

California State University, Fullerton
Program Performance Review:
Department of Modern Languages & Literatures
External Review Report (Spring 2018)

Review Team Members

Dr. Clorinda Donato, California State University, Long Beach, is the George L. Graziadio Chair for Italian Studies, Professor of French and Italian, and Director of the Clorinda Donato Center for Global Romance Languages and Translation Studies.

Dr. Darrell B. Lockhart, University of Nevada, Reno, is Associate Dean in the College of Liberal Arts, Associate Professor of Spanish, and former chair of the department of World Languages & Literatures.

Dr. Franz Mueller is Professor and Coordinator of the Linguistics Program in the Department of English, Comparative Literature and Linguistics at California State University, Fullerton.

The Review Process

This report is based on the review team's study of MLL's Program Performance Review self-report and supplemental materials, followed up with a site visit that took place on February 20, 2018. During the on-campus visit, the review team met with Dr. Sheryl Fontaine, Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Dr. Lynn Sargeant, Associate Dean of H&SS, and Dr. James Hussar, Chair of Modern Languages & Literatures. In addition, the reviewers had the opportunity to meet with the department office staff, tenure-track and adjunct faculty, as well as graduate and undergraduate students. The review team visited three different classes (JAPN 316, SPAN 467, and FREN 325), which afforded the opportunity to visit at length with distinct student groups without an instructor present.

This report is organized in three principle sections in which we outline commendations, challenges, and recommendations for the Department of Modern Languages & Literatures. Our primary focus is on the degree and minor programs offered through the department.

Commendations

In the period under review, the Department of Modern Languages has been successful in maintaining, and adding to, its programs in a diverse range of languages. Its successes include the following:

- The development of a program in Vietnamese and the hire of a dedicated tenure-track faculty member for Vietnamese, Dr. Linh Nguyen. The program now offers a minor, with the potential of a future major under consideration.
- The development of a Hispanic Media certificate in cooperation with the College of Communications.
- The development, in cooperation with the College of Health and Human Development, of the Spanish for Health and Human Services Certificate Program.
- The development of an undergraduate certificate in the teaching of English as a second language and the associated Subject Matter Preparation Program in ESL to complement the existing Master of Science and graduate certificate in TESOL.
- The development of a fully online program in Portuguese, which is aimed at students from throughout the CSU system.
- The strengthening of existing language programs with tenure-track hires in both, Spanish and Japanese.
- The department has also wisely strengthened its presence in the university's General Education program and contributes the majority of course offerings in GE category C2.
- Collegiality and a caring community of scholars were evident in all our encounters, but especially in our meetings with adjunct faculty, whose enthusiasm about teaching Spanish was boundless, and with the students in the French, Japanese, Spanish classes which the reviewers were fortunate to observe. Faculty from the smaller language programs, such as French and Japanese, repeatedly emphasized that they see being part of a wider department of modern languages as protection from the storms that may overwhelm small departments.
- The department is fortunate to be led by a dedicated, knowledgeable, and effective department chair who clearly has the best interest of the department and its faculty at heart.

Challenges

- Advisement presents a challenge to MLL due to the great variety of languages, programs, and student needs it must meet. Currently, the Department has assigned students to advisers by dividing them up according to language area and last name. This system, while working reasonably well for small programs with only a minor degree, for programs with the BA, and especially, the BA and MA programs, the system is not meeting the students' needs. Students in French appeared happy with the advising and the availability of the advisor to answer their questions. In Japanese, students were relatively pleased with advisement, but referenced discrepancies in the description of courses in the catalogue, and the courses as they were actually offered. There seemed to be a great deal of uncertainty as well about how course sequences will be offered and when literature will be in the schedule. There is also some confusion with the College of Business over the offering of certain courses and divergent voices in the advisement over these courses. Spanish, with the most majors and with the MA program as well needs a much tighter advisement plan. Students need to be given more tools so that they can

understand where they are in their degree itinerary. Students expressed frustration with accessing advisors and with changing advisors on a semester by semester basis.

- Five-unit lower-division language courses. These courses are a scheduling challenge and make the workload division onerous. Five-unit language courses have been largely phased out throughout the country as they are difficult for students to fit into their schedules as well, dissuading some students. The transfer of study abroad units is also highly problematic because of these courses, discouraging students from going abroad for a technical barrier that should be removed.
- The workload for the Chair is a challenge. The Chair works tirelessly and is highly effective, although this comes at a risk to him and his wellbeing. By sharing some of this burden with a Vice Chair, perhaps, he could offload a specific number of duties (even advisement) and be freed for more creative thinking. Since he is working an overload to teach his online Portuguese program, this also results in his being spread very thin.
- Growing programs into more fulsome degrees. A number of the programs in MLL are running at top speed and should be monitored and encouraged to move ahead. The challenge lies in that of goal setting and strategically planning for growth. Vietnamese is poised to become the first BA program in the country; Japanese may be on the way to having the numbers to offer the MA in Japanese. Chinese is also enjoying growth and has a promising future.
- Translation and interpretation courses were requested by several students. There is also a great deal of opportunity for service learning with translation courses and programs.
- Online vs traditional courses. Online offerings in languages besides Portuguese and Farsi might benefit students who are unable to take language course on campus, in real time.
- Literature courses prove to be an obstacle for some students who don't understand how literary study completes their knowledge of the languages and cultures in which they are specializing.
- Scheduling of upper-division courses during the day as opposed to solely offering them during the late afternoon-evening.
- Student clubs and opportunities for practicing languages outside of the classroom.
- A real challenge for the department lies in covering its courses with the available faculty, many of whom having taken on administrative roles or are on reduced loads due to FERP.

Recommendations

- As identified above, the current method for delivering undergraduate student advising does not function effectively. This is a detriment to the department and to the students it serves. The department should devise a more systematic and consistent method for advisement. One recommendation would be for the department to have a single advisor for its majors and minors. This would require that a faculty member be given a course release (or course releases), some other reassignment of duties, or a stipend in order to

take on the duty of department advisor. A dedicated advisor can be indispensable in increasing the number of majors/minors.

- Five credit basic-language courses are no longer the practice in the vast majority of language departments/programs. These high-credit-load courses do not mesh well with standard university-wide course scheduling, even when offered through variable time schedules. Curricula can be revised to retain pedagogical rigor and desired student learning outcomes in a 4-credit model (or even a 3-credit model). With no language requirement, students are likely avoiding language courses because of the high credit load, even if such courses satisfy a general education requirement. An alternative would be to offer all five-credit courses in a hybrid structure (3 credits face-to-face and 2 credits of online self-study).
- Undergraduate students in Spanish—the largest major in the department—overwhelmingly expressed dissatisfaction with the heavy emphasis on literature in their major. This did not seem to be as much of a concern with the other two undergraduate majors. This is consistent with national trends and in order to keep current with standard practice the department should consider a revamping its curriculum to include topics and areas of study that students would find more desirable and practical. This is not to suggest that literary studies should be removed from the curriculum, but that there should be other options available to students as well. Literature can also be worked into the curriculum in innovative topical ways as a substitute for the traditional survey, genre, and period courses. For example, one might offer courses around contemporary themes and social phenomena (The Spanish Civil War; The Mexican Revolution, Neo-fascist military dictatorships in Latin America; Gender and Sexuality in the Hispanic World, etc) that would incorporate literature, film, culture, history, journalism, politics, and so on. The department may wish to consult the reports issued by the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (ADFL) in this regard.

The Report to the Teagle Foundation on the Undergraduate Major in Language and Literature (2009)

https://www.adfl.mla.org/content/download/3207/81182/2008_mla_whitepaper.pdf

Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World

<https://www.mla.org/Resources/Research/Surveys-Reports-and-Other-Documents/Teaching-Enrollments-and-Programs/Foreign-Languages-and-Higher-Education-New-Structures-for-a-Changed-World>

Literature, Literacy, and the Undergraduate Foreign Language Curriculum

<https://www.adfl.mla.org/bulletin/article/adfl.44.1.39>

- The MA program in Spanish is also quite traditional in its approach. It is primarily structured toward students who would go on to a PhD program in literature, which is not the case for the majority of graduates from this program. The department would be well-served to reconsider its course offerings, its reading-list for the purposes of the written

exam, and the nature of the written exam itself with an eye toward considering what kinds of employment their MA students seek after graduation.

- Translation and interpretation courses would be a good avenue to pursue, but this would also require thinking differently about the kinds of future hires the department wishes to make in order to address curricular changes.
- The department would greatly benefit from tenure-track faculty hires in Spanish, French, and Japanese in order to help these majors become more robust.
- The department is engaging in many innovative initiatives such as the Spanish for Hispanic Media Certificate Program and the Chicana/Chicano track in the Spanish MA, the goal of pursuing translation studies, and the development of a Vietnamese language program. These are to be encouraged as avenues of growth along with other interdisciplinary opportunities that would raise the profile and purpose of the department within the college and across the university. The department could seek to create upper-division courses that would contribute to general education requirements for majors/minors in other departments.
- The department would greatly benefit from being able to hire some of their temporary adjunct faculty as full-time lecturers. The review team was highly impressed by their level of dedication and professionalism. Such positions could help alleviate staffing problems that the department is experiencing due to FERP faculty and those with administrative duties.

Summary

In sum, the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at California State University, Fullerton is doing an exceptional job in fulfilling its mission to provide quality instruction in modern language acquisition, linguistics, literature, and culture. It has set a series of defined goals with a strategic plan to attain them. Moreover, the goals of the department are clearly articulated with the strategic goals of the university. The faculty and staff in the department are universally committed to their individual programs and to the success of their students. The department greatly benefits from strong leadership and advocacy from the chair. MLL has several exciting avenues that they could pursue to improve and grow their programs, and with the aid and support of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences this department has the potential to make significant strides in refining some of their current practices, and cultivating new ones that will ensure the longevity and legacy of MLL.