

¡A SU SALUD!
**SPANISH LANGUAGE
DISTANCE EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT**

EVALUATION REPORT

Evaluation Report Prepared by:

Claudia S. Plaisted, MS, RD, LDN

Gina Johnson, RN

Karl Umble, PhD, MPH

North Carolina Institute for Public Health

School of Public Health

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

May 29, 2002

Executive Summary

The healthcare workforce has a great need for Spanish language competency in order to better serve the *Latino* population. *¡A su salud!* is a distance-education program designed to promote Spanish competency and is targeted at the healthcare workforce. The program has been specifically designed to meet the educational needs of practitioners who need or want a formal learning structure to build Spanish language competency but who cannot leave their geographic location to attend residential classes or already have very busy class schedules. A one-month short course of *¡A su salud!* was pilot tested between November 5th and December 7th, 2001. The main research questions posed for this evaluation were:

1. Does the program sufficiently impact Spanish language knowledge and skills?
2. Do students using the program materials enjoy using the program materials such that they would take a full course using the materials or recommend them for others?
3. What specific aspects of distance-based learning using technology-based education do course participants like or dislike?

Participants completed several pre- and post-pilot evaluations of their language competency and post-pilot questionnaires of their technical and educational impressions of the program. Most participants also attended one of two focus groups to provide more insight into their program experience. A third focus group was conducted at *El Centro Latino* to discuss the program's dramatic scenario with members from the *Latino* community. A fourth focus group was conducted with faculty in the Romance languages department to discuss the overall structure and approach of *¡A su salud!* and solicit their input.

The following report is divided into separate sections for each of the 3 separate groups from which data was gathered: participants, community members, and faculty members.

Measures:

¡A su salud! participants completed several instruments, including an overall language competency evaluation (sub tests of vocabulary, language structure, spoken language comprehension, and speaking ability), a retrospective pre- and post-test of their perceptions of their skills, a rating of the program performance along several domains (educational, technical, etc.), and use of course materials. Those participants who could not attend the focus groups provided further written evaluations in the form of open-ended questionnaires. However, most participants attended a focus group in which they discussed several aspects of the program.

Findings from Participants

Language competency test scores: Graded tests measuring vocabulary, language structure, spoken language comprehension, and speaking ability all showed improvement between the pre- and post- tests. Participants also rated these tests as fair evaluations of what was taught in the program and of what they learned in the program.

Retrospective pre- and post- tests: From *prior to the program* to *after pilot program completion* participants rated their actual skills as improving to a larger extent than other attributes, such as their awareness of *Latino* cultural aspects or comfort with the culture. However, in an absolute sense, participants pre- and post- test ratings improved in every category of the 10 questions posed. Statistical analysis indicated that all of these changes were significant in every category.

Ratings of *¡A su salud!* program performance: Overall, participants rated the program favorably for educational aspects, interaction with the learning exercises on the DVD, and the *Cuaderno*. They rated the technology aspects of the program poorly, reflecting the considerable technical problems associated with program installation and some technical bugs during program execution. They were rather neutral as to whether they would complete the program again, rating slightly above a 3 (or “neutral”) for whether the course were offered as an entire semester or for university credit. However participants rated taking another course for personal education purposes at a higher level which approached “agree” (see table 4).

Participant Focus Groups: 17 (77%) of 22 participants completed the focus groups. Overall, the program was well received, although participants were vocal about the technical issues with the program. Participants wanted a greater sense of “community”, more time to practice their verbal skills, more access to their professors, and more feedback on the exercises they completed. For many of them, the Centra audio chat room was not an option, worked poorly, and was frustrating. While having an assigned partner for spoken Spanish was felt to be good in concept, in reality scheduling issues prevented this from being an effective exercise for most.

In summary, areas for discussion and further improvement include:

- Address technical issues with the DVD based portion of the program.
- Build a sense of community into the course
- Greater feedback from educators
- Create more effective opportunities for speaking practice, preferably with a skilled Spanish speaker.

Findings from the Latino Community Member Focus Group

Four *Latino* community members living in the Carrboro area participated in a focus group in order to determine their perceptions of the video. Overall, they enjoyed the video and found it to be a good teaching tool for health care professionals. They believed that immigration issues, language barrier issues, and HIV/AIDS were very pertinent and served as good themes in the video. However, they felt that certain portions of the video were misleading and unclear and that there should have been more communication between the husband and the wife, instead of the extensive communication between the husband and the social worker/translator.

In summary, the ideas and suggestions for consideration include:

- Send positive messages about family.
- Illustrate the importance of obstacles experienced by immigrants.
- Emphasize the need for language acquisition on both sides, English for Spanish-speakers and Spanish for English-speakers.

Findings from the Faculty Member Focus Group

Four professors from the Department of Romance Languages, one of whom is a software developer, convened for a focus group. They were impressed by the technology and the intricacies of the interface and design. However, they encountered some technical difficulties and offered several suggestions for improvements in the program design. They felt that the workload for students was rather extensive for a small time period, but they believe that a two-semester long course would be realistic. There was some debate as to the workload for the instructor, but the general consensus was that it would depend upon the additional exercises designed to supplement the existing materials.

In summary, the areas for improvement and suggestions include:

- Clarify the order in the design and improve the flow of one screen to another.
- Incorporate authentic, realistic speech into the program as well as rehearsed, scripted speech so that students will know what to expect in real life scenarios.
- Organize the educational components so that the student receives maximum benefit from each exercise and test without too much difficulty or too much ease of use.