

# Law Enforcement Spanish Immersion Training Program

According to the 2010 Census, 50.5 million Americans, or one in six, are Hispanic. More than 12 percent of the total U.S. population speaks Spanish and of those almost half do not speak English very well.

In order to perform their duties, officers and agents need to be able communicate with the members of their community. And as more and more members of the community speak Spanish, so must our law enforcement professionals. The Federal Law Enforcement Training Center's (FLETC) new Law Enforcement Spanish Immersion Training Program (LESITP) will help these officers not only speak the language, but also have an understanding of the Hispanic culture.



The rapid influx of Hispanics into the United States in recent years has resulted in increasing numbers of encounters between law enforcement and individuals whose native language is Spanish. This 80-hour program is essential for law enforcement officers to communicate effectively with Spanish-speaking individuals.

In August, the FLETC ran a pilot of the LESITP at its site in Artesia, NM. Fifteen students from state, local, and federal agencies participated in the pilot program. Students were taught basic Spanish grammar, which is the foundation of any language. With this knowledge students understand how to properly formulate a sentence in Spanish. During the two week course students were given vocabulary words that they were challenged to put to memory. Recommendations solicited from the students and the instructors who were involved in the pilot are being evaluated for viability and will be included in the course if determined to be advantageous to the students learning experience.

“This course is not meant to make our students fluent in Spanish, but it gives them a basic understanding and teaches proper grammar rules” said Lee Newman, Branch Chief, General Training Branch-Advanced, General and Physical Training Division, Office of Artesia Operations. Students are given five verb tense conjugations that will enable them to speak in the proper tense as well as read Spanish and understand what tense the subject matter is written in. The knowledge gained from the course not only provides a basic comprehension of the Spanish language, but also provides the fundamental knowledge to improve on their skills through self-development.

During the course the student is totally immersed in the Spanish language. Students are required to converse in Spanish during the training day as well as outside the classroom into the evening. The FLETC Artesia’s geographic location is ideal in that many individuals in the local community are native Spanish speakers. Students are required to utilize their Spanish when interacting with individuals who speak the language.

Students who successfully complete this intensive course will be able to communicate in Spanish to solicit common basic information necessary in the description of individuals, items, locations, and to offer assistance. More importantly, the student will learn Spanish command phrases useful in dealing with low-risk or high-risk encounters, and in recognizing dangerous expressions in Spanish that are threatening to a law enforcement officer. Students will learn about different cultures that will enable them to understand voice inflection. They will hear dangerous expressions and understand how the situation could escalate quickly, so they are able to take proper precautions for their protection.

As in any other culture, there are significant differences in the Hispanic culture that are essential for the law enforcement officer to know. Not only will students learn to be aware of certain situations, but they will also understand the cultural differences law enforcement officers face when dealing with Hispanic culture.

By understanding the Hispanic culture, students gain familiarity with cultural mannerisms useful in preventing a situation from escalating. Furthermore, the program is designed to familiarize the student with investigative and arrest expressions, and meanings of street/slang Spanish. Many street/slang phrases have literal meanings for weapons, drugs, and other expressions, which on the street could be interpreted as impending danger. Street gangs are a big part of today’s world and students will better understand these dangerous expressions and body posture from gang members.

Included in the instruction are short phrase arrest expressions the student will learn with ease. The focus is on the ability to command a situation with easy-to-remember phrases designed to neutralize a potentially dangerous situation.

At the conclusion of the two-week course, the students will engage in scenario-based practical exercises covering multiple situations that are tailored to meet specific agency priorities, goals and objectives. The FLETC employs Spanish speaking role players who will assist instructors and enable students to hear Spanish being spoken in a controlled scenario. Students will be able to give Spanish commands and make an arrest in the Spanish language during stressful situations that instructors will put them through.

“Our officers must be able to understand those they are obligated to protect,” said FLETC Director Connie Patrick. “This program provides them with a basic comprehension of the language to prevent misunderstandings during potentially life-threatening situations.” 🌟