Spanish Heritage Speakers in Study Abroad Programs

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SPANISH HERITAGE SPEAKERS IN STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

A Guide for students and administrators

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Part 1: Understanding heritage speakers

Introduction

The goal of this guide is to improve the experience of Spanish heritage speakers (SHS) studying abroad in countries where Spanish is the majority language. It explores the experience of SHSs who decide to study abroad in a Spanish-speaking country for which they feel some kind of linguistic, familial or cultural affiliation. In our discussions, it is assumed that the study abroad programs provide a mandatory or optional language learning component for students. We will *not* discuss here the cases of heritage speakers who study abroad in a country where there are not linguistic, familial or cultural affiliations, such as the case, for instance, of a SHS studying engineering in Australia in English.

Heritage speakers share some common characteristics, challenges, experiences, and needs in the study abroad context. However, this student population may be still relatively unknown or not well understood by some program administrators, instructors, staff, and host community members. This could create conflicts that may negatively affect the SHS's overall experience abroad. The three parts that make up this guide address important topics that will give SHSs tools and resources so that they can make the most of all the opportunities available to them during their time abroad. This guide provides a comprehensive illustration of heritage speakers' experience in a study abroad context, dealing with topics of language development, cultural awareness, identity, program design and instruction, among others. The guide is composed of three parts:

- **Part 1: Understanding Heritage Speakers.** The objective of the first part of this guide is to provide a general overview of SHSs in the U.S. context. After analyzing some statistical data on the Hispanic and Latino population in the United States, a definition of the term "heritage speaker" is provided. This is followed by a discussion of some of the factors that often influence the proficiency level of heritage speakers in Spanish. After outlining some of the differences between heritage speakers and second language learners, some cultural topics related to heritage speakers are discussed. This part concludes with some of the obstacles that may cause heritage learners to opt out of study abroad programs.

- **Part 2: Fostering Language Development.** This part discusses some of the linguistic characteristics that are typically exhibited by SHSs. Then, we analyze some of the barriers that heritage students often encounter in study abroad programs when trying to develop their language skills in Spanish. With the objective of helping improve the language experience of heritage learners, some didactic considerations and strategies are presented.

- **Part 3: Fostering Cultural Adjustment.** The third part of this guide provides information and ideas on how to enrich the cultural experience of heritage speakers in study abroad programs. This includes managing perceptions and expectations from the point of view of both heritage speakers and the host community (including host families, instructors, staff, etc.). Three opportunities to enhance heritage speakers´ cultural experience while abroad are discussed: service learning, voluntary work, and internships.

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Hispanic Population in the United States

If you are reading this guide, you probably self-identify as a Spanish heritage speaker. This means that you count yourself as part of the Hispanic population in the United States. This section presents some statistical data that will help you better understand the situation of this group within the context of the United States.

Census reports in the last decades have witnessed a steady increase of Hispanics and Latinos living in the United States. In 1990, 22.3 million people (9% of the US population) identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino. Ten years later, this number increased to 35.3 million (or 12.5%). In the 2010 Census, there were 50.5 million Hispanics in the United States, composing 16 percent of the total population. It is significant to note that more than half of the growth in the total population of the United States between 2000 and 2010 was due to the increase in the Hispanic population (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). A more recent report published in 2020 by the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that the Hispanic population as of July 1st, 2019 totaled 60.6 million, that is 18.5% of the nation's total population. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The 2020 Census report will provide a more official account.

This growth in the Hispanic population in the U.S. has manifested in an increase of Hispanic and Latino students' enrollment in post-secondary degree-granting institutions (community colleges, colleges and universities). Data from the U.S. Department of Education (2019) shows a continuous rise of Hispanic students who attend college in the US, from 10.8% in 2005 to 19.5% in 2018. This is reflected in the number of Hispanic Serving Institutions, which has increased from 281 in 2008-2009 to 539 in 2018-2019 (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2019). This upward tendency can also be seen in the number of Hispanic students who decide to study abroad. According to the 2020 *Open Doors Report* developed by the Institute of International Education (2020), while in academic year 2007-08, the 5.9% of study abroad students identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino, in 2018-19 this percentage increased to 10.9% (see figure 1)[1] .

[1] This upward tendency, although modest, also applies to other races and ethnicities, progressively making the profile of study abroad students more diverse. Thus, the percentage of students of color studying abroad has increased from 20% in 2008-09 to 31.3% in 2018-19.

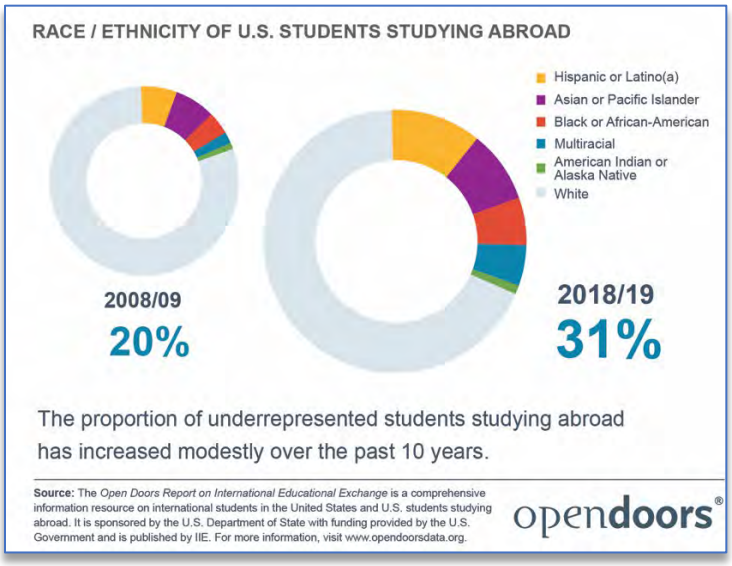

Figure 1: Race/ethnicity of US students abroad.

It should be noted here that the figures collected in the *Open Doors Report* refers to Hispanic or Latino students enrolled in a study abroad program in any country, not necessarily in a Spanish-speaking one. So far, there are no documented statistics on the total number of SHSs who decide to study abroad in Spanish-speaking countries. Jiménez Jiménez (2019) explored this topic in the context of US study abroad programs running in Spain. A survey was sent to all members of APUNE, the Association of North American University Programs in Spain, inquiring about the number of SHSs in their programs. Thirty-one programs responded to the survey, accounting for a total of 2,111 students, out of which 467 (22.12%) were reported as SHSs. As the enrollment of Latino/a students in SA programs continues to grow (Institute of International Education, 2020), it can be predicted that this trend will be accompanied by an increase in SHSs interested in studying abroad in Spanish-speaking countries.

In order to better understand the experience of SHSs during their time overseas, we need to first understand their experience in the U.S., as part of the larger Hispanic population. Where in the U.S. do they live now? What language or languages do they use?

Other than English, Spanish is, by far, the most spoken language in the U.S. The following two figures from the MLA Language Map Data Center are based on the American Community Survey with information collected between 2006 and 2010 (the most current figure until data from the 2020 Census becomes available). Figure 2 shows that English is indeed the majority language in the US, spoken by 80.38% of people over 5 years old. Languages other than English are spoken by 19.62%. Of all these other languages, Spanish is spoken by 35,437,985 (or 12.19% of the entire U.S. population in 2010). Figure 3 shows the most spoken languages other than English spoken in the U.S., being Spanish the most popular language (62.13%) followed by Chinese (2.96%) and Tagalog (2.70%).

	Ages 5 +	%
English	233,780,338	80.38%
All languages other than English combined	57,048,617	19.62%
Spanish *	35,437,985	12.19%
Chinese	1,685,655	0.58%
Tagalog	1,542,118	0.53%
Vietnamese	1,292,448	0.44%
French	1,288,833	0.44%
Korean	1,108,408	0.38%
German	1,107,869	0.38%
Russian	836,171	0.29%
Arabic	764,753	0.26%
Italian	764,326	0.26%

Figure 2: Most spoken languages in the entire U.S. in 2010.

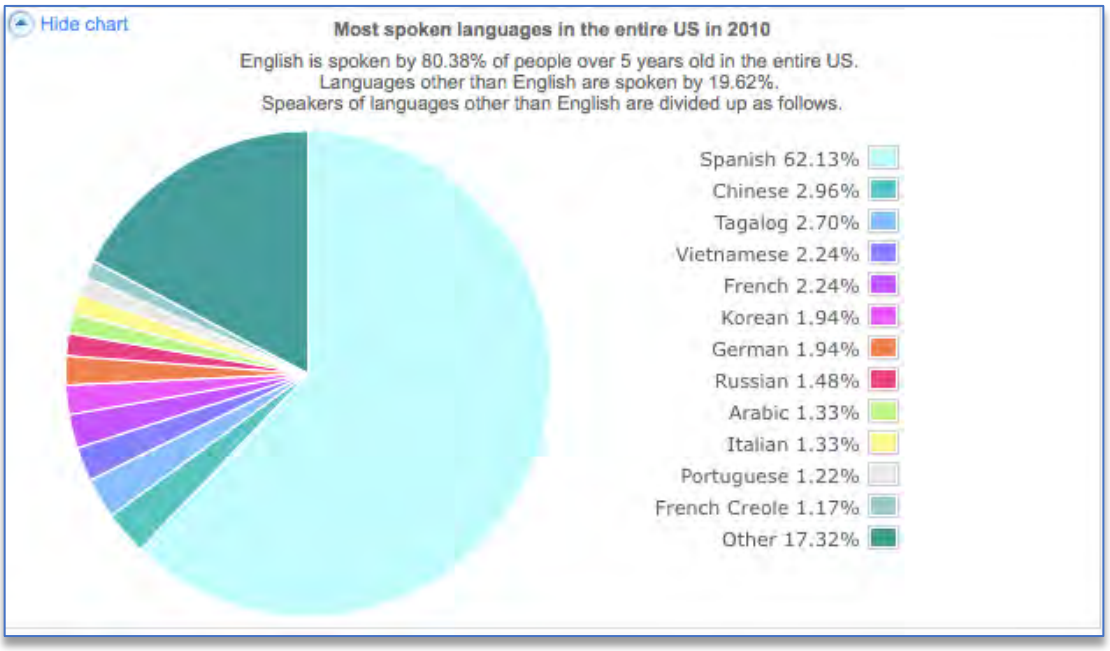

Figure 3: Most spoken languages other than English spoken in the U.S.

How these Spanish speakers are distributed along the U.S. geography is illustrated in the next two figures, also collected from the MLA Language Map Data Center. Figure 4 presents a table with the distribution of Spanish speakers by state, showing the biggest concentrations in California (27.36%), Texas (18.47%), Florida (9.61%), New York (7.37%), and Illinois (4.28%). Figure 5 presents a map of the United States showing the density of Spanish speakers at the county level.

	Ages 5 +	%
California	9,696,638	27.36%
Texas	6,543,702	18.47%
Florida	3,406,460	9.61%
New York	2,611,903	7.37%
Illinois	1,516,674	4.28%
Arizona	1,202,638	3.39%
New Jersey	1,193,261	3.37%
Georgia	651,583	1.84%
North Carolina	598,756	1.69%
Colorado	542,016	1.53%

Figure 4: 10 US states with largest Spanish speaking population.

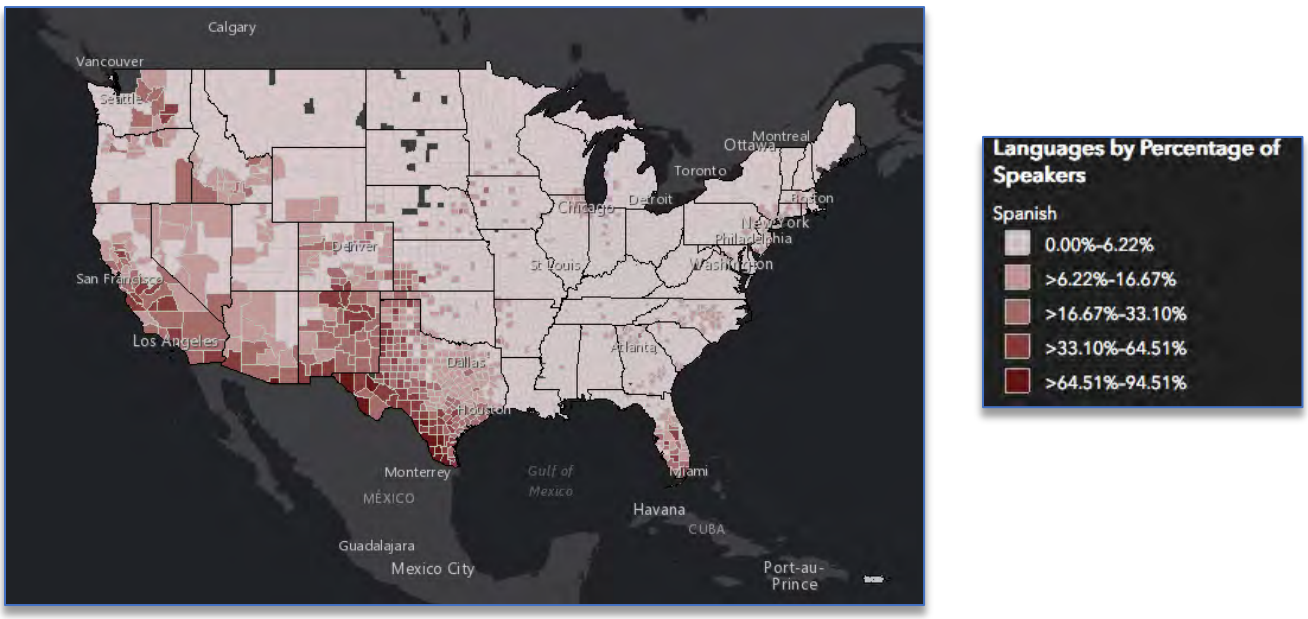

Figure 5: Map of US showing percentage of Spanish speakers by county.

In terms now of linguistic ability, figure 6 shows the English proficiency level of those 35,437,985 people who speak Spanish in the U.S. This table reveals that 25,561,139 (or 72.13%) reported to speak English "very well" or "well." Only 27.87% reported to English "not well" or "not at all." Figure 7 illustrates a more recent study by Nielsen (2016) using data from the US Census Bureau, which reveals that 55% of Hispanics are bilingual, while 27% are English dominant and 19% are Spanish dominant. If we focus on the graph that shows the language proficiency of Hispanics from ages 18-34 (the student population most found in study abroad programs), it shows that 58% are considered bilingual, while 28% is English-dominant and 14% is Spanish-dominant.

	Ages 5 - 17	18 - 64	65 +	Total
Spanish	**8,177,762**	**24,883,060**	**2,377,163**	**35,437,985**
Speak English "very well"	6,101,265	12,149,484	866,281	19,117,030
Speak English "well"	1,388,186	4,605,010	450,913	6,444,109
Speak English "not well"	574,602	5,230,682	530,365	6,335,649
Speak English "not at all"	113,709	2,897,884	529,604	3,541,197

Figure 6: English proficiency level of Spanish speakers in the US.

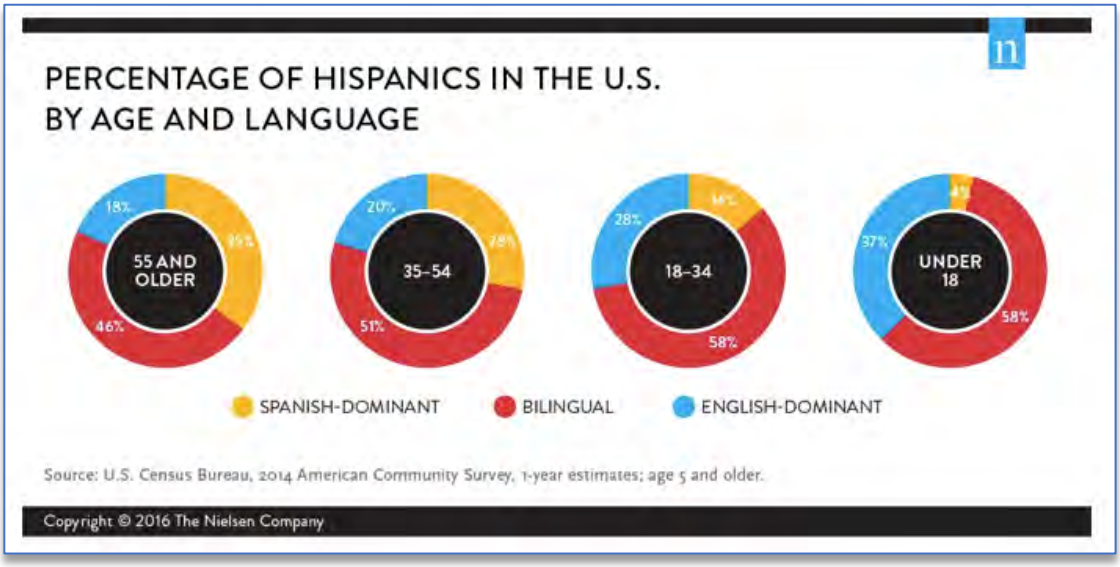

Figure 7: Percentage of Hispanics in the US by age and language.

Figures 6 and 7 are comprised of self-reported data and therefore these figures should be considered as general trends. In addition, the concept of "bilingual" is vague, and it can mean different things to different speakers. Despite the ambiguous nature of this data, this numbers reveal a plain but important fact as it relates to our discussion on SHSs: the level of bilingualism in this student population can vary greatly from individual to individual. This is significant because some may perceive SHSs as a homogenous group, with similar linguistic abilities. As we will discuss below, nothing could be further from the truth. SHSs present as great linguistic variation as second language learners (L2 learners), and consequently we should avoid making assumptions about their linguistic abilities.

Questions for reflection

Answer the following questions to the best of your availability:

1. What is the distribution of the population in your state and county by race and ethnicity? What percentage of that overall population is considered Hispanic or Latino?

2. What is the distribution of students at your university by race and ethnicity? What percentage of that population is considered Hispanic or Latino?

3. Visit the MLA Language Map Data Center website (https://apps.mla.org/map_data) and look at the distribution of languages most commonly used in your state and county. What percentage of the population in your state and county speaks Spanish?

4. On the same web page you can compare the evolution of the language distribution in your state and county from 2000 to 2010. Is the percentage of Spanish speakers increasing or decreasing?[2].

5. Would you consider yourself Spanish-dominant, English-dominant or bilingual? What does it mean for you to be "bilingual"?

Definitions

Do you consider yourself a "heritage speaker"? What does this label really mean? Having provided some important general information regarding the Latino/Hispanic community in the U.S., we will focus our attention now to define the concept of *heritage speaker*. In order to do that, we first need to clarify what a *heritage language* is. Simply put, a heritage language is a language other than the dominant societal one. The term "heritage language[3]" is associated with immigration processes, where a person, a family or a group of individuals leave their place of origin and move to another where a different language is spoken. Immigration has been, and continues to be, an intrinsic part of American history and today the U.S. is home to many heritage languages. These migration processes may have started long ago (such as the case of Italian families who arrived to the U.S. in the late 19th and early 20th centuries) or more recently. Regardless of how many generations have passed since leaving the country of origin, the term "heritage language" describes a connection to a language in a particular social context where it is non-dominant (Carreira, Hitchins, & Kagan, 2017). The contexts in which this heritage language is typically associated with include the family, the home, and local communities of speakers (such as a church, a sports team, etc.). The extent and depth of this connection can vary greatly from individual to individual and will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections.

Having conceptualized the term "heritage language," the definition of "heritage language speaker" (also known as "heritage speaker") becomes self-explanatory. However, in the field of language education, two other related terms are frequently used, namely "heritage language learner" or "heritage learner". The difference between "speaker" and "learner" is that the former simply denotes a person who speaks—to some degree of ability—the heritage language while the latter is actively engaged in improving their proficiency in their heritage language These terms were not widely used until the publication in 1996 of the Standards for Foreign Language Learning

[2] At the time of writing this guide, the 2020 Census results were not yet available.
[3] The term "heritage language" is also used in the context of indigenous languages, but this meaning of the concept does not fall within the scope of this training and it is not considered here.

(National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996). In the context of this guide, we will use both terms interchangeably, since they are both widely used in educational settings. The abbreviation "SHS" will be frequently employed to denote "Spanish Heritage Speakers."

The term "heritage speaker" has been defined and re-defined in numerous occasions. However, one of the most frequently quoted definition is provided by Valdés (2001):

> A student who is ''raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or at least understands the language, and who is to some degree bilingual in that language and English" (Valdés, 2001, p. 38).

In our case, this definition refers to individuals who were exposed to Spanish as children, but did not learn it to full capacity because English became dominant at some point in their lives. These speakers, depending on a number of factors that will be discussed below, can exhibit very different levels of linguistic proficiency; some of them will just be able to understand some basic lexical items and structures in the heritage language while others will demonstrate a more sophisticated speaking and writing ability.

This definition is now considered too "narrow" and it has been further refined by Potowski (2014), in order to accommodate two other types of heritage language speakers. The first type describes individuals who have been raised with a strong cultural connection to a particular language, usually through family history and interaction (Fishman, 2001; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003; Hornbergber & Wang, 2008). However, they do not show any measurable proficiency in the heritage language. In Potowski's (2014) own words:

> Those individuals who were raised with a strong cultural connection to a particular ethnolinguistic group and have a ''heritage motivation,'' but who do not speak or understand the language at all. These latter individuals [...] are often linguistically indistinguishable from traditional second language (L2) learners (p. 405).

This could be the case, for example, of a third or fourth generation Mexican-American student who grew up in a home where no Spanish was spoken and who may seek to study Spanish to come to know that part of their heritage. Despite this lack of proficiency, these learners may have been raised with a strong cultural connection to a particular culture (normally through family history and interaction) and they show a "heritage motivation" to learn the language.

The second type refers to learners in the other end of the spectrum, who demonstrate an advanced proficiency in the heritage language. These are individuals who are born in a Spanish-speaking country and who migrate to the U.S. during their teen years. Typically, but not always, these students have received formal education in Spanish, and they have developed a rather complete linguistic system in Spanish. As Potowski (2014) puts it:

> Students who arrived from a Spanish-speaking country after the age of 12, who typically have developed adult-like proficiency (Montrul, 2008; Silva-Corvalán, 1994) and are usually considered ‘‘native’’ or ‘‘homeland’’ Spanish speakers (p. 405).

As one can see, the terms “heritage speaker” can refer to individuals with drastically different Spanish language skills. The following sections analyze the different factors that may impact heritage speakers’ trajectories, and the effect that these factors may have on your degree of bilingualism.

Questions for reflection

Answer the following questions to the best of your availability:

1. Which of the three definitions provided in this section best reflects your situation? Do you agree completely with this definition or would you make some changes?

2. Do you feel like you have a “heritage motivation” to learn or improve your Spanish?

3. Do you feel like you were raised with a strong connection to the Spanish culture?

Linguistic factors

In this section, we will discuss some of the main factors that may affect your level of proficiency in Spanish. As you read through this section, think of your personal situation. Do you think these factors have played any significant role in your current level of Spanish proficiency? If so, to what extent?

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

One of the main factors that influences a learner’s mastery of the heritage language is his or her generation status. The following information has been adapted from Escobar and Potowski (2015) and it provides definitions and a description of the typical linguistic characteristics of each generation.

First generation or G1 refers to those speakers who arrived to the U.S. during or after their puberty (that is, at age 12 or after). These speakers spent their formative years in a Spanish speaking country and, for this reason, are considered Spanish native speakers. In their countries of origin, they had the opportunity to develop their language until their period of puberty in a familiar and social context in which Spanish was used. This follows the language acquisition literature which employs puberty as the minimum age to establish that an individual acquired a language to the level of a native speaker. This also assumes that individual who belong to the G1 had the opportunity to be exposed to different language styles and were able to learn to use them in a variety of social spheres. It is assumed that they had access to learn the academic variety of the language, especially at school. Sociolinguistic studies show that the more formal education in Spanish they receive, the more experience the speakers will have using and listening to formal varieties of the language (Labov, 2001). That is, the educational level (and then their profession) expose the speaker to different stylistic varieties, depending on the social spaces they have access to. However, those individuals who arrived after puberty but did not receive schooling in their countries of origin are also considered native speakers of the language, even though they were exposed to fewer stylistic varieties.

Between the first and the second generation we have a group of individuals who arrived to the U.S. between the ages of 6 and 12. They are known as the **generation 1.5** and they arrive with a strong level of Spanish due to the amount of years spent in the Spanish-speaking country where they come from (which probably included some years of formal schooling).

Second generation or G2 are the children of the members of the G1. They arrived to the US before the age of six or they were born in the U.S. Since their parents tend to be monolingual in Spanish when they migrate, G2 individuals typically develop a rather strong level of Spanish because that is what was spoken at home when they were children.

A person who belongs to the **third generation or G3** was born in the U.S and has at least one parent who was also born in the U.S. Torres and Potowski (2008) found differences between those G3 individuals who had one G1 parent and one G2 parent (whom they call G3:1) compared to those who had to G2 parents (G3:2). They found that the 24 participants who belonged to G3:1 had a significantly higher proficiency level than the 30 individuals pertaining to G3:2. The following table (adapted from Escobar and Potowski, 2015, p. 22) provides a summary of the main characteristics of each generation:

Generation	Acronym	Definitions	Typical linguistic characteristics
First	G1	Immigrant who arrived to the US at age 12 or older (Silva-Corvalán, 1994)	Native Spanish English as a new language, depending on length of stay in the US
	G1.5	Immigrant who arrived to the US at age between 6 and 11 (Silva-Corvalán, 1994)	Native Spanish English as a new language, depending on length of stay in the US
Second	G2	Immigrant who arrived before the age of 6, with one or two parents from G1; or Person who was born in the US, with both parents belonging to G1	Spanish = It depends, but tends to be strong English = Most dominant language
Third	G3	Person who was born in the US, with one or two parents from G2	Spanish = It depends, but tends to be weak English = Most dominant language

These observations are, of course, general trends. Pertaining to one or another generation should not invoke any lesser or greater degree of bilingual competence. Some G3 Spanish learners may reflect higher levels of grammatical and discourse proficiency that some G2 speakers. Ultimately, a heritage speaker's proficiency level in Spanish will be influenced in great part by the quantity and quality of exposure and input he or she receives in this language. Access to Spanish input may be conditioned by other factors, such as those presented below (adapted from Escobar and Potowski, 2015).

AGE

The level of bilingualism in English and Spanish of heritage learners depends largely on the age at which students were introduced to each of these languages. The specialized literature establishes two general patterns: **simultaneous acquisition** and **consecutive or sequential acquisition**. In the first case, the child receives input in both languages from birth and the acquisition of both languages occurs concurrently. This does not mean that the input the child receives in both languages is identical. Generally, there will be one language that develops more than the other over time, depending on the circumstances of each individual. In consecutive or sequential acquisition, the child receives input in one language from birth and the second language is introduced at a later point. The age at which this second language is introduced will have an impact on the proficiency an individual achieves in that language. Generally speaking, heritage learners who are exposed to their heritage language earlier in life often demonstrate higher proficiency levels (Flores, 2015; Montrul, 2010). The threshold hypothesis, a widely-held theory in the field of linguistics, states that those who learn a second language before puberty (between the ages of 9 and 12) can become native speakers of that language. On the contrary, those who learn it after this period rarely achieve proficiency comparable to native speakers, although they can demonstrate a high proficiency in the language.

FAMILY

The input that HSs receive within the family home will have an impact on their linguistic development. This input depends on the family composition and varies from case to case (especially if grandparents are part of the family household). For this section, we focus on the input received from parents. Three main patterns of family language use have been established:

- Each parent speaks to the child in only one language.
- Both parents speak to the child in both languages.
- One parent speaks in only one language and the other parent speaks to the child in both languages.

Although we do not have a large number of studies investigating each of these patterns, existing research suggest that the second model is the one that offers the best results when learning two languages (de Houwer, 2009). Proficiency level can also be affected by parental attitudes towards the heritage language and culture. Positive parental attitudes are beneficial to the language development of heritage speakers and often lead to higher proficiency levels (Makarova et al., 2019).

BIRTH ORDER

Certain patterns of language acquisition have been observed in relation to the birth order of siblings within a family, when the parents belong to the first generation and the children to the second generation. This is because birth order has an effect on the amount of Spanish input an individual receives. As Escobar and Potowski (2015) explain, older siblings tend to develop a better command of Spanish than younger siblings. This is because older siblings receive abundant Spanish input from their monolingual parents. However, when these older siblings begin to learn English, especially when they enter the U.S. educational system, they begin to use English with their younger siblings, who begin to acquire this language at an earlier age compared to their older siblings.

COMMUNITY

Outside of the family context, the level of proficiency a heritage learner can reach also depends on the quantity and quality of input he or she receives within his or her community. If we take a broad approach to community, heritage learners who live in areas with a strong Hispanic population density are more likely to develop their Spanish skills than other learners who live in areas with a low Hispanic presence (Alba et al., 2002). The importance of community is even more palpable if the circle of people with whom the heritage speaker interacts on a daily basis use Spanish (whether they are friends or people with whom he or she shares time at work, at the university, at sporting events, at church, etc.). This is even more so if these interactions are with recent immigrants who have strong levels of Spanish proficiency. Lastly, travel to the heritage country can contribute to further develop SHSs' level of Spanish through extensive contact with monolingual family and community members (Potowski, 2014).

EDUCATION

The level of formal Spanish instruction received by the heritage speaker will certainly have an impact on his or her proficiency. The educational background of these students can vary substantially. In the U.S. context, it is not uncommon to find heritage students who in fact have not taken any Spanish courses prior to their experience abroad. However, there will be others who will have received some kind of formal Spanish language instruction. Let's take a brief look at the different possibilities for Spanish instruction at different levels of education:

- **Elementary education:** Heritage learners who spoke only Spanish as children may have been enrolled in a bilingual education program. Some of these programs focus on transitioning from Spanish to English progressively during the early school years. The goal is to ultimately provide all instruction entirely in English (usually in second, third or fourth grade). Other dual immersion programs aim to develop both languages simultaneously. The grades in which these programs are available depend on the school district.
- **Secondary education:** Spanish as a second language is most often taught in secondary school. How much formal instruction they receive during high school will depend on the individual. Some may have taken one single course while others may have taken Spanish throughout their high school years, some even in Advanced Placement courses.

- **Higher education:** At the university level, some institutions have a second language graduation requirements, Thus, it is normal for many heritage students to choose Spanish. This requirement can typically range from one semester in some cases to four semesters in others. Beyond this, it is also common for heritage students to choose to minor or major in Spanish, so their knowledge of Spanish (both linguistically and culturally) will be greatly expanded. Some Spanish departments offer separate courses for heritage speakers.

ATTITUDES

Students' attitudes toward their heritage language and culture can vary greatly (Potowski, 2012). A study by Alarcón (2010) shows that students with a high proficiency level in Spanish were proud of their heritage language and dialectal variety. Additionally, heritage learners who strongly identify with the heritage culture can have higher proficiency levels (Malone et al., 2014). However, another study by Beaudrie and Ducar (2005) concluded that a group of bilinguals with only receptive abilities in Spanish showed a positive attitude towards their heritage language but a negative attitude towards their own linguistic variety.

As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon to find heritage learners who experience some kind of language anxiety in the classroom as they think poorly of the level of Spanish they have or the language variety they speak. Attitude towards the language may affect their motivation to learn and improve the heritage language. This is why some studies recommend that Spanish courses for heritage learners should work towards fostering self-esteem and pride in the heritage language (Aparicio, 1997).

The dimensions described here (generational differences, age of acquisition, family, birth order, community, education, and attitudes towards the heritage language and culture) along with other dimensions that could also be mentioned (e.g., the learner's aptitude for language learning), show the complex wealth of experiences heritage learners go through and how these may affect their level of bilingualism to varying degrees. This topic will be further discussed in the second part of this guide, which is focused on fostering language development during a study abroad experience.

Questions for reflection

Answer the following questions to the best of your availability:

1. What generation do you belong to? Does the description provided for your generation fit your situation? If not, explain the differences. Do you think generation status has played any significant role in your current proficiency level in Spanish? Explain why yes or why not.

2. At what age did you start learning English? And Spanish? Do you consider yourself a simultaneous or a consecutive bilingual speaker? Do you think age of acquisition has played any significant role in your current proficiency level in Spanish? Explain why yes or why not.

3. What language/s where used by your caregivers (parents, family members...) during your childhood? Was there a positive attitude towards Spanish language and culture in your

household? Do you think these family factors have played any significant role in your current proficiency level in Spanish? Explain why yes or why not.

4. Do you have siblings? If so, how would you describe their Spanish proficiency level compared to yours? Do you think birth order has played any significant role in your current proficiency level in Spanish? Explain why yes or why not.

5. Is Spanish used in your local community? To what extent do you use Spanish in your interactions with community members (including friends, coworkers, classmates, etc.). Do you think that your local community has played any significant role in your current proficiency level in Spanish? Explain why yes or why not.

6. Describe your experience taking Spanish language courses (elementary, secondary and university level). Do you think that this education has played any significant role in your current proficiency level in Spanish? Explain why yes or why not.

7. Describe your attitudes towards the Spanish language and culture. Do you value the language? Do you feel proud about your cultural heritage? Do you think that your attitude towards the Spanish language and culture has played any significant role in your current proficiency level in Spanish? Explain why yes or why not.

Differences between heritage and second language learners

It is possible that you have taken Spanish courses with learners of Spanish as a second language. You may have noticed that heritage speakers are typically stronger in certain aspects of the language (i.e., speaking or understanding) while second language learners are stronger in other ones. (i.e., knowing the grammar, accents rules, etc.). The following paragraphs provide a comparison between these two student profiles.

In this section, we highlight some of the main differences between heritage learners (HLs) and second language learners (L2Ls). Before we start, we must clarify, as Potowski noted (2014), that HLs with no demonstrable proficiency in Spanish are often linguistically closer to traditional L2Ls. Thus, in this section, HLs do not include this subset of students and refers mostly to those learners who show some degree of bilingualism in both English and Spanish, including those “native” or “homeland” Spanish speakers who arrived in the U.S. after the age of twelve.

Carreira and Kagan (n.d.) argue that the differences between HLs and L2Ls stem from the fact that heritage learners hear and often speak Spanish in a natural environment (at home and in the community), while L2 learners experience the language in a formal, more structured context, normally in the classroom and at a later age. As reported in Potowski (2014), this general difference leads to the following specific differences between HLs and L2Ls:

AGE	
Heritage Learners	**Second Language Learners**
Early age of acquisition gives HLs certain linguistic advantages, particularly in informal vocabulary, in phonology, and receptive ability (Au, Knightly, Jun, and Oh 2002).	Later age of acquisition, typically starting in high school, around the age of 14. The "critical" threshold theory predicts that the late onset of acquisition will have a non-native-like end state (even though they can reach very advanced levels of proficiency).

LEARNING CONTEXT	
Heritage Learners	**Second Language Learners**
Exposed to authentic informal registers of the language (at home or the community). They are more familiar with oral rather than written modes of communication. Lack of metalinguistic awareness.	Typically, in the classroom, with access to a formal register of the language. L2Ls are used to L2 teaching grammar explanations involving a high degree of metalinguistic awareness (e.g., explicit grammar explanations).

LANGUAGE VARIETY	
Heritage Learners	**Second Language Learners**
HLs often acquire a stigmatized variety of the language, because: ▪ it is associated with rural or less educated dialects of the language. ▪ the social/ethnic groups who speak that variety are marginalized. ▪ the variety may exhibit features that indicate a direct contact with another language (Spanglish).	L2 classrooms teach varieties of the language that are considered prestigious.

CONNECTIONS TO LANGUAGE AND CULTURE	
Heritage Learners	**Second Language Learners**
Important familial and insider Hispanic cultural experiences.	L2Ls approach Spanish as an academic subject. They are normally outsiders to the cultures of the Spanish speaking world. They study historical events, literary figures, facts, etc.

PROFICIENCY/LINGUISTIC SYSTEM	
Heritage Learners	**Second Language Learners**
HLs can have varying degrees of proficiency in Spanish. Their trajectory for language acquisition, compared to L2Ls, is much more diverse.	L2Ls tend to follow a similar curriculum regarding what is taught first, what is taught next, etc., such that it is relatively easy to predict what L2 learners at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels know, and what their gaps are.

These basic differences between HLs and L2Ls show the need to honor the specific characteristics and qualities of each group of students. Not recognizing these differences most commonly results in applying, by default, a traditional approach to language teaching that is based on and is focused on second language learners. This will most certainly prove unproductive for heritage learners. Part 2 of this guide will discuss approaches to foster linguistic development for heritage learners in study abroad programs.

Questions for reflection

Answer the following questions to the best of your availability:

1. Do you see yourself reflected in the description of heritage learners as they relate to age, learning context, language variety, connections to language and culture, and proficiency/linguistic system?

2. Do you think that the descriptions provided for second language learners match your experience with these learners in your courses?

3. Comparing the two different profiles: what do you think are your strong and weak points when it comes to your Spanish proficiency level and culture knowledge?

4. Have you been in a Spanish course in which you felt out of place? If so, explain why.

5. Have you been in a Spanish course with second language learners? Describe this experience.

6. From your point of view, what would you recommend to an instructor who has both heritage and second language learners in the same classroom? How do you think he or she could meet the specific needs for both groups?

Cultural background

Language and culture are two inseparable concepts; one cannot exist without the other, like the two sides of a coin. As pointed out by Weiyun (2006), most heritage learners describe their interest in maintaining and learning their heritage language because of their cultural identity, as they would like to stay connected to their heritage culture. Furthermore, cultural identity does not require proficiency in the heritage language, as some may identify with a heritage community even when they may be monolingual English speakers. Thus, heritage language identity does not necessarily entail some kind of language proficiency, but it could be entirely based on some level of affiliation with and connection to the heritage culture (Val & Vinogradova, 2010). It is important then, in order to best serve our heritage students, to not only assess their language skills, but also to understand their cultural background. The cultural diversity of our students can be as varied as the linguistic diversity they exhibit.

Spanish is the majority language in more than twenty countries, each with its own set of customs, traditions and value systems. The cultural identity of a family from the Argentine Pampas will be substantially different from that of a Dominican or Peruvian family. This rich diversity will also be reflected in our heritage students. The United States is home to people from all over the Hispanosphere, although certain countries are more represented than others. Figure 8 shows the country of origin of Spanish speakers living in the U.S. It can be observed that the largest Spanish speaking population comes from Mexico (62%), followed by Puerto Rico (9%) and the Central American countries (9%) (American Community Survey, 2006-2010):

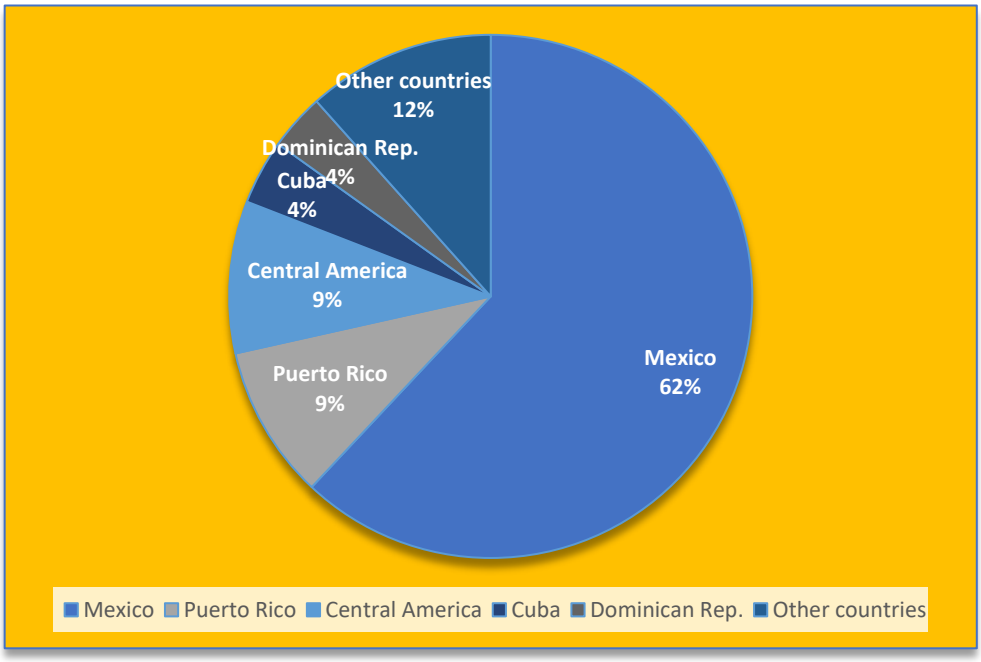

Figure 8: Country of origin of Spanish-speaking population in the US.

Often, depending on the geographic location of the university, there will be a majority of students with ties to a particular country. For example, students with Mexican heritage tend to be in the majority in states bordering Mexico, while students with heritage from Caribbean countries (Cuba, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico) are predominant in eastern states such as Florida or New York. Nevertheless, the fact that students have roots with a particular country does not necessarily imply that they all share the same cultural identity. Even within the same country, there can be great cultural, ethnical, racial and linguistic diversity. This is the case, for example, in Mexico, where there is a multitude of indigenous communities who use their own languages. It is important to recognize and celebrate the cultural diversity of all heritage students.

The degree of connection to their heritage culture can vary greatly among heritage learners. There are many factors that can influence their sense of belonging to their heritage culture. One of those factors is their generation status (as described above). Students who belong to G1 or G1.5 and who have spent part of their lives in their home country will have experienced firsthand the ways of thinking (ideas, beliefs, attitudes, values, philosophies), the behavioral practices (patterns of social interactions), and the cultural products (for example, art, history, literature) of their community. However, students who were born in the United States will live a portion of these experiences

mostly through their interactions with their family and the surrounding Latino community. The degree of cultural connectedness often decreases across generations, as shown by Potowski and Gorman (2011) in a study conducted around *quinceañera* celebrations. In their research, they interviewed 380 high school students and found that *quinceañera* celebrations decreased by generation (from 75% for G1 and G1.5 girls, to 59% for G2 girls, to 41% for G3 girls).

The heritage students' experience of their ancestral culture will also be shaped by the household's attitude toward maintaining the culture or adapting to the US society. Not all families value cultural traditions in the same way. Cultural representations will not be as important to those whose goal is to have their children adapt as quickly as possible to the U.S. context, while they will be important to other families who consider their culture an essential part of their identity.

Despite all of this, the connection to their heritage culture is, above all, a personal choice. Regardless of generational status or family influence, each individual constructs their own identity and decides what value their heritage culture will have in their daily life. The cultural identity of each individual is, moreover, a fluid process, which is continually defined and redefined through our interactions with others. This is why, in the context of study abroad, students will experience situations and have conversations with the host community that will cause them to rethink issues of their own identity. These moments can be fruitful and spark positive growth, or they can lead to an identity crisis that students will have to face. If this crisis is not resolved successfully, this can cause insecurities and problems that can negatively affect the students' overall experience abroad. This can happen to any student enrolled in a study abroad program. However, heritage students, because of their particular linguistic and cultural circumstances, may encounter different situations than those experienced by students of Spanish as a second language. Part 3 of this guide is devoted to further exploring this issue, from the point of view of heritage students.

Questions for reflection

Answer the following questions to the best of your availability:

1. Do you know the distribution of the Hispanic population in your county according to their country of origin? To know this information, you can visit to the following web page http://proximityone.com/hispanic_origin_zip.htm

2. What's your family country of origin? From 1 to 10 (10 being the strongest), what level of connection do you feel with this country and its culture? Explain.

3. What role does your heritage culture play in your daily life? In which ways is it reflected (i.e. music preferences, movies you like to watch, attendance to cultural events related to your heritage culture, etc.)?

Barriers to study abroad

One of the best ways for students to discover more about their heritage language and culture is to spend time in their family's country of origin. During the college years, this can be accomplished by participating in a study abroad program. Those who choose to do so will need to decide whether they prefer to study in their family's home country (if this is an option available within their university) or in another country within the Hispanic sphere. This decision will depend on each student's personal interests and motives. For example, the heritage student who decides to study in the family country may be motivated by a desire to get to know or reconnect with his or her roots. On the other hand, the student who wants to study in another country in the Hispanic world may be motivated by a desire to get to know a new country, explore new customs and experience all that the new culture has to offer while developing his or her Spanish language skills.

Regardless of their choice, it seems like studying abroad presents a particular ideal opportunity for heritage learners. However, as we analyzed earlier in this chapter, while in 2018-19 the percentage of study abroad students who identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino was 10.9% (Institute of International Education, 2020), the percentage of Hispanic students who attended college in 2018 was 19.5% (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). This shows a gap of 8.6%. This underrepresentation of Hispanic students in study abroad may be driven by a number of factors that we briefly discuss below.

FINANCIAL RESOUCES

Probably one of the main reasons that prevent greater participation of Latino students in study abroad programs is the lack of economic resources. Figure 9 below specifies the median household income in the United States (Statista Research Department, 2021). As the table shows, the median annual income of Hispanic families in 2019 is significantly lower than the Asian and Caucasian populations ($42,061 and $19,994 less respectively). We should add that the price of college tuition keeps rising. From 2006 to 2016, the average tuition price increased by 31%, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2019). This is why many students work during their college years. In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce (2018), 45% of Hispanics studying full-time and 80% studying part-time work while completing their studies. It is also common for college students, depending on their economic situation, to receive scholarships and grants or apply for loans. All of these economic determinants make it impossible for many Hispanic students to study abroad.

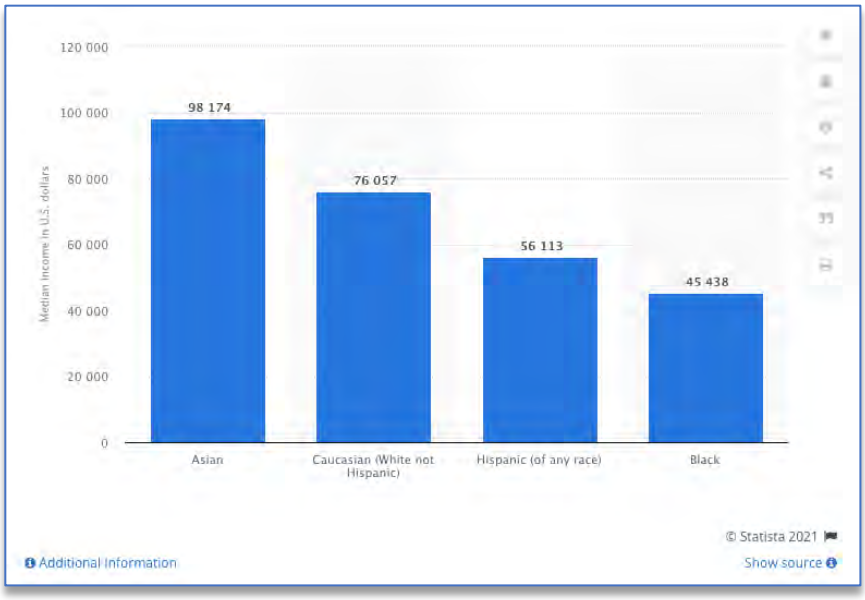

Figure 9: Median household income in the U.S. by race/ethnicity in 2019.

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

Family is one of the fundamental values of Hispanic culture. The family composition tends to be larger than the average U.S. family and the relationship between its members tends to be closer and deeper. It is not uncommon for three generations to live in the same household. Because of the close family relationships typical in the Hispanic culture, students who want to study abroad may encounter resistance from their families.

Leaving the family home, even temporarily, can also have consequences on the development of the family´s daily activities, since there are certain responsibilities, such as raising and educating children or caring for the elderly, which are usually shared among family members. These responsibilities tend to affect female students more than male students. Latina students may face additional family barriers to studying abroad. For example, some families may object to their daughters going alone to an unfamiliar or distant location.

It is also possible to find families who are opposed to their children going to study in their home country. This may be motivated by the fact that the family may have immigrated to the United States in part to provide their children with better academic opportunities. The family may think: Why study in (their country or origin) if the education is better in the U.S.?

LACK OF STUDY ABROAD OPTIONS

Many of the study abroad programs in Spanish-speaking countries focus on teaching Spanish as a second language. Thus, if the student has a major other than Spanish, it may be difficult to find a program that fits his or her academic needs. And even if the student has a major or minor in Spanish, the programs are often not designed with this population in mind, but rather tend to focus on more traditional students who have Spanish as a second language. It is uncommon for programs

to offer specific academic resources and opportunities for heritage students, so they may consider studying in one of these countries to be a fruitless enterprise that may not be worth the investment of their financial resources.

OTHER PERSONAL REASONS

In addition to the aforementioned barriers that may affect heritage learners to a greater degree than other types of student populations, there are other personal factors that may prevent them from being able to study abroad. These factors are not specific to HSs, as they affect all students. Programs should be prepared to support students who face the following situations:

- Special educational needs (due to learning difficulties or cognitive disabilities).
- Physical barriers (e.g., students in wheelchairs, hearing or visual impairments, etc.).
- Fears and phobias (such as getting on an airplane, anxiety about the unknown, etc.)
- Other mental health problems (diagnosed or undiagnosed).

Questions for reflection

Answer the following questions to the best of your availability:

1. What barriers did you have to face in order to be able to study abroad? How did you overcome these barriers?

2. How do you think your university could have helped you in overcoming these barriers?

3. What initiatives do you think your university could implement to increase the number of Hispanic learners studying abroad at your university?

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