

## Department of Romance Languages / Spanish Graduate Student Assessment Report 2006-2007

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### LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR MA STUDENTS

1. Ability to discuss critically and analytically, both orally and in writing, a variety of topics in target language, culture, and literatures.
2. Ability to conceive and complete successfully a relative original research project on target language, culture, and/or literature; to defend orally the results of said project and to answer questions related thereto.
3. Advanced competence in the Spanish language.
4. Familiarity with theoretical issues and research tools in the field, and with MLA style (or APA for applied linguistics).

### ASSESSMENT METHODS

#### 1. *Placement Test*

A language placement exam is administrated to all students at two points during the program: at the beginning of their first year, and at the end of their second year, before graduation. Our goal is to compare student's progress in grammar proficiency made during their two year studies<sup>1</sup>.

#### 2. *Midterm Examination and Final Project/Thesis*

As a requirement for graduation, all graduate students take a **comprehensive exam** at the end of their first year, and write either a **final project** or a **MA thesis** at the end of their last year. Our goal is to monitor the students' development of critical and analytical thought and knowledge. The comprehensive exam gives the students opportunity to demonstrate their preparation in a set of topics and concepts given at the beginning of the first year. At this stage, the faculty committee measures fundamentally the students' ability to write critically about important areas of culture, literature and linguistics.

Before graduation, all graduate students write either a twenty-page essay or a MA thesis, which they have to defend orally before a faculty committee. This allows us to consider students' progress in almost all learning outcomes, especially by comparing this project/thesis with the midterm comprehensive examination. In order to draw conclusions, the faculty committee completes a two-page evaluation of students' performance on the basis of both the written project/thesis and the oral defense (see appendix B for a document sample).

#### 3. *Student Portfolio*

All students are required to submit a **portfolio** before graduation. It contains a sample assignment from classes taken during the MA program. Students are encouraged to include their most representative graded assignment. In addition, students include a self assessment of their progress on the program's learning outcomes (see appendix A for a questionnaire sample).

The assessment plan we have created allows us to evaluate all learning outcomes. Outcomes 1, 2, and 4 are qualitatively assessed both by the students as a self-assessment statement and by the faculty through review of portfolios and the final project/thesis evaluation defense. We measure quantitative data for progress in the target language, which corresponds to outcome 3.

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<sup>1</sup> Because of changing in the exam used to assess student's language skills, students graduating in May or August 2007 took the new placement exam (the BYUHTRC) twice, at the beginning of the second year and before graduation.

## RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

- The following table shows language placement test results for graduate students graduating in May or August 2007. The BYUHTRC exam is interactive, which means that students are not given the same questions, nor do they answer the same amount of questions when taking the exam again. Therefore this exam gives us much better sense of the overall students' *level progress* instead of specific improvement in any individual score. A score above 400 indicates an advanced or near native fluency. As shown below, all of our graduate students begin their first year with excellent scores of proficiency (average **730.23**).

Advance level students do not usually change significantly their scores when taken this exam for the second time. Learning process does not exhibit dramatic improvements at this level of linguistic proficiency. Furthermore, as in case of **E-Ez** and **J-Ra** scores may be slightly lower. It should be noted, however, that there is a clear indication of a general improvement. Second year students' scored an average of **754.15**, which represents a general improvement of 3.27%. Especially notorious were the exit scores of **M-Ky**, who showed an improvement of nearly **21.5%**.

As a conclusion, the results show general improvement in **84.62%** of the students (11 out of 13).

### BYUHTR PLACEMENT TEST

	<b>STUDENT</b>	<b>FIRST YEAR</b>	<b>SECOND YEAR</b>
1.	S-Ba	711	713
2.	J-Br	405	409
3.	C-Co	824	858
4.	E-Ez	901	835
5.	T-Ga	602	698
6.	A-Iw	914	925
7.	T-Ja	878	902
8.	A-Kg	714	746
9.	M-Ky	603	733
10.	R-Mz	904	922
11.	J-Ra	701	672
12.	E-Sh	702	750
13.	A-Sz	634	641
	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>730.23</b>	<b>754.15</b>

- Students' portfolios give an indication of the variety of assignments students consider a successful achievement. Since they are encouraged to include their most representative assignment, examples of the work students completed vary from papers, oral presentation (generally as power-point presentation) to written exams. Most of them choose to include a term paper.

We have used students' statements of self-assessment questions to ponder their experience and the areas they have considered important in their progress (see appendix A). In addition, students' comments have focused principally on three issues:

- Year-abroad experience
- Course taken
- Teaching experience

Almost 93% of student's statements have judged their year abroad absolutely crucial in their language progress; 70% of these comments have focused on the daily experience (non-curricular); only 15% have mentioned their student experience, especially when mentioning curricular choices. Students from our program in Mexico found little or no choices when registering to courses offered by the Autonomous University of Guadalajara. No student from our program in Spain brought this issue. Around 65% of the students' statements emphasized their on campus experience motivating and intellectually challenging, especially because of the *quality* of courses taken on campus. Almost all comments considered cultural studies a completely new area of interest. Half of them remarked the importance of this kind of courses in the development of critical thought. This group of students

manifested their interest in pursuing doctoral studies. Teaching experience was mentioned by 40% of the students' self-assessments as an important vehicle of language improvement.

- The faculty evaluating the students during their defense considered 46.2% of the students' final project/thesis originality (Q<sub>1</sub>) excellent and 53.8% good. The committee also considered that the students' defense showed an impressive demonstration of critical and analytical thought during the presentation (Q<sub>2-sp</sub>), with a 46.2% judged as excellent. Similarly, 23.1% of the students' final projects were considered outstanding pieces of analytical work (Q<sub>2-wr</sub>), and 69.2% were judged good. Almost all graduate students demonstrated familiarity with research tools and the MLA style. We believe that these results show a significant achievement, and demonstrate the level skills and knowledge we expect from our graduates. Below is the table of the Graduate Student Assessment Defense results for questions 1, 2 and 3 (see appendix B for document).

**GRADUATE STUDENT ASSESSMENT DEFENSE RESULTS**  
*ex=excellent g=good f=fair p=poor*

STUDENT	Q <sub>1</sub>	Q <sub>2</sub> (SP)	Q <sub>2</sub> (WR)	Q <sub>3</sub>
1. S-Ba	g	g	g	ex
2. J-Br	g	f	f	g
3. C-Co	g	g	g	ex
4. E-Ez	ex	ex	ex	ex
5. T-Ga	g	g	g	ex
6. A-Iw	ex	ex	g	ex
7. T-Ja	ex	ex	g	ex
8. A-Kg	g	g	g	ex
9. M-Ky	ex	ex	ex	ex
10. R-Mz	ex	ex	ex	ex
11. J-Ra	g	g	g	ex
12. E-Sh	ex	ex	g	ex
13. A-Sz	g	g	g	ex
	Ex 46.2% G 53.8%	Ex 46.2% G 46.2% F 7.6%	Ex 23.1% G 69.2% F 7.7%	Ex 92.3% G 7.7%

## **ACTION TAKEN / PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS**

During 2006-2007 the following actions have been taken in order to improve the quality of our graduate program.

### *Evaluation*

We have changed the placement exam to better reflect students' level improvement. This exam will be taken at the beginning and at the end of the students' MA studies. Also, we have modified the comprehensive exam to use it as an assessment tool. Instead of former "core assignments" we decided to give the students several topics about literature, culture and linguistics so that they can explore and expand during their first year. The essay-oriented comprehensive exam, then, gave us some guidance in measuring the students' ability to perform learning outcomes 1 and 3.

### *Curricular Revisions*

Answering to graduate student's self evaluation of the AYA program, we conducted a complete review of the first year graduate program in Mexico. As a result, for the academic year 2007-2008 we will change our program in Mexico to a new location at the University of Veracruz, Xalapa. This new agreement will be part of the new FIPSE-funded North American Studies Consortium.

## **APENDIX A**

### GRADUATE STUDENT SELF EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions when writing your self-assessment.

1. To what extent have your courses and assignments helped you to develop your critical and analytical thinking skills, both orally and in writing? Is there anything you could have done differently to develop your critical and analytical thinking skills more? Is there anything the program could have done to help you develop those thinking skills more?
2. How has your participation in the program—both your time spent abroad and on campus—helped you to enhance your competence in the Spanish language? What has been most helpful to you? What do you think you, or the program, could have done to advance your language skills more?
3. Based on your courses, papers, and final project, do you feel that you have developed familiarity with literary and cultural theories, the appropriate research tools to complete your assignments, and with MLA style?

## APENDIX B

### Graduate Student Assessment / Defense

Student's Name:

Project or Thesis title:

Committee members:

Date of defense:

1. How successful has the student been at conceiving and completing an original research project/thesis, presenting it orally, and answering questions about it?

excellent       good       fair       poor

Comments:

2. To what extent has the student's final project/thesis and defense demonstrated an ability to think critically and analytically?

Speaking:

excellent       good       fair       poor

Comments:

Writing:

excellent       good       fair       poor

Comments:

3. What level of familiarity with theory, research tools and style (MLA or APA) has the student's final project/research demonstrated?

excellent

good

fair

poor

Comments: