

### THE PROBLEM

#### Linguistic Priority

- Instruction often prioritizes **grammar** over intercultural competence, **limiting students'** ability to **engage** meaningfully **across cultures**.

#### Cultural Deficit

- Cultural content is **superficial**, often seen as sporadic "culture notes" or add-ons.
- Information is **fragmented or isolated** from core language learning objectives.

**How does a culture-centered instructional approach influence students' intercultural awareness and perceptions compared to traditional first-year Spanish instruction?**

- Spanish textbooks treat culture as an **add-on**, while scholars emphasize the need to integrate culture as a core component (Horwitz, 2024; Cutshall, 2012).
- Culture is most effectively understood through **Products, Practices, and Perspectives (3Ps)**, which allows learners to move beyond surface-level knowledge (ACTFL).
- Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from different cultures. ICC requires **knowledge, attitudes, skills, and critical cultural awareness** (Michael Byram, 1997).

### THE SWITCH

#### TRADITIONAL

- Grammar-first
- Culture as add-on
- Culture isolated
- Limited authentic materials

Same Textbook

#### CULTURE-CENTERED

- Culture-Centered
- Culture first
- Culture integrated
- Authentic texts and activities

### WOULD THIS WORK?

Culture-centered **vs.** traditional instruction

Students' self-perceptions of **intercultural learning**

Students' **perceptions** of culture-centered instruction

### PARTICIPANTS



N = 114

Undergraduate students

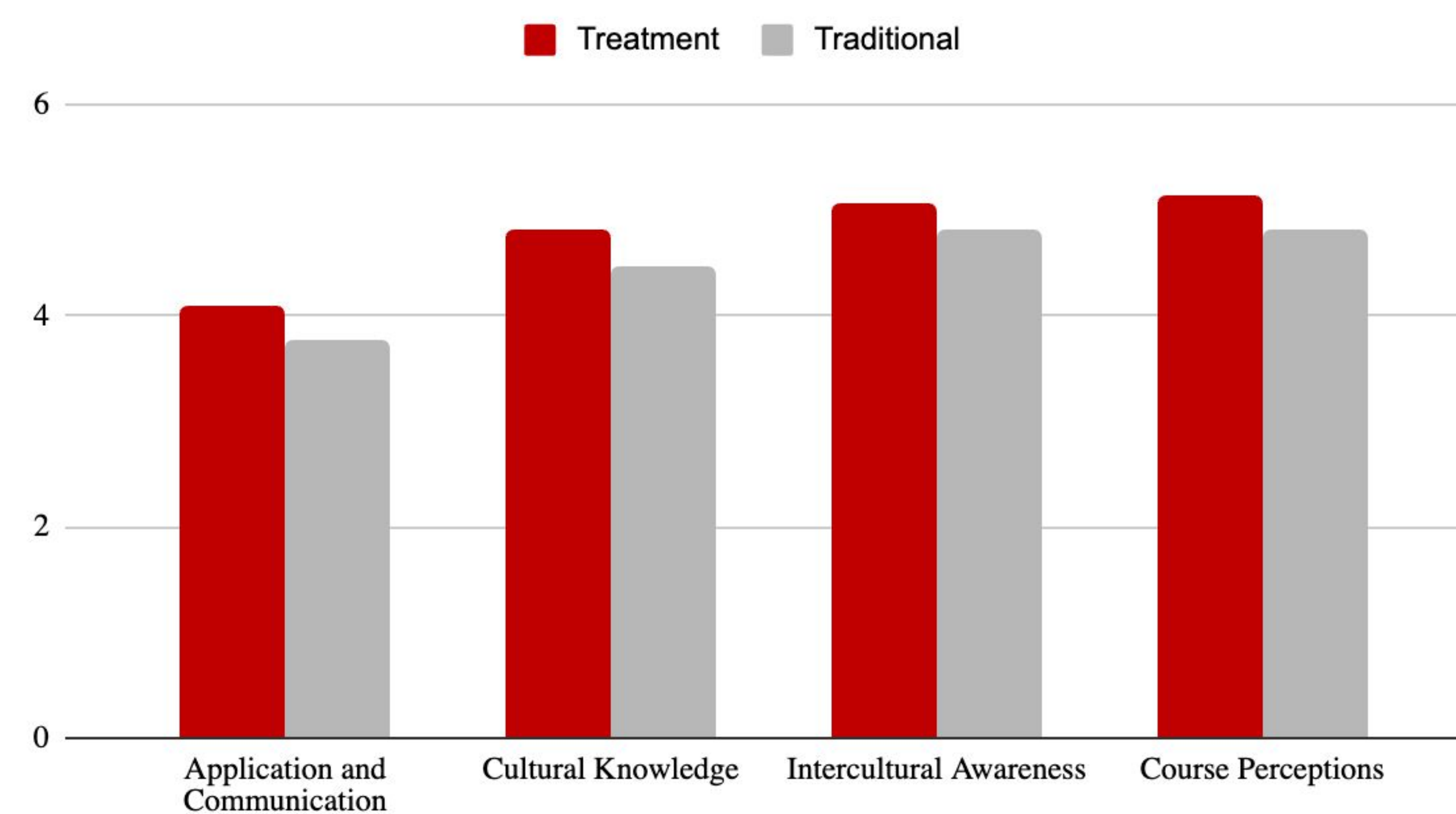
Second-semester Spanish

N = 56  
**Culture-centered**  
4 sections

N = 58  
**Traditional**  
5 sections

### THE EVIDENCE

Mean Scores by Instructional Group Across Intercultural Constructs



**Students in the culture-centered group reported higher mean scores across intercultural constructs than students in the traditional group.**

Significant differences were found for items related to:

- Interpreting Cultural Cues
- Respectful Communication
- Understanding Cultural Perspectives
- 3Ps Connections
- Cultural Comparison
- Culture as Central to Instruction

$p < 0.05$   
[Mann-Whitney U test]

### BEYOND THE NUMBERS

#### Cultural Knowledge

- "Mate", "El handuti", "Spanish/indigenous influences"
- "Seafood", "Siestas", "Tapas"

#### Interpreting Culture

- "Andean women reclaiming identity via cholitas clothing"
- "Cultural events", "Popular dances"

#### Critical Cultural Awareness

- "Half Cuban... more proud of my heritage"
- Limited critical reflection in responses

#### Authentic Cultural Engagement

- "real people", "first-hand experience", "individual stories", "into the weeds"
- "watch videos", "show a map", "cultural figures"

#### Openness

- "My culture is just a small sliver", "similarities strengthened knowledge"
- "hasn't really changed", "not very much"

**Key Finding: Students in the culture-centered group demonstrated significantly stronger intercultural awareness and more reflective cultural understanding than students in traditional instruction.**

### THE DESIGN

#### Mixed-methods:

- Quantitative survey
- Open-ended qualitative responses

6

#### 6-POINT SCALE

#### INTERCULTURAL CONSTRUCTS

- Application and Communication
- Cultural Knowledge
- Intercultural Awareness
- Course Perception

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I can use Spanish to participate appropriately in everyday cultural practices (e.g., greetings, social interactions).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel confident interpreting cultural cues in Hispanic contexts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel confident interacting with native speakers of Spanish.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can adjust my communication to show respect for Hispanic cultural practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am taking this course for personal enrichment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### MAKING SENSE OF IT

Traditional Students  
**Additional Element**

Treatment Students  
**Lens for Critical Awareness**

While the **quantitative** differences between treatment groups are **modest** qualitative responses reveal **clear** patterns of **depth** of intercultural awareness.

### WHAT'S NEXT



#### Pedagogy

Ongoing refinement of pedagogy to enhance ICC.



#### Expanded Scope

Larger sample sizes and diverse contexts.



#### Longitudinal Design

Tracking growth over multiple semesters

### TO CONCLUDE

■ **Self-perception**  
Culture-centered students showed a deeper IC

■ **Comparisons**  
Higher results between the traditional and culture-centered approach

■ **Perception of the course**  
Positive perception of the culture-centered classroom (CP1)

**Students in the culture-centered group reported significantly higher intercultural awareness across multiple measures.**

### REFERENCES

