Ramapo College of New Jersey Professor
Elected by American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL)
to Leadership of New Special Interest Group

Professor Natalia Santamaría Laorden to Lead Prestigious Special Interest Group
on the Issue of Language and Profession

MAHWAH. NJ – Ramapo Professor Natalia Santamaría Laorden was recently elected to lead a pioneering national initiative that encourages the contextual teaching of language. Newly formed by the ACTFL, The Languages of Specific Purposes (LSP) Special Interest Group is the first of its kind to further the issue of language and profession through the ACTFL network of professionals and in classrooms across the country. Santamaría Laorden will serve as the LSP group’s chair throughout its first full year.

“The formation of the Language of Specific Purpose Special Interest Group at ACTFL is an optimistic sign of a broader cultural shift towards an interdisciplinary approach,” said Professor Santamaría Laorden. “Whether it is health equity, climate change, sustainability, or
accountability, I firmly believe that the way we teach world languages can humanize interactions and better outcomes across industries.”

Reflective of growing student interest and real-world needs, the LSP Special Interest Group’s primary focus will be on cultural humility within language learning. Aligned with a broader focus on an interdisciplinary approach, the network of educators, professionals, and industry experts will define best practices and shared goals for educating towards the socio-dynamic context of language. Of all the ACTFL’s Special Interest Groups, the Languages for Specific Purposes group is the only one dedicated to providing students with real-world, transferable skills for the contemporary workplace. The principles defined and discussed in the group will lay the foundation for how colleges and universities approach language learning across the country.

“I am thrilled to serve in this position and extend the interdisciplinary work we already practice at Ramapo to the whole country,” added Santamaría Laorden. “We are currently expanding the Spanish program at the College through potential certification by the Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters. This will allow us to join efforts with county colleges to strengthen the mission of educating well-rounded foreign language teachers.”

A pioneer in the issue of language and profession, Natalia Santamaría Laorden introduced the concept to Ramapo College with a Certificate Program on Spanish and Healthcare backed by a US DOE UISFL grant. Resonating with the student body and administration, the certificate program led to the creation of three popular new courses and an 80 percent increase in enrollment for its Spanish minor curriculum. The program also led to a successful new study-abroad opportunity in Bilbao, dedicated to immersing students in the Basque healthcare system.

In 2022, Santamaría Laorden co-authored the textbook, Spanish for Health Care and Human Services: An Interdisciplinary Approach (Cognella, 2021). Currently, 200 desk copies have been distributed in the United States, and 12 universities, and the University of Colorado-Boulder, Northeastern University, University of North Florida, and University of Cincinnati have already adopted it.

According to Santamaría Laorden, the group, its work, and her efforts at Ramapo will have a significant tie-in to desires at the federal level about enhancing language education as a way to increase global competitiveness. “My work with colleagues at the ACTFL will contribute directly towards addressing recent concerns by US Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona about the needs to promote bilingualism as a gift and to educate professionals to compete abroad. In such a diverse country and world, the work will foster a better understanding by the education and business industries of the connection between world languages fluency and success.”
Providing vision, leadership and support for quality teaching and learning of languages, the ACTFL is an individual membership organization for language educators and administrators from elementary through graduate education, as well as government and industry. Since its founding in 1967, ACTFL has become synonymous with innovation, quality, and reliability in meeting the changing needs of language educators and their learners. It is where the world’s educators, businesses, and government agencies go to advance the practice of language learning.

To learn more about Natalia Santamaría Laorden, click here.

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**About Ramapo College**

Ramapo College of New Jersey (RCNJ) develops ethical leaders who serve as change agents across all sectors. The College’s unique interdisciplinary academic structure, its liberal arts core, its size (approximately 5,500 students), and its setting in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains on the New Jersey/New York border provide an optimal environment for individualized, student-centered learning and leadership development. RCNJ’s designation as “New Jersey’s Public Liberal Arts College” by the State legislature is the foundation from which the College’s commitment to an accessible and transformative undergraduate and graduate education is realized.

Graduation and retention rates of RCNJ students exceed national averages and, as just one of many markers of student success, the superior rates are made possible by the College’s provision of impactful mentorship and student well-being supports, hands-on learning, and a range of opportunities for service and leadership development. Ramapo is ranked #1 among New Jersey public institutions by *College Choice* and is recognized as a top college in the country on the list of Best Disability Schools by *Great Value Colleges*. Further commendations include designation as a “Military Friendly College” in Viqtory Media’s *Guide to Military Friendly Schools* and as a leading college by *U.S. News & World Report*, *Kiplinger’s*, *Princeton Review* and *Money Magazine*, among others.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College was named by *CondeNast Traveler* one of the 50 Most Beautiful College Campuses in America. The barrier-free campus occupies 300 acres and is home to 52 bachelor’s degrees programs spanning the arts, business, data science, humanities, education, nursing, social work, social sciences, and the sciences. In addition, the College offers graduate programs leading to master’s degrees in Accounting, Applied Mathematics, Business Administration, Contemporary Instructional Design, Computer Science, Creative Music Technology, Data Science, Educational Leadership, Nursing, Social Work and Special Education, as well as a Doctor of Nursing Practice. Every degree program is designed and delivered through the collaborative and interdisciplinary efforts of student-centered faculty scholars and staff who are committed to serving the public good through the delivery of an academically rigorous, inclusive, and transformative collegiate experience.
Distinguished as a Career Development College of Distinction by CollegesofDistinction.com, every student at Ramapo enrolls in the College’s unique and award-winning Pathways Program, which equips and empowers students across the continuum of their student career to secure internships, pursue graduate/professional school, and/or enter/re-enter the job market. As a result, Ramapo College’s over 40,000 alumni are confident, intellectually curious, self-aware, and humble people who are highly sought after and who make a positive impact at local, national, and global levels. As community leaders, engaged citizens, and professional colleagues, Ramapo College alumni serve as the change agents necessary to innovate, problem solve, and elevate the human condition in NJ and beyond.