

It is my pleasure to introduce the winning essay for this award, “Español, English, y Spanglish: The Battle of Language in Puerto Rico” by Noah Dexter, from Marylou Gramm’s “History and Politics of the English Language” course. In reading essays that combine personal narrative with research, a few things are crucial: the ability to transition seamlessly between one thread and the next, and the ability to maintain a distinct and consistent “voice” as one drifts between the self and the world. In this essay, the student does both with a swiftness and confidence that immediately draws the reader into the world of the piece. The student intersperses the Spanish language throughout the essay to marry the content of the piece to the form, creating stakes that engage the reader in our discovery of the titular “battle of language.” The student also embeds quotes and sources effortlessly— every quote serves a purpose, and every explanation of the quote seeks to explicate and complicate the purpose and history of language. This was a fascinating read— I read it once through, compelled and impressed by the writing, and then again and again— compelled and impressed by the complexity of the narrative and what it says about the role of language in our society. This essay is urgent, intricate, and expertly crafted all at once. Noah, congratulations on receiving this award— it is more than deserved.