APPLICANT:
Paloma Moscardó-Vallés
Lecturer at the Spanish and Portuguese Department

DATES:
Phase 1: exploratory trip (without students) Spring Break 2017
Phase 2: trip with students as a part of a Medical Spanish class Spring Break 2018
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

I have been fortunate to work at the Spanish Department since 2006. Given my interest and experience in the field, I was asked in 2008 to teach the Medical Spanish course. Under different formats (SPA 108, 207 and now 205), I have developed a curriculum that combines the practice of linguistic tools for a medical interview with an introduction to the social and cultural aspects the students have to consider while working in the medical field in particular with the Latinx population.

One of the most important parts of this class is a community project. I believe that having students interact with the members of the Latinx community is an invaluable experience. What they learn in this short experience makes a much greater impression on them than the data they are exposed to in the classroom. From the point of view of a language class, it is also fundamental that the students use their skills in a real situation, far from the controlled environment of the class, with native speakers that will challenge the student's comprehension, production, and improvisation skills.

Recently, I have been put in contact with a team of Ophthalmologists (Conestoga Eye Group, www.conestogaeye.com/projects-3) that has been organizing a Medical Mission in Ecuador for the past 4 years and, before that, in other Latin American countries. The goal of this effort is to offer eye clinics in rural areas of Riobamba. Guided by a local organization, doctors and other volunteers travel to different schools and provide care to the maximum number of children and school staff they can see in a week. As an example, during last year's trip, the team screened over 1,100 children in 5 days, providing 166 pairs of glasses and performing 16 surgeries. They could be even more efficient and reach more children if they had more Spanish speakers working with them since most of the doctors don't speak any Spanish.

My idea is to design a course for the Medical Spanish students with this trip as the core. The classes will prepare the students during the first part of the semester for the experience, and then the class will travel to Riobamba during the break. Afterwards, students will reflect on the experience and will deepen the research about some of the topics we will encounter in Ecuador. In addition, beyond this course, the eye doctors from Conestoga have been happy to work with students interested in doing research and publishing about the medical topics they have seen in Ecuador, which I think, is a very attractive opportunity for our students.

In our global world, and in our diverse country, being able to communicate effectively with the patients is a tremendous asset for our future doctors. As a language teacher, the opportunity of taking my students on a medical mission like this one is a dream come true. They will not only be using their linguistic knowledge in a real context (a Spanish-speaking country), they will also have the chance to practice their medical vocabulary and skills. Research has shown that students who participate in projects in a Spanish-speaking country improve
their speaking abilities significantly compared to those who have not participated in such programs. On the other hand, I am confident the students will not only have a very rich learning experience, but they will also provide a useful service to the community, and the trip will shape their future not only as doctors but also as human beings.

In order to prepare the syllabus, I will travel myself and be part of the Medical Mission during Spring Break 2017. On this trip, I will collect information about introductory topics such as Ecuador’s health care system, demographics, socioeconomics, politics, and the cultural and linguistic landscape. I will also compile specific medical vocabulary that will be useful for the trip. I am planning on interviewing local medical staff and do some research on the medical system in place as well as the use of traditional medicine.

More specifically:

- I will collect information about the indigenous population and their particular challenges with regard to health care. I will also collect information about other health problems besides the ophthalmology related, that affect this area.

- I will gather a corpus of vocabulary for the course with: (1) specific variants to this area of Ecuador and (2) words in the ophthalmology field and other general words that will be particularly useful during the mission.

- I will gather any relevant information to better prepare the students for the trip, the goal of the course being a successful experience in Ecuador for everybody.

I believe in the tremendous benefits that such a trip will have for our students, but I am also aware of the impact that such experiences can have on the communities we will visit. A good way to avoid negative consequences is to prepare the students before leaving. The design of this course will allow me to give the students a fair amount of relevant information about the context of the communities we are going to visit and also to dedicate time for a reflection on the ethics of volunteering abroad.

One aspect of this medical mission that I believe is crucial is the fact that the eye-doctor group works directly with an organization based in Riobamba: FIBUSPAM. This organization has a clinic in Riobamba where they perform the necessary surgeries and follow-up once the American group has left. They provide all the logistics such as where to go to provide the medical services. From my point of view, it is very beneficial for our students to work directly with local doctors and health workers.

I hope to share my experience and the outcome of my learning with my Department. I believe the opportunity of having this intersection between medicine and culture is a very rich and
promising field that hopefully will be beneficial for my colleagues too. In a broader sense, even though Princeton has not a medical school, we do have a growing number of pre-med students, and such a course can be of great interest to them since it combines the medical content with the language and the cultural experience.

I profoundly believe in the value of topics that have an intersection between different disciplines since they prepare our students for the real world. This course with a trip element is a perfect example. At the same time, it will contribute to Princeton’s goals of internationalization. I see it as an opportunity to create solid bonds with a community in a very concrete, organized interaction that is useful for both sides.

**TIMELINE:**

- Travel to Ecuador: Saturday, March 18, 2017 – Sunday, March 26, 2017
- Work on the material collected on the trip: End of March to September 2017
- September 2018: Medical Spanish course with the Ecuador component will be proposed for Spring 2018.
- Spring semester 2018: class will take place with the trip during Spring Break

There will 12 be students in this class, which is the maximum for a language class and also an ideal size for the trip. The students will be selected from applicants that have to be pre-med and be outside the language requirement of the department since it will be a 200 level course. Those requirements assure that, before taking this course, the students have sufficient fluency in Spanish and an interest in medicine.