



Translating U.S. Undergraduate Admissions into Spanish

By Michael Doyle

Demographic projections, nationally and for the state of North Carolina, indicate that Hispanic/Latino students will soon represent a significantly higher proportion of college and university enrollments. As of July 1, 2006, the estimated Hispanic/Latino population of the U.S. was 44.3 million people, making persons of Hispanic origin, now 15% of the total population, the nation's largest ethno-linguistic minority. Of every two people added to the nation's population between July 1, 2005 and July 1, 2006, one was Hispanic, for a total of 1.4 million Hispanics added during that year alone. By the year 2050, the total projected U.S. Hispanic population will constitute at least 25% of the total projected U.S. population of 420 million.¹ Demographic data regarding school- and college-age U.S. Hispanics is summarized in Table 1 on page 17.²

In terms of the educational attainment of U.S. Hispanics/Latinos 25 years and older (23,499,000 persons in the year 2006), 28% were high school graduates, 19% had some college or an associate's degree, and only 9% had

earned a bachelor's degree, compared to 32%, 27%, and 20%, respectively, for non-Hispanic whites. If the percentage of U.S. Hispanics holding a bachelor's degree rises to that of non-Hispanic whites, then 2,528,000 more U.S. Hispanics would hold the degree.

In the 2000 census, North Carolina led the nation in the percentage increase of Hispanic/Latino residents per state.³ In its 2006 study, "The Economic Impact of the Hispanic Population on the State of North Carolina," the Kenan Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina reported that, "North Carolina's Hispanic population totaled 600,913, or 7% of the state's total population, in 2004," and that "Hispanics accounted for 27.5% of the state's population growth from 1990 to 2004, and 57% of the total enrollment growth in North Carolina public schools between the school years 2000-2001 and 2004-2005" [emphasis mine].⁴ This growth in the state's public schools will soon have a significant impact on enrollments in the 58 campuses of the North Carolina Community College system and the 16 campuses of the University of North Carolina.

Reaching Out

In a 2005 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, it was reported that "Spanish speakers constitute nearly one in eight U.S. household residents," and that there are more than 32 million "U.S. household residents five years and older who speak Spanish at home."⁵ Given the rapidly changing demographics and growing number of Spanish-speaking students who are or will be enrolling in American colleges and universities, we can expect a greater demand for the translation into Spanish of the information prospective students will need to navigate the complex application process and financing of a college degree. This is particularly true for the admissions content of college and university websites, where many applicants will look for information on admissions requirements and financial aid. As such, American higher education represents a niche for translators working from English into Spanish.

To begin to address this need, a spring 2007 graduate workshop at the University of North Carolina at

Table 1

Hispanic/ Latino Population	Total (in rounded thousands)		Hispanic Origin Mexican		Puerto Rican		Cuban		Central American		South American		Other Hispanic	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total	43,168	100	28,323	100	3,704	100	1,584	100	3,536	100	2,587	100	3,434	100
5-9 years	4,032	9	2,888	10	332	9	89	6	286	8	172	7	266	8
10-14 years	3,899	9	2,683	10	335	9	117	7	245	7	188	7	331	10
15-19 years	3,513	8	2,335	8	332	9	85	5	255	7	189	7	316	9
20-24 years	3,628	8	2,471	9	309	8	83	5	326	9	189	7	249	7
Total Kindergarten– 24 Age Group	15,072	34	10,377	37	1,308	35	374	23	1,112	31	738	28	1,162	34

Charlotte, “Translating American Higher Education from English into Spanish: UNC Charlotte’s Undergraduate Admissions Website,” provided an opportunity to students to reach out linguistically and culturally to inform and welcome Hispanic/Latino students and their families.⁶ (The concept of family/*familia* is an important cultural factor in this communication effort because decisions made by Hispanic/Latino individuals often involve the opinions and advice of family members, both immediate and extended.) The three-credit hour course offered nine graduate students enrolled in the Translating and Translation Studies track of the Master of Arts in

Spanish at the university a real-world learning opportunity, the results of which they can now use to establish a foothold in this developing market niche within the translation profession. The following provides an overview of the project and its outcome. For more information on the Master of Arts in Spanish, please visit www.languages.uncc.edu/masters/index.htm.

Course Design

The semester-long project involved translating portions of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte’s undergraduate admissions website from English into Spanish. The project served a dual purpose. First, it created

an opportunity for students to give something back to the university by providing Hispanic/Latino applicants and their parents (and extended family) with information in Spanish about the university and its admissions processes. Second, having these translations online also created a favorable public relations initiative on the part of the university.

The 12 documents translated from English into Spanish are listed in Table 2.

Process

At the outset, each student was required to present at least five resources for terminology related to undergraduate admissions and financial aid that might prove useful to the work at hand—e.g., specialized dictionaries and glossaries, Spanish-language Web pages at other colleges and universities (both in the U.S. and abroad), and other related material. Having students find resources also helped to develop their familiarity with the terminology of higher education institutions. A major surprise of this initial research stage was that the class found very few examples of Spanish-language translations of online admissions and financial aid materials at American institutions of higher learning, even among states with large Hispanic/Latino populations and college enrollments. A final list of resources was compiled and distributed to the students to assist them in their work. These resources are ➡

Table 2

Document #	Document Name	# Words
1	Menu	41
2	Academic Requirements	247
3	Application Information	38
4	Estimated Costs	316
5	Visit the Campus	159
6	Checklist for Admitted Students	633
7	Academic Services	781
8	Out-of-state Student Information	2,406
9	Scholarship Information	932
10	Student Orientation Advising and Registration	197
11	University Profile	300
12	Degrees Offered	755
Total Words		6,805

provided at the end of this article for the benefit of the reader.

The Office of Undergraduate Admissions at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte was identified as a primary resource, especially director Regena Brown, who was overseeing the project. The students met Ms. Brown during the first class meeting, where she informed them that they should feel free

and register (contemporary and more “hip”) that targets the prospective student as the primary reader. Other institutions adopt a more formal tone, which broadens the readership to include parents and other stakeholders. In Spanish, this difference is reflected between the pronominal “you” forms, *tú* (first-name basis, John/*Juan*, and Mary/*María*) or *usted* (last-name basis or use of title,

for extended periods in Spain and Mexico, so that their level of Spanish was in effect that of an educated native speaker. Therefore, much of the workshop was devoted to an ongoing negotiation concerning which dialect would be most appropriate to use for translations on the website. At times the discussion, which was always conducted in a productive and respectful manner, was quite vigorous, reflecting the fact that we are often more culturally hard-wired to express things a certain way than we are aware of, and that we are very attached to our way of speaking.

American higher education represents a niche for translators working from English into Spanish.

to contact her should they have any questions about the meaning of the source-language documents.

Each student was responsible for completing individual translations of the documents listed in Table 2 on page 17, which were then graded. These translations were discussed and compared in class, either in pairs, small groups, or by the entire class. Students were encouraged to negotiate and arrive at a consensus regarding the most appropriate target-language text renditions into Spanish. The final versions of these translations were edited and proofread in class and online. The instructor synthesized the best options and stylized the final consolidated translations to ensure a consistent style.

Problem solving

The translation process involved many problem-solving considerations, both general and specific, some examples of which follow.

Tone: The tone and register of each document had to be determined. Some university Web pages (in both English and Spanish) use a more informal tone

such as Mr./*Sr.*, Mrs./*Sra.*, or Miss/*Ms./Srta.*). The students learned that the University of North Carolina at Charlotte preferred a more formal tone, so they adopted the *usted* form of address in all translated documents.

Dialect: Another initial general consideration involved determining which variation of Spanish to use in the translations, which is an issue related to localization. There are at least 20 Spanish-speaking nations in the world, in addition to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, each with distinctive accents, vocabulary, and ways of expressing things. Among U.S. Hispanics/Latinos, the Spanish (or even Spanglish) spoken by different national-origin groups may differ considerably depending on whether individuals live in California (a large Mexican-origin population), Miami (Cuban, Colombian, Central American), or New York (Puerto Rican and Dominican). Additionally, the class included native speakers from Mexico, Colombia, and Puerto Rico, as well as near-native speakers (Anglo-Americans) who had lived or worked

Demographics: Another aspect that students needed to consider as they completed their translations was the issue of demographics. The country of origin and citizenship of Hispanics/Latinos in the U.S. and North Carolina appear in Table 3.⁷

Table 3: Hispanic/Latino Country of Origin and Citizenship

	United States	North Carolina
Mexico	59%	65%
Puerto Rico	10%	8%
Cuba	4%	2%
Other	27%	25%

At first glance, it might seem appropriate to “mexicanize” the Spanish of the translation, since the majority of Spanish-speakers in Charlotte and North Carolina are originally from Mexico. However, there are also many Spanish speakers in the metro region and state who hail from other parts of the Spanish-speaking world: Central America, the Caribbean, the Andean region, the Southern Cone region of South America, as well as Mexico. The Hispanic/Latino students who will be enrolling at the University of North

Carolina at Charlotte come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Just as the English used on the university's website is not tagged linguistically, i.e. "southernized" in the style and diction of North Carolina, it was decided that the Spanish the class would use in their translations should be as neutral as possible. The translations would rely on an Americanized Spanish, examples of which can be found in several of the education glossaries and governmental documents that are already shaping and standardizing such usage in the U.S.⁸

Translation Challenges

Students learned that even apparently simple or obvious translations could be quite complex. For example, in the academic requirements document, the words "course" and "high school" posed unexpected problems. The online *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*⁹ provides several definitions from which to work. An individual "course" may be translated as *asignatura* (*cada una de las materias que se enseñan en un centro docente o forman un plan académico de estudios*), *materia* (*asignatura*), *clase* (*en los establecimientos de enseñanza, cada una de las asignaturas a que se destina separadamente determinado tiempo*), or *curso* (*estudio sobre una materia, desarrollada con unidad; tratado sobre una materia explicada o destinada a ser explicada durante cierto tiempo*). *Curso* can also refer to a course of studies (the semester-long class), or an academic program (a major). "High school" can be translated as *escuela secundaria* (*la intermedia entre la primaria y la superior*), *colegio* (*establecimiento de enseñanza para niños y jóvenes*), or *escuela preparatoria* (*Méx. escuela en la que se realizan los estudios de segunda enseñanza antes de empezar los estudios universitarios*). The group decision was to use the word *curso* since:

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- 1) It appears in the main American glossaries students consulted.
- 2) "Courses" in the source-language text referred both to specific classes as well as to year-long programs of study (e.g., required high school courses, such as English, algebra, and social studies; and recommended high school courses, such as math, science, foreign languages, and world history).
- 3) It is an Americanized cognate that is used by many native-speaking faculty colleagues and students to refer to a single course.

In the end, *escuela secundaria* was used for "high school," but with a footnote explaining that it is *Equivalente en EE.UU. a la escuela superior o la escuela preparatoria en diversos países hispanoparlantes*.

At times, humorous mistranslations arose from having misunderstood the original English. For example, in the document entitled "Information for Our Out-of-state Students," a description of the university as having "a number of 24/7 computer labs on campus" was taken to mean that the university had seven computer labs with 24 computers in each lab, instead of the labs being open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. On the same page, the students also discovered information that needed to be

updated in the English-language Web page: the source-language text referred to the "WNBA Charlotte Sting," which no longer exists in Charlotte.

Translation Process Reports

An important part of the workshop was the requirement that students submit short (500-600 words) translation process reports during the semester. In these reports, students identified and explained any problems or challenges they encountered while working on their translations. Students were also required to justify their proposed (theory-based) solutions to these challenges. The reports served to document students' resourcefulness and problem-solving methodology for the instructor.

Project Outcome

One outcome of the semester-long project is that the University of North Carolina at Charlotte now has a new Spanish-language link at www.uncc.edu/admissions/espanol/espanol.htm. To our knowledge, the site represents the first such translation of higher education documents into Spanish within the 16-campus University of North Carolina system.

The students in the course gained valuable experience working on real-world documents, the translations of which they can now add to their portfolios. They learned to negotiate meaning through collaborative teamwork, ➡

which means entertaining other possibilities that they may not have considered on their own. They sharpened their reading, proofreading, and editing skills. They improved their capacity for research-based and creative problem solving. They also developed a professional discourse for addressing translation quality, standards, and assessment criteria. Students also provided a valuable outreach service on behalf of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Translating the undergraduate admissions website for the University of North Carolina at Charlotte served as a student-centered learning model for reaching out linguistically and culturally to inform and welcome Hispanic/Latino students to our institutions of higher learning. This project can now be added as a resource for those at other colleges and universities who will be working on similar translations in the future.

Notes

1. The statistics on population growth were compiled from the following sources:

U.S. Census Bureau: State & Country QuickFacts

<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37000.html>

U.S. Census Bureau: Projected Population Change in the United States, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 2000 to 2050

www.census.gov/ipc/www/usinterimproj/natprojtab01b.xls

U.S. Census Bureau News

www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/population/007910.html

A Demographic and Health Snapshot of the U.S. Hispanic/Latino Population: 2002 National Hispanic Health Leadership Summit

www.cdc.gov/NCHS/data/hpdata2010/chcsummit.pdf

2. U.S. Census Bureau: Hispanic Population of the United States (March 2006), www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/cps2006.html.
3. The 10 states with the largest change in proportion of Hispanic/Latino residents between 1990 and 2000 were (in order of population): North Carolina, Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, Nevada, South Carolina, Alabama, Kentucky, Minnesota, and Nebraska. In 2006, 42% of U.S. Hispanics lived in the West,

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Resources

Glossaries Consulted

Wikipedia Glossary of Education-related Terms
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_education-related_terms

English-Spanish Higher Education Glossary
http://gearup.ous.edu/documents/pdf/English-Spanish_Glossary.pdf

Glossary of Educational Acronyms
<http://westspringfield.massteacher.org/id32.htm>

Dictionary Resource
www.diccionarios.com

Glosario de términos útiles
www.okhighered.org/student-center/espanol/glosario.shtml

ProZ Spanish-English Glossary for All Levels of Education
www.proz.com/glossary-translations/english-to-spanish-translations/33

School Wise Press Glossary of Educational Terms
www.schoolwisepress.com/smart/dict/dict.html

Postsecondary Education English-Spanish Glossary
www.tgslc.org/pdf/Spanish_glossary.pdf
Includes financial aid terminology.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Glosario de Educación Superior
www.unesco.org/ve/general/glosario.asp