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An Overview of Basque Studies in the United States

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Abstract: The goal of this paper is to offer an overview of Basque studies in the context of U.S. universities, with a focus on the twenty-first century. To that end, it offers, firstly, a brief historical introduction to Basque emigration to the United States; secondly, a contextualization of the presence of Euskera (the Basque language) and the study of the language and Basque cultural topics in non-university contexts; thirdly, a discussion of the origins of Basque studies programs in U.S. universities, the contributions of academic societies and journals, the efforts made by the Etxepare Basque Institute to promote Basque studies internationally, and an overview of lectureships and chairs; and lastly, conclusions. The data that served as the basis for this study was drawn from various sources: prior research on the Basque diaspora in the United States and information provided by Etxepare.

Keynote: Basque studies, Euskera, teaching of Basque language and culture, chairs, lectureships, Etxepare Basque Institute

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1. Introduction¹

The purpose of this article is to offer an overview of Basque studies in the context of the twenty-first-century American university, as well as to highlight the relevant efforts of the Etxepare Basque Institute² with a primary focus on its current lectureship and chair offerings. To contextualize this work, a historical tour of the Basque presence in the United States, particularly from the nineteenth century onward, will be conducted. This historical review is essential to understanding Etxepare's interest in collaborating with certain geographic areas and universities in the country, and to examining some of the actions aimed at meeting this objective. Within the framework of this historic context, it is critical to understand the path of the Basque language through distinct generations of the Basque diaspora in the United States. This understanding provides a solid foundation for highlighting the importance of the academic initiatives of Etxepare in the U.S. university environment.

Although the primary focus of the article is to provide an overview of Basque Studies³ in today's university setting, some prior academic initiatives will also be discussed, as well as linguistic and cultural activities undertaken by other organizations, Euskal Etxeak, or Centros Vascos (informal contexts), some of which were launched by Etxepare.

¹ This study was produced as part of the research project PID2021-125952NB-100, as well as in the context of the research group GIU21/003 and the consolidated group REWEST IT-1565-22.

² Abbreviated as Etxepare or the Institute from now on, except in certain cases, where the full name has been retained.

³ In this article, the generic term "Basque Studies" refers to teaching and research related to the Basque language (Euskera) and Basque culture in the university setting.

As this study makes clear, Euskera and Basque Studies have been gaining relevance and visibility over the years. Even so, there remains significant room for growth. In addition to internal challenges—such as the limited budget for bolstering current activities—external factors like university policies in the U.S. and the pandemic represent obstacles to strengthening and promoting Basque language and culture in North America.

2. Historical Context

For centuries, the Americas have been the primary destination for Basque emigration. Basque travelers have long pursued employment, trade, or colonial adventures, first to South America and then to North America. They were shipbuilders and sailors in fifteenth century Iberia and played roles in exploratory voyages for the expansion of the Portuguese and Spanish empires (Douglass, 2013, p. 1). Similarly, Basque whalers set off from the coasts of Vizcaya and Gipuzcoa as early as the seventh century to hunt in the North Atlantic. Documents from 1540 show that at that point they had very likely been fishing off the coast of Greenland for a considerable number of years (Totoricagüena Egurrola, 2004, p. 82).

The history of Basque emigration to the United States represents a significant share of the country's migratory history. This migration has given rise to Basque communities, known as the Basque diaspora in the United States, where cultural and social organizations dedicated to preserving and promoting the Basque identity have been established. These communities provide a social and cultural context for the study of history, literature, music, dance, and other Basque forms of expression, which has influenced the development of Basque Studies in the U.S. in various ways. Other types of activities and efforts to promote Basque Studies are situated within this context, as this study will explain.

The California gold rush of the mid-nineteenth century is considered the historical beginning of Basque emigration to the United States (Douglass, 2016, p. 10). The first Basques to emigrate to the U.S. did so after moving initially to Argentina or Chile, before they continued to California in search of gold. The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 facilitated travel to the West, where most Basque emigrants settled (Totoricagüena Egurrola, 2004, p. 204). Many came from rural environments and made their living as shepherds. Most of those who remained in New York and New Jersey, on the other hand, came from maritime families and worked in ports and docks along the East Coast, typically as merchant mariners (Totoricagüena Egurrola, 2004, p. 207).

The Basque community in the East settled at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge: they worked on docks and in ports along the coast, ran hotels to accommodate Basque emigrants, and operated grocery stores, restaurants, and delivery services (Totoricagüena Egurrola, 2004, p. 222). From the 1930s to the 1960s, Basque emigrants in New York City played an important role in political affairs due to their association with the offices of the Basque government-in-exile that had been established in the city. Basque communities in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Florida were unique due to their promotion of Basque pelota and jai alai from the seventies to the nineties. Thanks to these political and athletic networks, communities in the cities of New York and Miami had a major impact on relations between their country of origin and the Basque diaspora (Totoricagüena Egurrola, 2004, p. 224).

In the West, Basque emigrants found work in the then-declining profession of shepherding. In the 1850s, a small group of Basque explorers, disappointed by the California gold mines, moved into the sheep industry. Between the 1870s and the start of the twentieth century, Basque shepherds spread throughout the American West (Lane and Douglass, 1985, p. 1). Contrary to the assumptions of their English-speaking employers, few Basque emigrants had been shepherds in Basque Country, but their rural roots, persistence, and effort were the key to their success in shepherding.

Despite the low prestige and the extreme working conditions, shepherding provided economic opportunity for young Basques because it did not require formal education or English fluency.

Around 1910, with the expansion of shepherding in the West, Basque emigrants called for more labor from the Basque Country, which led to an increased presence of first-generation immigrants. In the 1970s, however, the shepherding industry declined sharply in the American West, which directly resulted in a drop in the number of Basques emigrating to the U.S. Simultaneously, the Basque economy improved, and wages became competitive, leading to a drop in economic emigration (Totoricagüena Egurrola, 2004, p. 219), as Basques preferred to stay in their homeland.

6 Unlike Basque emigrants to South America, those who moved to the U.S. confronted a language barrier that significantly impacted their settlement and relationships in the host country. Because they were not proficient in English, first-generation Basque migrants were frequently ridiculed, and their employment opportunities were limited to those that did not require language skills, as mentioned above. That said, this generation taught their children English and provided them with an education that enabled integration (assimilation) within mainstream U.S. culture. Many of these descendants thrived and became managers, bankers, lawyers, business owners, etc. (Bieter & Bieter, 2003, p. 4). One side effect of this assimilation, however, was the loss of the Basque language, Euskera, in countless Basque families.

Thanks to individual and collective efforts within the Basque-American diaspora, as well as the intervention of the Basque government and actions by other organizations, younger, post-assimilation generations have been able to learn Euskera in the United States in informal, non-academic environments. Many non-Basque North Americans have also delved into the study of Euskera and Basque culture, often

because they are surrounded by many Basque peers, because of the positive reputation of Basques today, or because of the unusual and enigmatic quality of the Basque language.

Just as the first generation relied on gathering places like pensions to feel at home (Echeverría, 1999), subsequent generations began to build Basque centers and clubs to connect with their ethnic heritage. The Euskal Etxeak are the centers where Basque-American traditions began to be consciously put into practice, and they have continued to play that role. Through dances, picnics, and sporting events, Basque traditions were preserved, assuring the survival of cultural elements and paving the way for the third generation. Additionally, beginning in the 1960s, it became more popular for U.S. citizens to highlight additional cultural heritage beyond being “American,” which gave the bearer a distinct identity. Thus, unlike the first two generations of Basque immigrants, the third could publicly demonstrate their ethnic pride (Bieter & Bieter, 2003, pp. 3–5).

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3. The Trajectory of Euskera and Basque Culture in Informal Contexts

The civil rights movement that began in the mid-fifties marked a qualitative leap in the (self-) perception of diversity in the United States. It is in this context that the Basque community, like other previously invisible and marginalized communities, began to publicly reclaim its ethnic pride. Until that point, many families had been forced to assimilate within mainstream U.S. culture, but the publication of the Robert Laxalt’s *Sweet Promised Land* in 1957, as well as what would later be called the First Western Basque Festival in 1959, marked a clear turning point in the relationship of the Basque community with its ethnic and civic identity. This generation was determined to (re)vitalize, institutionalize, and dignify what had until then been timid activities, undertaken in private spaces. Thus there emerged, primarily in the Western U.S.,

initiatives like dance groups, choirs, and Euskal Etxeak, the aforementioned Basque centers or clubs thanks to which Euskera and Basque culture gained prevalence and importance.

The North American Basque Organizations, Inc. (NABO), was founded in 1973 with the aim of supporting its member organizations in attaining the same goal: the perpetuation of “Basqueness,” or Basque culture and identity. NABO’s articles of association emphasize the need for the development of programs that preserve Basque language and culture. The first serious initiatives for the perpetuation of Euskera were led by Martin Goikoetxea, in 1999 and then in 2000.⁴ In Boise, Idaho, the Basque Museum and Cultural Center (BMCC) was founded in 1985, and Boiseko Ikastola was created in 1998, thanks to the efforts of a group of Basque parents, as well as the Basque government (Gandarias, 2022). Since its beginnings, Boiseko Ikastola has focused on preschool education and has worked with about two hundred children of Basque descent. Additionally, although the start date cannot be confirmed, the BMCC has offered adult Euskera classes for several years; between 2020 and 2024, for example, the museum and cultural center had over five hundred students. The BMCC offers in-person and online language classes year-round.

Other organizations belonging to NABO, including the Euskal Etxeak, also offer Euskera classes. As mentioned above, and as reflected in the relevant NABO minutes, the first motion for such classes was made in 1999 and adopted in 2000. In response to the motion, the Basque government implemented the program now known as Euskara Munduan, whose objective is to foster knowledge of Euskera among Basque collectives around the world (sixty-five Basque centers as of today). To this end, in recent years, in collaboration with NABO, the program’s U.S.-based teachers have organized annual training meetings. Helduen Alfabetatze eta Berreuskalduntzerako

⁴ Information pulled from the minutes of NABO in 1999 and 2000. Minutes provided by Jean Flesher, current president of NABO.

Erakundea (HABE)⁵ oversaw the project until it was transferred to Etxepare in 2018. Kinku Zinkunegi has been the designer and coordinator behind Euskara Munduan since its early days. Today, the program houses five organizations that belong to NABO, and in the academic year 2023–2024, 864 students are studying Euskara thanks to the initiative. BMCC in Boise exists under the auspices of NABO and the Euskara Munduan program and receives corresponding financial support and didactic and pedagogic resources, as do the other participating members.

Other organizations that are part of NABO, although not directly associated with Etxepare in all cases, carry out programs to promote Euskera and Basque culture with financial backing from other areas of the Basque government. This is the case for Boiseko Ikastola (Boise, Idaho), Basque Educational Organization (San Francisco, California),⁶ Cenarrusa Foundation for Basque Culture (Boise),⁷ the Society of Basque Studies in America (San Francisco),⁸ Basque Studies at Boise State University, Boise, and the Center for Basque Studies (University of Nevada, Reno).⁹

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4. Early Developments in Basque Studies in the United States

4.1. *Beginnings of Basque Language and Culture Instruction at U.S. Universities*

The presence of Basque Studies in the U.S. university context, in the form of lectures and instruction on Basque culture and history, was documented as early as the 1940s, at Boise Junior College (currently Boise State University), led by bibliographer,

⁵ Institute for the Re-Basqueization and Literacy of Adults, established by the Basque Government in 1981. HABE is an autonomous institute within the Basque government, affiliated with the Department of Culture and Language Policy but with its own legal status, created by the Basque Parliament's Law 29/1983: <https://www.habe.euskadi.eus/habe-institucion/webhabe00-edukiak/es/>

⁶ The stated objective on the organization's website is to "preserve Basque history and cultivate awareness of the Basques through their rich artistic traditions." Among its many activities, one worth highlighting is Basque Cultural Day, during which lectures on various Basque topics of interest take place: <https://www.basqueeducational.org/>.

⁷ <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/56-2421115>.

⁸ <https://www.euskonews.eus/O214zbnk/kosmo21403.html>; <https://nabasque.eus/sbsa.html>. See the next section of this study for more information.

⁹ Basque Studies at both universities are covered in the next section of this paper.

professor, and researcher Jon Bilbao¹⁰ (San Sebastian, 1991, p. 45): for several months in 1939, Jon Bilbao offered lectures and classes on Basque history, thanks to the collaboration of Spanish professor Camille R. Power (San Sebastian, 1991, pp. 45, 402). During this period of Basque exile as a consequence of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975), José Antonio Agirre, the first Lehendakari¹¹ of the provisional Basque government,¹² taught at Columbia University (New York) from 1942 to 1945. Although there is little historic documentation of his classes, evidence confirms that in the spring of 1942, he offered a course titled “The Modern History of the Iberian Peninsula,” in which he discussed topics specific to Basque culture, such as the history of the matter of sovereignty, as Agirre himself records in his diary.¹³ In the informal context, choreographer Jon Oñatibia began teaching Basque dances and Euskera to children in New York in the 1950s (Toticagüena Egurrola, 2003b, pp. 118–119).

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In the following decade, it was the University of Nevada that took the next step in introducing Basque Studies to U.S. academia, launching a Basque Studies Program in 1967 at the Desert Research Institute, which was itself established in 1961 to facilitate research on the ecology of the arid regions of the American West. The institute was divided into four laboratories, one of which, the Western Studies Center, focused on social history and anthropology. It was there that the Basque Studies Program was launched, alongside research projects on Native Americans (Douglass, 1972, p. 6).

¹⁰ For a detailed description of his biographical and professional trajectory as a bibliographer, exile, and promoter of Basque Studies at Boise Junior College and the Center for Basque Studies in Reno, as well as at other universities, see Toticagüena Egurrola 2003b, Zabala 2008, and San Sebastian 1991. Also, see the section of this study on academic chairs.

¹¹ Basque term for “president of the Basque Government.”

¹² A comprehensive profile of this figure can be found in the corresponding entry in the Electronic Biographical Dictionary (DB~e) of the Real Academia de la Historia (<https://dbe.rah.es/biografias/5404/jose-antonio-de-aguirre-lecube>); users can also access a wide range of documentary, audiovisual, and written material about Lehendakari Agirre on the page <http://www.lehendakariagirre.eu>, created by Comisión AL 50 and several other collaborating institutions in commemoration of the fifty-year anniversary of his death.

¹³ In the diary Agirre kept from 1941 to 1942, the first entry referencing his teaching opportunity at Columbia University is dated November 19, 1941 (Agirre Lekube, 2010, p. 161). The same entry mentions a second course he would offer starting in the fall of 1942: “Influence of European Countries on South American Thought” (Agirre Lekube, 2010, p. 161).

The first Basque Studies program focused on Basque emigration as it pertains to shepherding and Basque-American relations, a faithful and meaningful reflection of the sociology of Basque emigration during that period, given the substantial contribution of this emigration to the sheep industry and, by extension, the economic development of the “Intermountain American West.”¹⁴ Under the leadership of social anthropologist William Douglass, who specialized in the anthropologic study of the Basque community of shepherds that emigrated to the American West, the Center for Basque Studies gradually strengthened its offerings over the course of thirty years, and today, the William A. Douglass Center for Basque Studies in Reno stands as the preeminent center for Basque-studies research and training outside of Europe (Totoricagüena Egurrola, 2008, p. 58; 2024a). Among other academic programs, it offers talks, seminars, and residencies for a large number of researchers, a minor in Basque Studies (one of four available at universities internationally),¹⁵ and a tutorial PhD in Basque Studies that allows students to specialize in an area of anthropology, language, literature, geography, political science, or history.¹⁶

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In the neighboring state of Idaho—and in Boise in particular—courses in Euskera and Basque culture were introduced starting in 1971 thanks at the initiative of the Idaho Basque Studies Center (Totoricagüena Egurrola, 2008, p. 58; 2024b). With the mission of preserving and promoting Euskera and the Basque ethnic identity, the center partnered with the Basque Studies program at the University of Nevada to organize a six-week summer study opportunity in the Basque Country for a group of students and faculty who, with no prior exposure, would have their first in-person encounter with the language and culture (Totoricagüena Egurrola, 2024b). The first modest edition took place in 1970, and the second in 1972, with academic recognition

¹⁴ See <https://www.unr.edu/basque-studies/about> for more information.

¹⁵ Currently, students can pursue a minor in Basque Studies not only at the William A. Douglass Center for Basque Studies but also at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, the University of Liverpool, and Boise State University. The University of Nevada, Reno, offers a maximum of sixty-five credits, consisting of fourteen credits in Basque language and fifty-one in various topics of Basque history and culture, of which students must complete a minimum of eight credits in language and fifteen in history and culture.

¹⁶ For more information, see <https://www.unr.edu/basque-studies/about>.

from the Idaho Office of Higher Education. It included a graduate-level linguistics seminar whose aim was to analyze the most important linguistic phenomena of the Basque language (Douglass, 1972, p. 7). Additionally, starting in 1971, courses on Basque culture and anthropology were introduced at the University of Idaho in southern Idaho, at Idaho State University, and via Basque language courses at Boise State College, formerly known as Boise Junior College (Douglass, 1972, p. 7; Totoricagüena Egurrola, 2024b). There is evidence that Euskera instruction has continued at various levels since 1994 and up to the present.

In 2005, when Boise State College became Boise State University, the university and the Basque Country's Departments of Culture, of Education, and of Presidency signed an agreement to create a minor in Basque Studies from 2005 to 2008. Under this agreement, and with this multilateral funding, the university was able to offer a program with several courses and weekend workshops on Basque culture, which remain among Boise State University's academic offerings today and can either be applied to a minor in Basque Studies or certificates in Basque language or culture, or taken as electives (Gandarias, 2022).

In California, and specifically at the University of California, Santa Barbara, students have participated in an academic and cultural Basque studies program since 1993. As the university's website indicates, the program was founded thanks to the personal interest that Professor Juan Bautista Avalle Arce (1927–2009) took in promoting Basque studies UC Santa Barbara. Bautista Avalle Arce—who was born in Argentina to parents of Navarrese descent and educated at Harvard—worked to add Basque language and culture to the curriculum from his arrival at the UC Santa Barbara in 1984 onward. In 1993, he received external funding from several now-defunct Navarrese financial institutions and the Basque government, which he used to establish the José Miguel Barandiarán Chair, named in honor of the illustrious Basque

anthropologist.¹⁷ As the institution's website notes, from the 1990s until 2011, the university offered two courses on Basque language and culture every year (<https://basquestudies.spanport.ucsb.edu/home>). In 2011, the university's Basque studies program entered a new phase, following the signing of a cooperation agreement with Etxepare and the establishment of a lectureship that currently offers seven courses annually.

After the founding of the Etxepare Basque Institute in 2010, the 2011–12 academic year saw the creation of lectureships at U.S. universities including the UC Santa Barbara, the University of Chicago, and Stanford University. Several years later, in the 2014–15 academic year, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign established another lectureship, and UCLA followed suit in 2016–17. In just one case, at Stanford University, the Basque language and culture lectureship ended after three years of cooperation. As of 2023–24, five Basque Studies lectureships in the United States remain active and are becoming increasingly established.¹⁸

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4.2. Contributions of Basque Studies Societies and Academic Journals in the U.S.

In addition to Basque studies offerings in the form of language courses and/or academic content related to Basque history and culture in various U.S. universities, it is worth noting the major efforts that U.S. Basque studies societies and academic journals have made to share scholarly knowledge and verified research about Basque culture with the English-speaking public.

The Society of Basque Studies was a nonprofit organization originally conceived of in 1939 in Hartford, Connecticut (Estornés Zubizarreta, 2024) and physically established that same year in San Francisco. Later on, in 1979, it was revived in a

¹⁷ For a detailed biographical sketch of the anthropologist and his immeasurable contribution to Basque anthropology, see the website of the foundation named in his honor: Fundación José Miguel de Barandiaran Fundazioa (<https://www.barandiaranfundazioa.eus/en/>).

¹⁸ The evolution of Basque Studies in the abovementioned lectureships will be addressed in section 4.4, *The Network of Basque Lectureships*.

second phase in the same city, by Emilia Sarriugarte Doyaga, Gloria Castresana Waid, and Juan Mendizabal. Its purpose was the study and promotion of Basque culture—traditions, customs, and folklore—in the United States, and, by extension, to any English-speaking public interested in Basque culture. One significant contribution of this society was the magazine *Basque Artistic Expression* (1980–1981), which was renamed *Journal of Basque Studies in America* in 1982 (Totoricagüena Egurrola, 2003a, 2003b).

In 1984, Society of Basque Studies members Gloria Castresana Waid and Juan Mendizabal founded another Basque studies society, this time in Fresno, California, and named it the Basque American Foundation.¹⁹ This new foundation took over the aforementioned magazine, which in 1988 became the *Journal of the Society of Basque Studies in America*, then published out of Indiana (Estornés Lasa & Totoricagüena Egurrola, 2024) and moved in 2011 to Boise State University. The university's Basque studies program housed and consolidated the production of the periodical publication, marking the start of a second generation for the magazine. With the new name *BOGA: Basque Studies Consortium Journal*, the multidisciplinary and open-access magazine took on a more academic character, based on a peer-reviewed selection process, as described on their website (<https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/boga/>). In the past ten years, they have published forty articles written by academics specializing in Basque studies on both sides of the Atlantic, about a range of subjects including Basque immigration to the United States, the evacuation of Basque refugee children after the bombing of Guernica in 1937, *Euskara batua* (the standardized Basque language), and literature and memory.²⁰

¹⁹ After 1984, the Society of Basque Studies was led by Emilia Sarriugarte Doyaga, Anna Mari Aguirre, and José Ramón Cengotitabengoa (Totoricagüena Egurrola, 2003b, p. 258). For a general overview of the founding, evolution, leadership, and activities of this Society, please see Totoricagüena Egurrola, 2003b, pp. 256–322.

²⁰ This journal can be accessed freely, and its articles downloaded directly, at: <https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/boga/>.

4.3. The Work of the Etxepare Basque Institute

The Etxepare Basque Institute is a public institution, established by the Law for the Creation and Regulation of the Institute,²¹ which was passed by the Basque Parliament in 2007. The Institute commenced its mission in 2010 and since then has worked to increase the presence and visibility of Euskera and contemporary Basque creative output on the international level. Additionally, it advocates for international cooperation, exchange, and communication among creatives, professionals, stakeholders, institutions, and universities.

Three pillars guide the institute's work: cultural diplomacy, promotion of Basque culture, and promotion of Basque language. This study will focus primarily on the third area, as it encompasses the network of universities that collaborate with Etxepare to disseminate Euskera and Basque culture (Basque Studies). It is worth noting that, within the framework of the Institute's international promotion of Basque Studies, the term "lectureship" is used to refer to an academic program consisting of courses in Basque language and/or culture at a university outside the Basque linguistic and cultural area, for example, the United States, with academic recognition equal to that of other subject areas. The foundation of each lectureship is a cooperation agreement between the university in question and the Institute, which stipulates aspects such as the design of the academic program, the department that will host the lecturer, the lecturer's ideal profile, and the role in which the lecturer will be hired, as well as the co-financing of the program.²² The teaching program is the responsibility of the lecturer, a professional with specialized training, selected by way of a process including a public call managed by Etxepare and ultimately chosen by the host university. In addition to their teaching duties, the lecturer performs tasks related to cultural visibility

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²¹ https://www.legegunea.euskadi.eus/webleg00-confich/eu/contenidos/ley/bopv200702618/eu_def/index.shtml.

²² Depending on the university and the specifics of the agreement, the lecturer may be hired as a teaching assistant, a lecturer, or an assistant professor. Etxepare uses the term "lecturer" in all cases on its website and in various public communications because regardless of each individual contract, all participants are considered members of the Etxepare lecturer network.

and vitality by organizing cultural and academic activities and promoting spaces for intercultural exchange. In other words, their work is not only to transmit knowledge to the student body, but also to promote understanding of and appreciation for Basque culture within the academic community. In short, they are cultural representatives or ambassadors, acting in ways that are essential for the promotion and protection of Basque language and culture inside and outside of the university environment.

When Etxepare began its journey in 2010, there was already a network of lectureships in Basque language and culture spanning twenty-five European and American universities, managed and financed up to that point by the Basque government's Department of Education, Language Policy and Culture. Now, with the program in the hands of Etxepare, thirty-five cooperation agreements for lectureships have been signed with universities in nineteen countries: twenty-three lectureships in Europe, eleven in America, and one in Asia.²³

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With the aim of reinforcing recognition and visibility of Euskera in the United States, Etxepare also drives the creation of Basque Studies chairs²⁴ at internationally renowned universities. These chairs promote specialized teaching (especially at the postgraduate level) and academic research related to Basque Studies. They take the form of residency programs for specialized professors, artists, or creators at universities with which Etxepare has signed agreements. Each chair focuses on one or several disciplines within the humanities and social sciences. Moreover, each chair is named after a prominent figure who has made or continues to make significant contributions to the research area or specialty, or who had an academic connection to the host university. All of this is the product of cooperation between universities and the Institute, which come to an agreement regarding the discipline or research area, the name of the chair, the profile of the invited academic, the duration and dates, and

²³ See the interactive map of Etxepare lectureships (and chairs) by visiting the institute's website:

<https://www.etxepare.eus/en/promoting-basque-language>.

²⁴ <https://www.etxepare.eus/en/basque-studies-chairs>.

the type of activities that will be undertaken. Currently, the Institute facilitates twelve chairs worldwide: eight in the Americas²⁵—six of which are in the United States—and four in Europe.

A long-term goal in creating these chairs is to provide a forum for the exchange of research synergies on Basque or cross-disciplinary topics related to humanistic, cultural, and linguistic studies, thereby connecting current lines of research from both Basque and international academia.

4.4. The Network of Basque Studies Lectureships: Cooperation Between U.S. Universities and the Etxepare Basque Institute

As previously mentioned, within the United States, in 2011, there was only one Basque Studies lectureship—at Boise State University—in addition to two Basque language and culture courses per year at UC Santa Barbara, within the framework of the Miguel de Barandiarán Chair.

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Since then, lectureships have been signed into existence at five new universities: UC Santa Barbara, and University of Chicago in 2011–12; University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, in 2014–15; and UCLA, in 2016–17. Therefore, the growth and consolidation of the lectureship network within the U.S. academy represents a notable advancement in academic offerings related to Basque language and culture.

Each lectureship reflects the idiosyncrasies of its university and the profile of the student body that will partake in the program: some lectureships are more linguistic in nature, others more cultural, while still others offer a combination of language and cultural courses, as presented in Table 1.

²⁵ These will be described in section 4.5.

The most extensive academic offerings in Basque Studies are found at Boise State University, where students can obtain an Elementary Certificate in Basque Language, an Advanced Certificate in Basque Language, a Diploma in Basque Cultural Studies, and a minor in Basque Studies.²⁶ It is a comprehensive academic program including both language and culture, with semester-long courses as well as weekend intensives. It is, after all, the lectureship with the longest history and deepest roots in the United States. Attesting to this is the fact that the Basque Studies division within the Department of World Languages has two professors: one a tenured chair whose position is funded by the university itself, and the other an assistant professor, co-funded by the university and the Etxepare Basque Institute as part of their lectureship cooperation agreement. The division offers courses on Basque literature and culture, such as “Food and Culture: The Basque Case,” “Globalization and Minority Literatures: The Basque Case,” “Introduction to Basque Culture,” and “Culture and Tourism.”

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At UC Santa Barbara, where the lectureship is housed within the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, there are currently seven Basque Studies courses on offer, three in language and four on cultural topics, such as cultural memory, literature and migration, and cinema.²⁷ The flexibility of cultural courses provides an opportunity to adapt teaching not only to the student body, but also to the competencies and specialties of the lecturers. Thus, during the 2014–15 and 2018–19 academic years, courses were more rooted in sociological and cultural studies: for example, “Basque Gastronomy and Identity,” “Basque Food Studies,” and “Basque Cooperatives and Fiscal System.” Subsequently, in 2019–20 and 2021–22, there was a greater focus on literary and film studies, with courses such as “Memory and Conflict in Cultural

²⁶ For a detailed overview of their characteristics, from the credit breakdown and topic of each course to the requirements for each academic qualification, please refer to the following link to the Basque Studies Program section of BSU:

<https://www.boisestate.edu/registrar/catalog/#/programs/r1fmBOEhL?bc=true&bcCurrent=Minor%20in%20Basque%20Studies&bcGroup=World%20languages&bcltemType=programs>.

²⁷ The specific offerings of the lectureship at UCSB can be found at:

<https://my.sa.ucsb.edu/public/curriculum/coursesearch.aspx>.

Production,” “Moving Bodies: Stories of Migration,” and “The Basque through Film.” In the current academic year, 2023–2024, the focus on memory and cinema continues, with the incorporation of gender studies: “Gender in Basque Culture,” “Conflict and Memory,” and “Basque Cinema.”

At the University of Chicago, the lectureship is integrated into the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. Initially, it was housed in the Department of Linguistics, where Basque language was included as an academic offering in a series on non-Indo-European languages. Thus, given that students in the department were required to take at least one non-Indo-European language to graduate in Linguistics, the Basque language became part of the mandatory language offerings. At the outset of the collaboration, the academic program of the lectureship comprised three language courses and one Basque culture course. In the academic year 2021–2022, a program specifically designed for students in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures—though open to all students—was introduced, consisting of three language courses and two Basque culture courses. These latter courses cover a variety of topics that vary from year to year, ranging from memory in cinema to sociolinguistic aspects of language revitalization.²⁸

Etxepare and UCLA began their cooperation in the 2017–18 academic year. The lectureship, integrated into the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, offers three quarterly Basque language courses each year. This is the most recent agreement, and the pandemic occurred in the lectureship’s third year. It is worth noting that, despite the vulnerability one might expect of a relatively new lectureship facing a pandemic and its effects on all levels of society—including within the university system—the lectureship has resumed after a strategic one-year pause.

²⁸ To consult the course catalog, see <https://rll.uchicago.edu/courses>.

At the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the first agreement, which came into effect in 2015–16, calls for two Basque language courses worth three credits each to be offered to undergraduate and graduate students. This lectureship is also housed in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese.

The following table summarizes total enrollment by university over the last five academic years, along with information about the start of the program, the start of the lectureship in cooperation with Etxepare, and the characteristics of the current academic program offerings:

	Start of academic program related to Basque Studies	Start of lectureship with Instituto Etxepare	Current academic program offered	Total enrollments between 2018 and 2023
Boise State University	2005	2011	Minor in Basque Studies, Elementary Certificate in Basque Language, Advanced Certificate in Basque Language, Diploma in Basque Cultural Studies	894
University of California, Los Angeles	—	2017	Three quarterly courses in Euskera	46
University of California, Santa Barbara	1993	2011	Seven total semester-long courses: three in language and four in literature/culture	612
University of Chicago	—	2011	Five total quarterly courses: three in language and two in literature/culture	87
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	—	2015	Two semester-long courses in Basque language	58
TOTAL				1755

Table 1. Total student enrollments in lectureships by university over the past five academic years. Source: Etxepare Basque Institute.

As shown in Table 1, between 2018 and 2023, Boise State University had the highest number of student enrollments in the Basque Studies lectureship, while UCLA had the most modest numbers. We can surmise that the longer the trajectory of the lectureship and the broader the academic program related to Basque language and culture, the larger the student body engaged in Basque Studies over the past five academic years. Therefore, at Boise State University and UC Santa Barbara, there is evidence of greater visibility and consolidation of Basque Studies, while the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and UCLA show lower enrollments. It is also important to consider the particularities of each university, which explain the more modest enrollments at the University of Chicago, whose academic offerings are designed for small student cohorts, a fact reflected in the lectureship's Basque language and culture courses as well.

The following table shows the evolution of student enrollment numbers in lectureships in the United States:

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	TOTAL
Number of enrollments in lectureships in the United States	446	419	318	336	178	1755

Tabla 2. Evolution of Student Enrollment Numbers in Lectureships in the United States.
Source: Etxepare Basque Institute annual reports.

As shown in Table 2, the historical total enrollments for all Basque Studies lectureships in the United States by academic year over the past five years show a clear decline, especially following the 2020 pandemic. The impacts of COVID-19 on the U.S. national economy in general and university enrollments in particular are clearly reflected in these lectureship enrollments.²⁹ However, according to data gathered from

²⁹ According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the overall number of students enrolled in U.S. universities decreased from 26,091,786 in the academic year 2019–20 to 24,095,342 in 2021–22. This reflects a trend that is also evident in the 14.2 percent decline observed between the academic years 2011–12 and 2021–22.

the Institute’s annual reports and published on its website,³⁰ declining enrollments continue to be a challenge even as the pandemic recedes. When comparing this 61.3 percent decrease in Basque Studies lectureship enrollments with the enrollment trends for Catalan studies, as reported by the Institut Ramon Llull—the main public Catalan institution promoting Catalan studies internationally—it is clear that Catalan language and culture lectureships have experienced similar declines, with a 59.4 percent decrease, dropping from 320 students enrolled in the 2018–19 academic year to 130 students in 2022–23 (Institut Ramon Llull, 2020, 2023).

Furthermore, it is important to contextualize this data within the broader framework of declining university enrollments in the humanities and non-English languages. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, in its report “Bachelor’s Degrees in the Humanities,” shows that the number of humanities graduates has decreased by 24 percent over the past ten years, from 236,826 in 2012 to 179,272 in 2022. It also highlights a significant 7.3 percent decline in just one year, from 2021 to 2022 (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2024). Focusing specifically on language enrollments, the census by the Modern Language Association shows a 16.6 percent decrease in university enrollments in languages other than English between fall 2016 and fall 2021 (2024). During that period, enrollments in Spanish courses decreased by 18.21 percent, French by 23.4 percent, German by 36.6 percent, Catalan by 38.7 percent, and Basque by 41.49 percent (Modern Language Association, 2024).

³⁰ Etxepare’s annual reports can be accessed at <https://www.etxepare.eus/en/annual-reports>. Furthermore, the Modern Language Association maintains the Language Learning Enrollment Database (1958–2021), available at https://apps.mla.org/flsurvey_search, which collects enrollment data for courses in various languages, including Basque, at U.S. universities. It is important to note that this database does not compile data for courses on culture, so the data may differ from those in Etxepare’s annual reports. Therefore, the MLA’s Language Learning Enrollment Database does not provide a fully accurate reflection of the reality of Basque Studies lectureships.

The lectureships' academic offerings have an important complement in the cultural and academic activities organized by the lecturers throughout the year. These activities serve to introduce students to the current Basque cultural reality and offer direct contact with contemporary Basque cultural figures, such as writers or actors, aiming to reinforce motivation and provide direct experience with Basque language and culture. They are also key for raising the visibility of Basque Studies and inviting entire university communities to engage in intercultural exchange and dialogue. Lecturers tailor cultural activities to each university's profile, and these activities range from screenings of classic or contemporary films in the original Basque with subtitles, to live Twitch sessions in which young Basque streamers discuss topics related to their culture.

Regarding the evolution of the quantity and typology of activities organized in the lectureships, by consulting Etxepare's annual reports from the past five years, we can compare the number and type of activities organized before the pandemic, such as those held in 2018 and 2019, and those held in the years following the pandemic. In 2018 and 2019, an average of six academic-cultural activities were held per year across all U.S. lectureships, including two international conferences, "Memory and Emotion: Women's Stories, Constructing Meaning from Memory" in March 2018 at Boise State University and "First Annual Writers and Scholars in Indigenous Languages and Literatures Conference" at UC Santa Barbara in April 2018; the screening of the film *Amaren Eskuak* at UCLA in April 2019; the photography contest on "Basque Places" and the subsequent exhibition at Boise State University in December 2019; and several film screenings to celebrate International Basque Language Day on December 3, 2018, and 2019.³¹

³¹ See the data from 2018 in Etxepare's annual report: Etxepare Euskal Institutua, 2018 on https://www.etxepare.eus/media/uploads/memorias/etxepare_urteko_txostena_20181.pdf; and from 2019: Etxepare Euskal Institutua, 2019, on https://www.etxepare.eus/media/uploads/memorias/2019ko_memoria.pdf.

Beginning in 2020, however, the number of activities decreased to two or three per year across all lectureships, with a noticeable trend toward events related to audiovisual works or that lent themselves well to online formats. For example, in 2020, still in the midst of the pandemic, the University of Chicago's lectureship organized an online meeting with Basque actor Koldo Olabarria.³² In 2021, the same university held a literary session on Harkaitz Cano's novel *Belarraren Ahoa* (2004) (*Blade of Light*, 2010) and two screenings related to Bertsolaritza: the film *Bertsolari* and the educational documentary *What is Bertsolaritza?*, available in English with subtitles in five languages.³³ In 2022, notable activities included the screening of the film *Maixela* (2021) followed by a roundtable on the Basque conflict, as well as a Chicago video tourism contest in Basque and a dance workshop, also at the University of Chicago.³⁴ In 2023, the lectureship at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, offered an online conference on Basque dialectology by linguist and former Basque language and culture lecturer Ander Beristain. The lectureships at UC Santa Barbara and UCLA jointly organized a Twitch session with young streamers Iruñe Astiz and Eneko Oroz. Clearly, the number of cultural events organized by U.S. lectureships has dropped, and events with digital formats have taken on a more significant role.

In conclusion, the continuation of Basque Studies through these lectureships relies on ongoing cooperation between universities and Etxepare, as well as a comprehensive academic approach that advocates for a pedagogical offering in Basque language and culture combined with an academic-cultural program open to the entire university community and beyond, to society as a whole.

³² For the data collected in 2020, see Etxepare Euskal Institutua, 2020:

https://www.etxepare.eus/media/uploads/memorias/memoria_etxepare_20201.pdf.

³³ For the available data from 2021, see Etxepare Euskal Institutua, 2021:

https://www.etxepare.eus/media/uploads/memorias/memoria_etxepare_2021_web2.pdf.

The documentary *What is Bertsolaritza?* is available for free at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LkOFhAN3S8>.

³⁴ For data from the 2022 annual report, see Etxepare Euskal Institutua, 2022:

https://www.etxepare.eus/media/uploads/memorias/memoria_etxepare_2022_baja1.pdf.

4.5. *Chairs and Basque Studies*

As previously mentioned, at present, six American universities host individual chairs in Basque Studies. The creation of each chair within the framework of the Etxepare Basque Institute is carefully designed to address specific disciplines within the humanities to ensure that together they serve as a forum for the exchange of research on Basque language and cross-disciplinary topics related to humanities, culture, and linguistics. The aim of this focus is to establish a link between the current field of Basque Studies and the international academic community, thus promoting dynamic and productive collaboration. Additionally, as will be further developed below, the names of the chairs are chosen in honor of individuals who have made or continue to make significant contributions in the specialty or area of research promoted by the respective chair, giving the academic's work a sense of recognition and continuity. The foundation of each chair is an agreement between the university and the Institute; this collaborative and contractual relationship ensures effective implementation of the chairs and fruitful collaboration among all parties involved.

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The Bernardo Atxaga Chair, City University of New York (CUNY, New York), was the first to be created. The main objective of this chair is to promote research and study on Basque language and literature, although it now also encompasses cultural studies. The writer Bernardo Atxaga himself inaugurated it in 2011. Jose Irazu Garmendia (1951), better known by his literary pseudonym Bernardo Atxaga, is one of the leading Basque writers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Since the beginning of his career, he has always written in Basque, and he is considered the most widely read and translated author working in the language to date. He is also one of the most internationally recognized Basque authors today. The theme addressed by the chair in 2023 was Basque cinematography, made by Basque female filmmakers.

The Koldo Mitxelena Chair at the University of Chicago was created in 2012 and is integrated into the Division of Humanities. Koldo Mitxelena (1915–1987) remains one of the leading authorities in the study of Euskera. He was the architect of the codification of standard Basque language and a pioneer of Basque Country public university education via University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU). The chair named in his honor focuses on the study of linguistics and literature. This multidisciplinary approach suggests an interest in exploring both the linguistic and literary aspects of Basque culture. In 2023, plurilingualism and plurilingual education were analyzed from a psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and educational perspective.

Founded in 2014, the Jon Bilbao Chair at the Center for Basque Studies (CBS) of the University of Nevada, Reno, promotes research and knowledge about the Basque diaspora and culture. The researcher selected for the chair carries out a one-month stay as well as various knowledge-transfer activities at the CBS, the main teaching and research institution for the study of the Basque diaspora in the United States. The chair is named after the professor and researcher Jon Bilbao Azkarreta (1914–1994), who, as explained earlier, had a very close relationship with the University of Nevada and Basque Studies. This relationship resulted in the work *Amerikanuak: Basques in the New World* (1975), co-authored with William A. Douglass.

The Eloise Garmendia Bieter Chair in Basque Studies at Boise State University, inaugurated in 2015, pays tribute to Eloise Garmendia Bieter, who played a fundamental role in the promotion and preservation of Basque culture in Boise, Idaho. Garmendia (1925–1999) was a prominent figure in the Basque community of Boise, and her legacy lives on through this chair. Her commitment to Basque culture was reflected in her work at the Basque Museum and the Basque Club in Boise, where her entrepreneurial spirit and dedication helped shape and strengthen these institutions. Additionally, Garmendia was one of the driving forces behind the first study program for American students in the Basque Country, which took place in 1974. The creation

of the Eloise Garmendia Bieter Chair prolongs her legacy by promoting the teaching and research of topics related to Basque language and culture. Here, in 2023, Basque and translation technologies were explored, focusing on machine translation and the ADITU tool.

The William A. Douglass Chair in Basque Cultural Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (Amherst, Massachusetts), inaugurated in 2016, aims to promote studies on Basque anthropology. Seminars and lectures are held annually, usually aimed at graduate or doctoral students. Anthropologist William A. Douglass (Reno, Nevada, 1939) is considered one of the American scholars who has undertaken the most in-depth study of Basques and their legacy in the American West. As explained previously, he created the Basque Studies Program in Reno and directed it for thirty years, until his retirement in 2000. The 2023 chair addressed the subjects of new Basque speakers, linguistic contact, and its social significance.

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Lastly, in 2022, at California State University Bakersfield (Bakersfield, California), the Frank Bidart Chair was established as part of the university's Institute of Basque Studies. The objective was to promote research or creative projects related to culture and art. The expert or creator selected through a public call carries out, as in the case of the Jon Bilbao Chair, a one-month stay for research or creative production. Frank Bidart was born into a Basque family in Bakersfield (1939). He is a celebrated and prolific poet and academic. Among other awards, he received the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 2018. The second edition of this chair involved the research and creation of a documentary theater piece addressing immigration through the lens of theater.

The following table provides attendance history for the programs and events within the chairs organized by Etxepare in the United States over the past five years:

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	TOTAL
Attendees to chairs	204	24	150	309	300	987

Tabla 3. Number of attendees to the chairs over time. Source: Etxepare Basque Institute.

Overall, one can see a significant decline in attendance in 2020 due to the pandemic. That year, Etxepare was forced to cancel almost all the chairs' academic programs, and the few that were held were conducted online. In 2021, activities could be resumed, but most of them were still carried out online due to the lingering effects of the pandemic. When borders opened for travel, albeit with requirements such as mask-wearing and proof of vaccination, the return to in-person formats was well received, as reflected in the year 2022. The inauguration of the Frank Bidart Chair in the same year may have also contributed to the increased attendance reflected in the table.

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In 2023, the total attendance was similar to that of 2022, which suggests that Etxepare and its collaborating universities are moving into greater alignment with the interests of master's, doctoral, and postgraduate students in general. The open lectures, in which experts share their research topics with a non-academic audience, are another success; these lectures are more informational in nature, but still fulfill the objective of promoting research by Basque experts and creating alliances.

5. Conclusions

In recent decades, opportunities for learning Euskera and maintaining or practicing Basque culture, especially in diasporic settings, and the increased presence and stability of Basque Studies in U.S. universities have been the result of individual and collective efforts. Undoubtedly, the program of lectureships and chairs directed and

funded by Etxepare has been fundamental in strengthening Basque Studies in the U.S. academic sphere. As described, these programs offer students and scholars the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of Basque language and culture, as well as to conduct research in various fields related to Basque Studies. Furthermore, the exchange of knowledge and the creation of international research networks have enriched the study of Basque language and culture from multidisciplinary perspectives.

The role of Etxepare, both in funding and coordinating these programs, has been crucial for their success and continuity over time. Nevertheless, it is important to continue to promote and support these initiatives to ensure that Basque Studies remain a subject of interest and admiration in the international academic context. Despite Etxepare's great strides, the Institute faces various barriers that may affect its ability to guarantee what it has thus far achieved, as well as to improving and enhancing its offerings. One such challenge, as evidenced, is the decline in enrollments affecting its lecturer programs. The case of Basque Studies is not unique, as the concern about declining interest in languages, including Spanish, and the humanities in general is widespread among institutions similar to Etxepare as well as in universities themselves. General policies affecting the humanities in universities globally are significant factors in their decline. Together, these factors represent important challenges for the humanities in universities worldwide, including in the United States. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes changes in educational policies as well as efforts to promote the relevance and value of the humanities in contemporary society.

As explained, lecturers also organize cultural events that complement their teaching. In the data provided in this article, one can see the drastic effect the pandemic had on the number of events organized through these programs. Although this number is improving, it has not yet reached pre-pandemic levels. It is believed that one reason for this is that the pandemic has left a general sense of fatigue in society,

which also influences lecturers and their host universities. The fact that Etxepare's budget is limited also poses a challenge, especially when it comes to events that may require significant investment.

Regarding the chairs, it is noteworthy that the U.S. hosts six of the twelve total existing Basque Studies chairs. Three are located in the western part of the country, two in the East, and one in what is known as the Midwest. It is interesting to observe that the distribution of Basque Studies chairs in the United States reflects the concentration of the Basque diaspora in the country, particularly in the West. This geographical distribution makes sense given the migratory history of the Basque community and its establishment in regions such as California, Idaho, and Nevada, among others. Additionally, it is understandable that the chairs located in the American West are named after relevant figures within the Basque diaspora, as this not only recognizes their contributions but also strengthens the cultural and historical ties between the Basque community and academic institutions.

It is encouraging to note that, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the collaboration between Basque Studies chairs and associated universities has remained strong. Of the three new chairs created in 2022, one was hosted by the American academy, the Frank Bidart Chair at California State University, Bakersfield. The inauguration of this new chair and the increased attendance at activities organized by these chairs in general are positive indicators of the vitality and growth of this academic dynamic.

The fact that Etxepare has improved its dissemination and communication system over the years, leveraging new technologies, has surely played a crucial role in this regard. The ability to reach a broader and more diverse audience through online platforms and social networks has allowed the activities of Basque Studies chairs to have a more global reach and attract a wider audience.

Furthermore, the quality of the experts participating in these activities and the growing prestige of the chairs also contribute to their continued success. The recognition of these academic institutions and the relevance of their research and cultural activities help consolidate the position of Basque Studies chairs as centers of excellence in the study and promotion of Basque language and culture both nationally and internationally.

In conclusion, the fact that the chairs are continually improving is a testament to the commitment and dedication of all parties involved in the promotion and dissemination of Basque Studies. Likewise, the collaboration between Etxepare, U.S. universities, and other interested parties has been fundamental for the advancement of Basque Studies in the United States and the strengthening of Basque identity in the diaspora. These joint efforts have demonstrated the transformative power of international cooperation in the academic and cultural spheres.

As for the pending challenges facing Etxepare, in order to overcome them, a strategic and collaborative approach by the institute and other stakeholders will be required. In addition, maintaining a strong collaboration structure with U.S. universities and other relevant institutions can contribute to strengthening the backing and continuity of Basque Studies programs in the United States.

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89. Eva Valero Juan. *La obra poética de José Antonio Mazzotti en EE. UU.: Declinaciones latinas y Las flores del Mall / The poetic work of José Antonio Mazzotti in the USA: Declinaciones latinas and Las flores del Mall.* (En español: 089-01/2024SP; in English: 089-01/2024EN) Enero/January 2024.
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