

The Creation of a Portuguese Teaching Minor for Secondary Education Majors

Blair Bateman

Brigham Young University

Abstract: Although Portuguese is the seventh most widely-spoken language in the world, Portuguese instruction in the United States continues to be limited almost exclusively to the post-secondary level. This article describes an initiative by Brigham Young University to introduce Portuguese instruction at the secondary school level in response to the decision by the Utah State Office of Education to offer teachers a world language endorsement in Portuguese. The article details the university's creation of a new Portuguese Teaching minor, along with the expected learning outcomes, required courses and assessments, and logistics of the program.

Portuguese is estimated to be the seventh most widely-spoken language in the world, with approximately 178 million native speakers worldwide and 193 million speakers including non-natives (Lewis, 2009). As such, Portuguese surpasses French, German, Japanese, and Russian in terms of the number of speakers. The United States alone is home to over 500,000 Portuguese speakers (Modern Language Association, 2010). Portuguese is the official language of eight countries, of which the largest, Brazil, now has the eighth-largest gross domestic product in the world (World Bank, 2010).

In light of these figures, one might expect that Portuguese would be more widely taught in American schools. Unfortunately, Portuguese instruction in the United States continues to be limited almost exclusively to the post-secondary level. According to a recent nationwide survey by the Center for Applied Linguistics (2010), Portuguese is offered at only one tenth of one percent of the nation's secondary schools.

Chamberlain's (1979) oft-cited volume *Building a Portuguese Program* discusses some of the challenges in the teaching of Portuguese in the United States. Although Chamberlain's work focuses mainly on post-secondary programs, some of the arguments cited in the volume apply to the teaching of Portuguese at the K-12 level as well. Harmons' (1979) chapter in the same volume asserts that Portuguese suffers from low esteem in the U.S., with Americans and the

American education system believing it is the language of Portugal alone. Harmon recommends promoting Portuguese study by stressing the Brazil-Portugal relationship, recruiting Spanish-speaking students, and stressing the relevance of Portuguese to other programs.

In a sense, establishing Portuguese programs at the K-12 level presents a circular chicken-and-egg type of problem: schools do not offer Portuguese classes because few teachers are prepared or licensed to teach it, and teacher preparation institutions do not offer Portuguese programs because few schools offer classes in the language. Because decades of experience suggest that a demand for Portuguese at the K-12 level is not imminent, it may be that the only way to increase Portuguese offerings is to begin by making training in Portuguese teaching an option for students in teacher preparation programs, ostensibly in conjunction with preparation to teach another language such as Spanish. This article reports on the creation of a pre-service program for Portuguese teachers at Brigham Young University (BYU), a large private university located in Provo, Utah.

In response to the creation of a K-12 world language endorsement for teachers by the Utah State Office of Education in July 2009, BYU decided to offer a minor in Portuguese Teaching beginning in Fall 2010. As host to one of the nation's largest Portuguese programs, BYU is in a unique position to offer such a minor. Our undergraduate- and graduate-level Portuguese classes enroll approximately 400 students, many of whom have served as missionaries in one of the 31 Portuguese-speaking missions of BYU's sponsoring institution, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and have developed fluency in the language. In terms of faculty, BYU has four full-time Portuguese faculty members and two part-time faculty, plus one full-time professor who specializes in Portuguese and Spanish linguistics and another who specializes in Portuguese

and Spanish pedagogy (the author of this article). As such, BYU offers a full slate of upper-division courses in the Portuguese language and in Lusophone literatures and cultures, creating an ideal opportunity for the preparation of Portuguese teachers.

Like other teaching minors at BYU, the Portuguese Teaching minor was designed under the auspices of the Secondary Education initial teacher licensure program. As such, is intended to be taken in conjunction with a teaching major in another subject, along with the required education courses in adolescent development, multicultural education, educating students with disabilities, and classroom management. We anticipate that this new teaching minor will appeal primarily to two groups of students: (a) returned missionaries from Portuguese-speaking countries who desire to become language teachers and would otherwise probably teach only Spanish; and (b) students majoring in teaching another foreign language who desire a teaching minor in an additional language.

The remainder of this article explains the expected learning outcomes, required courses and assessments, and logistics of the new Portuguese Teaching minor at BYU.

Expected Learning Outcomes

Following are the expected learning outcomes for the Portuguese Teaching minor:

1. Students will demonstrate skill in using the Portuguese language, including the ability to express themselves effectively orally and in writing, as well as the ability to teach the language accurately to their students.
2. Students will be able to discuss key aspects of Lusophone literatures and cultures.

3. Students will be able to create a classroom environment that is conducive to learning, plan effective lessons, teach with a variety of instructional strategies suited to the needs of their students, and accurately assess their students' learning.

Course Requirements

Students wishing to pursue a Portuguese Teaching minor must complete four semesters of lower-division Portuguese courses or the equivalent; six upper-division courses in Portuguese grammar and linguistics and Lusophone literatures and cultures; and two teaching methods courses. The specific course requirements are as follows:

Prerequisite courses – 16 credit hours:

Port 101 First-Year Portuguese (4 hrs.)

Port 102 First-Year Portuguese (4 hrs.)

Port 201 Third-Semester Portuguese (4 hrs.)

Port 202 Fourth-Semester Portuguese: Reading and Comprehension (4 hrs.)

These courses are intended to provide a foundation in speaking, listening, reading, and writing Portuguese, as well as in grammar and culture. The courses may be waived for students with sufficient proficiency in the language.

Portuguese language courses – 9 credit hours:

Port 321 Third-Year Portuguese Grammar and Composition 1 (3 hrs.)

Port 322 Third-Year Portuguese Grammar and Composition 2 (3 hrs.)

These courses are intended to expand students' understanding and mastery of Portuguese grammar, as well as to develop the ability to write academically in Portuguese.

Port 326 Portuguese Phonetics and Pronunciation (3 hrs.) or

Port 329 Survey of Luso-Brazilian Linguistics (3 hrs.)

These courses are intended to provide an understanding of the Portuguese linguistic system. Students have the option of taking the broader survey class (Port 329) or a more specialized course in phonetics and pronunciation (Port 326). We believe the latter option will prove useful for students who need work on their pronunciation, or who desire to improve their understanding of the Portuguese phonetic system.

Lusophone literature courses – 6 credits:

Port 339 Introduction to Portuguese and Brazilian Literature (3 hrs)

Port 441 Survey of Portuguese Literature (3 hrs.) or

Port 451 Survey of Brazilian Literature (3 hrs)

These courses are intended to develop a foundation understanding of the Portuguese language and literatures, a basic vocabulary of literary terms, skills in extensive reading and interpretive writing, and an introduction to critical approaches to literature.

Lusophone culture courses – 3 credits:

Port 345 Portuguese Civilization (3 hrs.) or

Port 355 Brazilian Civilization (3 hrs.)

These courses are intended to provide an understanding of the culture, history, art, music, and traditions of Portugal or Brazil.

Teaching methods courses – 6 credits:

Span 377 Spanish Teaching Methods 1 (3 hrs.)

Span 378 Spanish Teaching Methods 2 (3 hrs.)

Because we do not anticipate having enough Portuguese Teaching minors to justify a separate methods course, at least not initially, students will take our Spanish methods courses. These courses are designed to develop prospective teachers' ability to plan effective lessons based on the national *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*, teach with a variety of instructional strategies, and assess their students' language and culture learning. There is precedent for Portuguese-speaking students taking these Spanish methods courses; our graduate student instructors of Portuguese have taken them for many years, and have had little or no difficulty understanding and participating in the courses. Portuguese speakers are allowed to develop lesson plans and materials and teach microlessons in Portuguese, which actually provides a valuable opportunity for the Spanish speakers in the course to play the role of "students" of a language that they do not already speak.

As previously mentioned, we anticipate that many Portuguese Teaching minors will be pursuing a teaching major in another foreign language and will have already completed methods courses in that language. For these students, one or both methods courses may be waived. Spanish Teaching majors may count the two methods courses toward both a Spanish Teaching major and a Portuguese Teaching minor. For students majoring in teaching another language besides Spanish who have had a methods course in that language, the first of the two methods courses, Spanish 377, may be waived. We hope that these waivers will provide an added incentive for students majoring in Spanish, French, or German Teaching to pursue a Portuguese Teaching minor.

Assessments of Student Learning

In order to qualify for a world language endorsement, the Utah State Office of Education requires all teachers to pass an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) at the Advanced Low level or better. BYU's College of Humanities pays the cost for Portuguese Teaching minors to take the OPI in Portuguese.

Other assessments required of all teaching majors and minors at BYU include (1) a Teacher Work Sample, a detailed unit plan designed to be taught to a specific group of students, with pre-assessments of students' knowledge, plans for instruction, assessments of students' learning, and a reflection on the success of the unit; and (2) an assessment of students' teaching skills during their student teaching experience, completed by the students' university supervisor and their mentor teacher. Because Portuguese Teaching minors currently will not have the opportunity to student teach in Portuguese due to the lack of existing programs, these assessments will be completed in their teaching major.

An additional assessment that is currently under development is Portuguese WebCLIPS (the "CLIPS" stands for Computerized Language Instruction and Practice Software). This program consists of a series of computer modules that provide a diagnostic assessment of students' mastery of Portuguese grammar principles, as well as practice with specific principles. The software is scheduled for completion in Fall 2010 and will be available free online to BYU students as well as students at other institutions. We plan to require Portuguese Teaching minors to complete the diagnostic tests and work through the practice modules for any grammar principles in which they show a need for improvement.

Conclusion

“If you build it, he will come,” affirms the voice that actor Kevin Costner’s character hears in the movie *Field of Dreams*. We hope that building a Portuguese Teaching minor will invite students to come – students who love the Portuguese language and Lusophone cultures and who desire to teach them in secondary schools. We anticipate that our graduates will initially be hired to teach Spanish or another language, and that after gaining the confidence of school administrators, they may receive approval to offer one or more Portuguese classes.

One of the components of our teaching methods classes is a unit on advocacy for foreign language programs. It is our hope that Portuguese Teaching minors will apply what they have learned in order to advocate for the creation of Portuguese programs in U.S. public schools. Although such programs will undoubtedly be few in number, at least initially, we believe they have the potential to grow in the coming years. The key, of course, is to prepare teachers who are skillful enough that students want to take their classes, and when they do, they become “hooked” on Portuguese.

Works Cited

Center for Applied Linguistics. “Foreign language teaching in U.S. schools.” *Results of a national survey*. Washington, DC, 2010. PDF.

Chamberlain, B. J. *Building a Portuguese program*. East Lansing, MI: Latin American Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1979.

Harmon, R. M. “An eclectic approach to Portuguese program development.” *Building a Portuguese program*. Ed. B.J. Chamberlain. East Lansing, MI: Latin American Studies Center, Michigan State University (1979): 20-28.

Lewis, M. P. *Ethnologue: Languages of the world*. 2009. <http://www.ethnologue.com/>

Modern Language Association. *MLA Language Map*. 2010. <http://www.mla.org/>

World Bank. *World Development Indicators*. 2010. <http://datafinder.worldbank.org/about-world-development-indicators>

Viera, D. J. "A selected annotated bibliography on the history of Portuguese language teaching in the United States." *Hispania* 73 (1992): 445-453.