

***Latina Loquenda*: Creating a Regional Spoken Latin Program**

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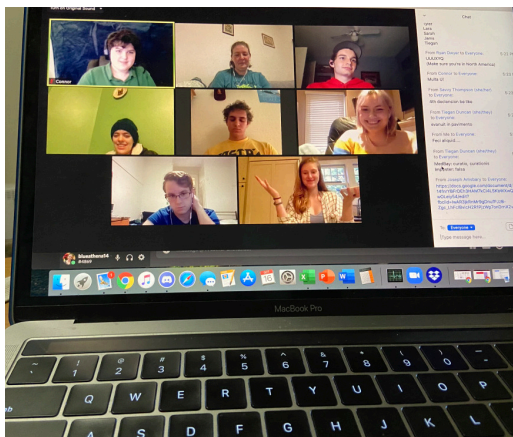


Biography

Alicia Lopez is a junior at the University of Pennsylvania studying Classics and English. Previously she attended St. Stephen's and St. Agnes School in Alexandria, Virginia as well as the Virginia Latin Governor's Academy, where she was first introduced to spoken Latin. With support from her high school Latin Teacher, Ian Hochberg, and Phil Gallagher, the Spoken Latin teacher at VA Latin Gov. School, she was able to create and run the spoken Latin program, *Latina Loquenda*! For more information, go to latinaloquenda.org.

When talking to Latin teachers, I often hear that it is difficult for teachers to balance the push and pull between supporting grammar and translation-heavy curriculum and supporting the new and growing movement that is spoken Latin. In my high school experience, most teachers fall into one camp or the other and claim that there isn't time to include the other curriculum. While translation and grammar give students access to thousands of ancient texts, spoken Latin teaches students how to use that grammar through composition, enriches Latin and English vocabulary, and promotes a greater understanding of syntax. Without a doubt, both methods provide benefits and complications for students, and offering a combination of the two allows students to get the most out of Latin. Creating an after-school spoken Latin program can be the perfect way to introduce spoken Latin to your students without taking class time from translation.

In this article, I will first list some of the benefits of creating a spoken Latin program at your school or in your region. Next, I will explain how I started and ran *Latina Loquenda*, my own spoken Latin program. Then, I will describe the methods of creating and sustaining a spoken Latin program I have found to be most successful. Finally, I will allow access to all of my spoken Latin materials to create your own spoken Latin programs.



Why You Should Create A Spoken Latin Program

Creating a spoken Latin program helps students read Latin texts, expand vocabulary, and increase grammatical understanding.¹ Spoken Latin forces students to engage with the language in a completely different way than through translating from Latin to English. By its nature, it encourages sentence formation and requires students to think creatively, at times having to create their own modern words to express themselves in an ancient language. Additionally, spoken Latin allows students to use Latin as the Romans did: conversationally. Speaking Latin revives the language for students and provides them with a greater variety of ways to interact with it.² Students better appreciate the sounds of Latin words and can envision ancient conversations with all their grammatical imperfections and corrections (not the perfect writings of Cicero, Vergil,

and Catullus). Seeing Latin in a raw form teaches students what “real Latin” was (i.e., what the commoners spoke) and helps them understand another aspect of the ancient world.

More than the grammatical benefits, the sense of community created by a spoken Latin program helps hold students’ interest in both the Latin language and Classics as a whole by creating a shared experience.³ At spoken Latin events, students are encouraged to ask questions beyond Latin grammar and delve into mythology, history, culture, and other topics of the ancient world. These questions spark curiosity and help students work together to generate responses. Additionally, an extracurricular program connects students to other students and teachers both inside and outside their school networks. This fosters more inter-regional connection and helps students engage with other people in the field.

When starting a program, it is essential to ensure that participants understand that everyone will make numerous grammatical mistakes when speaking and that making these mistakes is okay— even encouraged. Make clear that making mistakes is a vital part of understanding new grammatical constructions. Support participants so they don’t get frustrated if they can’t form sentences like those they read in Latin class,

which could influence them to give up on speaking Latin entirely.⁴ At least initially, spoken Latin is not about using the complex vocabulary and grammar which so many other Latin classes put focus on. In spoken Latin, the main goal is communicating and understanding. Students usually find that the exhilaration of finally understanding what someone has been explaining or being understood is well worth the effort required to get there.



Latina Loquenda

My program, created in Virginia, is called *Latina Loquenda*, which means “Latin must be spoken.” The goal, like that of any other spoken Latin program, is to encourage students and teachers around the state to try spoken Latin. On average, about 15 students and teachers from three to five schools attend each event. This number is ideal because it ensures there are plenty of people to talk to but not so many that the event is overcrowded.

The vast majority of my events have been held at restaurants, and Noodles and Company has been the most frequent location. I pick places that are centrally located, usually close to public transportation, and affordable for most people in the area. Each of my events is held on a Friday night and lasts for an hour and a half, from 7:00-8:30 pm, generally after sports practices, play rehearsals, and other after-school commitments.

I publicize each event on social media, at my school, and through friends. I follow the same procedure with each event: scheduling events, advertising on social media, and following up with emails and text messages. I use [Canva](#), a website used to create professional-looking graphics. Then, two weeks before the event, I post the advertisements on Instagram and Facebook. One week before the event, I post a quick reminder on Facebook and Instagram, and the day before the event, I post one more reminder on social media. This approach ensures that people have plenty of reminders, which increases attendance. Especially with the first few events, it is essential to reach out to as many people as possible through email or text message. Once a core group of participants has been established, publicity becomes easier; participants attend multiple events, bring friends, and help advertise the program at their schools.



Additionally, I make sure to have plenty of copies of vocabulary sheets and grammar packets printed out to distribute (see materials section for more information). When the day of the event arrives, I arrive early to reserve table space and set up so that the event runs as smoothly as possible .

The organizer must speak to every person at the event. This helps newcomers start to get comfortable with spoken Latin and helps jump-start the event by creating an inclusive atmosphere. When first starting the program, I had to initiate the conversation. By talking to each person individually and involving surrounding groups, groups ranging from 2-3 people up to 5-7 people break into their own conversations. I use my role to start many small conversations

then let people continue conversations with people around them. I generally circle the groups again later in the evening. After people have attended multiple events, they can start conversations too. Because repeat attendees often start conversations, discussions are lead by students and teachers alike. As the organizer, I make sure to keep an eye on the group to help jump-start another conversation if a group reaches a lull.

As my program commenced, the conversations started with simple things like favorite colors, numbers of siblings, and pets. As the program continued, people began to tell stories in Latin. With only a few meetings, participants began learning to speak Latin more fluently, and the change was evident. It was surprisingly easy for everyone to pick up vocabulary and grammar with just a few sessions.

Don't be worried about people staring at a group speaking Latin in public. Generally, no one notices. The only time someone commented was when a woman



sitting at the table next to our group asked, “Wait...are you speaking in Latin?” to which we responded yes. She had taken Latin in high school and thought it was “so cool” that we were speaking Latin, something she hadn’t been able to do in her Latin class. Other than that one instance, no one has ever noticed that our group was speaking Latin.

While at events, I take photos to post on social media afterward. Usually, I take a couple of group shots and several pictures of people in twos and threes. Remember, you must have people’s consent before you post photos of them online. Also, I make sure to talk to everyone at the events and to thank them for coming at the end. After events, I always post photos and a thank you to the people who came to the event on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and the *Latina Loquenda* website. It’s important to let people know that their participation in an event is crucial to its success and show others how much fun the event was to encourage them to attend future events. These events have done very well so far in my state, and I hope they will be a hit in your state as well!

Beyond monthly dinners, *Latina Loquenda* also hosted summer events between the usual school year events. We took a trip to the National Zoo, where we practiced animal vocabulary. We met at

noon, toured the zoo, got ice cream, and left at 3:00 pm. This trip allowed participants to expand their vocabulary past dinnertime conversation and to speak in Latin for longer than the usual hour and a half.

Also, *Latina Loquenda* hosted a special program called “Coquamus,” meaning “Let us cook.” At this event, we tried making ancient Roman recipes. I



picked the recipes adapted from Apicius and Cato the Elder and printed packets that participants could take home (see materials section for the recipe packet). Two fantastic sources for ancient Roman recipes are:

Pass the Garum run by Neill George
<http://pass-the-garum.blogspot.com/>

Tavola Mediterranea run by Farrell Monaco
<https://tavolamediterranea.com/>

Thirteen people attended the Coquamus event from 3:00-7:00 pm on

a Saturday. The group split into groups of 2-4 people, each making different dishes. We made chicken, porridge, *moretum*, bread, a cabbage dish, a date dish, and



posca. Of course, it is difficult to procure all the ingredients used in ancient cooking. However, through basic Google searches, I was able to find suitable equivalents. Overall, *Coquamus* was a smashing success, and participants loved making and eating ancient dishes. Cooking like the ancients helped give participants a deeper look into what life was like for the ancient Romans, creating a unique experience for all. Scavenger hunts, trips to museums, zoo trips, cooking, and the like are fun activities that a spoken Latin group can do to practice speaking Latin.

At the end of the second year of the program, I conducted a survey to discover how participants feel their Latin has improved, why they continue to attend

events, and how to increase attendance. Participants overwhelmingly stated that they attended multiple events because of the other people participating in events and the community in general. When asked why she attends events regularly, one participant answered, “I always get to see my friends and speak Latin with them. Each event is just so much fun!” Creating a welcoming environment and introducing everyone proves crucial to the program’s success.

Additionally, the survey responses reflected on the program’s success in teaching spoken Latin. Participants most frequently mentioned the program was



effective at increasing and retaining Latin vocabulary. When asked about how *Latina Loquenda* has helped increase spoken Latin ability, one student stated that she has “definitely improved in both confidence and accuracy.” Another participant mentioned she loves “getting a chance to talk about

things [she doesn't] normally talk about." The novelty of the vocabulary and topics of conversation help keep events exciting and engage participants.

Finally, I asked survey participants how to increase attendance at events. Suggestions included varying the day of the week the events are held, holding events more often, and tighter integration with the Virginia Junior Classical League, the state youth Latin organization. In the future, *Latina Loquenda* will consider and try to incorporate many participant suggestions.

In the upcoming year, I will be moving to Pennsylvania for college and will not run *Latina Loquenda* in Virginia. To ensure the program's continued success, I am passing it off to two high school students, Maddie Davis and Luella Wallander. These two students are from different regions of Virginia, which will encourage a wider distribution of events. Another advantage of this duo is that Maddie is a rising senior, and Luella is a rising junior. Each year, a senior will co-lead the program with a junior, ensuring that one person has a year of experience running the program. Finally, I have left my successors access to a Google Drive with materials, instructions, and a list of contact information for people who have helped promote and support the program. These resources will enable *Latina Loquenda* to continue to run smoothly for

years to come.



How to Create your own Spoken Latin Program

I think it's helpful to break a spoken Latin program down into four main parts: organization, social media, website, and materials. Clearly defining these four parts will make it easier for you to run your program.

The first part is organization, which includes the logistics of when and where your event will be held (if people don't know when or where to show up, they can't attend your event). The most important thing to consider when deciding the logistics of your event is general convenience. Initially, when I started *Latina Loquenda*, I planned to have events on Wednesday nights. As it turned out, many people couldn't attend events on Wednesday nights because they had homework or other obligations. Upon realizing this, I moved my events to the



1st Friday of the month, avoiding major holidays. Keeping the events on the first Friday helped give my events consistency, allowing participants to put events on their calendars in advance.

My events run from 7:00-8:30 pm. This time was ideal for my events because it's a little past rush hour, making traffic a little lighter but early enough that people can still get home at a reasonable hour. You don't have to hold events at night; however, keep in mind what is most convenient for your participants. While meetings directly after school may be suitable for participants at the same school, it may be difficult for students and teachers from other schools to make the commute from their school to the host school in time for the event.

Location is just as important as timing. For starters, you need a central location that is easy to find. No one likes to get lost, so an easy-to-find site is always a good thing. Schools make an ideal setting for

spoken Latin events. Additionally, having to drive a long distance to get to an event will deter people. Essentially, think about the excuses that you could come up with: traffic, getting home late, getting lost, too expensive, etc., and try to minimize them. If the event is held outside of someone's home or school, it is often difficult to find venues with enough good seating. It is necessary to have a seating arrangement that facilitates conversation. Libraries, rec centers, religious centers, and the like make great options. If you are organizing an event at a restaurant, be sure to get there early, so you have plenty of time to grab tables together. Calling ahead to let the place know that a group will be there is also a good idea.

We have so many unique forms of communication through various social media platforms that it is easier than ever to announce events to the world. Social media is a great way to share information, photos and take questions when creating your program. The Virginia *Latina Loquenda* Program has a Facebook group, which typically is an excellent way to communicate with teachers, and an Instagram, which is more directed at students. Having a place to post photos and reminders where everyone will see it is invaluable. Through good use of your social media accounts, people will stay informed and engaged on the goings-ons of your program.⁵ While social media is

a great way to ensure people are up-to-date on your events, the main takeaway is that communication is crucial to a successful program. Whether you use social media, emails, or in-class reminders, frequent reminders (3-4 per event) help guarantee a good turnout.

The final part of creating your spoken Latin program is the website. This does not have to be daunting. I am not tech-savvy, nor did I have any prior website experience before creating my website. Put simply: creating a website like mine takes little skill. I made my website using WordPress, an easy-to-use website creation site.⁶ One benefit of using WordPress is that you can monitor the stats of your website. This way, you can see how many people visit your site each day, month, year, etc. and what pages they use. With this information, you can better fit your website to your participants. Also, the website is another great place to share photos. Photos give the website a professional appearance. It helps that people coming to your site can see what your program is about, not just read about it.

For my program, I chose to create a catchy domain name for the website. When you create a free WordPress account, your domain name has .wordpress.com at the end of it. Because I wanted my site to be more easily accessible to as many people as possible, I bought the domain

name Latinaloquenda.org.⁷ While I think the domain Latinaloquenda.org helps people find my website, I want to reiterate that creating a successful program is not contingent on purchasing a domain name.

If all of this sounds intimidating, remember that running a spoken Latin program does not have to be a one-person job. Having multiple organizers splitting up tasks would make the endeavor much more manageable. For example, different people could be in charge of social media, the website, and securing the location of events. Additionally, having a group of organizers helps bring students and teachers from multiple schools together, which helps build friendships and creates a more robust Latin program regionally.



Materials

All of my materials are posted on the website latinaloquenda.org. I made all of these materials and am happy to share them with everyone. They are available as word

documents and should be easy to download. These materials include useful vocabulary for conversation on sports, weather, pets, school, and practical conversational grammar. My materials are based on materials from the teacher who taught me spoken Latin.⁸ When creating vocabulary sheets, I often use Whitaker's Words, Latin Lexicon, and a standard dictionary. For more modern words like cell phone (which is *telephonium* .n.), you'd be surprised what you can find on the internet. A great resource I've used is a podcast called *A Way with Words*, available online, which walks through "modern Latin words." I think it is fun to create neologisms, my own words based on literal translations. One example of this is "*raeda dolorum*" which I use to mean "struggle bus."

Conclusion

I hope this article has explained how I have created my own spoken Latin program and how you can create a successful program. I have found that students and teachers alike enjoy speaking Latin and that speaking Latin provides a new way to explore an ancient language. Creating an extracurricular program enables teachers to maintain a translation-based class while also providing their students with the opportunity to experience Latin as the Romans did.



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Endnotes

- 1 Lloyd, Mair Elizabeth. *Living Latin: Exploring a Communicative Approach to Latin Teaching Through a Sociocultural Perspective on Language Learning*. Diss. The Open University, 2017. (78-79)

2 Wills, Jeffrey. "Speaking Latin in Schools and Colleges." *The Classical World*, vol. 92, no. 1, 1998, pp. 27–34. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4352180.

3 Bailey, Justin Slocum. "The Persistent Perks of Speaking Latin" *Eidolon* (2017).

4 Azher, Musarrat, Muhammad Nadeem Anwar, and Anjum Naz. "An investigation of foreign language classroom anxiety and its relationship with students achievement." *Journal of College Teaching & Learning (TLC)* 7.11 (2010).

5 Social media accounts are public forums; however, I have not encountered any issues with unwanted guests attending events. More and more schools are using social media to post information about events (sporting events, drama productions, etc.), and this is no different.

6 To do this, go to wordpress.com and create an account. After creating an account, you can set up pages, which are the header tabs on your site, and you can post on each page. For example, my pages are *Domus*, *De Latina Loquenda*, *Res Ventura*, *Materia*, and *Contactus*. Within each of these pages, I post different information by hitting the edit button at the bottom of the page or hitting the write button at the top right section of the tab. If you get stuck, many YouTube videos describe how to run a WordPress account. It only took me about two hours to set up the account.

7 I bought this name through namecheap.com, a site that sells website domains. Namecheap provides me annual access to the name *Latinaloquenda.org* for \$20 a year. N.B. You can purchase a domain name through Wordpress. However, it is much more expensive. Once you have purchased a domain name, you can link it to your Wordpress account using your purchased domain as a redirect to the WordPress account. To do this, go into Namecheap, manage domains, then under redirect domain, paste your WordPress domain.

8 Gratias to Magister Phillip Gallagher, an instructor at the Virginia Governor's Latin Academy.