Dear Alumni and Friends:

Our efforts and commitment to provide students with opportunities to expand their international education and global awareness continue to grow. To this end, we have added Portuguese to our language offerings and a new minor in Spanish. In addition, our students continue to enjoy our already established courses in French, German, and Spanish.

Learning a foreign language benefits students in any major of study. As Shayla Copeland, a senior in business administration and accounting, puts it, “Being able to learn a foreign language has been such a delight at Saint Leo University… having another language to fall back on puts you one step ahead of others in a job process and in the real world. It is such an awesome opportunity and is just one of the many things that will better our future.” Brian Tyler, a senior majoring in business administration with a specialization in international business, states that “Learning a foreign language opens your eyes to new cultures and different ways of life. It has been an amazing experience that has taught me more about myself and my personal preferences and goals.” Likewise, Alexia Areallano-Monreal, a biology major, says, “I’m glad there are foreign language classes at Saint Leo. They enable you to learn about different cultures that you wouldn’t learn about otherwise and in a way that is more effective than by simply hearing about the culture.”

The new Portuguese classes are Beginning Portuguese I and II, with additional courses to follow. This is a strategic addition that takes into account that Portuguese is not only important in southern Europe, but also the official and most commonly used language in Brazil. As Brazil is such a growing economy internationally, the university is paying special attention to the South American nation, and has begun an educational collaboration with a major Catholic university there, the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio). “It’s important that our students have the opportunity to expand their language skills in Portuguese,” says Dr. Marcela Van Olphen, associate professor of Spanish and Portuguese.
These Portuguese courses have been very well received by students. Yakira Harvey says she finds her studies very rewarding. “I especially enjoyed learning about Brazilian culture and hope to one day visit. Being a marketing major, I would love to have the opportunity to work in Brazil.” Andree Garnier, a senior and a psychology major, enjoyed the opportunity to study a language that is similar to, yet different from Spanish. “The teacher pushes us to practice, to read and to listen, and to understand. If I weren’t graduating, I would be the first student to register for level three.” Andrew Pavoncello, a current student in Portuguese with majors in political science and global studies, is just as enthusiastic. “I hope for the future that Saint Leo provides an abundance of other languages so students like me have the opportunity to explore the vast culture that the world offers us.”

The new minor in Spanish is tailored to cater to the needs of both non-native and native speakers. Yakira Harvey explains why she, as a native speaker from Costa Rica, decided to enroll in advanced Spanish, as well as Portuguese. “It helps me further my language skills … I would love to travel to other countries where Spanish is spoken and even one day work in a Spanish-speaking country.”

We also anticipate seeing more students with academic travel plans, such as Suzanne Lehman, an English (professional writing specialization) major who plans on studying in Spain next fall and is enrolled in language study in preparation. Suzanne noted that she had no Spanish-language knowledge at all before enrolling at Saint Leo. “I came to this school hoping to learn a new language. I am excited to know that my efforts in Spanish will come with a Spanish minor, and I am hoping to gain a vast amount more of the Spanish language and culture through the minor.”

“Learning a language is a process that transcends the vocabulary lists and the grammar any textbook or online software program offers,” says Dr. Van Olphen. Providing a cultural context is necessary, too. So when the minor was developed, four new upper-level undergraduate courses were created. These are: Introduction to Spanish-Speaking Cultures; Peoples of Latin America: Cultural Perspectives; Peoples of Spain: Cultural Perspectives; and Advanced Spanish through Literature and Film.
Students who enroll in these courses will gain a more well-rounded view of the world, as well as more advanced language skills. We are glad to see students thriving and learning foreign languages from the School of Arts and Sciences. Anyone seeking information about French, Spanish, and Portuguese studies should contact Dr. Marcela Van Olphen at marcela.vanolphen@saintleo.edu. And those interested in our German classes should contact Carol Ann Moon at carol.moon@saintleo.edu.

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