CONTRASEÑA

UNLOCK THE WORLD.

How *Contraseña* inspired UC Davis students to become genuinely motivated to learn Spanish

Director of First-Year Spanish: Dr. Claudia Sánchez-Gutiérrez
Course Sequence: SPA 1, 2, and 3
Total Sections Annually: 23 sections per quarter
Estimated Annual Enrollment: 1350
First implementation: Fall 2019

Dr. Claudia Sánchez-Gutiérrez

The Challenges

UC Davis language departments are fortunate to have a language requirement that guarantees large numbers of students enrolling in language courses every quarter.

But because it's a requirement and not a choice, instructors are often faced with teaching students who are less than enthusiastic about having to learn Spanish.

According to UC Davis Director of the First-Year Spanish Program, Dr. Claudia Sánchez-Gutiérrez, students tend to come into the program without an "intrinsic motivation to learn Spanish."

And, despite living in California where Spanish is spoken by 38% of the population, many beginning Spanish learners are oblivious to the rich language and culture that quite literally surrounds them on campus, in their neighborhoods, and in their workplaces.

Long ago, the department set an explicit goal of making students more aware of the wide world of opportunities that will open for them, both locally and internationally, when they become more proficient in Spanish.

But In 2019, several years after Claudia had been named the language program director, too many students still seemed disconnected and unmotivated.

Claudia and her colleagues decided it was time to adopt a language program that would support the department's goal of sparking genuine student interest in working toward the built-in and lifelong rewards of language learning.

The Solution

When the department started evaluating options in 2019, *Contraseña* quickly became their favorite for many reasons.

Most importantly, it provided a strong linguistic foundation while remaining flexible enough to dial up or down and precisely calibrate each section for maximum engagement.

Which elements in Contraseña make it ideal for motivating students?

- At first, the UC Davis team was so excited about the abundance of *Conversar* activities that they overestimated the quantity that students could reasonably fit into each week. They adjusted based

  on student feedback, and now these synchronous communicative activities are giving students just the right number of opportunities to put language to use via virtual or face-to-face with their peers. Communicative practice is essential and **the audience of peers inspires students to step up their game**.

- The *Exploración cultural* modules send students on an inquiry-based cultural exploration. With over 55 cultural collaborators from all Spanish-speaking countries sharing their perspectives, **students set off on their independent journeys, following their interests and conducting their own research**. Then they expand their cultural competence by comparing what they learn to what they know of their own culture.

- The way culture is presented in *Contraseña* inspired the instructors at UC Davis to add their own cultural content into the mix, namely *Talleres de series/películas* (e.g. *Betty en NY*, *Rebelde*, and *Encanto*) *and Taller de lectura* (graded readers authored by instructors). Instructors explicitly connect the content of these series, films, and readers to what they're learning in their *Contraseña* unit. This contemporary content is **not only fun and motivating for students but it's incredibly motivating for the GTAs** who come up with the shows and help Claudia conceptualize how to create activities around them.

- The *proyectos* are culminating projects at the end of each unit that greatly impressed the UC Davis team. Students must complete a project to show what they've learned and to reflect on their cultural exploration research relative to their own culture. Thanks to the flexible nature of *Contraseña*, UC Davis has decided to have students complete one *proyecto* each quarter. They put an emphasis on the *preparar* sections of the *projectos* in class. Within Lingrofolio, an online ePortfolio space, students collaborate on their work with their peers. **Students are more invested in the learning process when they're given an opportunity to express their creativity.**

- The cherry on top, and an additional motivator for students looking for reasons to get excited about Spanish, is **the affordable student pricing** with *Contraseña*.

- Finally, **UC Davis has had a strong collaboration with the LingroLearning team** from the outset; setting the tone for a fruitful partnership.

"This was the first time that I had direct access to people in a learning company who would answer my questions, listen to my suggestions, and offer a quick and efficient support system for me, my GTAs, and our students."

--Claudia Sánchez Gutiérrez, Director of the First-Year Spanish Program, UC Davis

The Results

Ultimately, the department was able to reach those goals that they had set for their program. Here is what some students said about *Contraseña* after using the program:

- *Contraseña* has helped me engage in Spanish and made the transition to speaking a new language comfortable, especially in a post-COVID era.

- *Contraseña* has been an amazing aspect of my Spanish learning experience- it takes a holistic approach that allows me to hold conversations with Spanish-speaking customers I have after just a quarter. It's been pretty great!

- *Contraseña* was a very intuitive platform for learning Spanish. Everything I learned felt relevant and important. Ahora, yo puedo hablar mejor que antes!

- *Contraseña* gave me the resources to become a more culturally aware and prepared student.

- *Contraseña* has given me the ability to understand my grandma now and has advanced my Spanish faster than any class I've taken before.

- The program provided many opportunities for me to improve my Spanish. I enjoyed how the multiple activities and assessments there were along with the feedback.

- I loved all the variety in resources and assignments. You can find and apply whatever works best for you.