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# ***Españolandia: A Statewide Language and Culture Simulation for Spanish Students***

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**Blair E. Bateman**, Brigham Young University

**Nieves Pérez Knapp**, Brigham Young University

## **Introduction**

Imagine your foreign language students having the opportunity to visit a locale where they must use the language to go through customs, arrange transportation, check into a hotel, make purchases, order food in a restaurant, and purchase souvenirs. Now imagine *all* of your students having this opportunity without ever leaving their home state. Such is the objective of *Españolandia*.

*Españolandia* is a large-scale simulation of a Spanish-speaking country that is conducted in conjunction with Brigham Young University's annual Foreign Language Fair in April. The Fair is an activity in which secondary school students of French, German, and Spanish from throughout the state of Utah participate in competitive events such as skits, prepared and impromptu talks, poetry reading, show and tell, and a language bowl. During the "down time" between events, students can spend time in a simulation of a Spanish-speaking country (*Españolandia*), a French-speaking country (*La Petite France*), or a German-speaking country (*Kleindeutschland*). *Españolandia* is the oldest and largest of these three simulations.

## **History of the Foreign Language Fair and *Españolandia***

The Foreign Language Fair at BYU began in the late 1950s as part of a nationwide movement encouraging language fairs and festivals, spurred on in part by the National Defense Education Act of 1958. Kaplan (1971) offers the following definition of a language fair (LF):

A LF is a large group activity, a whole school, or several schools or districts doing *things* for a day, or several hours at least, in a large area such as a gymnasium, a college campus, an athletic field, etc., with no sense of curriculum, tests, academic reality or pressure intruding. It is a fun day, yet a day with a sense of structure and purpose . . . with foreign language being the theme that runs through everything. . . . Teachers and students participate and enjoy themselves. (p. 13)

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**Blair Bateman** (Ph.D., University of Minnesota) and **Nieves Knapp** (Ph.D., Universidad de Oviedo) are Assistant Professors in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Brigham Young University in Provo, UT. Professor Bateman has taught Spanish at the high school level as well as Portuguese and Spanish at the university level, and currently teaches foreign language methods and research classes. Professor Knapp has taught English, French, and Spanish in Spain, and currently teaches methods courses and serves as the Director of *Españolandia*.

A number of articles and research studies were published from the 1960s through the 1980s advocating foreign language fairs as a means of increasing enrollment in FL classes and motivating students to learn languages (e.g., Becker, 1973; Becker & Findlay, 1985; Hunt, 1968; Kaplan, 1971; Marshall, Novak, & Savoie, 1983; Miller, 1975; Probst, 1966). During those decades, language fairs or festivals began to be held in a number of locations throughout the U.S. at the school, district, or state levels. Although the popularity of language fairs seems to have declined somewhat in recent years, as evidenced by the dearth of literature on the subject since the mid-1980s, BYU's Foreign Language Fair has continued to thrive for nearly four decades.

The popularity of the fair at BYU grew rapidly in the years following its inception, and by the early 1960s over a thousand students were attending each year. Due to the large numbers of students attending and the distances they had to travel, an attempt was made for several years to share the responsibility for hosting fair events with other universities throughout the state. Not all universities were equally committed to the idea, however, and by the mid-1960s BYU had again resumed responsibility for hosting the fair for the entire state.

Accommodating such a large number of students and keeping them occupied for an entire morning proved to be a challenge. Although students were accompanied by their teachers, the teachers could attend only one event at a time, leaving many of their students unsupervised. It soon became obvious that an activity was needed to occupy students' time between fair events, when some students would wander the campus emptying vending machines and playing in elevators. Faculty members began searching for additional language- or culture-related activities that would involve students in meaningful ways.

Another type of activity that was being advocated in foreign language programs of the time was simulations of foreign countries and cultures (Weight, 1978). Jones (1982) explains that a simulation is an activity that requires participants to carry out actual communicative functions in an environment that imitates a real-world setting. Jones maintains that simulations are an ideal activity for promoting language development because "almost all simulations involve a substantial amount of interaction between the participants, and interaction involves language" (p. 7).

Simulations found their way into foreign language classrooms beginning in the 1950s (Jones, 1982), and by the early 1960s, large-scale simulations of foreign countries were being conducted by Concordia College in Minnesota at its Language Villages (Concordia Language Villages, n.d.). In the late 1960s, Dr. James S. Taylor of BYU attended a presentation at a professional conference about a simulation of a foreign country that had been conducted in a school gymnasium. Dr. Taylor and his colleagues decided to construct a simulated Spanish-speaking country that students could visit when they were not participating in competitive events at the Foreign Language Fair. The name they selected for the country was *Españolandia*. Since its inception in the late 1960s, *Españolandia* has been held each year and has continued to grow, both in terms of participants and in the variety of activities offered.

### **What *Españolandia* Is and How It Works**

*Españolandia* is a composite of Spanish-speaking cultures, whose "citizens" are stu-

dent volunteers who have lived abroad or are native speakers of Spanish, each of whom contributes his or her own linguistic and cultural insights. The basic premise of *Españolandia* is to provide an atmosphere in which students must use Spanish in order to accomplish simple communicative tasks similar to those that they might encounter in Spanish-speaking countries, such as checking into a hotel, mailing a letter, or purchasing souvenirs. No English is allowed, except at the information table in the center of *Españolandia*, where students may seek help with the Spanish words and expressions they need in order to carry out tasks. In order to accomplish each task, students use words and phrases that they have learned and practiced in their schools before the fair. To facilitate their preparation, *A Visitor's Guide to Españolandia*, a task-specific phrase booklet, is mailed to teachers several weeks before the Fair (available online at <http://spanport.byu.edu/hispanet/Spainfair/guia/index.html>).

Teachers are encouraged to review the phrases with their students and practice the tasks in advance. In addition to the phrase booklets, teachers are sent "passports" for their students to fill out with their personal information. These passports will serve to keep track of the communicative tasks that students accomplish as they visit the various booths in *Españolandia*. Students receive a stamp in their passport for each task they perform, and they must receive at least seven stamps during their visit. Some teachers offer extra credit to students who fill their passport with all the possible stamps.

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### **Preparation and Setup**

The process of preparing, setting up, and running *Españolandia* is supervised by three faculty members from the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, with the help of a part-time secretary hired specially for this purpose. Conducting a simulation on such a large scale presents a challenge; the number of students attending the Spanish Foreign Language Fair and *Españolandia* each year ranges from 1,700 to 3,000. Both events are open to students in their second year of Spanish study or beyond, as first-year students generally do not yet have the language skills to compete in fair events or communicate effectively in *Españolandia*.

Two months before the fair, a post card is sent to all teachers directing them to a website (<http://spanport.byu.edu/hispanet/Spainfair/index.html>) where they can print a registration form and mail it along with a check for the registration fee. Registration costs \$4 per student, which covers the cost of photocopying and mailing copies of *A Visitor's Guide to Españolandia* and passports to teachers, the wages of the secretary, and other expenses. In addition, teachers are sent a number of *pases diplomáticos* (diplomatic passes) that permit parents and other visitors who do not speak Spanish to enter *Españolandia*, provided they are accompanied by a Spanish-speaking student who can serve as their interpreter.

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The week before the fair, volunteers to staff Españolandia are recruited from upper-division Spanish classes at the university, which typically enroll around 1,500 students. Approximately 120 of these students are needed to volunteer as customs officers, hotel clerks, store employees, and the like; many of their professors offer them extra credit for participating. Students from the methods classes for students preparing to teach Spanish are assigned to serve as the leaders at each post, and a class session is devoted to briefing them on their duties. The other volunteers are asked to attend a one-hour training meeting in which they are instructed on the procedures of Españolandia and assigned to a specific post. Volunteers are encouraged to wear articles of clothing that they may have acquired in their residence in a Spanish-speaking country.

The day before the fair, the university's custodial staff sets up the booths and tables for Españolandia in two large adjoining rooms in the student center. The first room contains tables for the customs office and the bank, as well as crowd control posts and ropes to form lines for the students waiting to enter. The second area, comprised of three large adjoining rooms with the dividing walls retracted, contains the “shops” and “businesses,” housed in booths made of metal poles hung with fabric. The front and sides of the booths are approximately 3' high, and the back is 8', similar to those used by vendors at professional conferences. Tables are set up inside each booth for displaying the items to be sold. (See Appendix A for a “Map of Españolandia” that illustrates the setup of the two rooms.)

The morning of the fair, volunteers report at 7 a.m. to transport Españolandia materials to the appropriate rooms and to set up the materials in the booths. The leader of each post supervises the setup and verifies that the volunteers understand their duties. Volunteers are issued mini-stampers (colored markers with the tip cut to form different shapes) for stamping the passports of students as they complete a communicative task at their booth. (See Appendix B for a summary of the preparation process for Españolandia.)

### **Places to Visit in Españolandia**

Españolandia consists of interesting places to visit and people to talk with, offering students ample opportunity to practice their Spanish. These include the following:

*Aduana* (Customs). As students enter Españolandia, they pass through customs, where they must present their passports and answer questions about their place of origin, the purpose and length of their visit, and the content of their backpacks. The customs officials wear old military uniforms obtained from a secondhand store, with an Españolandia patch pinned on.

*Banco de Españolandia*. The next stop is the bank, where students exchange American dollars for “pesos” of Españolandia, which are printed on colored paper in denominations of one, five, and ten, and are used for all purchases made in Españolandia. The exchange rate is ten pesos to the dollar. Although students may

exchange any amount of money they choose, they are not required to purchase anything in Españolandia except a subway ticket, as explained below.

*Metro* (Subway). The metro (a long storage closet) runs between the bank at the border (the first room) and *Ciudad Españolandia* (the second room). It is lined with posters showing maps of the transportation system, advertisements, and the like. Students purchase a ticket for one peso; this is the only required expense in their visit to Españolandia. Occasionally, students will run into a volunteer dressed as a beggar or musician soliciting money in the metro.

*Hotel Buenavista*. Upon arriving in Españolandia students can check into a hotel. The “government” of Españolandia requires guests to fill out a form listing their home country and the dates and purpose of their visit. After filling out the form, students can check in to the hotel by signing the guest registry, and are then issued an “electronic key” (printed on paper) to their room. They are also expected to ask questions regarding the daily rates, the availability of TV and air conditioning, whether breakfast is included, and similar topics.

*Farmacia* (Pharmacy). Here students have an opportunity to describe the physical symptoms that ail them (headache, nausea, rash, etc.), whereupon the pharmacists recommend various medications (small envelopes of Skittles) which are sold for a minimal price. The pharmacy is equipped with empty bottles and boxes of medications from Spanish-speaking countries, as well as a poster listing various vitamins and minerals in Spanish, to simulate the environment and decor of a real pharmacy. The pharmacists wear white smocks purchased from a secondhand store.

*Fotos* (Photo Shop). Here, for a small fee, students can have a Polaroid photo of themselves taken on the beautiful beaches of Españolandia (i.e., in front of a backdrop of a beach scene painted on canvas). *Sombreros*, *sarapes*, and *ponchos* are available for students to wear for the photo. Group photos are always popular.

*Panadería “La Flor de Españolandia”* (Bakery) and *frutería* (Fruit Stand). The *panadería* sells cakes and cookies that are supplied by a local Mexican baker; the *frutería* sells apples, oranges, and bananas.

*Kiosco* (Newsstand) and *Tienda “Recuerdos de Españolandia”* (Souvenir Store). The *kiosco* sells items such as travel pamphlets, magazines, and newspapers, many of which are old copies that have been discarded by the Spanish Department or the library. It also sells pens, pencils, bookmarks, and small notebooks. The souvenir store sells small piñatas, Aztec calendar pins, maraca keychains, stickers of flags from Spanish-speaking countries, *balero* toys, hand-made Guatemalan kickballs and Mayan worry dolls, and other such items, which are purchased from mail-order catalogues catering to foreign language teachers. Students are encouraged to bargain in Spanish to get the best price, although the volunteers that staff these stores are given a list of minimum prices in order to avoid selling the items at a loss.

*Emisora de radio “Radio Españolandia”* (Radio Station). At *Radio Españolandia* students can request that songs by their favorite Latin artists be played over the sound system. Shakira, Ricky Martin, Luis Miguel, Enrique Iglesias, and Maná are among the most popular. The CDs are provided by the volunteers who act as employees of the radio station. If the students wish, they can perform karaoke. The radio station also

serves as a lost and found, announcing lost passports and other articles over the sound system.

*Confecciones “La Última Moda”* (Clothing Store). Here students can ask to try on various articles of clothing (again purchased from a secondhand store). Students are encouraged to describe the color, style, and size of the clothing they wish to try on. In some years, articles of clothing are actually available for purchase, such as t-shirts or visors with *Lo pasé genial en Españolandia* (“I had a great time in Españolandia”) printed on them.

*Correos* (Post Office). At the post office students can write a postcard in Spanish to a friend, family member, or their teacher. The postcards are printed on cardstock with *Recuerdo de Españolandia* (“Souvenir of Españolandia”) printed on one side and room for the message and address on the other. Students are provided with sample phrases to use, as well as with a list of school addresses in case they want to write to their teacher. The students pay the postage, and the postcards are actually mailed following the fair (via U.S. mail, of course).

*Restaurante “El Buen Comer.”* The restaurant has always been a popular feature of Españolandia, especially as lunchtime approaches. The food consists of burritos, taquitos, chips, and salsa, which are provided and sold by employees of a local Mexican restaurant, with special permission from the university’s Dining Services. *Jarritos* soft drinks, bottled water, and other beverages are also available for students to purchase.

*Entrevistas* (Interviews). A number of citizens of Españolandia have the special responsibility to grant interviews to students, and can be identified by the *entrevistas* sign that they wear. These citizens take on the role of famous Spanish-speaking people. In any given year, the interviewees may include Pablo Neruda, Gloria Estefan, Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, or Fidel Castro. Students are encouraged to ask questions about the interviewee’s name, age, hometown, family, occupation, interests, and experiences.

*Policía / Seguridad* (Security). The responsibility of the security officers is to monitor the lines of students waiting to enter Españolandia and to make sure that everyone enters and exits by the appropriate doors. The police officers are charged with roaming Españolandia and listening for students (or citizens!) speaking English. Anyone caught speaking English is escorted to jail, which is a large storage closet with black ribbons representing jail bars that hang down over the entrance. Students can get out of jail by paying a small fine or by singing a song in Spanish. The police and security officers wear secondhand uniforms and carry toy pistols, handcuffs, and radios.

#### *Leaving Españolandia*

When students are ready to leave Españolandia, they can exchange their remaining pesos for American money at the bank (a separate bank is located near the exit). They then show their passport to a customs official, who allows them to pass provided that they have received at least seven stamps in their passport.

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### *Cleanup and Storage of Materials*

Españolandia begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at noon. After the last students have left, the volunteers pack up the materials from each booth in file folder boxes that are appropriately labeled and help to carry the boxes back to their storage closets. The volunteers are then treated to a free meal at the *restaurante*.

The U.S. money that was exchanged is used to reimburse the caterers and others who purchased supplies, and the remainder is deposited in a special account, to be used for the next year's Españolandia as well as for the Foreign Language Fair (including trophies and certificates for event participants). Finally, faculty members sit back and heave a sigh of relief.

### **Theoretical Foundations of the Españolandia Simulation**

The Españolandia simulation finds support in several theories of language learning. The activities that students perform, such as checking into a hotel or making purchases, are what Nunan (1989) calls "real-world tasks," and are a form of task-based language learning. Long and Crookes (1993) affirm that these types of tasks "provide a vehicle for the presentation of appropriate target language samples to learners . . . and for the delivery of comprehension and production opportunities of negotiable difficulty" (p. 39). These "target language samples" are provided in written form by the sample phrases in *A Visitor's Guide to Españolandia*, as well as orally by the utterances of Españolandia volunteers who interact with students.

A second theoretical basis for Españolandia is found in Swain's (1993, 2005) Output Hypothesis. As students visiting Españolandia strive to make themselves understood in Spanish, they are "pushed" to produce "comprehensible output." According to Swain, this type of activity provides students with opportunities to test hypotheses about the target language, to receive feedback about the comprehensibility of their utterances, and to recognize what they know and do not know how to do in the language.

Another supporting theory is Long's (1981, 1996) Interaction Hypothesis, which posits that conversation is not only a vehicle for language practice, but also the means by which learning takes place (Gass, 2003). Research on the Interaction Hypothesis suggests that learning can occur as a result of the adjustments that students make in response to breakdowns in communication as they "negotiate for meaning" with a "native speaker or more competent interlocutor" (Long, 1996, p. 452). This is precisely the type of interaction that Españolandia is designed to facilitate between junior high or high school students and upper-division Spanish students at the university, the latter group consisting largely of individuals with considerable conversational experience.

The activities in Españolandia also address several goal areas of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (1999). Students' interactions with Españolandia volunteers

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furnish ample opportunity to provide and obtain information in the target language, addressing the Communication goal area. Furthermore, students have the opportunity to use the language “beyond the school setting,” a specification of the Communities goal area.

The Cultures goal area of the *Standards* is addressed as students learn about products and practices of Hispanic cultures. Although no single “real” Hispanic culture is represented by *Españolandia*, an attempt is made to draw on cultural products that are common to many Spanish-speaking countries, such as food, magazines, and music, as well as common cultural practices such as bargaining in a street market, purchasing fruit at a stand, or going to a *farmacia* with one’s medical ailments. In the future, we hope to provide teachers with resources for discussing the perspectives that underlie these products and practices, and how they differ from students’ own cultural perspectives (addressing the Comparisons goal area). Future plans also include the development of materials to aid teachers in discussing the diversity among Spanish-speaking countries, as well as within each country, in order to help avoid the formation of cultural stereotypes (Galloway, 2001).

In addition to learning about practices that are specific to Hispanic countries, students who visit *Españolandia* are exposed to several culture-general concepts (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, & Colby, 1999). These concepts include the following:

- Other countries use their own currencies rather than the dollar.
- Other cultures actually carry on their day-to-day activities exclusively in the target language, without ever speaking English.
- Different cultures have practices, products, and perspectives that differ from students’ own culture, which are neither superior nor inferior but merely different.

These concepts may seem obvious to teachers, but they often come as a surprise to students who have never traveled outside the United States.

### **Feedback from Teachers**

In April 2005, we e-mailed an informal questionnaire soliciting feedback from the teachers whose students participated in the Foreign Language Fair. Teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the *Españolandia* simulation. Responses to the question “What did you like most about *Españolandia*?” included the following:

- Pretty much everything. I like the wide variety of shops and activities that are provided. That makes it fun for the kids. They really enjoy the food every year. They also had a lot of fun *regateando* (bargaining) for a good price. It was a great experience for them.
- The kids loved being able to barter with the vendors. They also loved being thrown in jail.
- The helpful nature of the workers. Everyone seems to want to help our students have a good time while practicing their language skills.
- I love seeing my students experience something similar to being in a foreign country and HAVING to speak Spanish to get by. This is when they really see what they know.

Another item on the questionnaire asked teachers, “What do you do to help your

students prepare for Españolandia?” We included this question because students whose teachers prepare them in advance seem to derive the greatest benefit from visiting Españolandia and enjoy the simulation the most. In response to this question, teachers listed a variety of activities including the following:

- We start studying the yellow guide book several weeks before, including quizzes on the vocabulary. The students work through the yellow book, figuring out what the phrases mean and adding phrases they personally might want to use. The week before, they study and fill out their passports.

- I have a mini Españolandia in my classroom, with ESL students manning the booths.

- Hand out the guide early and practice questions as they come in the door each day.

When asked “What suggestions, if any, do you have for improving Españolandia?” approximately half of the teachers made comments related to managing the large numbers of students who attend. A number of teachers expressed concern about the long lines at the entrance and at some of the booths, and several suggested having junior high and high school students come at different times. In response to this feedback, next year we plan to schedule the competitive Foreign Language Fair events for junior high and high school during different blocks of time so that each group can attend Españolandia separately.

## Conclusion

Although hosting Españolandia represents a significant amount of work, we believe that the payoff is worth the effort. Many teachers in the state regard the Foreign Language Fair and Españolandia as the culminating event of the year and feel that it gives students a goal to work toward. Students can earn trophies and certificates by competing in the fair, and they go home with the satisfaction of having put their Spanish to use in Españolandia, in addition to whatever souvenirs they may choose to purchase.

We also believe that the Foreign Language Fair and Españolandia represent an important outreach effort on the part of the university. These events let teachers and parents know that university faculty support what goes on in public school classrooms. The events also expose students to the university campus and faculty and encourage students to continue their foreign language study, both at the secondary and postsecondary levels.

In conclusion, we hope that this information will prove helpful to anyone thinking about hosting a foreign language simulation at any level. To those who may be considering such an undertaking, our advice is simply to give it a try! We believe that you and your students will find it well worth the effort.

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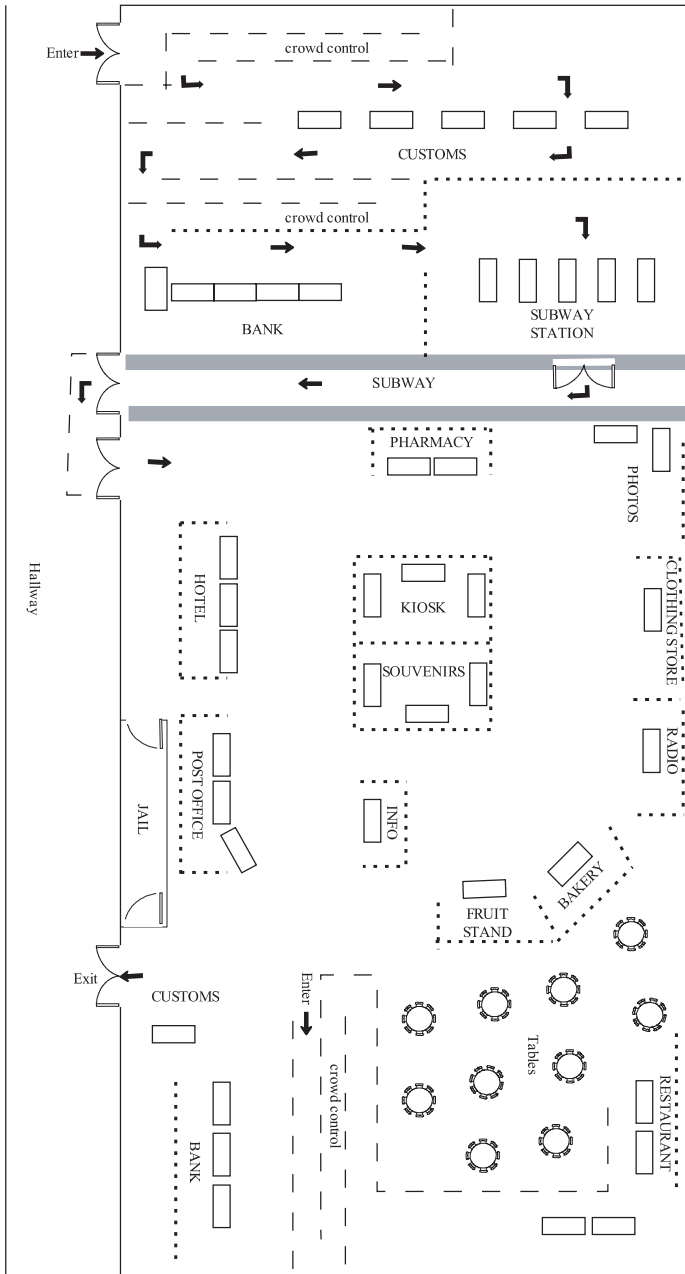
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# Appendix A.

## Map of Españolandia.



## Appendix B.

### To-Do List for Españolandia.

#### Two months in advance

- Send out post cards directing teachers to registration website
- Confirm rooms with Campus Scheduling
- Have visitor's guides and passports printed
- Confirm with caterers from Mexican restaurant

#### One month in advance

- Send packet to teachers who have registered (including information letter, visitor's guides, passports, and *pases diplomáticos*)
- Order merchandise to sell at *Kiosco*, *Tienda de Recuerdos* and *Confecciones*
- Make list of registered teachers and schools

#### Two weeks in advance

- Submit Españolandia floor plan to Campus Scheduling
- Reserve room for the meeting with volunteers
- Order parking passes for caterers and delivery vehicles
- Request P.A. system for *Radio Españolandia* through Media Services
- Assign methods students to be leaders of posts in Españolandia
- Send around volunteer sign-up sheets to upper-division Spanish classes
- Make copies of post cards for *Correo*, tickets for the *Metro*, and room keys for the *Hotel*
- Make copies of handout with instructions for volunteers, to be given out in the meeting

#### One week in advance

- Hold meeting with volunteers
- Pick up parking permits
- Withdraw \$1000 from Españolandia account; use \$800 for change from bank, and the rest to pay for fruit, film, etc.
- Print list of minimum prices for *Kiosco*, *Tienda de Recuerdos* and *Confecciones*

#### Three days in advance

- Buy Skittles and small envelopes for *Farmacia*
- Buy Polaroid film for *Fotos*
- Get change for *Banco*: \$100 in fives, \$150 in ones, \$250 in quarters, \$200 in dimes, \$100 in nickels
- Go through boxes of supplies for each booth to make sure everything is in order

#### The night before

- Check to be sure booths are being set up properly
- Purchase fruit for *Frutería* and pastries for *Panadería*
- Label booths after they are set up so that the post leaders can find them

#### The morning of

- Supervise volunteers in transporting materials to Españolandia rooms and setting them up