

Spanish classes use new learning method

By Katelynn Toft

Durant High School's two veteran Spanish language teachers, Mrs. Laura Meincke and Mr. Jeff Trask, are immersing their students in a new way of learning the Spanish language.

Mrs. Meincke, who splits her time between Durant and Wilton, was the one to bring the idea of an immersion program back to her Durant Spanish classes four years ago.

Wilton had been doing this type of program a few years before Mrs. Meincke started teaching there, but as soon as she got to experience this type of teaching, she immediately brought it to Mr. Trask's attention.

"I remember Miss Meincke came to me, and she said, 'Hey, I want you to look at this curriculum,'" recalled Mr. Trask.

"I was like, 'Oh, okay.' And she's like, 'This is what they're introducing in Wilton. What do you think about it?'"

And according to both teachers, they were eager to give it a shot.

This new curriculum was a very different approach to teaching students the Spanish language and culture.

Called Somos, it exposes students to the language by completely surrounding them when they are in class, instead of simply teaching the language.

"Before we were teaching you like you were going to teach Spanish, and now we're teaching you Spanish as if you were to go travel somewhere," said Mr. Trask.

High school students spend three to four weeks on each Spanish unit in class, and it's all in class.

There is very little homework. In each unit, the students are introduced to a handful of terms that they will ultimately be tested on at the end of the unit.

The way these students learn the terms is through repetition. They see the terms in weekly stories that use the specific words, and the stories teach the students about Spanish culture at the same time. It

takes about one week to get through a short story, and during that time, the students see the terms numerous times.

After the students finish the readings, they have different activities where they start using the terms. On occasions, students play games and do worksheets that give different examples of the words.

These activities give the students a better understanding of how these terms are used in the Spanish language and have been proven to help students remember the terms longer.

"I feel like Spanish one and two are very similar in terms of grammar and the target structures and everything, but then once kids get into Spanish three and especially four, that's when I don't have to slow down as much to explain things," said Mr. Trask.

Somos is set up to continuously reuse content from previous units. The curriculum wants kids to remember the vocabulary from earlier stories, so that when the words come up again, the students will remember them.

"We go over focus words, structures, that are constantly showing up again in later units and later stories, and they're emphasized, so for anybody who didn't get it, they continually get exposure to those high-frequency structures that they'll need," said Mrs. Meincke.

What captivated Mrs. Meincke about using the Somos curriculum was the stories and the use of grammar within it.

"Storytelling in itself can be very captivating I think, just when you're telling somebody a story, and they want to listen and hear the rest of it," said Mrs. Meincke. "The Somos approach is just more friendly. It's fun, and it flows well. It just makes sense."

Mr. Trask and Mrs. Meincke started incorporating the Somos curriculum in 2021 with most of the freshmen and a few eighth graders who were in their Spanish one class-



Photo by Royce Richman

Mr. Jeff Trask calls on one of his students to answer a question during his first-period Spanish class.

es.

"I will be honest with you, when we first started with the new curriculum, I felt like it was really slow, but what I came to realize is the building blocks to get to the point at which you need to be at, at the end of the curriculum," said Mr. Trask.

The Somos program does a nice job of providing teachers with a bunch of activities to do with their students and makes the teachers more involved and active throughout the class. A lot of material gets covered in every class at every level.

"[Before] I would pull out my notes on the screen, and then everyone would have their notebook out, and they'd be writing down conjugations and all these rules, but the thing that was lacking is we're not actually using it [the language]," said Mr. Trask.

Now with this new Spanish curriculum, Mr. Trask and Mrs. Meincke are talking all class period long, switching back and forth between English and Spanish.

"I'm talking to you [students] the whole time, so you [the teacher] kind of get really tired," said Mr. Trask. "You're just so

much more interactive that you're just wiped out, and that's fine. I would prefer that be the case than being bored to tears."

Mrs. Meincke and Mr. Trask are very passionate about teaching the students of Durant and work very hard to make something that is generally hard to learn much easier.

"Señor Trask's class is very enjoyable, and he always has interesting and fun activities planned for each day," said sophomore Aiden Weimerskirch, who is taking Spanish two this year and plans to continue next year as well. "Señor always has my attention with his creative Spanish stories."

Learning Spanish, both the language and the culture, is a very beneficial skill, and that is why Mr. Trask and Mrs. Meincke put so much effort into their lesson plans.

"I just think it's one of the best things you can learn," said Mr. Trask. "I mean, I'm teaching my kids Spanish. I just feel like knowing about other languages and cultures just brings you together with other people."

Graduate pursues childhood dream of being policeman

By Kila Wink

A 2010 Durant graduate is working in the thick of the crime world while pursuing his childhood dream job with the Davenport Police Department.



Simms

Sergeant Murphy Simms says that he "never looked back" after deciding he wanted to be a police officer in middle

school.

After graduating from the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy in 2017, Sgt. Simms has served seven different positions in the Davenport department.

Sgt. Simms started in the patrol unit and within a year was assigned to the Emergency Services Team, or SWAT team, which he still takes part in.

"Our SWAT Team is not full time, so I've been able to do this along with other assignments at the same time," said Sgt. Simms.

In 2019, Sgt. Simms was assigned to the Neighborhoods Energized to Succeed (NETS) unit where he worked to put an end to neighborhood crime trends.

Less than a year later, Sgt. Simms received the call to serve as a detective in the Criminal Investigation Division (CID)

on the Major Case Unit.

High-level crimes such as homicides, major assaults, and robberies are the key focus of the Major Case Unit. Simms was involved in 47 death investigations from 2020-2022.

"This included murders within families, gang shootings resulting in death, drug cases, and many more," said Sgt. Simms. "I've learned the most as a detective, and it is a valuable skill set I still use to this day."

Dealing with those tough cases as a detective might have been overwhelming, but Sgt. Simms knows that he has support from his family, despite the emotional toll it can take.

"Although I've seen unspeakable things, I do this job to help those truly in need and knowing I have my family to support me in that, I love what I do and wouldn't change it for the world," he said.

After two years as a detective, Sgt. Simms received a promotion to corporal and returned back to the patrol division shortly before being assigned as a training supervisor.

Sgt. Simms had a lot on his plate while in this position.

"In this position, I managed all of the training all sworn and civilian personnel attend on a yearly basis," said Sgt. Simms. "This included a lot of instruction in things such as firearms, traffic stops, de-escalation, etc., and developing the curriculum for the training itself."

Sgt. Simms was promoted to sergeant in September and is currently a supervisor for the night-shift patrol.

He knows he is making a positive

impact in his community.

"I have the ability to change the perception any one person has on the police with just one positive encounter," he said. "If I can make this happen even one out of 10 people I encounter, I will have made a profound impact on the perception of police in this country."

While at Durant High School, Simms participated on the football and wrestling teams.

Durant industrial tech teacher Mr. Tim Rouse recalls having Sgt. Simms in class.

"Murphy was always there for his friends and anyone else that needed help," said Mr. Rouse. "Great kid."

Because of his compassion for others, Mr. Rouse is not surprised by the career path of his former student.

"What I remember most about Murphy is his willingness to help others," he said. "It does not surprise me that he went in the direction of a service-oriented job."

Sgt. Simms definitely finds his job very rewarding and had a hard time deciding what was the best day of his career.

"I enjoy the job so much I truly get excited to come to work each and every day," he said.

"Big drug busts, solving and charging homicide cases, and helping people truly in need are just a small part of what makes this job the best."

Looking ahead, Sgt. Simms believes he will finish his career with the Davenport blue.

"I love the community I work in and could never see myself leaving," he said.

Latta Harris' soccer player of the month

Junior Clay Dierickx has been playing soccer for 11 years. He plays left wing, the midfield position on the far left side of the field. His favorite memory is when Durant United beat Muscatine in the team's first season. He thinks Durant United will end up with the same number of wins and losses.



Dierickx

Latta Harris, LLP
CPAs & CONSULTANTS

1201 North Ave | Tipton, IA | 52772
563-886-2187 | Fax: 563-514-4312

Hair~Makeup~Tanning

Kiley Van Sloten (DHS 2007)
Owner/Stylist

Alicia Cooling and Danielle Halferty,
Stylists

210 5th Street, Durant, IA
(563) 785-6227