

## Business Language in Focus

### *Business Language Networking through NOBLE*

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In October's *Business Language* column, we focused on valuable strategies to help language instructors (without a background or training in business) develop business language courses. Of all the strategies noted there—and in our [previous columns](#)—the most important are focused on learning from colleagues. In that light, this issue showcases a resource that facilitates connections to other business language teachers: the [Network of Business Language Educators](#) (NOBLE).

### NOBLE and its Backstory



Founded in 2009, NOBLE is an online project that started out as an information- and resource-provider for business language teachers. Funding for NOBLE comes from the University of Florida's Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) and the Center for Latin American Studies. Both centers are grant-based programs through Title VI funding from the U.S. Department of Education (to learn more about CIBERs and their Business Language programs, visit <http://ciberweb.msu.edu/>).

The powerhouse behind NOBLE is its founder Mary Risner from the University of Florida, where she is Associate Director of the Center for Latin American Studies. When I spoke with her about NOBLE, her boundless energy and excitement about this project was palpable.

Risner originally proposed NOBLE as part of her work towards her Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction/Educational Technology. For Risner, it began as a project to help “get the word out” about the need to connect foreign language/culture and business: “Not many people were talking about it, even though they were talking more and more about ‘preparing global leaders’.”

Risner's interest in connecting business with language and culture studies was sparked when she was an undergraduate marketing major. One day in a Business Communications course, a French language and literature professor gave a lively presentation on cross-cultural communication, which included discussion of culturally steeped non-verbal cues that can color or drastically alter a speaker's meaning. At first Risner was surprised to see a professor from a completely different discipline in her business course, but she quickly recognized the value and the event had a lasting effect: She studied abroad in Spain, chose to minor in Latin American Studies, and went on to become a “pioneer” in Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), ([Crouse](#), 2013, p.32).

Getting faculty to cross disciplinary divides is not an easy task, yet NOBLE makes it a top priority. “It's about grassroots relationship-building and working together as a team,” says Risner. For those new to LSP or Business Language Studies, the NOBLE site provides a community of experienced teachers and program developers eager to share their expertise (see especially the [NOBLE Advisory Board](#) listing). Examples of model programs, Business Language majors, minors, and certificate programs are linked under “[Develop a Program](#).”

Language instructors looking for lesson plans and classroom activities will also find rich pickings for both general and specific topics, such as the following:

- [Fun and Effective Ways to Apply Business Language in K-12](#): This presentation by Miami high school teacher Mieko Avello gives an overview on integrating business-related topics into elementary and secondary school language education.
- [Using Business-Related Content to Enhance Language Courses](#): Following a thorough case for why teachers should move in the direction of LSP, Emily Spinelli of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese offers an immediately implementable, Standards-based activity for Spanish language learners at varying levels, that addresses language and culture comprehension and production (starting on slide 19: reading and creating business cards).

### **Broadening NOBLE’s Reach**

Over the past five years, NOBLE has evolved in two significant ways: First, it has expanded beyond Business Language Studies to encompass other professional fields, and thus it can be considered a resource for LSP in general. Under the category “Language Resources” in its menu, for example, NOBLE has amassed useful materials—including videos, exercises, and articles—on language for business but also for law enforcement, health professions, and STEM.

Second, it has branched out from its original focus on providing information into becoming a resource for the professional development of teachers. According to Risner, “Once people ‘got it’, they wanted to know ‘How do we make this happen in the classroom?’”

While NOBLE’s focus is on K-12 teachers, Risner stresses that it is impossible to work in isolation, since articulation is key. She notes, “We tap into higher ed because we all need to be talking. When students start earlier, they can do more at the later levels.”

### **E is for *Educators* but also...**

The “E” in NOBLE might just as easily stand for “Empowerment.” By moving into professional development activities, NOBLE gives teachers the tools they need to link language learning directly to students’ future careers. This month, NOBLE launched its first professional development webinar, “*Preparing Students for Global Careers*,” featuring Dr. Annie Abbott of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

One empowerment success story comes from Florida high school teacher Danika Cornelius. In addition to receiving “endless resources for LSP lessons,” Cornelius found opportunities for networking and collaboration through NOBLE. Specifically, NOBLE linked her to another LSP-interested teacher, Cristin Bleess from Colorado, with whom she developed the course “Spanish for Leadership and Global Competency,” which she then offered at her school. NOBLE funding then sent her to conferences where she was able to share her work with other teachers. Not surprisingly, Cornelius greatly values the support she has found in NOBLE. She says,

“Becoming an active member of NOBLE has been one of the best professional experiences I have had since becoming a teacher five years ago.”

The remaining challenge is to win the support “up top”: “We need administrators to recognize and reward the teachers working on innovative LSP program and course development,” Risner says. Not surprisingly, in this area NOBLE again offers language educators support through its sections on [Advocacy](#) or [Global Careers](#), featuring links to reports, presentations, and videos. For ongoing news bites and quick info, teachers and other fans can follow [NOBLE on Twitter](#).

## **References**

Crouse, Douglass. (2013). “[Languages for Specific Purposes in the 21st Century](#).” *The Language Educator*, 8 (3), 32-35.