results from the first chapter test, given to students one month into the semester. The test included questions that measured listening comprehension and oral production, reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and written production. The course final exam was used to establish end-of-semester language levels for participants. The two groups, both hybrid and distance, scored similarly on most sections; t-test analysis showed no statistically significant difference on measures of oral production or comprehension, written production, or vocabulary. The results of these analyses, found in Appendix D, show that the hybrid students scored significantly higher on the grammar section at the end of the course; they also show a slight tendency towards higher results in reading comprehension. It should be noted that the small sample size involved affects the reliability of these statistical conclusions.

For the spring semester the distinction between students in each section became more blurred. The instructor, in fact, chose to invite all students, distance or hybrid, to attend the Saturday class meetings during the spring semester. As a result all participants were asked to report many face-to-face class sessions they attended, and despite the fact that three participants were nominally enrolled in the hybrid section, only one student regularly attended the Saturday classes. (One other student reported attending the face-to-face class on one occasion.) With only one participant who could truly be considered a hybrid student in the spring, no quantitative comparisons were attempted. Initial language level test results were compared with final test results for all students using paired t-tests, and they showed a tendency of declining scores in all areas except grammar, which improved. The trend of declining scores may be a result of ceiling effects on the first test, however. These results can be found in Appendix E.

In the satisfaction surveys, students were asked to rate the quality of the course (independent of the instruction) and the quality of the instructor's teaching (independent of the course materials) on a 5-point Likert scale (see Appendix C). Both measures were compared between sections for the fall semester[2], and results showed that the hybrid students rated the course and the instructor higher than the distance section for the fall semester. While distance students rated the course at an average of 3.75 (with 5 reflecting excellence), hybrid students' responses averaged 4.2. Both sections were more satisfied with their instructor, with distance students' responses averaging 4.5, and hybrid students' averaging 4.8. Although there was no statistically significant difference in satisfaction between these two groups, the results are notable when the qualitative data are taken into account.

*Qualitative data*

The first semester the hybrid option was offered, there was great confusion on the part of the students. Many had not realized that there was a difference between the two distance (or "TV") options until the mandatory orientation session the first week of class. Many students initially enrolled in the hybrid section left the orientation session and immediately switched themselves into the pure distance section. As several study participants indicated in their questionnaires, they had signed up for the "TV" section deliberately because they expected to work at their own pace; others had no desire to attend any classes in person, to the point of chafing at the requirement to attend class to

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[2] This section was eliminated from the spring semester's final survey; low participation in the hybrid section precluded any comparison between sections.

take tests.  Given that the tradition of the distance class had been well established, this initial reaction was not particularly surprising.

Interestingly, however, the qualitative data reveal a tension between expectations of a self-paced organization and a desire for more structure.  [check for quotes here - no Nvivo node documents that I saw - will have to refer to evaluations?]

The study participants frequently mentioned frustration with the technology used in class, particularly about the rigidity of the online exercises.  Some of the perceived problems stemmed from misunderstandings about the importance of details such as gender agreement and accents, but other elements such as punctuation were not treated consistently.  As one student explained, "I think that the quizzes can help you prepare for the test, I mean it helps me decide what I need to brush up on, polish up on more.  But, the only problem I have is they are so sensitive with the typing."  In addition, several students mentioned frustration with the mismatch between the recorded segments and the book sections.  Given that these recordings were originally created based on a different textbook, some amount of mismatch was to be expected; however, the grammar topics should have matched each chapter.

Others complained that the students in the videos were too advanced, which made them feel that they were behind.  The instructor did offer some students strategies to those who mentioned this issue, including stopping the recording after a question was asked and attempting to answer before listening to the "audience" responses.  Those students who followed this advice noted much higher satisfaction once they treated the recordings as more interactive: "[As the instructor in the video] is talking to the students

you can press pause and answer and then hit play and that's helpful… I had to [do this], because otherwise I'd be lost."

Indeed, although there were many who had issues with the technology interface, the vast majority of comments about the course instructor were positive. This was particularly true of the students who attended the hybrid sessions in the fall semester. The core group of four or five students who consistently attended formed a bond with each other and the instructor, providing them with a sense of community. One student who switched from the hybrid section in the fall to the distance section in the spring expressed some regret, mentioning that she felt very comfortable asking questions in the small face-to-face group. She felt this gave her a much better understanding of material, something she missed in the spring.

Many participants mentioned speaking skills as an important goal, which was somewhat surprising given that they had not chosen to attend a traditional section. Naturally, the distance and hybrid sections provided options for those who were simply unable, due to work or other commitments, to attend class multiple times per week. Nevertheless, a good portion of the participants seemed unwilling and uninterested in attending class in person, seemingly at odds with their desire to gain speaking skills. Only a handful of students seemed to regret the lack of interaction with other students, yet in the final questionnaire many complain about the lack of opportunities to speak the target language.

It would seem that the hybrid section could have provided those opportunities, yet students failed to anticipate the benefits of attending some classes in person. By the end of the semester, several students do mention that they may have been better off in the

hybrid section.  [quotes from D's focus group, quote from fall 06 open q's]  In fact, the face-to-face class sessions seemed to represent a last-resort option for many students, a place they could go if they had no other way to figure things out.  Only in hindsight did students start to see the in-person classes as a missed opportunity.

In contrast, those participants who took the hybrid section (and actually attended the face-to-face classes) seemed happy that they had taken it.  There was no real indication that anyone who attended the classes on Saturdays regretted having done so, or felt that the sessions had wasted their time.  [any quotes to back this up?]  This apparent mismatch between student expectations and behaviors will be addressed in the next section, as well as recommendations for future offerings.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

To some extent, it should not be surprising to see that the hybrid students scored higher on some measurements of language gain.  With all other aspects of the two sections being equal, hybrid students received two hours per chapter of class time.  It is true that this does not necessarily mean that hybrid students spent more time on coursework overall, as distance learners may have spent that same amount of time (or more) working independently.  In fact, it's very possible that hybrid students might spend a great deal less time overall on coursework, relying on those face-to-face meetings to satisfy most or all of their study requirements.

While participants were not asked to report the raw hours per week spent studying, the results suggest that the face-to-face class meetings did have an impact on the hybrid students' language gain.  One of these class meetings was observed by the

researcher, and this observation suggests that the main focus of the face-to-face meetings was the discussion and practice of grammatical topics. The instructor began the observed session addressing individual student comments and questions, which included both logistical and content-related issues. Next, he presented the main grammatical topics from the chapter, making use of a PowerPoint presentation provided by the textbook for classroom use. Not surprisingly, given that these students were in first-semester Spanish, the presentation of grammar was conducted in English, with Spanish used for examples. The PowerPoint slides also included questions that the students were asked to answer as a class. Finally, the instructor would ask individual students questions in Spanish designed to practice the grammatical structures in question.

Under these circumstances, it seems logical that the hybrid students' scores would reflect greater facility with grammar. While the distance students had access to these PowerPoint presentations, the explanations in person, combined with the possibility of asking the instructor questions to clarify any confusing points, seems to have resulted in an increased ability to manipulate these structures when tested. The question remains, however, as to whether a different use of class time would have resulted in improved scores in other areas. This group might have scored higher on oral production, for example, had the instructor emphasized oral practice between students in class.

The tendency towards higher satisfaction ratings among the hybrid students may also be directly influenced by the face-to-face class sessions. While both groups of students responded very positively to the quality of instruction they received, the hybrid students had more of an opportunity to get to know their instructor. The observed class session reflected a very friendly atmosphere, and the instructor clearly knew many

aspects of the students' personal lives. This congenial tone may have also resulted from the small size of the group attending class, as only four students (all of whom were participants in this study) regularly attended the face-to-face class sessions. This very small group resulted in an extremely high level of personalization. It is possible that a larger group of regularly attending students might preclude this same type of group dynamic.

The question remains, even if the hybrid section seems to show advantages both in language gain and satisfaction, will students *choose* to take a hybrid versus a distance section if both are offered? The number of students who attempted to switch from the hybrid section to the distance section immediately after learning of the additional class meetings suggests that this population in particular is somewhat resistant. The newness of the hybrid option was definitely a negative factor, as many students had clear expectations of attending in person only for tests; the discovery that more attendance was required than initially anticipated made students see the class meetings simply as additional work, as opposed to an additional opportunity to learn. In some ways, this was not an inaccurate perception, as the class meetings were additional scheduled times when students would be required to attend class in person. However, foreign language educators generally hope that students will see extra work, particularly that involving interaction among classmates and students, as largely beneficial.

The reality of a commuter campus such as the one in this study, however, is that most students have multiple demands on their time and energy in addition to school. Many students choose to take distance courses, not because that is necessarily their preference, but because their schedules do not allow any other option. Other students

may in fact simply prefer to work on their own.  If a student has chosen a distance course

for that reason, having additional class meetings would hold little or no interest.


## Conclusion

The trends observed in the first semester that a hybrid option was offered for

distance Spanish students at this particular urban university are notable, but further

research is understandably needed to confirm these findings.  [ADD COMMENTS TO

RELATE TO ADDED DATA FINDINGS, QUAL AND QUANT FROM SPRING

TOO].

The issues at play in this study are of particular interest to other commuter

campuses, with large populations of older students who work significant hours outside of

school.  The same options offered to traditional students aged 18-22, taking 4-5 classes

and working 15 hours or fewer each week, might not produce the same results.  Although

it is promising that the hybrid students in this particular case performed equal or better

despite working longer hours than their distance counterparts, this improved performance

means nothing if students cannot be convinced to take advantage of a hybrid option.  As

Allen et al (2002) point out, "A student may choose a format because it appears to

provide an 'easier' or more convenient set of options rather than selecting a format that

would maximize the potential success of that student" (92).  Clearly the population that

chose the hybrid option worked many more hours per week on average, while those in the

distance section were generally unwilling to sacrifice additional time commitments to

take Elementary Spanish I.   The question that remains unanswered, at least for now, is

whether or not students can be convinced to commit to additional scheduled sessions in

order to improve their learning outcomes. As time is a particularly scarce commodity for

non-traditional students, this may be indeed a tough sell.

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Appendix A: Background Survey Questions

General questions included name, sex, age, country of birth, academic year, hours working outside of school, majors, and minors.

1. What do you consider to be your native language(s)?
2. What language did you speak growing up?
3. What other language(s) did people around you speak while you were growing up?
4. Please list each language you know something about, the number of year's experience you have with it (even if it's not formal study) and rate your fluency for speaking, listening, reading and writing. Use the following scale: 0-no ability, 1-novice, 2-intermediate, 3-advanced, 4-native-like.
5. What Spanish courses have you taken before this one, if any?
6. What language courses have you taken at [this institution]?
7. What other second language learning experiences have you had? (Residence in a non-English speaking country, study abroad, vacation, etc.)
8. Have you ever taken a distance learning course before? If yes, explain.
9. Have you ever taken time off from your university education? If so, how long?
10. Why are you taking Elementary Spanish I? Please check all that apply: to fill a requirement, because I like learning languages, to go abroad, for my career, because my family speaks it, because of my family history, to be able to read menus, to be able to read literature in Spanish, to sound sophisticated, to speak with new people here in [the city], other (please specify).
11. Why did you choose to take the "TV" or distance learning section of S117, instead of a traditional section that meets twice per week in person? Please check all that apply: None of the traditional sections fit with my other courses, none of the traditional sections fit with my work schedule, because I prefer learning at my own pace, because of the instructor, because I enjoy using computers and other types of technology, because I wanted to try a new way to take a course, because I don't want to attend class twice per week, because I don't like being called on in class, other (please specify).
12. Why did you choose to take the "TV class" or distance learning section of the course, instead of the "TV class with practice" or "hybrid" section that has additional class meetings? Please check all that apply: I didn't know there was another section, I would have taken the hybrid section but I had conflicts with my other courses and the mandatory Saturday meetings, I would have taken the hybrid section but I had conflicts with my work schedule and the mandatory Saturday meetings, I know someone in this section, I wanted to try taking a language course without having to meet with a class, I think I can practice Spanish more at home (or a work) this way, I work better on my own, other (please specify).
13. What do you expect to get out of this course? What are your goals? Be as specific as possible.
14. Please read over the following statements carefully, and indicate if you agree or disagree with each one [5-point Likert scale]:
    a. The technology we use for this course helps me study.
    b. It is easy to get feedback on my Spanish ability from my instructor.

c. Talking to fellow students or my professor in Spanish motivates me to learn more Spanish.
d. I get enough practice using Spanish in this class.
e. I feel motivated when I use Spanish through TV, internet, or other kinds of technology.
f. I feel motivated to use Spanish in a native speaker group or community.
g. I am studying Spanish because I want to interact with native speakers.
15. How often do you use Spanish in the following places? Choose a frequency from the list, then indicate who you speak Spanish with in the space following: At home, at work, social life/free time, around town.
16. How often do you use the following types of technology to practice Spanish? Choose a frequency from the list for each item: Browse web pages, send/receive email, listen to the radio, watch television, chat in chat rooms.

## Appendix B: Written production rubric

| Relevant to topic | 1: not on topic | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5: all on topic |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Overall development | 1: list-like | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5: sense of completeness |
| Organization/ordering principle (chronological, interest, etc.) | 1: seems random | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5: well organized |
| Use of transitions, cohesive devices | 1: choppy | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5: flows well |
| Vocabulary | 1: impedes comprehension (or relies on English) | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5: appropriate and varied |
| Syntactic complexity and variety | 1: monotonous, simple sentence structure | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5: sentences vary effectively in length and structure |
| Grammatical accuracy | 1: so frequent or severe that impedes comprehension | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5: errors are not very frequent and not very serious |
| Mechanics (spelling, punctuation, accents, capitalization) | 1: so frequent or severe that impedes comprehension | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5: errors are not very frequent and not very serious |
| Length | 1: insufficient | 2 | 3: minimum required | 4 | 5: well beyond minimum required |

## Appendix C: End-of-semester Satisfaction Survey (Distance version)

1. What were your main goals in taking this course?
2. Did you accomplish your goals? What helped you accomplish them? What didn't help?

3. Which aspects of the course did you like?  Please be as specific as possible.
4. Which aspects of the course did you dislike?  Please be as specific as possible.
5. Would you have liked to meet as a class on days when there weren't tests?  Why, or why not?
6. What did you think of your interactions with other students in this class?
7. Did the course change or affect your study habits?  For example, did you study more, more often, more regularly, or less than for your other classes?
8. Has the course affected your motivation to learn Spanish since the beginning of the semester?  In what ways?
9. Would you recommend the course to a friend? Why or why not?
10. Are you planning to take the next course (S118)?
    a. If yes, are you planning to take the TV or distance course again? Why or why not?
    b. If you're not planning to take S118, why not?
11. Please rate the overall quality of this course, including the material or the content, independent of the instructor's teaching. [5-point Likert scale]
12. Please rate the overall quality of the instructor's teaching regardless of whether or not you liked the content of the course. [5-point Likert scale]

Appendix D: T-test Results for Hybrid/Distance Comparison, Fall Semester

|  | Hybrid section mean score (SD) | Distance section mean score (SD) | T stat (DF) | p value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Listening comprehension** | 7 (5.28) | 7.15 (8) | 0.10 (7) | **0.92** |
| **Reading comprehension** | 4.8 (0.2) | 4 (1.11) | -2.06 (13) | **0.06** |
| **Written production** | 25.5 (33.67) | 19.5 (46.7) | -1.66 (7) | **0.14** |
| **Oral production** | 21.4 (90.80) | 25.1 (22.36) | 0.82 (5) | **0.45** |
| **Grammar** | 29.7 (1.7) | 22.3 (72.23) | -2.69 (10) | **0.02*** |
| **Vocabulary** | 16.2 (13.58) | 13.85 (14.89) | -1.15 (8) | **0.28** |

**\* Statistical significance at p < 0.05**

Results from the initial test revealed that there were no statistically significant differences in language level on any of these measures at T1, thus only results from the final test are shown.

Appendix E: Language Gain Results for the Spring Semester

|  | T1 mean score (SD) | T2 mean score (SD) | T stat (DF) | p value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Listening comprehension** | 9.5 (1.01) | 7.6 (3.33) | 4.05 (15) | < 0.01* |
| **Reading** | 4.5 | 2.75 | 5.48 | < 0.01* |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **comprehension** | (0.20) | (1.40) | (15) | |
| **Grammar** | 13.1 | 9.7 | 5.14 | < 0.01* |
| | (2.89) | (10.66) | (15) | |
| **Vocabulary** | 7.5 | 9.6 | -5.53 | < 0.01* |
| | (4.38) | (1.73) | (15) | |

**\*Statistically significant**

Due to logistical problems during the spring semester, there were insufficient data to compare gains in either written or oral production.  A marked ceiling effect occurred for listening and reading comprehension, with students scoring an average of 9.5 of a possible 10 and 4.5 of a possible 5 respectively.  This is also reflected in the markedly lower SD for the T1 scores compared with T2.  This was also true for the grammar section to a lesser extent, with the average 13.1 out of 15.5.  Only the vocabulary section showed a positive trend (although the final 9.6 average, of a possible 10, also shows a ceiling effect).