



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously-funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the current guidelines, which reflect the most recent information and instructions, at <https://www.neh.gov/program/spotlight-humanities-higher-education>.

Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Education Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: *Revising an Online Business Writing Course*

Institution: University of Puerto Rico

Project Directors: Jacelyn Smallwood Ramos, Brenda Dominguez Rosado

Grant Program: Spotlight on Humanities in Higher Education Exploration Grants

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

Puerto Rico's geographic, political, and social characteristics have sculpted an unparalleled linguistic exchange of English & Spanish on the island. While English and Spanish are the official languages of Puerto Rico, proficient English speakers represent approximately half of the population (U.S.Census Bureau, 2017). Language is the conduit for societal development and interaction therefore as a bilingual country, proficient language skills in English and in Spanish are essential. For this reason, the public University of Puerto Rico in Bayamón (UPRB) supports the development of human potential and resources in the form of English language education. Concurrently, the increasing popularity of distance education has resulted in a metamorphosis of course offerings in higher education institutions (Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem and Stevens, 2012). In an effort to meet student needs, the UPRB has included in its strategic plan the mission of increasing the number of courses offered online. As part of the curricular development of online courses the project, *A systematic approach to online course revision*, will combine English language instruction and online course offerings by piloting a systematic exploration of revision for the online course Effective Business Writing, Research & Reports (INCO 4009). A team of Humanities professors currently offering online courses in English and in conjunction with the Distance Education department will draw on the best practices criteria of Quality Matters to begin a unified approach to course revision. The aim of this project is to ensure the quality of distance education and as a result increase student achievement and retention in the Humanities. Upon successful completion of the exploration of a systematic online course revision, future online course revisions in the Humanities may be replicated and potentially utilized by other courses throughout the institution.

HUMANITIES CONTENT AND ACTIVITIES

At the base of human interaction is language, which influences all facets of life. Language in the Humanities shines a light on how language is used in society and culture for greater understanding and appreciation. In the case of students at UPRB, Spanish is the language of instruction for every class outside of the English department. There are approximately thirty-five courses offered each semester within the English department, but only four classes are currently being offered online. Two of the four classes are directly related to the Business Administration department, nevertheless they require the participation of the Humanities department since these courses are delivered completely in English and the Business Administration faculty, at this time, are unable to deliver the course in English. Because of this, the Effective Business Writing, Research & Reports course is interdisciplinary, bringing together linguistics, writing composition, and professional skills development, making this a valued course in the institution.

Of the four courses offered online, INCO 4009, was chosen to be the first course formally revised and validated by the review team because it is a required course for all Business Administration students and is available to students enrolled in other programs as an elective. In the past two years this course has been taken by 385 students. It was recently converted from a face-to-face course to an online course. The general objective of the course is for students to develop socio-humanistic and cultural knowledge that he/she will apply in his/her social and professional environment. The content of the Effective Business Writing, Research & Reports course focuses on cognitive, interpersonal through written communication, and intercultural intelligence through language, all the while presenting professional skills. This is accomplished by analyzing and evaluating written texts, case studies, reports, and documents in American English. It is impossible to teach a language without teaching the culture (Fuller, 2009). As Humanists, we strive to support our students' intellectual development and appreciation for other cultures as well

as their own culture. Through the comparative and contrastive analysis of the English language and American culture to Spanish and Puerto Rican culture, students will develop a greater appreciation for cultural differences and professional practices. By developing both oral and written language skills, students improve their effective interaction with others both on the island and abroad.

INCO 4009 is the fusion of two courses within the Humanities: Grammar and Composition & Reading and Technical Report Writing. It was created to fulfill the requirements of developing English language skills as well as professional writing skills. It is a required course for the following four-year programs: all four majors of the Business Administration department (Accounting, Finance, Management, and Marketing). Business Administration is the second largest department at the institution. It is currently being offered once a semester face-to-face and online, for a total of four sections per academic year. It impacts roughly one hundred students a year with the opportunity for multiple section offerings in the future. The course was initially created due to the pandemic but has continuously been offered online due to its demand from the student body. The focus of this sixteen week semester course is to engage students in writing composition and to improve their oral and written communication skills in their second language, English. Students practice writing skills such as document organization, cohesion, and word choice. By orally presenting the letters, memos, proposals, and research reports they have created, students practice their oral communication skills. The online course provides students with the opportunity to accommodate their work and/or family schedules while continuing to pursue their career goals. Additionally, online classes allow 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, access to course materials which allows students to review the material multiple times, an added benefit for English language learners who through the use of videos, could watch, rewatch, and even slow the instruction speed for greater understanding, which can lead to higher achievement. Additionally, the course was created and launched in 2020; however, online course offerings are fairly new at UPRB, so a rigorous course revision plan has not yet been established by the institution.

In 2019, there were 977 incoming freshmen, and 29% listed their major as either business administration or office management. While representing more than a quarter of the new students, both majors scored the lowest on the student evaluation exam for English proficiency administered to incoming students, resulting in a great need for quality instruction in English (UPRB Self-Study Report 2021-2022, 2021). UPRB students can benefit from this grant since it seeks to improve student learning outcomes in a virtual environment. Since English is not most students' first language, one advantage of distance learning is that it allows for a less intimidating setting than a traditional classroom, which is beneficial to those students whose confidence in using English as a second language is not as strong. Students may feel more comfortable taking language risks when they are in their own personal space versus a classroom. The use of online forums, webinars, and groupware such as Google Docs and Microsoft Teams, may allow students the comfortability to be more involved, thereby improving their English language skills which will undoubtedly be utilized in their future professional lives.

The students at UPRB are an underserved population due to the fact that 72% of the UPRB student body receive Pell Grants reflecting a mostly low-income status population (UPRB Self-Study Report 2021-2022, 2021). Notwithstanding, their enrollment at UPRB indicates their desire to improve their economic position through higher education. As a bilingual country, those who are fluent in both English and Spanish are more marketable for employers looking to appeal to various audiences. An average of twenty-five students are enrolled each semester in this online course with varying degrees of English proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students enrolled are typically second year students majoring in one of the six business programs

offered at UPRB, and are typically between the ages of 19-24. The English Department consists of three tenured professors, two tenure-track professors, and nine adjunct professors. The revision committee will consist of three faculty members from the English Department.

“Courses should be viewed as living documents that will change and adapt with time and information”(McGahan, 2018; Wambeke, Barry & Bruhl, 2017). Successful courses, whether face-to-face or online, require a continuous, consistent process of revision (Baldwin, et al., 2018). This project would spearhead an initiative for the importance of revising the other online courses offered by the English Department and within the institution. It may also serve as a framework for the future creation of new online courses. One of the aims of this revision is to ensure that the quality of the course is as rigorous and beneficial to the students online as it is for the students who attend in person. The NEH Spotlight grant would allow for adequate time to explore and review this course in order to strengthen humanities teaching and learning in a virtual environment. An additional byproduct of the revision process may include opportunities to strengthen student, faculty, and institutional participation in online teaching and learning.

To maintain a focus on best practices, this revision committee plans to use the eight general standards in the Quality Matters rubric. These standards serve as guidelines for effective teaching and learning and include: (1) course overview and introduction (2) learning objective (competencies), (3) assessment and measurement (4) instructional materials, (5) learning activities and learner interaction (6) course technology (7) learner support and (8) accessibility and usability (Quality Matters, 2016). As a model of sound pedagogical practice, they will support the exploration of a course revision process. While the Quality Matters general standards represent what is to be evaluated, McGahan’s (2018) steps to reflective course review and revision are clear guideposts on how to conduct a course review and will also be used to inform the revision process.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

The project director will be Jacelyn Smallwood Ramos, EdD, an associate professor in the English department. Her role will be to organize revision meetings, lead the revision process and monitor progress. She has taught English to Speakers of Other Languages for 12 years and holds a master’s degree from the University of Maryland, College Park in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and a doctorate degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras.

Dr. Brenda Dominguez Rosado is a tenured associate professor of English at the University of Puerto Rico, Bayamon. She has a B.A. in Secondary Education in TESS (Teaching English to Spanish Speakers), an M.A. in American and British Literature, and a Ph.D. in the Language and Literature of the Anglophone Caribbean (Major: Sociolinguistics), all degrees from the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras campus. Dr. Dominguez has been an educator for thirty-eight years and has been part of the UPRB faculty for fifteen years.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND BENEFIT

In the past five years, Puerto Rico has encountered significant challenges in the face of natural disasters such as Hurricane Fiona in 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, earthquakes in 2019, and Hurricane María in 2017. As a result, the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) System has been challenged to revitalize its educational landscape through the creation of online courses and transformation of traditional courses to technology assisted courses. Despite the challenges faced by natural disasters, the UPRB has maintained its commitment to its mission which “ consists of

stimulating and supporting the personal and intellectual development of a competent student body in the sciences, arts, technology, research and in the generation of new knowledge; all based on ethics and social commitment” (UPRB Self-Study Report 2021-2022, 2021).

UPRB enrollment is for undergraduate degree seeking students only and was originally established as a community college in 1971; in 1998 it became an autonomous campus. In the Fall 2021 semester, the total enrollment was 3,326. All students are Hispanic with varying levels of English proficiency. Twenty-four percent of the students are first-generation college students representing almost a quarter of the student body as new members of higher education. The June 2020 graduating class consisted of 499 graduates (UPRB Self-Study Report 2021-2022, 2021). UPRB offers three higher education tracks; the first is a two-year associate degree with four programs of study, the second track is for a four year bachelor’s degree with thirteen study programs, and the final track is for students that will begin their studies at UPRB with the intention of transferring to another campus within the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) system to continue their studies.

The deflating economy has severely impacted funds allocated to the University of Puerto Rico. This has resulted in a decrease in funds assigned to the UPRB since the UPR is an entity covered under the federal PROMESA Law (UPRB Self-Study Report, 2021-2022, p.13). This grant will help to compensate for the reduction in resources at UPRB, all the while supporting the university's educational goal of improving the quality of education by evaluating the effectiveness of the course's curricular goals. Furthermore, “...many institutions put great emphasis on course development” (Baldwin, Ching, & Hsu, 2018; Dimou & Kameas, 2016; Robinson & Wizer, 2016), but revision may be seen as a secondary process. The Spotlight Grant would benefit the institution by prioritizing course revision and allowing faculty to explore an in-depth course revision process with the aim of offering concrete recommendations for improving the quality of the course and the successful implementation of its online programs which impact seven departments and is open to all students as an elective.

Reconstructing traditional face-to-face courses into distance learning courses online, with the same quality and rigor, has required faculty to rethink their course content and delivery. The task of adapting and creating new strategies to study, teach, excel, and fulfill academic goals has required a singular focus on course adaptation; however, this proposal seeks to provide the revision team space for reflective practice which to date has not been available. Performing an in-depth analysis of the structure, content, and evaluations for this particular online class to determine their effectiveness or areas in need of improvement, all of which seek to enhance learning, student retention, graduation rate, and ultimately achieve the vision of UPRB: “... to be the leading institution in our region and contribute to the sustainable development of the country. We aspire to educate, through the interaction and integration of scientific, humanistic, and technological knowledge, citizens who are informed, responsible, critical and committed to collaborating with the common welfare” (UPRB Self-Study Report, 2021-2022, p.19).

As a result of more pressing expenses due to the damage caused by natural disasters, there is no funding to support the revision of online courses. Consequently, this course revision proposal, if granted, would support the Humanities department’s exploration of the online course revision for *Effective Business Writing, Research & Reports* resulting in a complete course revision project ready to launch in the development stage.

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Work plan

A systematic approach to online course revision has the goal of developing a clear and systematic method for ensuring the quality of online course revisions. To date, none of the four online courses offered by the English department have been reviewed by a committee of peers within the Humanities department or by the institution. This warrants an analysis of student learning effectiveness as the lack thereof could hinder its successful continuation. A course revision will allow for better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses and will also allow for the updating of digital course materials and activities in distance learning based on the latest research regarding distance learning. The purpose of the revision is to determine what needs to be incorporated, eliminated, or updated to improve student learning outcomes. During the review, revision team members will evaluate the extent to which student achievement is reflected in meeting course goals. The revision team will meet monthly on every third Friday for 120 minutes beginning on July 1, 2023.

The work plan will be divided into monthly tasks. Each month a specific review standard according to Quality Matters will be addressed in the course INCO 4009 Effective Business Writing, Research & Reports. During the revision process, team members will record their ideas regarding what is working well and where there is need for improvement. Additional resources may be discovered during the exploration. The current professor will also keep a record of the successes and challenges of the course as it progresses. The final phase will provide a detailed framework of the revision process which may serve as a model for future course revisions. UPRB currently does not have a campus-wide course revision process; therefore, this innovative project may provide guidelines for the university to consider. The documented experience of the exploration of course revision will serve as a model to approach online course revision. Finally, a white paper will share faculty, student, and team feedback regarding the experience of exploring a systematic approach to online course revision along with suggestions for future implementation.

(SEE CALENDAR)

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| July 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Initial meeting to discuss the revision process using the Quality Matters rubric● Set revision goals & share proposed timetable● Establish the method for revision committee members to document their observations, ideas & recommendations throughout the revision process as a separate evaluation |
| August 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Course Overview & Introduction Standard 1 Indicators 1-4 structure<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Clear instructions to begin the course○ Stated purpose and structure of the course○ Video tutorial of how to navigate the course○ Institutional policies provided● Meet with the current professor to discuss and provide reflective guide questions & a note-taking instrument to be used while the course is being delivered.● Professor will record student emails, discussion posts, questions, virtual office visits to be shared with the revision team |
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| September 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus on Standard 1 Indicators 5-9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Technology requirements provided with access to obtain them ○ Student expectations for computer & digital information literacy skills are clearly stated ○ Students confirm review & receipt of the course introduction policies and expectations ○ Instructor includes a self-introduction ○ Students are asked to introduce themselves |
| October 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus on Standard 2 Learning Objectives (Competencies) Indicators 1-5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Learning objectives are stated from the learner's perspective and are clearly visible to students ○ Learning objectives, competencies and evaluations are aligned (could be presented in table form for greater readability) ○ Activities are directly related to course objectives ○ Objectives are suitable for the level of the course |
| November 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus on Standard 3 Assessment & Measurement Indicators 1-5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assessments measure the achievement of the stated objectives ○ Grading policy is clearly stated ○ Specific & descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of student work ○ Assessments are appropriate, sequenced and varied ○ Students can track their progress and receive timely feedback ● Administer first student course evaluation |
| December 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus on Standard 4 Instructional Materials Indicators 1-5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Instructional materials contribute to the achievement of learning objectives ○ The relationship between the materials as aides to completing activities is clearly explained ○ Course materials model academic integrity by providing source references & permissions ○ The materials reflect current theory & practice ○ A variety of instructional materials are used ● Analyze content presented, video lectures, video content and other course materials ● Administer second student course evaluation |
| January 2024 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus on Standard 5 Learner Activities & Learner Interaction Indicators 1-4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Activities promote learner achievement of learning objectives ○ Activities provide opportunities for interaction to support learning ○ There is a clearly stated plan for interacting with learners ○ The requirements for learner interaction are clearly stated ● What opportunities are provided for interaction with students? |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administer third student course evaluation • Collect the data on the LMS (# of views, grade distribution, too high or too low, quality of responses to forums, which questions did students score lowest on) |
| February 2024 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on Standard 6 Course Technology Indicators 1-4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Technological tools support learning objectives o Tools promote engagement and active learning o A variety of technology is used o Information for protecting student data and privacy is provided |
| March 2024 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on Standard 7 Learner Support Indicators 1-4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Technical support offerings and links are provided o Institutional academic support offerings and links are provided o Institution accessibility policies & services are articulated and linked o Student support service offerings and links are provided • What are common technological issues as expressed by students? |
| April 2024 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on Standard 8 Accessibility and Usability • Is each lesson, module or topic labeled? • Does each lesson, module or topic share a brief description? |
| May 2024 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review record of student emails, discussion posts, questions, virtual office visits for student feedback evaluation • Review formative student feedback form from 1st semester Aug. 2023-Dec. 2023 • Review the data on the LMS (# of views, grade distribution, too high or too low, quality of responses to forums, which questions did students score lowest on) • Incorporate professor's feedback from 1st semester • Review team meeting to share observations, questions and recommendations |
| June 2024 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make recommendations for implementation for first semester Aug. -Dec. 2024 • Prepare white paper of the course revision process |