HISPANIC BUSINESS: THE LINK BETWEEN
THE AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN

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ABSTRACT

The ethnocentrism of the United States ("We have room but for one language here...") is one thing when considered as an issue of domestic policy. But it is quite another outside the U.S., where indifference to another cultural code betrays an attitude which can be quite detrimental, in both the short and long terms. In light of this, to expect graduates of American business programs to perform successfully in the inter-American arena, without better preparing them to do so, is still too often an example of the "ugly American" arrogance. Yet, our institutions of higher learning are indeed in a position, if they choose to meet the challenge—and the practicality, necessity, decency and urgency of it—to begin to graduate a better, more versatile business person: men and women who will enter the job market linguistically and culturally prepared to do business in Spanish as well as in their native English. The following is a blueprint for this type of business education, in which language and business departments begin to work together more effectively for the benefit of their students. This interdepartmental cooperation will provide our graduates with more marketable skills, which can only enhance their employment opportunities. Of even greater importance, it will prove beneficial to the role played by business in linking the Americas and the Caribbean.

COMPENDIO

El etnocentrismo de los Estados Unidos ("We have room but for one language here...") es una cosa cuando se considera como tema de política nacional. Pero es otra cosa fuera de los Estados Unidos, donde la indiferencia a otra norma cultural descubre una actitud que puede ser dañina, tanto a corto como a largo plazo. Desde este punto de vista, esperar que los titulados de programas de estudios comerciales en EEUU actúen con éxito en el
campo interamericano, sin haberlos preparado mejor para realizarlo, todavía se delata demasiado frecuentemente como otro ejemplo más del arrogante "ugly American." Sin embargo, nuestras universidades ya están en una posición, si aceptan el reto--y el sentido práctico, y la necesidad, decencia y urgencia de ello--, de empezar a graduar una mejor y más versatil persona de negocios: hombres y mujeres que traerán al mundo mercantil la capacidad de funcionar tanto en español como en inglés. A continuación se presenta un programa para esta clase de formación comercial, donde los departamentos de lenguas y los de comercio empezarán a cooperar más efectivamente para beneficio de sus estudiantes. Esta cooperación interdepartamental proporcionará a nuestros estudiantes más posibilidades de empleo. Y de aún mayor importancia, será beneficiosa para el papel interpretado por el mundo de los negocios en las relaciones entre las Américas y el Caribe.

Verbal evidence of ethnocentrism can sound quite comic at times, as in the following instances I have come across recently. On a quiz I handed out to a group of university students, an answer was given by a quarter of the class that yes--CIERTO-- Honduras is the capital of Mexico. A colleague brought to my attention a conversation she had with a woman who began by saying that her husband was Spanish. Since my colleague's husband is from Madrid, she asked, "Oh, really, from what part of Spain?" Evidently, the woman became a bit flustered and began to backtrack: "Well, I guess he's not really Spanish. He's Honduranian." Well, not quite, indeed, but at least several centuries and some 4,000 miles close to it. Even the use of the word "Honduranian," rather than the more generally encountered "Honduran", is a bit suspect, and this linguistic estrangement invites one to continue the fun by speculating on just how much the woman really knows about her husband, or cares to know. And finally, I read the following anecdote in E. D. Hirsch's brilliant and important book, Cultural Literacy:

My son John (...) often told me of experiences. In one of his classes he mentioned to his students that Latin, the language they were studying, is a dead language that is no longer spoken. After his pupils had struggled for several weeks with Latin grammar and vocabulary, this news was hard for some of them to accept. One girl raised her hand to challenge my son's claim. 'What do they speak in Latin America?' she demanded. (6)
Again, such manifestations of ethnocentrism can and probably should make us chuckle on one level of discourse, interpretation and comprehension. We are horrified but bemused by such blatant ignorance. Yet the astonishment we feel (Can this person really be saying this?) shifts planes almost immediately from the light to the serious, as we realize that the comical expression of cultural ignorance owes itself at a deeper level to ethnocentric indifference, shortsightedness and arrogance. The ethnocentrism of the United States, and by this I mean the predominance of the English-speaking tradition (as in Theodore Roosevelt's dictum: "We have room but for one language here..." Simon, 91), is alive and well. This might be one thing considered as an issue of practical cultural and linguistic policy within the United States, but it is quite another outside the U.S., where ignorance of (indifference to) another cultural code (language, socio-economic tradition, etc.) acknowledges an attitude which can be quite detrimental to the United States in many ways, in both the short and long terms.

In light of the ethnocentrism indicated above, for us to expect our graduates of American colleges and universities to go out and perform successfully in the inter-American arena, without better preparing them to do so, is still too often an example of "ugly American" arrogance on the part of the United States. That this attitude and behavior continue is documented in articles with such telling titles as "Our Linguistic and Cultural Myopia is Losing Us Friends" and "America... Globally Blind, Deaf and Dumb: A Shocking Report of Our Incompetence, through Ignorance in Dealing with Other Countries." Yet, institutions of higher learning and training in the United States are indeed in a position, if they choose to accept the challenge—and the practicality, necessity, decency and urgency of it—, to begin to graduate a better, more versatile business person: American students, gringos or yanquis, capable of conducting business in Spanish, both here and abroad. The proposal is not farfetched; indeed, it is grounded in a growing reality of successful business and language programs such as those at Eastern Michigan University, the University of South Carolina and the American Graduate School of International Management in Arizona. Such programs serve as the vanguard of a blueprint for academia, a blueprint of language and business departments linking educational resources for a better graduate: men and women who will be able to enter the job market linguistically and culturally prepared to do business in Spanish as well as in their native English. In the case at hand, that of Spanish (the living language spoken throughout most of Latin America), a valid question is "Why do it, what's in it for me?"
Considered from the perspectives of both the student and the academic institution, the question is a natural one. For the business student, linguistic and cultural training in Spanish means additional work, while for the institution it might mean the same, although initially (prior to any consideration of additional funding or staffing) it may simply entail a diversification, re-orientation and collaboration of resources already in place in the language and business departments.

Sheer numbers begin to tell the story of justification for the blueprint above. Of the languages spoken in the world, Spanish is extremely practical in that it ranks fourth, with approximately 296 million speakers. The first three languages are Mandarin (788 million speakers), English (420 million) and Hindi (300 million). Economically, the United States has an import/export trade of some $39.5 billion with Latin America (including Brazil), and an additional $3.2 billion of trade with Spain, for a rough total of $43 billion. This equals 5% of our trade with all of Western Europe, 70% of our trade with all of Asia. It is also equal to double our trade with Japan, 4.7 times our trade with all of Africa, and eleven times our trade with all of Eastern Europe. In terms of the state of Louisiana (my particular audience at the University of New Orleans), the trade we do with Latin America and Spain is more than seven times the proposed state budget.

Aside from the international significance—linguistic, demographic, economic—summarized above, there is also a dynamic domestic reality which justifies an educational blueprint for persons who would be qualified to do business in Spanish. Of the total United States population (according to the last census report in 1980) of 239.4 million people, persons of Spanish origin account for 14,608,673 people, or 6.1% of the population of the United States. This makes the United States at least the seventh largest Spanish-speaking country in the world, and possibly even the third or fourth largest. There are seven states with a Hispanic population of more than 400,000 people: California (4.54 million), Texas (3 million), New York (1.7 million), Florida (858,158), Illinois (635,602), New Jersey (491,883) and New Mexico (477,222). It is interesting to note the geographic diversity of these states: North, South, East and West. California, Texas and New York each have more Hispanic residents than the populations (considered individually) of seventeen states in the U.S. Altogether, there are fifteen states with a population of greater than 100,000 Hispanic residents and there are twelve cities with more than 100,000 Hispanic residents: Albuquerque (112,030), Chicago (423,357), Dallas (110,511), El Paso (265,997), Houston (280,691), Los Angeles (815,305), Miami (194,185), New York (1,406,389), Phoenix (116,875), San Antonio (421,808), San
Diego (129,953) and San José (140,318). Many of these cities are established hubs of economic and financial activity. What becomes readily apparent is that Spanish is really no longer a foreign language in the United States (obeying the traditional ethnocentric view summed up in "We have room but for one language here...") instead it is developing as an increasingly important, widespread and vibrant co-domestic language, existing alongside the national English in many parts of the country.

Spanish, then whether it be considered domestically or internationally, is increasingly a crucial language for all of the Americas, both North and South, as well as for the Caribbean region. As such, it would seem warranted that institutions of higher learning in the United States should begin to do a better and more comprehensive job of linguistically and culturally preparing their graduates, i.e., that in this instance graduates of our business schools would benefit, perhaps even greatly, from programs which included the study of Spanish language, civilization and culture, built around a target proficiency in Business Spanish (the terminology in Spanish of business specialization). In today's world, and surely in tomorrow's, there is much to be gained from such linguistic and cultural proficiency, which effectively works toward counterbalancing the gaffes and seemingly innocent (though nonetheless insulting and damaging) transgressions of ethnocentrism.

Language and business departments in U.S. colleges and universities can begin to collaborate more effectively in improving the preparation of our English-speaking students for the real (internationally evolving/internationally involved) world of business. For such linking of resources to take place, several things must occur: changes in philosophy, increased flexibility, and a more accurate perception of the world around us.

There exists, according to my own experience in academia, a Quijote syndrome in language departments (a syndrome which does not limit itself to Spanish language alone). By Quijote, of course, I refer on the one hand to the stance assumed by the memorable madman (who could not or would not deal realistically with the reality around him) in Cervantes' classic work. On the other hand, my reference is to the literary canon symbolized by Don Quijote de la Mancha, a canon with its traditional and rightful home in language and literature departments nationwide. The canon represented by Don Quijote has been upheld over time by convention. Until recently, language departments were primary and primarily custodians of linguistics, literature, and civilization and culture, often exclusionist purists who limited language artificially and loftily in the hallowed hallways. Yet, the language itself, in this case Spanish, has always existed in another world from that contained, conserved and imparted in academia. Spanish existed after
and outside Spanish class, and perhaps more often than not, it was a dramatically different Spanish from that taught in school. It was a real-world Spanish, one for ordering food at a restaurant, buying clothes at a store, making a visit to the hospital, paying rent, insurance and other bills. In short, a Spanish of everyday transactions in society, a living Spanish, real and practical and effective, essential and urgent, therefore constantly valid. The Quijote syndrome meant that for many years language departments virtually ignored this other Spanish, the Spanish of a non-classroom reality, outside the canon. But in more recent years (it seems to me in the decade of the 1980s), a modification in the philosophy of language departments has begun; they are gradually becoming less quixotic, more flexible, less purist and exclusionist, more realistic and responsive (and accountable) to the real-world necessities of their students.

Many language departments, if they have not already done so, are moving slowly toward an acknowledgement that the study of a language necessarily transcends the classic considerations imposed on it by linguistics, literature, and civilization and culture. Room is finally being made in academia for practical language instruction for the professions, which begins to address Congressman Paul Simon's call for greater temporal accountability: "Each college should examine its own program to see if it is meeting today's and tomorrow's needs, or if it is still focused on yesterday's needs." Indeed, there exists a natural link between this recent tendency and the more traditional categories generally found under "culture studies". Business Spanish, for example, might rightfully be considered not just a part of culture studies, but perhaps its most vibrant, germane and crucial aspect today, in an age of rapid and continuous international trade and dependency, crippling foreign debts (which intimately link concerned party-nations), and still-budding industrialization in much of Latin America. Thus, the inclusion of business Spanish in the curriculum of language departments would appear to be a warranted and inevitable step by those departments toward the reality—linguistic, sociopolitical, economic—of the people who actually live the language day to day.

Coming to terms with the Quijote syndrome in language departments represents but one half of the resource linking I am interested in; the other half, of course, has to do with schools and departments of business. Perhaps the bulk of the task (at this time) of marshaling resources for a cooperative and felicitous venture lies with the members of a language department, who must convince their colleagues in business (if they are not already convinced of it) that language departments have something important to offer them. Something as direct and simple as: "We in languages, we professors of business Spanish, can help you to graduate a better business person, students better prepared for the world which awaits
them, both at home and abroad, where Spanish is a dynamic and increasingly important reality." The facts and figures in support of this proposal, based on yesterday's and tomorrow's projections, are undeniable. It would seem equally undeniable that it would be appropriate, therefore, for language and business departments to begin to work together effectively for the benefit of their students, i.e. cooperate interdepartmentally in order to provide their graduates with additional marketable skills which can only enhance their employment opportunities for the future. Language departments are an ideal resource upon which business schools can begin to draw to better prepare their students for the international and inter-American arenas, which more and more seem to be simultaneously the domestic arena. The destinies of the Americas are intertwined, and political and socioeconomic considerations would appear to underwrite the validity of more widespread and practical fluency in the Spanish language, on the part of English-speaking Americans. It is never too late for graduates of U.S. business programs to stop being "linguistically paralyzed" (Simon 37).

How do language departments--Spanish sections, professors of business Spanish--go about delivering the goods? In partial answer to this, I shall describe efforts under way at the University of New Orleans (UNO), where an educational experiment, presently in its initial stages, has an interesting potential for growth and impact.

For the past three years UNO has offered an advanced level business Spanish class in the spring. The course--SPAN 4051, available both to undergraduate and graduate students--has proven to be popular, with an average enrollment of eleven students. This is a larger average than the number of students enrolled in other (more traditional) courses at the 4000 level and above (levels run from 1000 to 6000), which suggests that business Spanish is addressing a student curricular need. The course description reads as follows: BUSINESS SPANISH IS DESIGNED TO ENHANCE YOUR CAPACITY TO RELATE TO A BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT IN AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT FOREIGN LANGUAGE. This is the broad wording I have arrived at after three years of experimentation. Concise and flexible, it allows me to tailor the class to some of the needs and expectations of the students, which they indicate to me in an informal discussion of the course possibilities on the first day we meet. I then try to match some of their input (the topics most unanimously voiced) with the content of the text/s to be used.

This past spring I used for the second time the companion texts for Al día en los negocios by Gómez-Quintero and Pérez. The following material was covered during the semester: numbers, quantities, measurements; currencies (charted for three months); office organization, equipment and personnel; a brief history of business and types of
enterprises; sales and purchasing; banking, credit and finance; marketing and advertising; stock exchanges; import/export; insurance and transport; and job hunting for success (preparing the resume and cover letter, practicing interviews, and drafting letters of recommendation). The effort was made always to relate these topics to a Spanish-speaking reality, to a real-world scenario of "hombres y mujeres de carne y hueso". This was reinforced by regularly having the students prepare economic (demographic and sociopolitical) overviews of Spain and Mexico, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, Central America, South America and Spanish-speaking United States, considering countries on an individual as well as regional basis. Spanish-speaking business specialists, representing different countries (e.g., Spain, Mexico, Ecuador, the U.S.), were also invited to hold informal discussions and question-answer sessions with us in class, thereby enhancing further the feeling of real-world relevance.

The class is designed to be conducted primarily in Spanish, although when there are native speakers of Spanish enrolled (which is more often than not, sometimes to the point of constituting a majority), I have found that it is equally beneficial for them to be learning and practicing the specialized business terminology in English. Whenever the class has been about equally divided between natives and non-natives of the Spanish language, it has assumed at times a virtually bilingual format, in which the students function as effective co-teachers and reinforcing of one another in questions of lexical mastery (nuances and regionalisms), cultural coding, etc. The linguistic composition of each class determines the degree of bilingualism used. In the end, regardless of which language may dominate at times in class, the purpose is to enable students to become competent and confident in linguistically negotiating the reality of business in both languages. Thus, the course attempts to match the reality to which they will later be able to take their linguistic skills: it is a two-way street, English to Spanish and Spanish to English, where the flow should be smooth, precise, and quick, accurate under pressure.

Class activities include many writing assignments, such that correctly drafting or dictating business correspondence on a variety of topics becomes second nature. The students also make frequent oral presentations (formal and informal), and they are required to engage actively in a great deal of role playing: conducting job interviews, making sales pitches, handling complaints, and irate customers, making phone purchases, etc. They take two exams (a midterm and a final), and they write a research paper (usually 10-15 typed pages, with full documentation) in Spanish. The paper allows them to develop a topic of their choice, such as: "Colombia se viste de colores: las flores colombianas como renglón de exportación," "La inversión extranjera en el Perú," "La
importación y la exportación: su papel en la economía mexicana," "Formas jurídicas de las empresas," and (what turned out to be a truly fascinating subject) "La situación legal (socio-económica) de la mujer en Latinoamérica."

At the conclusion of Business Spanish 4051, there is a bonus which has recently been made available to the non-native speakers of Spanish. We now offer the "EXAMENES DE ESPAÑOL COMERCIAL" sponsored by the Cámara de Comercio e Industria de Madrid, which has had the wisdom to create an instrument for certification based on the following:

Las empresas interesadas en comerciar con España e Hispanoamérica, o en realizar inversiones en estos países, necesitan un personal que pueda expresarse adecuadamente en español, conozca con precisión la terminología del mundo mercantil y domine las locuciones y giros específicamente comerciales.

This is the Spanish equivalent—practical and timely—of the profound observation made by a Japanese businessman: "Sir, the most useful international language in world trade is not necessarily English, but rather it is the language of your client" (Simon 27). The Madrid Chamber of Commerce will certify that English-speaking Americans who have successfully completed the exam are indeed qualified and able to conduct business in that particular language of their clientele—Spanish. It is a most desirable bonus for students of business Spanish at UNO. Not only can they take their UNO diploma and transcript to a potential employer, indicating their study and attainment of proficiency in business Spanish (with a letter of recommendation, if they request one), but they can also present a certificate of unreserved endorsement by commercial authorities in Spain.

Business Spanish 4051 (and its equivalents elsewhere) should be considered a nucleus, a seed with great potential for growth and impact. Its proper context is that of a beginning, an element in a more comprehensive program, a part of a whole, perhaps the cornerstone of an edifice which should have been built long ago. Another analogy would be that it is a team player, working together with other curricular offerings for the good of the student. A growth pattern, or a diagram of team play, might be described as
follows. Business Spanish 4051 would be one of six or seven classes in a Minor in Business Spanish. A possible sequencing of courses for the Minor could be:

INTERMEDIATE SPANISH (four skills: reading, understanding, speaking, writing)
INTRODUCTION TO BUSINESS SPANISH (general vocabulary and forms used in doing business in Spanish)
SPANISH CONVERSATION (to include other topics than those specifically related to business)
ADVANCED SPANISH GRAMMAR AND COMPOSITION
SPANISH CIVILIZATION, SPANISH-AMERICAN CIVILIZATION
ADVANCED BUSINESS SPANISH

The two classes in business Spanish would be offered in conjunction with prerequisites fulfilled in the business school: Microeconomics for the introductory class, Accounting and/or Macroeconomics for the advanced offering. In this arrangement, the classes in business Spanish would be complemented by other courses in the following ways: conversation and composition would help the student to achieve a more general proficiency in Spanish, and civilization courses would provide the broad cultural context within which it makes sense to conduct business in Spanish. The latter is always and everywhere important because, "Unless complemented by academic training in the history, culture, economics and politics of a given society, the knowledge of its language alone becomes a dull instrument" (Simon 59). Dull to be read as ineffective, inadequate, frustrating. A specialized language, such as that of business, always fits into a larger cultural network, of which it is but a part and a particular manifestation, and from which it derives its usefulness validity. As John Stuart Mill wrote in 1859: "trade is a social act" (Simon 33). It takes place within a society which gives it its peculiar imprint, the parameters of its feasibility.

The Minor in Business Spanish could develop into an even more appropriate curricular response to the international times in which we live. It could become a Major, more comprehensive in scope and deeper in detail, as in the programs available today at Eastern Michigan University. The Major in Business Spanish would include additional courses (Management, Marketing, Finance) from the School of Business. At this stage, there would be very close cooperation between the language and business departments. This, in turn, could lead to a full endorsement by the Business School: the creation of an MIBA or its equivalent, where proficiency in business Spanish and cultural awareness would become degree requirements. At the level of both the Major and the MIBA, exchanges and internships could be arranged with institutions and companies in the Caribbean and Latin America. Language and business departments could also begin to co-sponsor intensive review and total immersion
workshops, both for their own graduates and members of the business communities which they serve. In all of the above, language departments would be collaborating with business schools to make it possible for English-speaking Americans (hitherto of the "tongue-tied" stereotype) to begin to compete more effectively, and with a measure of greater respect, in the inter-American arena.

The link between the Americas and the Caribbean is manifold—historical, social, political, economic. But it is always a link with a linguistic determinant. As John Foster Dulles said: "It is not possible to understand what is in the minds of other people without understanding their language, and without understanding their language it is impossible to be sure that they understand what is on our minds" (Simon 66). While business may be the motor that makes the world turn, language is the oil which keeps that motor running. In this crucial sense, language departments at American institutions of higher learning can begin to play a more active role—one which only they can play—in linking the United States and its Spanish-speaking neighbors, for the benefit of all. We can work with business schools to graduate a better student—more informed, tolerant, and linguistically and inter-cultural competent—for more meaningful and rewarding participation in the business world today. It is really not such a difficult task. The resources are available. It is simply a question of linking them together.
1. E. D. Hirsch makes a compelling case for this particular kind of domestic policy in his book Cultural Literacy, where his priorities are practical: "I am opposed neither to biliteracy nor to the learning of foreign languages. I am strongly in favor of both. In the best of worlds, all Americans would be multiliterate. But surely the first step in that direction must be for all of us to become literate in our own national language and culture" (93). Although Mr. Hirsch goes far beyond the narrowness (emphasized by Congressman Simon) of Roosevelt's dictum, he stops short (because of the thematic limits he has set for himself) of internationalizing his concepts regarding cultural literacy, such that they might also address the crucial issues of inter-cultural or inter-hemispheric (inter-American) literacy. One must ask if the national cultural literacy can be appropriately considered apart from its international aspect. Mr. Hirsch suggests that it cannot, and he opens the door for interesting research in this area.

2. The numbers are taken from the 1987 edition of The World Almanac and Book of Facts.

3. Of the other major European languages most often taught in American institutions of higher learning, there are approximately 118 million speakers of German, 114 million of French, and 63 million of Italian.

4. An ideal educational preparation, of course, would make it possible for some of our students to conduct business in Brazilian as well as Spanish thereby making them conversant with all of Latin America. With Spanish, nonetheless, they will be able to make themselves understood in Brazil in situations where English might fall short of this goal.

5. According to The World Almanac, the U.S. would be the seventh largest Spanish-speaking country in the world. According to Congressman Paul Simon, we rank fourth, a ranking which may be understated, due to the discrepancy between the official census and the number of illegal residents.


7. New Orleans is listed in The World Almanac as having only 19,215 Hispanic residents. The city census, however, places the count at over 100,000. This suggests that there may be
many more cities in the United States with more than 100,000 Hispanic residents than the twelve indicated in *The World Almanac*.

8. A *Nation at Risk* points up that "Achieving proficiency in a foreign language (...) serves the nation's needs in commerce" (26, item 6). Also, Senator Paul E. Tsongas says that "We must orient language instruction toward the emerging market for foreign language students. And that market is business. More than any other application of foreign language training, business is most promising" (117).

9. The second half of this quote reads: "Literature should be a part of foreign language curriculum, but should not dominate it" (180). And Theodore Huebener writes that: "In their eagerness to educate the child for his environment, the educators have lost sight of the meaning of 'community'. They fail to realize that through modern means of communication and transportation the immediate environment has expanded to a much vaster community. It now extends to the furthest reaches of the globe—and beyond. Yes, let us educate the whole child, but let us educate him for his whole environment, for the whole community. This includes the nation, the continent, the world. All our major relations—political, military, commercial, cultural—are worldwide" (X). How appropriate these words are today, a quarter of a century later, and how much more compelling in light of what will be "tomorrow's needs".

10. Initially my course description was much longer and more detailed, in an effort to fit into one semester the full content of textbooks designed for a year-long course. I was too aware that students would have only one opportunity (one semester) to take Business Spanish at UNO, so I overtaught.

11. I have settled on these texts (pub. Random House, 1984) after having reviewed other possibilities and after having previously used Paul Rivers' *Cuaderno de español práctico comercial* and Nelly Santos' *Español comercial*.

12. The Cámara de Comercio e Industria de Madrid (Con la colaboración de la Escuela Oficial de Idiomas de Madrid) provides an Excellent pamphlet describing the Exámenes de Español Comercial (two levels: Básico y Superior). The pamphlet also includes a good selected bibliography to aid students in preparing for the exams.

13. EMU's programs include an UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR IN LANGUAGE AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE and a MASTER OF ARTS IN LANGUAGE AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE. Further information on these excellent programs of study can be obtained by writing to Dr. Raymond Schaub, Director.


