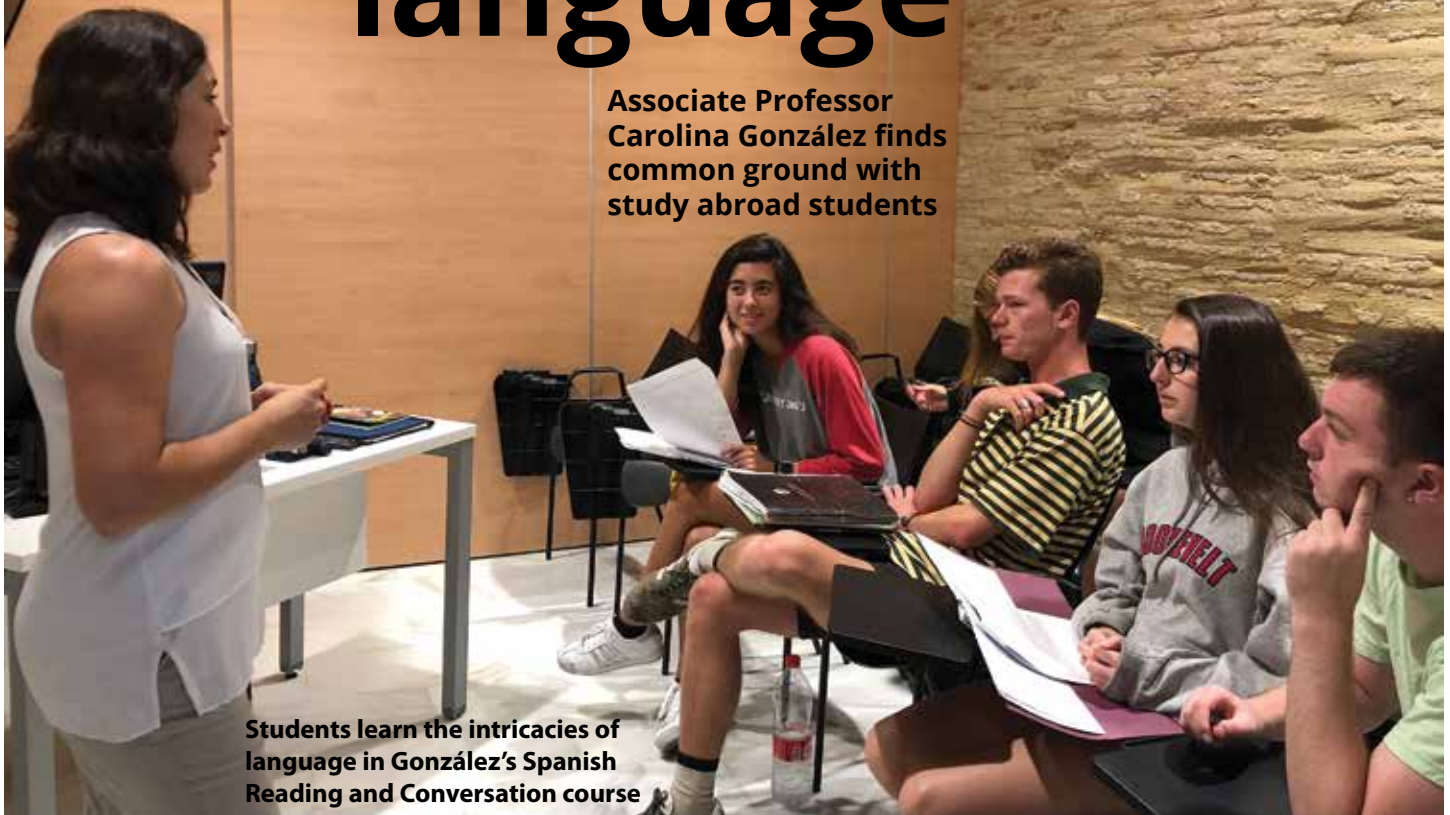


Speaking their language

Associate Professor
Carolina González finds
common ground with
study abroad students



Students learn the intricacies of language in González's Spanish Reading and Conversation course

Photo by Dani Brown

By Dani Brown

Carolina González is familiar with the difficulties that Florida State students who study abroad experience when they enter a new culture. She knows because she was in their situation in 1995 when, as a Spanish college student, she studied for nine months in Manchester, England.

"It was the first time I was in an English-speaking country, and I was very nervous," says González, associate professor of Spanish in the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics at FSU. In the summer of 2018, Gonzalez taught two upper-level Spanish courses in Valencia. "So I can sympathize with FSU students who come to a country where another language is spoken."

González is a native of Spain, and she grew up in Muskiz, a small town near Bilbao, a Basque city in the northern part of the country. She earned a bachelor's degree in English—called English philology in Spain—at University of Deusto in Bilbao, and during her junior year of undergraduate studies, González took the opportunity to study in Manchester. She compares the foreign exchange program called Erasmus to FSU's International Programs.

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"I remember the first day being very challenging," says González, who lived in Muskiz with her parents and her five younger siblings. "But, I really liked the experience of being abroad and being in a different country, being part of a different culture."

Teaching those two courses in Valencia provided opportunities that González does not get when she teaches FSU students in Tallahassee. The class lessons allow for immediate applications of what is learned in class and an opportunity for students to hear sounds that are not as frequent in America.

"I like to bring a lot of the expressions and colloquialisms to the course," she says, referring to Reading and Conversation. The second course she teaches is Spanish Phonetics. "I point out differences because most of the Spanish that students at FSU hear, especially if they are from Florida, is Latin American Spanish, which is beautiful. But here in Valencia, I tell them 'Look, here in Spain people say this.'"

In turn, FSU Valencia students learning Spanish have advantages that Tallahassee's campus cannot easily provide. The cultural immersion aspect helps students take what they learn in class and practice speaking in their day-to-day lives while living in Valencia.

Caitie Bahmandeji, a student in González's Phonetics class, appreciates the student interaction in class.

"She wants a lot of participation in class, which is nice because I came here to practice my Spanish," Bahmandeji says. "I definitely use it more than in Tallahassee. [In Tallahassee] I speak it in the classroom, and then when I leave the classroom—I'm done. Here, I get to speak with everybody in Spanish, which is so helpful."

The classes in study abroad programs can often be smaller than classes in the U.S., which encourages teacher-student interactions and participation in the classroom. González appreciates the opportunity to have

Dancing and singing for fun

Carolina González talks about her newfound appreciation and enjoyment for flamenco

I am from the Basque country in the north of Spain, and flamenco is not very popular there. However, when I lived in North Carolina, I saw a flamenco show as part of a bigger event, and it made a big impression on me. When I came to Tallahassee, one day I searched online and saw that there was a flamenco class starting, and I've been hooked ever since.

More recently I have taken up flamenco singing. I have learned a lot

from both. I enjoy flamenco for many reasons: The rhythms are haunting, the lyrics are typically very poetic, and the synergy between singer, dancer and guitar player is amazing.

I've always been into dancing. When I lived in Los Angeles I learned salsa, swing, and ballroom dancing. Although I really liked all of them, somehow I was a terrible ballroom dancer. But I had fun and I never intended to enter any competition, so I did not mind.

more one-on-one teaching and for students to feel more confident learning a second language. As helpful as that can be, González wishes that the students had more time than the five-week session to learn and apply their language skills.

"There is very little time for reflection," González says. "The classes are long, the students do a lot of activities, and there is so much to explore. You can only cover so much in a class, without the students feeling overwhelmed."

The time constraint is a minor obstacle to González's teaching, however, as she finds it is valuable for everyone to learn the home language if they are going to visit a country for an extended period. She recommends taking a language course to all future study-abroad students.

"It really makes a huge difference in [the students'] experience," she says. "If you go to Italy, take Italian. If you go to France, obviously, take French. At any level."

González teaches in the appropriate department to back up her suggestion, of course. As of 2017, González was named the Spanish and Portuguese coordinator in the Department of Modern Language and Linguistics. In this role, she oversees course schedules at the upper and graduate levels, as well as organizes faculty meetings that look to improve the program at FSU. In the future, González hopes to offer additional inclusive courses and programs for heritage speakers, those who grew up with Spanish around them but have varying levels of true Spanish classroom instruction.

González also brings a strong academic background to her position in the department. After earning her bachelor's degree in Bilbao, she traveled to the University of Southern California, where she earned her master's and then her Ph.D. in linguistics. She joined FSU's Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics as an assistant professor in 2006—she was a visiting instructor for 2005-06—and also taught in Valencia in the summer of 2016.

As a linguistics professor, González offers an array of courses that focus on phonology and phonetics of language. In addition, González has designed an FSU E-series

course called "Language Birth, Language Death," which focuses on both newly invented languages and endangered languages.

One of her main lines of research focuses on the family of Panoan languages spoken in the Amazon area. In that study, she looks at how consonants, particularly "laryngeals," interact with rhythm.

"I've been interested in this language family because it's not very well investigated," she says, adding that the interesting aspects of the research have kept her going with it since she joined FSU.

Her second line of research focuses more on the Spanish language and its consonants.

"I'm also interested in intonation, so the melody in how we speak, the ups and downs and how it interacts with the syntax of the sentences," she says.

González studied phonology, the shared patterns and systems in a language, during her academic time at USC.

"I really fell in love with sounds and wanted to contribute more in that area," she says.

Her doctoral dissertation is titled *The effect of stress and foot structure on consonantal processes*, but her recent studies involve recording people and analyzing how they speak. For González, she enjoys the discovery aspect of research and the directions it leads her.

For example, when she was working on the Panoan languages, she started with the sounds. She then realized that the data she was looking at had to do with morphology, or how you divide the words up. She did not know much about morphology, but that's where the data took her.

"It's a challenge, but you have to do it or you won't get it, you won't find out what is going on, she says. "You keep on learning. So, I am a student. I'm teaching but I am learning.

González believes that understanding how

Carolina González has taught summer courses for International Programs in Valencia in 2016 and 2018. Here, she and her husband, FSU Religion Professor Adam Gaiser, and their daughter Adela attend Valencia's Batalla de Flores parade in late July 2018.

languages function is at the heart of understanding new or different cultures. Reflecting back on her experience as an exchange student in an English-speaking country, she stresses to future International Programs students to further enrich their travels by learning the local language.

"As tourists we often feel that we have to check out all the 'it' places—but for a more meaningful and satisfying experience, I recommend taking time to talk to the locals and to the people who have made this country their home," González says. "You learn so much from doing that—and you will remember it always. Bonus points if you talk to them in Spanish."

