

iCharlemos!

A Message from Dr. Ebacher

I have big news to share with you! As of August 1, I will be transitioning to another post in the Department of Languages, Literatures & Cultures and our distinguished Dr. Francisco Martínez Ibarra (known by many as “Paco”) will begin his tenure as Director of the Graduate Certificate in Professional Spanish. As Graduate Director, he will oversee courses and staffing, mentorship of our graduate assistants, program communications, enrollments and recruiting amongst other duties. I know you will find him to be an efficient and responsive director. And he will serve as your academic advisor. Do reach out to him to share a “¡Felicitaciones! Bien hecho.” And, after August 1, with your questions (fmartinezibarra@towson.edu). Paco has the good fortune to have been awarded a sabbatical in spring 2027 during which time I will once again serve as Graduate Director.

We have several exciting pieces in this newsletter including an article on proficiency. We all want to be proficient in Spanish, but what does that mean exactly? We are also beginning a new feature of *¡Charlemos!* – a spotlight on a student. In this edition, we learn more about Thomas Palmer’s journey to proficiency. And in our ever popular “Pets of Professional Spanish” we have a real treat – several pets, all of whom keep Susan Pierson company on her dream farm.

Finally, if you haven’t already done so, please complete the graduate survey and let us know what courses you will take in Fall 2026. Wish us luck on our first ever study abroad program June 19-July 5 in Cuenca, Ecuador. We will report back in the fall 2026 edition of *¡Charlemos!* ¡Descansen este verano, practiquen su español y nos vemos en el otoño!

What Does it Mean to Be “Proficient?”

If you’ve been studying Spanish or another language for a while, you’ve probably had to take a proficiency test at least once. Chances are that this test assessed your proficiency level according to the ACTFL Proficiency Scale, and your result fell into one of nine categories: Novice/Intermediate/Advanced and Low/Mid/High. But what does it actually mean to be “proficient” in a language, and what are these categories? Read the rest of the article to find out.

Not Done with Spanish Yet—and That’s the Point: An Interview with Thomas Palmer

Some journeys through Spanish last a semester. For Thomas Palmer, it has spanned years, degrees, and now a return to the classroom through the Certificate in Professional Spanish.



If you’ve ever wondered what it looks like to keep coming back to Spanish—and getting something new out of it each time—Thomas’s story might feel familiar. A Towson grad (more than once!), he first

discovered his love for Spanish in a supportive classroom, but it didn’t stop there. Practicing with classmates, connecting with neighbors, and saying a bold “¿comer?” at a barbecue all helped him realize that language learning is really about people.

Since then, Spanish has shown up in all kinds of ways: professional translation work, teaching high school students, and now, returning to TU to grow his skills even further. Along the way, Thomas has learned that being a great language learner (and teacher) isn’t about being perfect—it’s about being open, curious, and willing to try.

These days, he’s focused on sharpening his academic Spanish and exploring big questions about language and identity. But his approach stays grounded: make Spanish part of your daily life, take risks, and don’t be afraid to sound a little messy.

Sound like your kind of journey? [Read the full interview](#)—you might pick up a few ideas for practicing your Spanish week.

Practice Makes Proficiency

Do things that you already do in your native language. Try to switch one of those things at a time to Spanish. -Paco

- Request Spanish books at your local library
- Change your phone and/or computer to Spanish
- Choose Spanish at the self-checkout kiosk
- Write your daily to-do list in Spanish
- Connect with your classmates outside of class
- Cook with Spanish recipes
- Find or join online discussion boards about your favorite Spanish media
- Journal in Spanish

Pets of Professional Spanish: The Many Pets of Susan Jacques Pierson, Ph.D.



Dr. Susan Pierson always wanted to live on a farm. She lived in a small townhouse until 2009, when she moved into a modular house on 40 acres in Pennsylvania and acquired her various animals. She currently has three sheep, a goat, four chickens, a rabbit, and six dogs—all Springer Spaniels.

The sheep spend their days hanging out in the barn or with their goat-friend, Dixie. Dixie is the only remaining goat.



The dogs all love to swim, even in very cold weather and they live to run. In front center, is Nory. She's almost 12 and doing well. On her right is Solas who just turned 1. He can jump incredibly high and is an awesome retriever and cuddle dog. To Nory's immediate left is Fiadh, an amazing retriever. She turned 5 in July and is a ball maniac. Nearest the creek is

Fallon, who turned 9 in June. She is always muddy. She is Fiadh's full sister and a therapy dog; she also visits schools, libraries and nursing homes. To the far left is Riley, who turned 8 in March. He is full brother of Fallon and Fiadh, and a gentle giant. He is training for Canine Good Citizen and will be a therapy dog. At the far right is Breeze. She completed training to be a therapy dog; she just needs to take her test. She will be 2 soon and is a wonderful, lovable dog. She is so friendly, calm and obedient but super fast in the field. She loves to swim more than any of the other dogs.

Susan holds ESL courses at her house in the summers, and says the students love all the animals. According to her, "the dogs all understand Spanish and I think the sheep and the goat do too."

**The Graduate Certificate in
Professional Spanish Team**