FROM THE DIRECTOR

Jacobo Sefamí

Dear Beginning Spanish Student:

On behalf of the faculty and administration of the Spanish School at Middlebury College, I welcome you as you embark on a wonderful new challenge. Middlebury’s renowned language pedagogy is based on nearly 100 years of research and practice, and is grounded in our immersion approach to language learning. This means that, during the seven weeks of the summer session, you pledge to conduct all of your activities in Spanish, even during the daunting first days during which you will acquire basic communication skills. As your start date nears, we are providing you with some preparatory information and resources that will ease your transition into the “all Spanish, all the time” world in which you will soon immerse yourself.

The famous Middlebury language pledge (palabra de honor, “word of honor”) reads as follows: “In signing this Language Pledge, I agree to use Spanish as my only language of communication while attending the Middlebury Language Schools. I understand that failure to comply with this Language Pledge may result in my expulsion from the School without credit or refund.” Advanced students as well as graduate students sign this pledge upon their arrival to the Language Schools, even before entering their dorm rooms.

“True beginners” (Level 1) and “high beginners” (Level 1.5) sign a modified Language Pledge: “In signing this Language Pledge, I understand that although my proficiency in Spanish is limited, I will do my utmost to follow the letter and spirit of the Pledge as defined by the Spanish School. I understand that failure to comply with the Language Pledge may result in my expulsion from the School without credit or refund. I will respect the Language Pledge taken by other students in my School and will not speak English in their presence. I will sign the full Language Pledge at a time determined by the Director of the Spanish School and, thereafter, I will use Spanish as my only language of communication while attending the Middlebury Language Schools.”

Even though you will not formally sign this Pledge until your Saturday morning orientation session, we ask that you read this Pledge fully before you arrive, and realize its implications. You should move into your room in Spanish; meet your roommates and your classmates in Spanish; send them e-mail and text messages in Spanish; learn your way around campus in Spanish; take your meals and receive your homework assignments in Spanish. Please do this as much as possible from the time you first arrive in your room. It will be much easier for you to maintain your relationship in Spanish if you establish your relationships in Spanish from the outset. Also, please remember that upon arriving at the dormitory, more advanced students will have already signed their Pledge; you are not permitted to speak to them in English, under any but the most dire circumstances, from the time you arrive on campus.

**How can I do that when I don’t speak or understand Spanish?**

During the first few days, you will have recourse to four basic tools:

1. You should use the preliminary information we are providing to acquire some basic Spanish vocabulary that can be used to meet your roommates and instructors (“Para sobrevivir: Vocabulario para principiantes,” or “Survival Spanish Cheat Sheet”), and which you can carry with you. As per the information below, you may order your textbook in advance and take some time familiarizing yourself with the first few chapters;

2. You will be allowed to carry and use a Spanish-English dictionary. You can thus prepare for some (if somewhat artificial) conversations by looking up some key words that describe yourself: where
you are from, what you do when not at Middlebury, why you have embarked on this adventure. You can carry these notes with you;

(3) You should review the list of language use strategies available on the pre-arrival website (“Study Abroad Strategies”); and

(4) You will learn to be very creative, with gestures and with your limited vocabulary, to get your meaning across to your (very sympathetic) listeners ;-)

**What is the difference between the “modified Language Pledge” and the standard one?**

The modified Language Pledge does give you the freedom to use a word or short phrase in English, when necessary, with your instructors or other faculty or administrators of the Spanish School, in order to make yourself understood. It is hoped that these English utterances will be brief, occasional, and a last resort only after other methods of communication have been attempted.

You should not use any English at all when talking to other students, even your fellow beginners; the reason for this prohibition is that you are obliged to respect the language pledge of your classmates. Your occasional words or phrases in English may be directed only to faculty or administrators, in order to move conversation forward or to solve specific problems or needs.

However, those faculty or administrators will respond to you in Spanish. Don’t worry—they are “friendly” speakers who will use cognates, gestures, and words that you know in order to communicate back to you. At the same time, they will be showing you how to ask the question the next time in Spanish.

Because of your “modified language pledge” which permits occasional English utterances, you and your classmates will sit at specifically designated tables in the dining hall for the first two weeks of the session. At the conclusion of the second week, in a special ceremony, you will sign the standard language pledge (see above), and from that moment forward you will be fully a part of the Spanish School community. As the Language School motto reads, “No English Spoken Here.”

**What if I need help in English?**

There is no question that the immersion approach is sometimes frustrating. You will find yourself thinking, at times, that an issue or a question could be resolved in five seconds in English, while it takes ten minutes to understand it in Spanish! You may also be tempted to leave questions unasked rather than undertake the effort to communicate with your limited Spanish. We ask you to remember that at these moments of greatest struggle, the greatest amount of learning is taking place. The immersion environment makes it possible for you to learn great amounts of vocabulary and grammar in a very short time, and you will need to call upon your reserves of patience and, above all, good humor in dealing with these moments.

Your instructors will be your greatest resource. As friendly native speakers, they will be able to provide the extra help you need, both within and outside of class time.

If you find that you are struggling more than your classmates, that your grades are suffering, or that you simply cannot put up with the stress any longer, you may visit the office of Assistant Director Manel Lacorte or Director Jacobo Sefamí and request permission to talk with them in English. They may not grant this permission from the outset—they may wish for you initially to articulate the problem in Spanish to assess your language level and communicative methods—but they will be able to help you, in English, if absolutely necessary.

Remember that many, many others have been there before you, and have been rewarded at session’s end by leaving Middlebury with solid and broad communicative abilities in Spanish. **Trust the process.** Be prepared for the feeling that you have been stripped of much of your personality, that you feel somewhat
Infantilized; be prepared for the thought that you would fully redesign this pedagogy if given the chance, and that this would all be easier if some English were allowed. To ease these frustrations, remember why you opted to spend the summer in an isolated Vermont dormitory—to learn as much Spanish as possible in seven weeks. Above all, maintain your sense of humor. After the first week, our experience demonstrates that you will find yourself able to get your meaning across better than you thought you would, and that you will give yourself over to the challenge of living in Spanish.

**Can I leave campus? What about language use off campus?**
Commercial transactions may be conducted in English; religious services, career services, and medical or counseling appointments are also exempt from the language pledge. However, at all times that you are with fellow students of the Spanish School, you are expected to speak only Spanish with them; this includes dining off campus, shopping in town, etc.

If family or friends visit during the summer, or if you plan to be away for the weekend, you must let your Associate Director know in order to obtain a Language Pledge exemption. And even with this permission, at no time may your visitors speak English within earshot of other language school students. Please note that the College cannot provide housing for members of your family, nor may guests be housed on campus.

Class attendance is required throughout the session; because of the intensity of the curriculum, any missed classes will adversely affect your grade. See the Handbook for further details.

**Can I call my family? Send e-mail in English? Read and listen to music in English?**
We do not micro-manage your personal relationships. However, we do advise you that the more time you spend in English, the more you will slow your own progress. Therefore, we advise that you limit your conversations, if possible, to once a week, and never within earshot of other language school students. We ask that you neither read nor listen to music in English; we recommend that you expand your Spanish-language music collection, if necessary, before coming to campus!

On Saturday June 28th, we will have one final session in English, where you will be able to ask questions and where further details about the curriculum will be provided. Until that time, we recommend that you find a good Spanish-English dictionary, order your textbook from the bookstore if you wish to get a head start, and get lots of rest so that you are ready to jump into the deep end of immersion study.

¡Bienvenidos!
FROM THE ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
Manel Lacorte, mlacorte@middlebury.edu

Things you can do before you come to Middlebury:

The Middlebury program is very intensive, with a whole year’s worth of material covered in a seven-week program. You will want to arrive ready to “hit the ground running”! The following are tips that will help you to get off to a good start. The following advice is not mandatory—the textbooks will be available in the campus bookstore when you arrive—but if you would like a head start, here is some advice.

Get to know your materials. If you wish, buy your textbook before you arrive. Level 1 students will be using Portafolio (McGraw Hill 2009) and level 1.5 students will be using Puentes – Spanish for Intensive and High Beginner Courses, 5th ed. (Cengage: 2011). Contact Georgia Best at the Middlebury College bookstore (best@middlebury.edu) to purchase. Learn the structure and recurring elements of each chapter, which will help you to know where to find quickly all the different kinds of information you will need. Use the following questions to get started:

- Where can you find a summary of all the vocabulary covered in a given chapter?
- What are the grammar sections of each chapter called? How many are there?
- What part of the chapter has video materials? How many sections of these are found in each chapter? What kind of information/skills will you learn in these sections?

If you have studied Spanish previously, try to locate the material (vocabulary and grammar) that is familiar to you. You might be surprised at how much you remember! Look especially through the labeled drawings in the first four or five chapters and (re)memorize the vocabulary.

Website. Once you have your textbook, visit the official website (http://www.mhhe.com/portafolio for level 1 or, for Level 1.5, http://college.cengage.com/spanish/0495906018_marinelli/index.html) and log in as a student user. Find out what materials are available on the site for learning the Spanish language and its associated cultures.

Get ready to talk! Use the table of contents of the textbook to find a more advanced chapter that has a topic of interest to you. You may want to start memorizing these new words before you arrive so that you can talk to other students and faculty at Middlebury about your interests. If you have a special interest or hobby, look up the basic vocabulary for it in a dictionary, or contact Assistant Director Manel Lacorte for more ideas on how to integrate yourself into the Middlebury community.

Practice immersion. Before you arrive, try to spend at least one day without speaking, reading, listening to music or TV, etc. in any language but Spanish. If you have to interact with English speakers, imagine how you would say what you need to say in Spanish first.

Ask! After your arrival, remember that your greatest resource—for Spanish knowledge and for your sanity—is the community of learners in which you will be immersed. Towards that end, during the first week we will match you with a padrino or madrina (godparent), an advanced student who has indicated interest in mentoring a beginner. This person may sit with you at meals to assist in the conversation, can serve as an occasional tutor, and will generally move you along the path toward fluency. Further information will be provided upon your arrival.