

July 29, 2009

Dear Class of 2013:

Welcome to Duke Med! My name is Rachelle Rebong and I am a rising third year medical student at Duke. I am writing to tell you about a great opportunity to learn medical Spanish during your first year at Duke: the Medical Spanish Elective. With the dramatic increase in Spanish-speaking persons in recent years in the Durham area and the rest of the country, the need for bilingual health care providers has become critical. Many medical schools and residency programs are beginning to ask applicants about their Spanish language skills.

This year, for the sixth year running, the medical school will offer partially-funded Spanish lessons to a limited number of students who wish to work on their medical Spanish skills, from beginner through more advanced levels. Below you will find information about this evolving opportunity for interested students and how you can participate in this program.

### The Basics

The Medical Spanish Elective (MSE) offers medical Spanish language classes to first year Duke Med students. The course was started with the support and guidance of our faculty mentor, Dr. Dennis Clements. During the first year we offered this course (2004-2005), we allowed 9 students to participate. The course has grown dramatically, and last year over half of the first year class enrolled!

**No former Spanish experience is required.** A short test will determine each student's placement in the language classes and will be given during the first few weeks of school.

### The Classes

#### *Beginners:*

The class is held once a week in the evening after the basic science classes and lasts an hour and fifteen minutes. Each semester will have approximately 11 weeks of classes. Students can participate in the fall, spring, or both semesters. The classes are taught by native Spanish speakers with experience in teaching Spanish. The beginner level class focuses on grammar and basic vocabulary and is meant to be fun! Ultimately, the goal of this class is to allow students to either continue grammar study during the second semester (should you wish to continue) or to graduate students to more advanced conversational classes (see below).

#### *Advanced:*

For more advanced students, we will be offering the opportunity to practice medical Spanish conversational skills through a personal tutor. These classes allow students to use voice and video conferencing to have real time conversations with a Spanish tutor in Guatemala. Dr. Clements and past students have worked extensively with the tutor Amarildo. Amarildo worked for the Spanish tutoring company Interlangua in the past but agreed to work independently with Duke students last year and this year. Amarildo will provide one-on-one Spanish tutoring through video conference conversations. Each student will be given 11 hours of lesson time per semester.

### Cost

**Funding from the medical school helps offset the cost of this course, so that each student pays only \$75 per semester to enroll.** Students will receive a textbook for the class at no additional cost. The computers you will receive at Duke contain the necessary

videoconferencing equipment for the online lessons. Students who are interested in the program but are concerned about financial aid can contact me or Stacey McCorison ([mccor014@mc.duke.edu](mailto:mccor014@mc.duke.edu)) for more information.

Note: While we would love to offer this course to all interested students, our budget requires us to limit the number of students who can participate in each level. There are 25 slots for the advanced classes, while the beginners' classes are more flexible in number. We encourage everyone who is interested to take the placement test. We will let students know about placement once we have an idea of how many people are interested and what level they would like to take.

### Credit and Requirements

Students will receive a notation on their transcripts for having successfully completed the elective based on attendance of 9 out of 11 classes. However, no actual grade or credit will be assigned and if students do not complete the course it will not appear on their transcripts. Students in the MSE will have the full support of their language teachers and faculty mentor, Dennis Clements. We recognize that the basic science requirements of first year are your top priority, and the Medical Spanish Elective should enhance, but not conflict or interfere with, your first year experience.

### Contacts

Beginning medical school is an exciting but also daunting prospect for most students. Signing up for an elective which requires an extra time commitment does require extra interest and dedication. We hope, however, that interested students will approach the Medical Spanish Elective as a fun, low stress, and unique opportunity to explore the language and culture of a rapidly growing segment of our patient population. In addition, having completed clinical rotations during second year, we know that having at least some knowledge of medical Spanish is critical to serving Duke's diverse patient population.

Should you have any questions, please contact:

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We have both participated in the online Spanish lessons and would be happy to share our experiences. In addition, we will be able to give you the names of rising second year students just completing the course, both the basic and advanced levels, should you wish to speak with more students who have experienced the program.

### Further interest:

**Stay tuned for more information about when the placement test will be given.**

Enjoy the rest of your summer, and we look forward to meeting you soon!

Sincerely,

Rachelle Rebong, MSIII  
Elizabeth Mannino, MSIV

Dennis Clements, MD, PhD  
Faculty Mentor, Medical Spanish Elective