

¿Qué tal la clase? Spanish On-Line Spanish instructor *Ed Sterling* shares his experience setting up and launching the Spanish 1A on-line class.

Q: What was your motivation for being the one to venture into on-line language learning?

A: I had learned some new skills by using computers and the Internet for professional growth, and I had found that the World Wide Web had many sites that taught, reinforced and exercised one's knowledge of Spanish. So, I wanted to offer the course online in order to serve those students who require the flexibility of time schedule or who want computerized tools to be built into the course. I already knew that online courses were not for everyone, because a person has to be self-disciplined enough to spend the time necessary.

Q: Did your previous experience with technology make you feel perhaps more prepared for taking on the various new procedures you would have to learn to have a successful class?

A: Having given workshops to fellow faculty members to promote web-based activities for students, I felt that I should take the next step and teach a class online.

Q: Could you briefly describe the process of working with TMI (Technology Mediated Instruction) to prepare the class?

A: TMI and the design support person, *Patricia Delich*, made the process do-able. Web CT

is the environment that I worked in, and *Patricia* made it possible. Basically, I broke down the steps of doing the materials in the Puntos de partida Spanish textbook that is used in our CCSF Spanish 1 and 2 courses. There is the text, audio and workbook for the lab component, and a written workbook. Without the classroom experience, the students needed more initial pronunciation practice that the lab provides on its own. So, I put a link to the University of Iowa Spanish sound library into the first week's tasks. Students who can push themselves to do the work had a step-by-step program for beginning Spanish. To evaluate them, I modified tests so they could be done online, but more importantly, I added tasks that require them to voice-mail me with assignments they can prepare and rehearse before calling. Students were also asked intermittently to do additional web-based cultural assignments. One is about the adoption of Chinese orphans by Spaniards, and another is about Afro-Peruvian music videos. TMI gave me the skills to put all of this together.

Q: How many students did you have enrolled in your class at the first census period, and, looking at your enrollments now, does there seem to be a drop rate similar to a classroom-based class?

A: The first semester, I held to the department cap of 35 students. However, I discovered that some students never

even logged in once! That is the equivalent of a no-show in a regular classroom! Also, I found that there was about as much attrition as in a regular class. So, the second semester I took 45 students. There are fewer than 20 students who are actually up-to-date in the tasks, but there are another ten or so who are active in the class, but behind. I think this about the same as one would experience in a daytime class, and a little better than an evening class.

Q: How has the expectation of on-line learning measured up to the reality? That is, what has been the biggest surprise in teaching the class?

A: I thought that students who would take a class online would already be very motivated and computer-savvy. Now, I believe there is little difference between the onliners and the regular students. Furthermore, there is more time spent giving feedback to individuals in the online setting, as is to be expected.

The biggest surprise is that my time spent on the class is about double any other class, yet, I deeply enjoy giving lengthy individual feedback to the hard-working students. I wish I had the time to do it with all my in-class students. I am only exaggerating a little when I say that teaching 30 students online is like tutoring 30 different students. *Ed Sterling*