Spanish Users and Their Participation in College: The Case of Indiana

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Spanish has become a widely used second language in the U.S. As the number of Spanish users (SUs) continues to increase, so will the need for more adequate services to accommodate this population at different levels of education. In fact, the current number of SUs residing in the country coupled with predictions for this population's growth could have an impact on future college demographics, especially as K-12 students of Spanish descent continue moving along the "higher education pipeline" (Ignash, 2000, p. 4). These learners along with international students from Spanish-speaking countries will create a college population with increasing participation from different types of learners, including heritage learners, new immigrants, and international students, all of whom will be interacting in a single setting. Although the bilingual education literature has extensively addressed the literacy development of SUs in states like California, Texas, or Florida, few researchers have investigated these learners at higher levels of education and in states with a small, yet growing, number of SUs. This document describes the presence of SUs in four- and two-year academic institutions in Indiana, discusses characteristics of these learners, and provides general implications for instruction.

Although not a new phenomenon, immigration continues to affect the viability of educational policies and practices in the U.S. Accordingly, as the number of immigrants has increased, so has the need for more adequate services to accommodate diverse populations at different levels of education. Different language groups are on the rise; however, researchers have predicted more rapid growth of populations of Hispanic descent who are expected to account for an average of 65 million U.S residents by 2040 (as cited in Ignash, 2000).

The current number of Spanish users (SUs) residing in the U.S., coupled with predictions for this population's growth, could influence college demographics as current K-12 learners move along the "higher education pipeline" (Ignash, 2000, p. 4). These learners, along with international students from Spanish-speaking countries, will create a college population with increasing participation from heritage learners, new immigrants, and international students,

all of whom will be interacting in college classrooms. While practitioners working at the K-12 level might not be unfamiliar with this panorama, those working at institutions of higher education are just beginning to face the challenges of addressing the needs of diverse populations, especially in areas with a relatively low SU presence. In this document, I describe the collegial participation of SUs in four- and two-year academic institutions in Indiana, a state with a small, yet growing, SU presence, address learners' characteristics, and provide general implications for instruction.

BILINGUAL POPULATIONS: OVERLAPPING TERMINOLOGY

Educators, researchers, and politicians among others have debated bilingualism and biliteracy in a number of contexts, which has led to the use of different terminology associated with different types of language learners. For instance, an educator working at the K-12 level might refer to an individual developing English proficiency as an English language learner (ELL). At the college level, an instructor could call the same individual an ESL learner, while people in the streets might simply call the learner a non-native speaker, foreigner, or an immigrant. With the primary purpose of underscoring the complexity of bilingualism, in the following section, I outline common terms grouped in three perspectives: legal, proficiency, and field-specific perspectives.

Legal Terms

Especially popular in government publications and demographic studies, legal terms have become the point of departure to associate groups of learners with particular statuses in the U.S. Common terms in this category include: a) *Foreign born* and b) *Immigrant*. While the former refers to people entering the U.S on any visa, the latter refers to individuals who have made the U.S their permanent home (Ignash, 2000).

Proficiency-driven Terms
As the name indicates, these are designations assigned according to the perceived level, self-reported or otherwise, of language proficiency a learner has. Some of the most common include: a) *Non native English-speaking student/non-native speaker*, b) *bilingual student/L2 learner*, c) *Limited English Proficient learner,* and *d) English language learner.*

Field-specific Terms

Given the interdisciplinary nature of second language studies, a number of fields have investigated language learners' issues and adopted terminology to refer to learners depending on the area of study. For instance, socio-linguists employ terms like *language minority, home background speaker, heritage language*

learner, or generation 1.5 learner to allude to individuals who speak a language other than English at home regardless of proficiency level or country of birth. In bilingual education, K-12 education, and second language studies, researchers and practitioners tend to rely on terms like *bilingual student, English language learner, or L2 learner*.

As the previous brief discussion illustrates, there are a number of labels associated with language learners in general. Although more prevalent in some contexts than others, these designations serve to mirror the complex overlap of different terms. Further illustrating this complexity are terms that, although broadly used, do not provide much information on the linguistic reality of learners. In particular, institutions of higher education have traditionally relied on legal status or ethnicity when collecting statistics on student enrollment. In this sense, the four- and two-year institutions in this review will be likely to document SUs' student enrollment using the terms *international student* and/ or *Hispanic*.

In this investigation, I use the term *Spanish user* as an umbrella term to incorporate learners with different proficiencies in Spanish. Although researchers have commonly relied on the terms *native* and *speaker*, I avoid the term "native" while expanding the term *speaker* to the term *user*. This decision is based on the belief that nativeness cannot be assumed and that learners do more than just speak the language. In other words, the term Spanish native speaker assumes that all Spanish users will be *native* and that they will only use the language to *speak* when, in reality, many of them might be proficient in Spanish and might do more or less with the language than speak. Being aware of these distinctions appears especially important in a discussion on Hispanics, where issues of identity, language, and proficiency interact.

Using total student enrollment as the main criterion, I selected institutions representative of different geographic areas in the state, including Bloomington, West Lafayette, Muncie, and Central Indiana. For each institution, the data are drawn from the campus with the largest student population. With a primary emphasis on SU populations, in the following section, I concentrate on current enrollment trends, while I further investigate terminology use and its potential application to education.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT: GENERAL FEATURES

Indiana University (IU)

Indiana University is a large public research institution with regional campuses across the state of Indiana. IU at Bloomington has been chosen for review since it accounts for almost 40% of the total student population in the IU system. Of the 42,464 students enrolled at that branch in the fall of 2011, 77% percent were undergraduate students, with the remaining 23% at the graduate level (http://www.indiana.edu/).

Purdue University (PU)

With a total student enrollment of 74,759 in all its campuses, Purdue University, a research institution, has placed itself among the top schools in the U.S, especially because of its international student enrollment. Like IU at Bloomington, Purdue University in West Lafayette (WL) is the largest of five regional campuses comprising 53% of the entire student population in the Purdue system. The Purdue data digest for the 2010-2011 shows that out of the 39,726 students enrolled at Purdue in WL, over 78% percent were undergraduate students, with the remaining 22% in the graduate category ("Fast Facts").

Ivy Tech State College (IT)

Ivy Tech offers affordable higher education opportunities for students in the state of Indiana. While total student enrollment in the Ivy Tech system is large, given this institution's commitment to offering many "convenient locations," there are few students at each campus. To illustrate, in spite of accounting for only 19% of the total 166,555 student enrollment, Ivy Tech Indianapolis has the largest student population concentrated in a single region. In this discussion, I chose a two-year institution because of the possibility of finding a high rate of minority enrollment at this level.

Ball State University (BS)

Located in Muncie, Ball State is a research institution in the state of Indiana. Of its 18,183 total students in 2010-2011, 16,216 were undergraduate, while the remaining 1, 967 were graduate students. Ball State is the only institution included in this review with no other regional campuses in Indiana.

As seen in the previous brief descriptions, the institutions in this review represent a broad range of campus types and sizes. For instance, while Indiana University and Purdue are large research-oriented institutions, Ivy Tech and Ball State are smaller academic institutions. Including a range of institution types allows the exploration of potential similarities and differences in SUs enrollment. Similarly, the most recent academic year (2010-2011) was chosen as a point of departure. This methodological decision, however, was restricted by the availability of data from each institution.

The following are the hypotheses in this investigation:

> *Hypothesis one*
> Four-year institutions will have more international students from Spanish speaking countries than two-year institutions.

> *Hypothesis two*
> The smaller the institution (based on total student enrollment), the higher the enrollment of SUs born and raised in the U.S.

Hypothesis three
The larger the campus, the more representation of SUs in general.

I discuss these hypotheses below in light of the data related to the enrollment trends of SUs.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT: GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Academic institutions in this investigation tended to classify domestic students by ethnicity and international students by legal status in the country. For instance, the institutions placed domestic SUs under the category of *Hispanics* while they categorized SUs from other countries as *international/foreign students/non-resident aliens*. While the label Hispanic suggests a possible linguistic background, the second designations are general and do not provide much insight into the potential linguistic needs of the students.

In spite of perceived agreement in terminology, the four institutions collected different types and amounts of data. While four-year institutions gathered information on student classification (undergraduate/ graduate), race, and sex, Ivy Tech appeared to put more emphasis on age and the students' academic load (part vs. full time). These categories are not mutually exclusive, but they provide a general idea of the primary emphases in data collection per institution. Different emphases reflect the characteristics of the student population to which the institution caters. Some of this demographic data can provide valuable supplemental information on the students' academic needs. For instance, knowing that a learner has a full-time job while attending school can provide instructors with information on the academic needs of the learner.

Institutions also vary in the degree of specificity in collecting international student data. IU Bloomington and Ball State kept general enrollment data on the total number of international students, in this case 4,826 and 651 respectively ("Enrollment by Ethnicity"; "Fact Book"). Purdue, the institution with the largest total international student enrollment (6,761), provided a more detailed breakdown on students' country of origin ("Purdue ISS"). In contrast to the four-year institutions, Ivy Tech did not have any available information on international student enrollment. For this reason, interpretations regarding hypothesis 1—that four-year institutions will have more international students from Spanish speaking countries than two-year institutions—are limited.

Student Enrollment: Spanish Users

In this investigation, Hispanic enrollment was found to be relatively low, but equally distributed across institutions regardless of the institution's size, with 3%, 3%, and 2.5% Hispanic enrollment at IU, Purdue, and Ball State. This finding appears to present evidence against hypothesis 2—that the smaller the

institution, the higher the enrollment of SUs born and raised in the U.S, who are likely to be classified as Hispanics in reports documenting student enrollment. Instead, research institutions such as Purdue and IU are seeing a small increase of Hispanic enrollment, especially at the undergraduate level, whereas the Hispanic student representation is higher than at the graduate level. As shown in Table 1, even smaller institutions, such as Ball State, seem to be experiencing the same phenomenon.

Table 1.

Comparison of Spanish speaking student enrollment and total student enrollment 2010-2011

Students	Indiana University	Purdue	Ivy Tech	Ball State
Hispanic Undergraduates	1,087	906	N.A	409
Hispanic Graduate	329	224	N.A	32
International students from SS countries	N.A	318	N.A	N.A
Total SS student enrollment	**1.416**	**1.448**	**N.A**	**441**
School's total student enrollment	42,464	39,726	N.A	18,183

Note. Data presented in this table comes from different sources, including: I. U. Fact Book 2010-11, enrollment by Ethnicity/Race and Level; Purdue Digest 2010-2011, enrollment by race/ethnicity; Ball State Fact book 2010-2011, Enrollment by race.

At Purdue, international students from Spanish-speaking countries represented 5% of the total student population in 2010-2011, with roughly an equal number of students at the undergraduate and graduate levels: 139 vs. 179 respectively. This information seems to suggest that SUs in the international student category are more equally distributed at the graduate and undergraduate levels than SUs in the Hispanic American category. In the end, having more precise data on international student enrollment across campuses could allow for a more accurate picture of total SUs collegial participation. For instance, given the type of data found at Purdue, SUs, both Hispanic and international, accounted for 4% of the total student population in 2010-2011.

SUs Student Enrollment: A Diachronic Comparison

Although no exact predictions could be made on the increase or decrease of collegial participation for SUs, rough estimates could be established by

comparing enrollment data. In the following section I attempt to supplement the previous section by examining enrollment trends in the two years prior to 2010-2011. Yet given the lack of data on international student enrollment across institutions, I include data on Hispanic student enrollment only.

As the chart below illustrates, Hispanic student enrollment showed a slight increase from the year 2008 to 2011. All institutions had more SUs on their campuses, with a marked increase in enrollment at IU and Ivy Tech. In 2010-2011, IU had 317 more Hispanic students, followed by Ball State with 55, and by Purdue with 23. Ivy Tech showed an increase of 174 Hispanics from 2008-2009. Although it was initially anticipated that larger institutions would show more SU representation, this was only partially supported by the data. On the one hand, the institution with the highest enrollment (IU) also showed the highest number of SU representation and growth from 2009-10. On the other hand, however, Ivy Tech, an institution smaller than Purdue in terms of campus enrollment, showed the second largest growth of SUs.   In this sense, hypothesis 3 could only be partially supported.

Figure 1.
SUs Student enrollment (graduate and undergraduate): 2008-2011
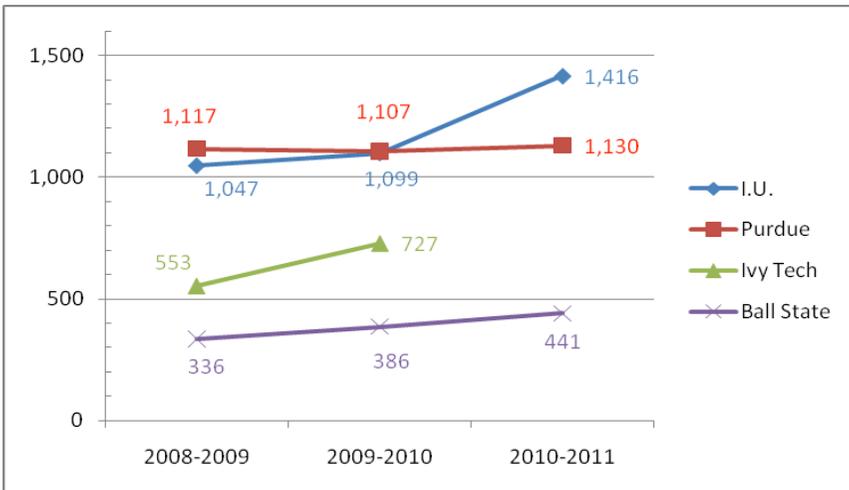
Although small, by comparison to other ethnic groups, SUs' collegial participation appears to be slowly, but steadily on the rise. It is also worth reiterating that given the lack of data, these numbers do not include international SU enrollment, which, if available, might have provided a more accurate picture of SUs' participation in colleges in Indiana. In the end, although currently low, SU enrollment could increase as more SUs leave the K-12 track, institutions

begin collecting more specific demographic data, and more SUs find adequate means to fund their education.

IMPLICATIONS

Although the current presence of SUs at higher levels of education is relatively low compared to that of other language groups, this trend is likely to change in years to come. Academic institutions need to better prepare for this incoming student population. In doing so, academic institutions can start by collecting more specific demographic data on their students and by identifying potential areas posing challenges for students joining the academic community. Given the focus of this investigation on demographic information at colleges, I additionally provide a fourth implication on how colleges' demographic information can inform teaching practices. Although I frame these implications in terms of SUs, they are applicable to other groups of language learners as well.

Reading

Much like other language learners, SUs might find it difficult to switch from reading informal texts (e.g., reading a magazine) to reading formal academic texts as those required as part of post-secondary course work. The language employed in academic texts can be more dense than found in informal reading materials to which SUs might have had access. Additionally, since academic work requires critical engagement with the ideas presented in a text, learners could face challenges in grasping meaning, while at the same time forming their own critical view of the ideas presented.

In this sense, reading poses high cognitive demands on learners; for instance, they must fully comprehend ideas in a text before they can critically assess their value. Additionally, however, other factors such as proficiency level and previous contact with the culture might determine learners' reading comprehension level and the difficulties learners might encounter. As ear learners (Reid, 2006) SUs born and raised in the U.S might be familiar with informal use of the language and expressions they have learned in their interactions with others in the target culture. In contrast, international SUs might have had more interactions with academic reading through their English language training. These previous experiences can determine the degree of difficulty learners might have in completing reading tasks, tasks that are essential to academic performance.

Writing

As another essential skill for success in college, writing plays a significant role in students' academic lives. Much like with reading, SUs will be used to encountering writing in informal settings, such as emails or for those learners

living in foreign language (FL) settings, writing activities used as part of language practice. In this sense, the initiation into academia presupposes a new set of writing skills requiring specific instruction. For instance, international students who have been living in a second language (SL) setting for a number of years could benefit from less grammatical emphasis and more exposure to the rhetorical demands of different written genres. On the other hand, learners who have recently switched from a foreign language to a second language setting might need a heavier emphasis on language command before they can receive instruction on other more idiosyncratic writing issues. Similarly, students who have been born and raised in the second language setting and are simultaneous bilinguals might benefit from explicit discussions on the differences between different written registers and how to navigate from one setting to the next. These learners, in particular, could benefit from exploring the influences that oral speech can have on writing and from learning to distinguish false and positive cognates to manipulate these in their writing.

Aside from identifying the kind of writing instruction SUs can benefit from, gaining a general understanding of the linguistic and rhetorical conventions of the students' first language can help inform writing teaching practices. For example, SUs who are fully proficient and literate in Spanish have been found to rely on long prepositional phrases, which has led researchers to describe Spanish writing as flowery, complex or convoluted (Lazarte & Barry, 2008; Simpson, 2000; Valero-Garces, 1996). Knowing that the writing of SUs in English might rely on the conventions and rhetorical style of Spanish to write in English could help instructors guide writing instruction to target a particular area, in this case, improving conciseness or eliminating wordiness. When no prior knowledge of the students' first language is available, practitioners can still use other resources to assist their students' writing development. Practitioners can use, for instance, observations of recurrent patterns, one-on-one conversations with the students, and negotiation of meaning to support the development of students' writing. Individualized instruction coupled with detailed information on the students' linguistic characteristics and literacy experiences can help enhance writing practices.

Proficiency level and type of learners

Although most of the literature, including this report, tends to focus on the two most divergent populations in the proficiency spectrum (foreign students vs. immigrants), in practice, many of these learners display varying degrees of familiarity with the written conventions of the language. This implication overlaps with previous implications in that language proficiency in English and can be tied to reading and writing proficiency and teaching practices.

As noted above, unlike their foreign language learner counterparts, second language writers might already be familiar with rhetorical conventions used in English writing. In this sense, individuals learning English abroad

might lack the linguistic control of a learner born and raised bilingually. Acknowledging the role foreign language (FL) training could have on SL learners could facilitate instructional practices in that it would more smoothly transition learners from one category into the next without failing to pose adequate challenges to learners with higher levels of linguistic proficiency.

Demographic Information

Academic institutions could collect more specific demographic information on students. This information should address proficiency level issues and it should more clearly discriminate among learners. This issue will be beneficial to all bilingual populations, including SUs, especially those living and residing permanently in the U.S, who might self-report at being Hispanic, but who might have varying levels of proficiency in either Spanish or English.

In particular, academic institutions could collect information on students' languages and the level of proficiency in each. This information could also discriminate between learners who have been living in the second language setting for many years from those who have just recently arrived in the country, so that institutions are able to provide services accordingly. These services could include writing courses targeting newly arrived SUs and other courses targeted to Hispanics who might have learned the language simultaneously with English. Although these suggestions might not be financially feasible in all settings, overall, they could contribute to the writing development of groups of learners and be implemented with all incoming bilingual populations.

In the end, collecting more specific demographic information could enrich both research and classroom practices. Researchers could use demographic data to develop a better understanding of phenomena impacting language users, while practitioners can use demographic information collected by their respective institutions along with demographic information collected in class as active tools to inform and supplement their teaching practices.

Conclusion

Minorities will continue enrolling in academic institutions. SUs along with language learners from other linguistic backgrounds will be likely to influence college demographics in future years. As debates over long-term residents' rights to pay in-state tuition even when they are not legally residing in the country continue to develop (Russel, 2007), more SUs might be likely to enroll in academic institutions. This is not to put into question the status of all SUs in the country, but to point out that the enrollment of SUs in colleges might increase if allowances are made for that portion of the population to have access to education.

As evidenced by the data analyzed, the use of the term Hispanic allows for a general characterization of individuals likely sharing a common language,

yet much like other umbrella terms, it also causes ambiguities regarding the differences in populations addressed. For instance, even though reports place all SUs residing in the U.S as Hispanics, as Suarez Orozco (1989) has argued, major differences in economic stability and educational attainment have been found between Cuban Americans who "are the most affluent… of the major Hispanic populations groups," and Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans, "[who have] the poorest economic circumstances … [and tend to lag] behind Cuban Americans and the "other Hispanics… [who tend to] be better educated..."(p. 21-25). Primarily concerned with immigrant populations and their educational and economic statuses, Suarez Orozco provides an overview of the complex situation and the diversity among a group of learners, often labeled under a single umbrella term.

Currently, the widespread use of terms such as Hispanic and international student do not seem to accurately represent learners in each category. Instead, although a laborious process, academic institutions should collect more specific demographic information on their learners if this information will become the basis for improved teaching practices.

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