the changing profession

Directing and Teaching in a Summer Intensive Program in Portuguese

SEVERINO J. ALBUQUERQUE

EARLY IN MY PROBATIONARY PERIOD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MADISON, LONG BEFORE MY DEPARTMENT (SPANISH AND PORTUguese) began assigning mentors to junior faculty members, I found myself in a work situation that would shape my career profoundly.

When I was hired in 1983, the Ibero-American Studies Program (as the Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian Studies Program was then called) was preparing to renew its National Resources Center status. It was decided that the new application would include a request for a United States Department of Education Title VI grant to fund a Summer Intensive Portuguese Institute (SIPI), with emphasis on Brazilian Portuguese. The first such program was held in 1985,[1] and it has been offered every other summer in the last twenty-seven years. The grants include FLAS fellowships for graduate students in diverse fields, who make up most of the enrollments, though faculty members, staff members, and upper-level undergraduates can also sign up for the classes. A number of the graduate students, almost all FLAS recipients, come from other universities. All participants must have Intermediate to Intermediate High proficiency in a Romance language; most of them meet the requirement with Spanish. Instruction in Portuguese, from day 1, is five hours a day and five days a week for eight weeks, and culture and language are taught in tandem.

The prevalent thinking in my department in the early 1980s was to put new faculty members to the most strenuous tests to see who would survive, and little thought was given to the consequences these demands would have on their research and careers. A mentor would have objected to the inordinate amount of service that was expected of me during some of the most crucial years of my career. The colleague who came closest to being my mentor was in another department and happened to be the director of the center that had received the federal grant. As a young assistant professor, I was in no position to turn down this prominent Brazilianist, whom I admired greatly and who judged, correctly, that bringing this summer program to Wisconsin was a major coup. With what he thought

SEVERINO J. ALBUQUERQUE, professor of Portuguese at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, is the author of *Tentative Transgressions: Homosexuality, AIDS, and the Theatre in Brazil* (U of Wisconsin P, 2004), among other works, and editor of *Joaquim Nabuco e Wisconsin* (Bem-Te-Vi, 2010). He is also a coeditor of the *Luso-Brazilian Review* and director of the university's Brazil Initiative (brazil.wisc.edu).

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were my best interests in mind, my senior colleague made sure I was deeply involved in the entire operation, from helping to gather information for the grant proposal to participating in the scholarship committee to selecting and supervising a lecturer to directing and teaching in the program. Not to mention arranging for workshops (e.g., the one taught by a local dance group), recruiting guest lecturers, organizing the conversation club (Bate Papo), hosting the feijoada dinner party at my house, conducting the entrance and exit oral proficiency interviews as required by the Department of Education. And so on. Not realizing that each added responsibility would curtail my research time, my mentor substitute and others thought they were facilitating my path toward a successful academic career.

Summer responsibilities were not taken into account during my tenure deliberations, although several years later I received a Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award, which in part recognized those efforts. It was mostly on the strength of my publication record that I went on to receive tenure, unanimously and with merit. The Portuguese program as a whole continued to grow,[2] and new faculty members were hired, but because I remained the only speaker of Brazilian Portuguese, I was expected to continue directing and teaching in the summer program.[3] At a major research university where merit was judged and promotion accorded on the basis of publications, I was at a disadvantage vis-à-vis my colleagues who, not having to teach during the summer, could dedicate their months off to their research and writing. Service encroached further as a result of the expectation that Portuguese faculty members, unlike their Spanish colleagues, would coordinate the language program, including the training and supervision of teaching assistants, during the academic year, with no release time.

Had I been in linguistics, I could have drawn from the summer and coordination responsibilities as part of my research and writing—on second language acquisition, for example—but I am a literature person. With the advent of cultural studies, however, new and exciting pedagogical opportunities sprang up, and SIPI class time dedicated to film, drama, and cultural performances (e.g., capoeira martial arts) increased considerably, as did discussions regarding gender, social, and political issues. Thanks to the schedule flexibility in a summer institute and the diversity and enthusiasm of the students, some of these discussions were lengthy and—the participants' limited proficiency in their new language notwithstanding—often intense. These discussions were to have profound and lasting implications for my career. I am now convinced that they were key in the qualitative leap in my research that led to my second book, published in 2004 and a recipient of two national awards.

So, yes, I have had a successful academic career—but important questions remain. When is it appropriate to ask (not to mention pressure) a junior faculty member to take on summer responsibilities? In the absence of a mentor, who should intervene if such a situation occurs where it is inappropriate? By directing and teaching in the Title VI–funded summer program, was I contributing to the perception that ours is little more than a service department in a large public research university? If used for research and writing, might not the time spent in planning, directing, and teaching in the summer program have dramatically improved my publication record? On the other hand, was the toll taken by summer teaching and administration really so heavy as to seriously limit my intellectual activity and overall productivity? Could it not be argued that the added teaching and service work I did in the last three decades made me a more rounded member of the profession, that contact with the many summer students shaped my teaching *and* my research, and that my career and indeed my life have benefited greatly from these experiences? Some of these

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questions are not easily answered, in part because of the variables involved, but it would be hard to argue that I did not benefit or to deny that directing a summer language institute expanded and nuanced what I had thought of as academic work.

Notes

1. Summer programs in Portuguese were held in Madison in the 1960s and early 1970s, with funding from the National Defense Education Act, but they were discontinued when Portuguese was removed from the federal government's critical-language list in 1972.

2. An MLA report by Nelly Furman, David Goldberg, and Natalia Lusin noted in 2006, "Enrollments in Portuguese continue to rise steadily: the 21.1% increase noted from 1998 to 2002 was followed by a 22.4% increase in 2006."

3. In the context of globalization and in the light of Brazil's growing relevance in world affairs, interest in SIPI continued to increase, as did enrollments, although available sources, including the comprehensive MLA report cited above, do not separate summer enrollments from academic-year figures. With the higher numbers, SIPI and other summer language intensive programs became a viable alternative to the "narrow model" the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages describes as "[t]he standard configuration of university foreign language curricula, in which a two- or three-year language sequence feeds into a set of core courses primarily focused on canonical literature" (236).

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