

**Spanish Language Program at Princeton University:
Course Assignment and Key Information for AIs
-Updated in April 2020-**

General program information

- In a given academic year, we have an average of 800 students enrolled in our 100- and 200-level language courses.
- Typically, we have 15-18 lecturers and 10-15 AIs teaching Spanish language courses.
- Undergraduate students need to take the [Spanish Placement Test](#) to determine in which Spanish course they should enroll. The test is available on Blackboard during the summer, and is offered once more in September for students who failed to take it over the summer.
- Students who place out of this test or whose score on the AP or SAT II tests is sufficiently high can enroll in 200-level courses.
- Students who intend to fulfill the language requirement by taking Spanish courses at the 100-level, are placed into one of these two tracks: the **101-102/103 - 107 track**, or the **105-108 track**. The courses in the first track hold classes every weekday, and the courses in the second track hold classes on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.
- Following the recommendations of the Dean of the Faculty, everyone teaching a Spanish course is expected to be on campus and available to their students during reading period.
- This graph illustrates our course sequence more clearly:
<https://spo.princeton.edu/undergraduate/language/spanish-course-sequence>

Methodology of Spanish-Language Teaching: Seminar and Practicum (SPA500)

First-year graduate students are required to take SPA500 before teaching language courses in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese (SPO). This course is only offered in the spring, and is taught by the Director of the Spanish Language Program.

The course offers an introduction to key concepts and issues in the fields of second-language acquisition and language-teaching pedagogy in connection with the teaching of Spanish and Portuguese. Students acquire knowledge and develop skills that will prepare them to teach foreign languages. SPA500 has a strong practical component in that students observe classes

that are currently being taught by lecturers in our Program, practice teaching techniques, and are guided in creating their own teaching materials.

Note that because SPA500 focuses on the pedagogical approach, courses and particular needs of the Princeton SPO language program it cannot be replaced by language-teaching methodology courses taken elsewhere.

Course assignments in the Fall

Graduate students who took SPA500 in the spring will teach a language course the following semester, i.e., in the fall semester of their second year. Except in the cases described below, the usual course assignment for graduate students (AIs) who teach Spanish in SPO is as follows¹:

| Year in SPO program | Courses | Level |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1st | no teaching (enrolled in SPA500) | |
| 2nd | SPA101 (or SPA103) | beginners |
| 3rd | SPA107 | intermediate |
| 4th | SPA105 or SPA108 (or SPA207) | intermediate-advanced |
| 5th | no teaching | |
| 6th (DCEs) | SPA105, SPA108, or SPA207 | intermediate-advanced/advanced |

The teaching sequence is meant to give graduate students experience teaching at the various levels: from the beginner-level through the intermediate-advanced level. In particular, note that:

- In order to ensure the collaboration between more experienced lecturers and AIs, the lecturer/AI ratio is important. Therefore, if there is a cohort with a large number of AIs who will be teaching in the same semester, we may have to assign them to different courses that are approximately at the same level (SPA101/SPA103, SPA107/SPA105). Assignment will depend on the AI's availability to teach at the times where there are sections in need of an instructor.
- If a student is scheduled to teach a precept, she/he will not teach a language course that same semester.

¹ For information regarding the Portuguese Language Program teaching assignment, refer to the documentation issued by the director of the program, Prof. Nicola Cooney.

- An AI will not be able “to skip” levels. All AIs should start either in SPA101 or SPA103, and work their way up through the higher-level courses. Students who have never taught a language course at PU must teach their first language course in the fall, not in the spring.
- As indicated in the table above, the usual course assignment for the 4th year is SPA105 or SPA108. However, an AI may be assigned to teach SPA207 in order to:
 - Balance the number of lecturers/AIs in a course
 - Resolve a scheduling conflict (e.g. an instructor may not be able to teach at a certain time)
 - Honor the Department’s contractual obligations with lecturers
- The criteria for assigning AIs to SPA207 during the 4th year are:
 - Availability to teach the course at a certain time
 - The AI’s personal background and teaching record (based on student evaluations and the directors’ class observations)
 - All things being equal, assignment is random
- The usual course load for AIs teaching Spanish-language courses is: either one section of a course that meets everyday (101, 103, 107) or two sections of a course that meets three-times a week (105, 108, 207). These two options are comparable in terms of the amount of work involved. Although the second option involves teaching only three days a week (M-W-F) and, in general, having students with a higher proficiency in Spanish, it entails having nearly twice as many students, an extra hour of teaching per week, and evaluating work with content and language that is much more complex (in other words, scoring student work tends to be time-consuming).
- Although every effort will be made to accommodate DCEs students in their 6th year seeking teaching appointments in the Spanish Program in the department, these assignments cannot be guaranteed and depend on the needs of the language program. In the case that a student does receive course assignments during his or her 6th year, he or she will be given at most 2 courses in the fall semester and 1 course in the spring. In the spring semester his or her stipend will therefore be lower. Information about the DCE status and the specific requirements for teaching are included in the [Graduate Rules and Procedures](#). Students must fulfill all of the listed requirements in order to be eligible to teach language courses in their 6th year. If there are any questions, AIs should consult the Director of Graduate Studies.
- Students who work with members of our Portuguese Language faculty may be able to teach a Spanish language course if the Spanish Language Program directors determine that they are qualified to do so, and if there is a need for additional instructors in a given

semester. These teaching assignments must be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies.

Course assignment in the Spring

There are fewer courses in the spring than in the fall because SPA103 and SPA105 are not offered (SPA101 is not offered in spring either given that 101-102 is a single-course sequence). In addition, SPO has to ensure that the lecturers' teaching load is met as specified in their contracts. Therefore, it is very unlikely that graduate students can switch their teaching to the spring semester.

Nonetheless, occasionally, there may be a need for additional instructors in the spring. Should that be the case and if there are graduate students interested in teaching, the directors would take into account the following to determine who should teach:

- The reason for requesting to teach in the spring (e.g. necessary travel to an archive the following fall; studies at a partner university; etc.). AIs are urged to consult the Director of Graduate Studies about their particular case.
- The AI's teaching and personal background (based on student evaluations and the directors' class observations)
- All things being equal, requests to teach will be granted in the order in which they were received.

The courses that AIs teach in the spring are determined by availability, after taking into account contractual obligations with lecturers and the course schedule. It is possible that this may require an AI to teach a course that is out of the sequence specified in the table above. In that case, the AI may be expected to teach the "skipped" course during the next teaching semester.

All requests to teach in the spring, as opposed to the fall, will have to be submitted by November 1st, and they will need to be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies. If more than one student has expressed interest in teaching in the spring, the Director of Graduate Studies will also determine who should be given priority.

Class observations

Class observations are conducted in order to provide formative feedback and pedagogical support for all AIs, especially to those who recently took SPA500 (AIs in their second year). For these AIs, there is a two-step observation process: first, the Program Director observes one class; and second, one of the Associate Program Directors, or the course coordinator, observes another class.

For AIs who are teaching at PU for the second time (AIs in their third year), there is only one class observation that is usually carried out by one of the three Spanish Program directors. Observing the class of AIs who are teaching for the third time (AIs in their fourth or fifth year) is

optional. If there is a class observation, it will be conducted by the course coordinator or by one of the three program directors. The classes of DCEs are not observed unless there is a reason to do so.

Class observations typically follow the same procedure: first, the person observing the class reaches out to the AI to schedule a date/time for the observation and to request class materials (e.g. class plans, syllabi, etc.); second, the class is observed; and third, the person observing the class and the AI meet shortly afterwards to discuss the observations.

Keep in mind that class observations are helpful not only for the Program directors, but also for the AIs. Observing a particular class allows the directors to follow up on the AIs' pedagogical and methodological development, assess the effectiveness of SPA500, and evaluate curricular development in specific Spanish courses. They are also essential to substantiate recommendation letters for graduate students who are on the job market by focusing on their observed strengths and capabilities. At the same time, having class observations allows AIs to become more aware of their teaching practices, discuss specific pedagogical procedures, and showcase pedagogical skills that would not be visible otherwise (e.g. by taking SPA500).

Other important information

- Courses that meet M-F (SPA 101-102, SPA103, and SPA107) have 3 class meetings during Reading Period, both during the fall and the spring semesters. AIs should arrange to be on campus until their teaching obligations have been fulfilled, i.e. until Dean's Date.

Prospective AIs will be given this information at the end of SPA500. All AIs will be reminded via a series of e-mails from: the Office of the Dean, the SPO language program directors, and the coordinators of the courses they will be teaching. Additionally, the information is repeated during the beginning-of-semester meetings, and is included in the course syllabi.

- AIs are also required to attend the beginning-of-semester meetings of the courses they will be teaching. These meetings will take place on a designated day of the week before classes start. In addition, AIs who are teaching for the first time must attend an orientation in September where, among other things, they will become familiar with the *Aprendo* platform. These SPO meetings are independent of orientation sessions and other activities organized by the Graduate School for new AIs.
- AIs or DCEs teaching in the spring will have to attend the beginning-of-semester meeting(s) of the course(s) they will be teaching. These meetings take place the week before classes start. Course coordinators will notify the instructors well in advance of the exact date of those meetings. Therefore, AIs should plan to be on campus the week before in order to attend their course meetings.

- In general, when a student receives an Assistantship in Instruction (AI) appointment for a given term, any other support from the University is adjusted accordingly to reflect the actual commitment to the AI and the other funding source(s).

If you have questions about any of the above information, please contact the Program directors.