

Latino Conexión

Through SP 356 Advanced Grammar and Composition, students connect West Alabama nonprofits with the area's Latino community.

BY DYLAN WALKER | PHOTOS BY DYSEN NEEB AND ELLEN JOHNSON

When Turning Point, a nonprofit that combats domestic abuse in West Alabama, approached Hale County police about opening a location in the area, its staff was asked one question: what could Turning Point bring to the Latino community? Thanks to University of Alabama students studying Spanish, the answer was hope.

In SP 356 Advanced Grammar and Composition, students improve their Spanish grammar and writing skills while translating local nonprofits' documents from English to Spanish.

"Where the community needs us, that's where we go," says Dr. Xabier Granja, who teaches the course and is an instructor in UA's department of modern languages and classics.

Since Granja added the service-learning component to his courses in Spring 2016, students have translated documents for Turning Point as well as Schoolyard Roots, an educational-outreach program that brings gardening to elementary schools, and Good Samaritan Clinic, a medical center serving low-income individuals and families.

Sara Kazyak, a sophomore from Hartland, Mich., majoring in biology,

translated documents for the Good Samaritan Clinic. Kazyak says the course combined her passion for medicine and Spanish, giving her a sense of purpose when completing classwork, which included grammar exercises and translations of consent forms, tax worksheets and medical documents.

"You could see how it was being used in the real world, and that's really what I like about Spanish – and that's what I like about science, too," Kazyak says. "What you're doing in class is really applicable to life right now."

Angela Williams, a sophomore

from Sumter, S.C., majoring in management information systems, translated documents including permission slips, instructions and student worksheets for Schoolyard Roots.

Williams says the course inspired her while improving her understanding of Spanish-language colloquialisms. "We had to take into consideration who our audience was, and we had to work a little harder to make it sound more natural," Williams says. "So that really helped my Spanish writing."

Because of the students' work, the West Alabama Hispanic community can better locate and access nonprofit resources.

Portia Shepherd, education and outreach coordinator at Turning Point, says translated documents are helping the organization grow. When working to expand into Hale County, Shepherd was able to show Spanish-language resources to local officials, demonstrating Turning Point's ability to reach the Hispanic community in Alabama's Black Belt, a low-income region of the state known for its dark soil. Before students offered their services, clients had to drive an hour to a location with translators.

"We're able to have that informa-



During lessons in school gardens, children use worksheets and instructions translated by UA students.

tion there all the time, instead of clients having to drive up to Tuscaloosa like before," Shepherd says.

Information Granja's students translated for Turning Point includes a resource list and a "Power and Control Wheel" outlining the causes of domestic violence. Shepherd says Turning Point uses these tools across its nine-county service area and shares them with other domestic-violence outreach centers.

"They're using it in Huntsville; they're using it on the state level," Shepherd says. "We're using it in different places because a lot of organizations don't have the money to ensure that everybody can get the services they provide."

Since Spring 2016, more than 60 students in the SP 356 Advanced Grammar and Composition class have dedicated more than 300 hours to translating nonprofit organizations' outreach materials into Spanish. In Spring 2016, the class translated 43 multi-page documents, and Fall 2016 students translated 40 items. During the next two years, Granja's students will translate Schoolyard Roots' entire curriculum into Spanish.

Schoolyard Roots operates school gardens and teaches more than 3,300 children about healthy eating and community gardening each year through weekly lessons. (See article on page 10.)

Lindsay Turner, executive director of Schoolyard Roots, says she is grateful to Granja and his students for their contributions.

"It was perfect timing to connect with the Spanish translations class," Turner says, "because last fall we expanded into several new schools with a high percentage of Hispanic students."

Granja hopes course alumni will continue doing outreach projects, whether in language or other fields. Kazyak plans to use Spanish

to serve a diverse group of patients as a doctor. Williams wants to improve translation technology to include colloquialisms, like those she learned in the class.

Community partners say they hope to see the lives of Alabama's Hispanic residents improve as the partnership with UA students continues. Shepherd says she noticed more interest and participation from the Hispanic community after the introduction of translated documents in schools and at a Latino health fair.

"Dr. Granja has opened up a door not just in the nine counties we serve, but also throughout the state of Alabama," Shepherd says. "And if it wasn't for him knocking on our door and saying, 'I am here to help,' this never would have taken place."

Granja credits the reciprocal nature of service learning for his course's positive effects on both community organizations and students.

"This is as much about teaching students as it is serving the community of Tuscaloosa. It's not just busy work," he says of the tasks that help students practice their new language. "It's work that matters."

For more information about SP 356 Advanced Grammar and Composition, contact Dr. Xabier Granja at 205-348-6355 or xgranja@ua.edu.

Members of the Fall 2016 SP 356 class translate documents for nonprofit organizations.



Dr. Xabier Granja [left] with the Fall 2016 SP 356 Advanced Grammar class

