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Growing up in northern New Jersey in the 1970s, and within an hour of New York City, I knew Hispanics as my neighbors, friends, community leaders, coworkers, teachers, etc., and therefore studying their language and culture was a logical step for me to foster my understanding and bolster my relationships. Eventually, my learning goals evolved into a beloved profession in teaching. But thirty-five years after my “formal” education on Hispanic language and culture began, and with now approximately 54 million Hispanics residing in the United States, Hispanic language and culture education is more critical than ever and comprises an indispensable component of a comprehensive and responsible US education at all levels. Personally, teaching continues to be about the mission, which is not simply the successful relay of course content, but reminding and convincing our students that such a language and culture education strengthens the success of any career as well as the many personal and professional relationships during one’s lifetime. Language and culture education fosters interpersonal respect and understanding, which is at the core of one’s successes in *any* society.



Mark P. Del Mastro is Professor and Chair of the College of Charleston’s **Department of Hispanic Studies**, which boasts the largest and most comprehensive undergraduate program of its kind in the southeastern United States. His research areas include Spain’s Generation of 1898 literary movement; the twentieth-century Spanish author Carmen Laforet; and identity, psychosocial development, and psychoanalysis in the post-Spanish Civil War novel. He also serves as the Executive Director of **Sigma Delta Pi**, the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society, and the Founding Director of the **South Carolina Spanish Teacher of the Year** program, among other professional activities. In March 2015, he was one of thirteen US Hispanists named “miembro numerario” of the **North American Academy of the Spanish Language (ANLE)**. For more about “Dr. D,” you may visit his [webpage](#).