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Spanish for Medical Professions: Speaking about Healthcare vs. Speaking in a Healthcare Context

For the last two years, courses in Advanced Spanish for Medical Professions have developed comprehensive procedures for assessing speaking. This presentation will describe the process, based on research and changes in curricular design, through which the focus shifted from assessing speaking with end-of-semester presentations to assessing speaking abilities within several contexts and in several modes.

The common structure of Medical Spanish courses and textbooks follows grammar points interlaced with sections on medical content, which ranges from cultural generalizations about Latino patients to actual information about medical procedures. With these limited resources, at this institution for several semesters Medical Spanish only used an end-of-semester presentation to assess students' speaking and these presentations were usually connected to the cultural and/or medical content covered in the textbook.

After realizing the problems inherent in an approach that requires language instructors to teach medical content and identifying the limitations of using cultural generalizations about Latino patients as fodder for student presentations, the Medical Spanish team created assessment tools that moved toward assessing speaking ability within a Medical context. These assessment tools are based on the CEFR categories related to presentational and interactional speaking abilities. This presentation will review these assessment tools and also highlight some initial results after using the assessments for two years.

Pre-med students who intend to enter medical school and eventually practice medicine in the U.S. will need speaking abilities that allow them to interact with patients from a variety of backgrounds in a variety of contexts and it is precisely with that goal in mind that Spanish for Medical Professions has transformed its assessment procedures to include: conversations with medical students in Mexico; health related presentations to Rice Spanish-speaking employees; interviews with instructors focused on medical internships; and role-plays based on actual naturally-occurring data from clinics.

Medical Spanish has the potential to prepare students for interacting within different health care contexts and this presentation will show how these assessment tools seek to do just that.