

The National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC)

Trilingual Task Force (ASL/Spanish/English) Update



The landscape was lush and the neighborhood exotic. However, to the 60 individuals sequestered at the Casa Cristo Redento in Aguas Buenas, Puerto Rico, the focus was less on the scenery and more on the beauty of working with ASL and Spanish cultures and languages. On June 27-30, 2013, people from across the United States and the U.S. territories convened at the retreat center for a total immersion experience in either ASL or Spanish.

The goal of this first-time program was two-fold: 1) enhance the Spanish skills of aspiring trilingual interpreters; and 2) enhance or increase the ASL skills of advanced signers. Each program met a number of educational objectives. For the ASL track, the participants left the training with an elevated ability to successfully use direct address, use a variety of classifiers and identify appropriate use of role shifting in ASL. Participants in the Spanish track left the training with an elevated ability to communicate with members of Spanish speaking communities, show culturally appropriate interactions when interacting in social, family, or business settings, utilize idiomatic expressions. They also gained understanding of basic geography, history, and culture of the Hispanic/Latino world. Conducted in two separate tracks, participants spent their days in the classroom acquiring skills and learning from one another. Evenings were spent immersed in the Puerto Rican culture as they completed specific tasks and assignments.



According to one participant, “This was such an amazing experience! For being the first time this Immersion Program was offered, it was carried out extremely well. I loved the workshops we had in the evenings, as well as the actual class content (Spanish track). I feel I learned more than a week’s worth of information and it is all related to

interpreting and can be applied to my work and future experiences. Thank you so much for this opportunity!”

Understanding that culture and language go hand in hand, Puerto Rico was an ideal setting for this type of training. The evening excursions instilled a more intimate understanding of the lifestyle and spirit of the local community, and classroom activities using unique teaching tools, such as salsa dancing and drum beating, encouraged active participation rather than passive observation. Combining the academic and cultural aspects of the program was pivotal to its success.

Reflecting the sentiment of many, Caroline Gunning, a Spanish Track participant shared, “The beautiful landscape and musical coquis were just a backdrop to the incredible educational experience I had in Puerto Rico! I enjoyed meeting new friends and colleagues and learning from a friendly staff by day while dancing La Bomba and La Salsa by night.”



When this program was first proposed, some members of the NCIEC National Trilingual Task Force (ASL/Spanish/English) were uncertain that people would travel the distance to Puerto Rico for the immersion experience. A feasibility study was conducted to determine the level of interest, the length and time of year best to offer the program, and the financial commitment people were willing to make. However, the feasibility study could never have informed us of the depth of interest people had and the speed at which the program would fill beyond capacity. Participants came from 22 states and U.S. territories, and represented every NCIEC region.



One element leading to the success of the immersion programs was the strong collaboration among this specialization’s stakeholders. The NCIEC Trilingual Task Force partnered with PRRID to spearhead the effort. A major contributing factor to this success was the hands-on work and expertise of Jose Bertran and Yaira Rodriguez, coordinators of the program. Jose and Yaira designed the format, solicited sponsors, identified instructors, selected the venue, and coordinated all the details from start to finish. Instructors, Sergio Pena (Spanish track) and Anthony Natale (ASL track), developed content and delivered expert instruction tailored specifically for these audiences. These programs would not have been possible without

generous sponsorship from Sorenson, Servicios Orientados al Sordo (SOS), Sign Language Interpreters (SLI), and Hands Performance Crew, Inc.

The success of these programs clearly illustrated that the need for this type of training is far-reaching. Trilingual interpreters have been underserved and have lacked access to education in this specialty area. Given the high demand, continued focus is warranted.

One participant said it best, "I cannot say enough about this experience. All of my skill sets have improved and I have learned a tremendous amount about the state of interpreting and Deaf rights around the world. All I can say is we need more, more, MORE!!"

In addition to the Immersion Programs, the NCIEC Trilingual Task Force is involved in numerous other projects. These include creation of an RID Standard Practices Paper, translation from English to Spanish of readings deemed essential for students in IEPs, a publication called *Toward Effective Practices: Interpreting in Spanish-Influenced Settings*, development of source material to be used in the education of trilingual interpreters, and various other educational activities.



If you are currently a practicing trilingual interpreter, please visit the Mano a Mano website (<http://www.manoamano-unidos.org/>) and register on the interpreter directory. Also keep a close watch on the NCIEC website (www.interpretereducation.org) for upcoming activities on trilingual interpreting.

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