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## **New Spanish Class Encourages Community Interaction, Service**

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – For Illinois Wesleyan University sophomore Danny Burke, the end of the semester will mean more than taking tests and heading home—he'll have to say goodbye to Jorge, the third-grader he has mentored this spring as part of his coursework for Spanish 240: Spanish for Social Justice.

The course, offered for the first time this spring, is part of an effort by the Hispanic Studies department to “strengthen course offerings at the 200-level, as well as involvement in the community,” said Professor of Hispanic Studies Carolyn Nadeau. The 10 students in the class spend three hours each week using their Spanish language skills to serve the community in a variety of field projects.

Burke mentors for the Grade-school Achievement Program (GAP) at Bent Elementary School and helps at the Immigration Project at the Western Avenue Community Center. Other projects include State Farm's PALS program (high-school tutoring) and working with families of pre-school children at Heartland Head Start.

Spanish 240 is comparable to the established 230 course, Medical Spanish and Cultural Competency for Healthcare, in which students learn the vocabulary to speak about medical issues and then apply their skills as volunteers in a local clinic. Instead of healthcare, the new course focuses on five other social justice issues: immigration, housing, education, employment and citizenship.

“This course is unique in that it offers students both theory in the classroom and practice in the community,” Nadeau said. “We are also serving as a model of possibilities for classroom collaboration with with IWU's Action Research Center.”

For class, students read articles and respond to each of the five issues with an essay. The fieldwork makes them aware of the national issues they study at a local and personal level.

“The course prepares students for democratic citizenship as we debate issues of social justice—all in Spanish, of course,” Nadeau said. For example, according to Burke, working with patrons at the Immigration Project has allowed him to more fully appreciate the value of citizenship.

The course, which carries a writing intensive flag, will culminate with each student completing a semester-long research project on a selected issue. Burke will combine his two majors, Hispanic studies and environmental studies, to write about environmental racism. “Minorities in general are disproportionately exposed to toxic waste sites,” he said. “Usually if an incinerator is proposed, it's in a minority community.” In short, he expects his project to take on “the fight for environmental justice.”

“Professor Nadeau gives us a lot of flexibility,” Burke said. “She knows I'm an environmental studies major, so she's allowing me to do my project on the social justice aspects of the environmental movement.”

For Nadeau, the variety of students in the class keeps things interesting. “We have first-year, fourth-year, second- and third-year students. The diverse mix of levels of education is a great learning experience,” she said. “The nature of the course draws an eclectic group of people.”