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Web 2.0 Tools in the Foreign Language Classroom

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From: Dr. Andrés Villagrá

RE: Thinkfinity Grant Mid-Project Report

Date: July 16, 2009

Cornerstone #3

Project: Web 2.0 Tools in the Foreign Language Classroom

Mid-Project Reports - Please submit the following:
A) Please outline your original goals.

"The Spanish Lounge de Pace University": Goals of the Proposed Project. (2008)

This project is two-fold: The development of both the social networking environment "Spanish Lounge at Pace University" (http://spanishlounge.wetpaint.com); and the student piloting community project called: "Spanish Success Story". Both pilot projects have already started this Fall 2008 and are under way at this point. The funds requested will help with a additional design work and maintenance of these projects.

1- The "Spanish Lounge de Pace University"

The purpose of the "Spanish Lounge de Pace University" project is to provide a social networking space for present students, alumni and other professional and friends connected with the Spanish community at Pace University. The goal of this social network has started as a collaborative wiki covering the following content areas: "members' area"; the "Spanish Success Story" project; student and professional resources; projects and collaboration; and Web 2.0 media tools.

In spite of its short existence, this challenging and innovative project has been labeled as pioneering project in the country. After an initial membership screening, authors are given permission to collaborate and create within this Internet site in Spanish and in English translation or to provide a summary. In the last two months, our community has grown over 56 members composed of present and graduated students, professors and Information Technology members from Pace University; high school students and students from other universities (such as Drexell University), as well as other professionals and friends (such as an archeologist, a former United Nations official and writer, and a Cambridge University Press representative). Here is the site address: http://spanishlounge.wetpaint.com.

Still in its preliminary stages, the student resource section also provides cultural, grammatical and literary support for use in Spanish language classes at all levels and it would be extremely useful for presenting cultural information in the lower level courses (110 to 280). Sections include: links to the Dyson Academic Advisement office, grants

and study abroad information, online grammar resources, as well as video, radio and TV programming in Spanish from around the world.

B) What progress have you made towards your original goals on your project to date?

1- The website "Spanish Lounge de Pace University" has been nominated as one of the best 5 educational sites of the year within the wiki environment of about 1.5 million wiki sites.

2- The "Spanish Lounge de Pace University" has been accepted for presentation at the "Campus Technology" Conference in Boston, July 26-29, 2009. This is certainly the most important conference in educational technology in the US. Certainly, acceptance for presentation at this conference is quite competitive. The acceptance of my presentation is recognition of the high quality of the material being developed in this website.

My last year use of this educational tool has resulted in a tremendous educational advancement in the teaching of Spanish with Technology.

3- Students in the Intermediate Conversation course created an electronic portfolio composed of their autobiography as a Spanish language learner, 4-5 compositions written during the semester and a final project of contributions to the "Spanish Success in the US" project already started the prior semester. In this occasion, students were required to interview a person of success in their field of specialization and record the interview in video. Students interviewed psychologists, professionals in the criminal justice and medical fields, musicians, actors, etc related to the Hispanic World, or of Hispanic origin or both. Once the interview was typed and uploaded into our website, students were also required to provide a rationale for choosing such individual or group, as well as a personal reflection including their experience while interviewing an important person in the field as well as their feelings with the implementation of technology and later publication in the web. The purpose of this exercise was two-fold: one to reveal to students the significance of creating, publishing and being responsible of meaningful and public work and materials; and second, to give them the opportunity to start a network with professionals within their field of specialization.

4- The work conducted by my students in my "Hispanic Culture Through Film" course has been striking and utmost satisfactory to me. After an initial two-week learning curve, students started creating materials and presenting information in the most creative and innovative ways. Not only they strived at being informative and fulfilling the course requirements, but also students worked hard at incorporating new technological tools such as online quizzes, questionnaires, themes for discussion and research projects. The final project for this class

involved the creation of an educational lesson plan to be reused in future courses. Topics range from "Surrealism Movement", "The Theater of Absurd" "Politics, Economics and Prostitution in Cuba", "Chilean Failed Revolution", etc. As such, students have become authentic co-creators of content materials. This is the first thing I tell my students when they enter my intermediate and upper-level courses of Spanish: "What you create in this class will be not only material (of high quality) that I will be using in my classes, but also you are creating a product that you can show and serve as a proof to future employers of the quality of your intellectual work and technological abilities." Certainly, there are two words that best defined students work this past semester: "responsibility and brilliance".

5- This approach to student-faculty content creation has resulted in my panel "The Publishing Revolution: Creating Textbook Content with Web 2.0 Tools" to be taken place at the North East Modern Language Association in Montreal, March 2010. This is the description for the call for papers I sent: "The model "Spanish Lounge at Pace University" project provides a social networking site for present students, alumni and other professional and friends connected with the Spanish community at Pace University. The goal of this social network is to create a Web 2.0 content site that can be reused in cross-disciplinary courses. Materials are available through the web or it is created by students and members. By constantly adapting new contributions, textbook materials are reduced or adapted to each objective accordingly. Presently, the publishing revolution is getting authors to write specifically for a company publishing textbooks online in a web 2.0 business model environment. This panel wants to address initiatives that work within this new form of textbook and content course/field web 2.0 environment. **Description:** As textbooks continue to increase prices, publishers and State Dept. of Education call for systematic ways to provide instructional materials for the Web. The use of computer, instructional software, internet resources and other media is generating courses where content is both designed to and created by an specific student community. Teachers and students are able to post updates, corrections and suggestions. Materials are then reused and adapted for other courses. This presentation is open to projects involving the use of Multimedia Web 2.0 tools (wiki, blogs, podcast) for English and all language instruction." I am hoping this conference will produce a lot of wonderful discussion as well as to signal directions for future initiatives in content creation.

6- In terms of technology, I have been extensively working in learning, refining and adapting podcasting and screencasting videos. The "Spanish Lounge" website now contains videos that help with the site navigation as well as videos related to course materials presently being developed for the Fall 2009, specifically for the courses: "SPA 310: Culture of Spain", and "SPA 263: Spanish for Bilinguals."

7- This summer, one student is working in updating materials and providing collaborations, such as the project "Hispanic Contribution of the Week" that we hope it can be implemented in the next Fall 2009.

8- The magazine "Latinos New York" (March 2008) published an article about this project called: "Dr. Andres Villagra, Our Educator of the Future".

9- Between conferences, grants, and interviews, I believe this site is at the forefront of the pedagogical use of technology in the classroom today and it has begun to gain a lot of recognition in the academic and the professional worlds.

Respectfully submitted,
Dr. Andrés Villagrá