

## **Program Review Committee Report Department of Romance Languages**

### **Review Process**

The Chair of the Department of Romance Languages prepared a self-study following program review guidelines. A two-person external review team then visited the campus, meeting with faculty from the Department of Romance Languages, faculty from related departments, students and administrators. The PRC reviewed the self-study and the external review report, and a member of the PRC met with the faculty in the Department. The PRC then met with the Dean of Arts and Sciences. The observations and recommendations of the PRC are summarized in the report that follows.

### **Summary of Self-Study**

#### **Mission and History**

The Department of Romance Languages was created in 1961 from a division of the former Department of Foreign Languages. The mission statement of the Department, adopted in 1993, states:

The Department of Romance Languages seeks to provide its students with the best possible undergraduate and Masters-level graduate education through the diversity of its core offerings and through its cooperation with interdisciplinary programs leading to a practical, liberal education.

The Department believes that its primary function is the preparation of well-trained and accomplished undergraduates. To this end, the Department is committed to

1. the general education curriculum,
2. the major-level programs in Classics, French and Spanish, as well as to minor programs in these languages, and Italian,
3. teacher preparation.

The second commitment of the Department is to its graduate programs at the Masters level in French and Spanish. There are links between its graduate and undergraduate commitments. The links are:

4. the preparation of students to become teachers of French and Spanish in high schools,
5. the preparation of some graduate students to pursue further graduate study elsewhere.

As a concomitant of graduate education, the Department believes in a strong commitment to a research role, which also strengthens undergraduate education. As majors, undergraduates benefit from the synthesizing role the faculty member plays in transmitting new knowledge through teaching. Graduate students, future teachers of foreign languages, must understand as fully as possible not only the languages which we train them to teach but also the cultural environment in which languages are spoken and from which languages are inseparable. In order to teach graduate students how to learn, our graduate faculty must teach by example and communicate the “how” of research to its graduate students.

### **Departmental Organization**

The Department of Romance Languages is divided into four semi-autonomous sections. Spanish has three undergraduate tracks (basic Spanish, Spanish education and Latin American cultural studies) and a master’s program. French has two undergraduate tracks (basic French and French education) and a master’s program. There are also undergraduate majors in classical civilization and Latin, and undergraduate minors in Italian, Spanish, French and classical civilization. The different sections report to the Chair who administers the Department as a whole. At the time of the self-study, there were 14 tenured and tenure-track faculty in the Department (Spanish: seven, French: five, classics: one, and Italian: one). The present full-time faculty have all been hired since 1990. There are fewer faculty in Bowling Green’s Department of Romance Languages than there are in similar units at peer institutions (Kent, Miami and Ohio Universities). Most of the faculty are successfully engaged in active scholarship.

The Department takes great pride in the quality education it offers its undergraduate majors and graduate students, while at the same time serving a large number of general education students. It also takes great pride in its dynamic approach to curricular development and assessment. During the 1990s, the Department recast its curriculum from traditional literature and language to a broad, but clearly-focused vision of language and culture, including new courses in French and Spanish with a New World / African (not France and Spain) emphasis. There are currently about 80 majors in Spanish, with more coming from the College of Education and Human Development than the College of Arts and Science. There are about 30 French majors, evenly split between Education and Arts and Sciences. There are just a few majors in classical civilization. The undergraduate curriculum is supported by an impressive array of academic abroad experiences (France, Quebec, Burkina Faso, Spain and Mexico). About half the undergraduate majors in French and Spanish (virtually all in Spanish education) take advantage of the abroad programs. There is a trend for enrollment in the majors to be declining, with the possible exception of Spanish.

The two-year graduate programs are characterized by a first year abroad, substantially paid for by the Department, and a second year in Bowling Green. Students in their second year at Bowling Green also teach one section of an introductory level language course. For the past 10 years, about 20-25 masters degrees/year have been granted in French and Spanish combined.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The self-study breaks down strengths and weaknesses to the level of lower-division, upper-division and the graduate program, within each language area.

*Classics.* The self-identified strengths in this area are strong enrollments and excellent teaching. The existence of two majors – classical civilization and Latin – is cited as a strength. However, the self-identified weaknesses of small number of majors and low enrollments in Latin literature courses may be connected to the attempt to offer two related majors. The program “instability” cited as a weakness is clearly related to the attempt to offer a variety of programs and majors, which is seen as a strength.

*French.* The study abroad programs are a basic strength of the French program. They contribute directly to the high quality of teaching by graduate students, the strength of language and cultural training of both the undergraduate and graduate students who participate in the study abroad programs, and the “coherent, targeted major emphasizing modern literary and cultural issues in France and the Francophone world.” The on-campus French House provides a similar program enhancement for on-campus undergraduate students.

The French faculty are productive.

There are both strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum. The methods course, which provides supervision and observation, is cited as a strength, as is the coherency of the program as a whole, with its emphasis on modern literature and cultural issues in a variety of French-speaking countries. However, the self-study notes that an emphasis on speaking over other skills may be limiting to students in the undergraduate major.

The self-study notes an inability to offer (staff) courses, at all levels. The need for additional faculty seems to be particularly keen in the areas of applied linguistics and curriculum development.

*Italian.* There appears to be growing interest in Italian, both at Bowling Green and nationally. One full-time faculty member supports BGSU’s offerings in Italian, with help from part-time instructors.

*Spanish:* The Spanish section is the largest and most complex in the Department. At the undergraduate level, distinctions are drawn among the Latin American track, the basic Spanish track and the Spanish education track, and between those and linguistics. Study abroad programs in Alcala de Henares, Spain, and Guadalajara, Mexico provide important contributions to the

undergraduate tracks and to the graduate program. However, the self-study points to a need for the creation of a “meaningful bridge between the Alcala program and the peninsular courses taken on campus.”

The lack of placement tests for lower-division courses leads to problems for students and teachers in these heterogeneous classes. There are also several problems in the curriculum at this level, including lack of courses in conversation, lack of coordination among related courses (e.g. 202, 351, and 352), unrealized opportunities in internships and coops, and the “need to cooperate with other departments to offer practicums.”

Two faculty have been hired in linguistics. However, “current courses do not yet reflect the interests and expertise of new faculty members.” These faculty also need to cooperate with faculty in the College of Education and Human Development to prepare students to succeed on the Praxis exam.

There are several curricular issues to be addressed, in addition to those mentioned above. These include: a lack of electives in the Latin American track; redundancy in the Alcala study abroad experience with courses in the peninsular track; lack of clarity in the purposes and standards for upper division courses in the peninsular track; and the development and offering of graduate level linguistics courses that articulate with the study abroad program, that extend past 601, and that take advantage of the expertise of new faculty.

### **Unit Planning**

*Language lab.* The language lab is in poor physical condition, outmoded in design and open at “hours inconvenient for many students.” The poor condition of the language lab has a particular impact on students concentrating in foreign language education. The self-study recommends that a new laboratory director be hired and that this person should have responsibility for “teaching and supervising the undergraduate foreign language education majors.”

*Department Staffing.* The recommendation for a second assistant professor in classics has apparently been fulfilled in the time elapsed since the self-study was written.

The Spanish section has a comprehensive plan for the distribution of its faculty between Latin American and peninsular areas. The self-study recommends a revision to their long-standing plan for staffing: “that the Cono Sur position be made at an advanced level,” ideally at full professor.

The French section is inadequately staffed at present, and anticipates additional staffing problems in the near future, with the imminent retirement of the chair and the reassignment of two other French faculty to joint or cooperative efforts with the Women’s Studies Program and the Canadian Studies Program. Consequently, the self-study recommends an assistant professor line in French to focus on Francophone literature and culture.

In Italian, the self-study recommends a continuation of part-time instruction in support of the one tenure-track (tenured, as of this writing) faculty.

The self-study offers the following overarching staffing recommendation: “We believe a reasonable solution to the staff challenges in lower-division general education courses is the recruitment of a larger number of graduate students, particularly in Spanish.” This recommendation is based on the rationale that graduate students are taught methods and they are supervised. Furthermore, increasing the number of graduate students would help create the critical mass necessary for the graduate program itself.

*Staff.* The self-study points to need for a second full-time secretary. This person would support the AYA France program, and support graduate coordinators and undergraduate advisors in their recruitment duties.

*Student-oriented goals.* The goal to establish a Hispanic living-learning community has been met since the self-study was written. In a parallel move, the Department plans to increase its academic presence in the French House.

The Department would like an undergraduate coordinator in Spanish and a joint appointment with the College of Education and Human Development in the area of teacher training. The self-study also calls for the use of a placement instrument in lower-division courses; however, details are yet to be worked out.

There are a variety of curricular goals and improvements that are needed.

*Faculty-oriented goals.* The self-study suggests a need for the executive committee to develop instructional and research support. It also sees a need for mentoring and recognition of staff and faculty.

*Goals for cooperation.* The Department sees an opportunity to promote its courses (and the Italian program) through cross-listing of courses.

*Community goals.* The self-study lays out an ambitious agenda of establishing contacts with a wide variety of external constituencies, including ethnic communities in Toledo, and continuation of the French immersion day. It also forwards the suggestion of developing a summer French M.A. program for Ohio teachers.

*Diversity goals.* The section describes another ambitious program of building on existing programs and creation of new ones to increase opportunities for under-represented groups, and for increasing the number of study abroad programs.

*Technology goals.* The self-study recommends that plans be developed to fund a multi-media language-learning center, in consultation with GREAL.

## **Results of Previous Reviews**

This is the first cycle of program review for the Department of Romance Languages.

### **Summary of the External Report**

The external review seemed to be carried out in a thorough and fair manner. The external report depicts Romance Languages as a department of contradictions. The Department does some outstanding things and there are some superb faculty members, but the external team sensed morale may be low. The junior faculty have a sense of disenfranchisement from administrative decision making, but they seem to show little willingness to participate in the process. The external reviewers found the academic year abroad programs to be of generally of high quality and assessment procedures to be of similar high quality, but some students complain of problems with course requirements and advising. Placement of undergraduate students in appropriate introductory language courses is unsystematic.

### **Selected Strengths Noted by the External Review Team**

- 1) The faculty are well-prepared in teaching and research. The junior faculty hired in the last 10 years particularly impressed the external reviewers. (However, they were not given the full CV's of the faculty).
- 2) The study abroad programs are diverse and well-funded.
- 3) Course offerings are innovative and the curriculum is current. The external report characterizes the Department as having made a successful transition from a literature to a more studies (cultural)-based program.
- 4) Students are satisfied with instruction.
- 5) The programs in Italian and classics are small but strong.

### **Selected Weaknesses Noted by the External Review Team**

- 1) Relations among department members are polite but strained. The faculty do not meet as a whole, even on an irregular basis. This system may have worked under the strong leadership of the current chair, but with his retirement imminent, the inter-group isolation may create problems.
- 2) Junior faculty do not currently have a sense of participation in the administrative process.
- 3) There is no placement test for entering students. It seems that it is practically impossible to predict foreign language competency just by counting the number of high school courses a student has had.
- 4) There is need for a "heritage" course for native Spanish speaking or bilingual students.
- 5) Advising needs to be coordinated and improved. There are two problems here. First, the Department needs to do a better job of deciding what kind of feedback to give students at every phase of their study. Progress needs to be predictable and tracked. Second, education students are having trouble passing

- the Praxis exam when returning from abroad; the external reviewers attributed this to the possibility that the program in Spain may in fact be too easy.
- 6) Italian and classics should be nurtured; they both seem to be successful in attracting student interest.
  - 7) The external reviewers were concerned by the apparent abandonment of classic literature, particularly in French, and that the choice of Spanish courses is not clearly articulated; they were concerned that the number in English may be too great.

### **Recommendations of the External Review**

- 1) To address the problem of isolation in the Department, the external report recommended that faculty members cultivate a sense of collective mission. This would start with regular faculty meetings (at least twice a semester) with a structured agenda so that faculty could share their vision for improving the Department and share their different perspectives in a community setting.
- 2) The sense of administrative hopelessness shared by junior faculty needs to be addressed. It is clear that many of the substantial successes the Department has had during the last 10 years were a consequence of the hard, seemingly autonomous work of the Chair. In light of his imminent retirement, the administrative climate in the Department will change. There will be a window of opportunity for the junior faculty to become active in the administration of the Department; this opportunity should be supported and guided by the senior faculty in the Department and the Chair.
- 3) Establish a standardized placement test for students in French and Spanish who have had some language instruction before entering BGSU.
- 4) Consider the establishment of a heritage language course.
- 5) Concerns about both the Department's undergraduate and graduate advising structure need to be addressed. Possibilities include: development of a brochure and other advisement material for students; development of explicit advising and outreach expectations for the faculty; and updating of the catalog. Something also needs to be done to get education students through the Praxis exam, particularly in Spanish.
- 6) Future hiring should address the clearly understaffed programs in Italian and classics. The external review suggested the possibilities of: hiring tenure track people in these areas; hiring tenure track people with joint appointments in Italian, classics and some other area (e.g. Spanish); or hiring instructors. The Department must decide what strategy is best to support these smaller programs. Also, coordination of the TA's in French would benefit from the addition of a specialist in French linguistics.
- 7) The curriculum is a long and complex issue. There seem to be two main foci. First, course offerings are not presented in a coherent and accessible fashion (see item 5, above). There is no document available to students, including the catalog, that clearly captures the current curricular emphases in the Department. Second, there is concern about the apparent abandonment of classical literature, particularly in French, even though course availability in this area is still suggested by the catalog. The faculty should revisit some of the curricular changes of the 90s and resurrect at least occasional offering of classic literature. Also, the external team understood that the Spanish section seems to

be getting dangerously close to offering too many so-called “cultural studies” courses taught in English. Such courses are clearly desirable, but if their presence comes to dominate, it could compromise the expectation that students will become fluent in a foreign language.

### **Program Review Committee Findings**

The PRC agrees with the assessment of the external reviewers that the Department has a core group of outstanding faculty, who provide quality teaching to students. Students, in turn, are generally satisfied with their classroom experience. The faculty also participate in the research enterprise. We note that the external report praised the scholarly productivity of the faculty, but offered no commentary on the quality of that work. The PRC has no independent means for evaluation of the quality of the faculty’s research efforts.

The PRC is reluctant to conclude anything about department morale because of the obvious problem in objectively assessing such a slippery cultural property. However, the PRC finds the lack of regular faculty meetings in the Department to be both highly unusual and inadvisable. The lack of regular department-wide meetings demonstrates that there is very little interaction among the Department’s four core areas and a lack of a collective sense of mission and destiny. Particularly in a department that is dominated by young faculty, the lack of regular faculty meetings (at least one a semester) may contribute to a sense of faculty disenfranchisement. At the very least, the historical lack of department faculty meetings may lead younger faculty to perpetuate a culture of section separation, a culture that may not serve their scholarly needs.

The PRC is also reluctant to conclude anything about the sense of disenfranchisement, suggested by the external reviewers, on the part of the junior faculty regarding departmental decision making. The PRC acknowledges that all faculty participate in the decision making process at the section level. However, given the lack of department-wide faculty meetings, it is hard to imagine how any faculty member, junior or senior, can have a sense of participation in the overall departmental decision making process. There appear to be few opportunities for faculty to exchange ideas about best practices in language education, the vision of the Department as a whole, or to come to a consensus on how the Department should address its problems and plan for the future. For example, Spanish and French face the same problem of assessing language proficiency of incoming students and an antiquated language lab. Why not work together to address these issues and any other problems that do not recognize the section boundaries in the Department?

The low number of faculty compared to peer institutions is worth close analysis. The number of faculty may limit the number and range of course offerings, limitations that have in part been compensated for by the excellent study abroad programs. On the other hand, at 13.93 SCH/FTE, the Department is well below the average for the College of Arts & Sciences (21.06). There does not appear to be evidence that the faculty carry unusually heavy teaching loads, making it difficult to justify large growth in the number of faculty. In this regard,

the PRC would like to point out that although the relatively low number of faculty may limit the number of courses taught, it does not follow that the diversity of course offerings should be as limited. The number of electives could be increased, in part by making electives available in alternate years.

There are problems regarding placement of students into entry-level courses. There is no assessment of language proficiency that would enable incoming undergraduate students to be placed in appropriate language courses. The Dean of Arts & Sciences supports the purchase of appropriate placement tests.

The catalog and materials distributed to majors do not adequately represent current course offerings and program emphases. The Department needs to communicate better with current and prospective students about the curricular foci of the various sections.

Majors in Spanish from the College of Education and Human Development are not performing well on one component of the very important Praxis exam. The PRC acknowledges the recent development in the French section of planning to offer FREN 451 on campus rather than abroad. Beyond this, however, the PRC had no information about how the Department is working with EDHD to address this specific issue and other problems faced by future teachers.

Italian and classics are small programs that seem to play a relatively modest role in the operation of the Department, despite success in student enrollment. The PRC acknowledges that Italian and classics make important contributions to the scholarly mission of the Department and University, and find that these programs should be supported at a level that will enable them to fulfill their mission.

The Department has enthusiastically embraced a “cultural studies” focus to its curriculum. In a small department, this naturally comes at the expense of other areas, which may include the teaching of other courses taught in either French or Spanish. The PRC cannot evaluate the merits of this curricular emphasis, but certainly curriculum development needs to be re-visited and re-assessed on a regular basis by the separate sections and the entire faculty in a traditional departmental setting to determine if changes are warranted.

The PRC finds that the language lab is a significant detriment to the success of the language programs and the various other programs that depend on language education, including area studies, international studies and international business. It is difficult to state the level of disrepair and inadequacy of the facility without appearing to resort to hyperbole. The PRC believes that a concerted effort should be undertaken to explore modern Web-based alternatives to the current language lab. The faculty have a responsibility in this regard to educate themselves regarding the use of modern technology for language education. Based upon careful exploration of alternatives, the College and University should commit to the creation of a modern language-learning facility. The creation of a new language-learning facility is critical to the success of language education, international studies, area studies, study abroad programs and other interests of

the University. Web-based language instruction may even provide a venue for offering low-demand languages.

The Department seems to be doing a good job in the assessment of learning outcomes among their graduates. However, there is some concern about what students are learning during their study abroad experience. It is not clear that learning outcomes of the various study abroad programs are being independently assessed.

The graduate programs in Spanish and French appear solid. However, the PRC was unable to assess the success of graduates in the master's program. Are the master's students in the romance languages successfully moving on to Ph.D. programs or gaining appropriate employment?

The Dean of Arts & Sciences informed the PRC of his plans in the area of international studies. Many of these will impact the Department of Romance Languages (as well as the Department of GREAL and area studies programs), and so are relevant to this report. In particular, the PRC strongly supports plans to place an office for the International Studies Program (staffed with a half-time secretary) in physical proximity to the language departments, and to house the Asian Studies Program and the Africana Studies Program offices nearby as well. Such a physical arrangement will have a positive impact on all the programs involved, including the language departments. The PRC sees this as a low-cost effort with many benefits, and so supports it strongly.

The PRC is also supportive of the creation of an International Programs Council, in which the language departments would participate alongside the area studies programs, the Department of Legal Studies and International Business and the International Programs office. Such a council will help the language departments contribute to a variety of international efforts and to attain a position of greater visibility to and impact on other university programs.

### **Recommendations of the Program Review Committee**

- 1) It is clear that the Department of Romance Languages should work to revitalize its sense of collective mission. At the very least, beginning in fall, 2001, the Department should meet as whole once a semester to exchange information about what is occurring in the various sections and try to work together to solve the problems facing the Department.
- 2) Given the relatively low SCH/FTE ratio in the Department, and university constraints on faculty growth, the PRC cannot recommend substantial growth in the number of tenure track lines in the Department. However, the Department deserves continued support from the College of Arts and Sciences to maintain the number of tenure track faculty at historical levels, and perhaps some growth in targeted programs with demonstrated success.
- 3) Placement of incoming students is critical in providing the best educational opportunities for students in Spanish and French. We support the

Department's request to ask the College to provide funds for appropriate placement tests. The placement test should be acquired and implemented no later than fall, 2002.

- 4) The Department needs to make a better effort communicating to students the nature of its programs as well as its curricular emphases at home and abroad. This would include making the catalog summary more current and representative, and the development of brochures, Web-sites and similar informational sources. The Chair should charge Department faculty to make these changes during AY 2001-2002.
- 5) The Department should make a greater effort in assisting language education students as they prepare for the Praxis test, and with students in the College of Education and Human Development in general. Ideally, this would be a collaborative effort to strengthen the ties between the Department and EDHD. Toward this goal, the PRC supports the idea of hiring an education language specialist jointly appointed in the Department of Romance Languages, GREAL and the Division of Teaching and Learning. However, it is important that all departments make efforts to insure that any new hire be comfortable in this complex administrative setting, with tenure criteria jointly agreed to by all departments and communicated to the new faculty member before a contract is offered. Further, the specialist should be qualified to address similar needs in German.
- 6) The Department should maintain a healthy intellectual presence in classics and Italian. Understandably, the Department's priorities will remain in Spanish and French. However, this does not preclude creative solutions to the scholarly, collegial and research needs of the faculty in the two smaller areas.
- 7) After consultation with the Department, it is clear that the Spanish curriculum is not diluted by the presence of too many courses taught in English; the problem is too few courses. However, the lack of course offerings in classic French literature may be a more realistic concern given that only one faculty member in French is a scholar in this area. Although BGSU students can study classic French literature during a semester in Tours, the reality is that only about half the majors get to go to France. The PRC suggests that the faculty in the Department reassess this curricular decision during AY 2001-2002, and if warranted, bring classic French literature back to the active course offerings on campus.
- 8) During the AY 2001-2002, the Department should undertake a review of its curriculum, with an eye to increasing the diversity of courses offered. The solution to the limited number of course offerings can not be a large increase in the number of tenure track faculty.
  - a) One solution is to have individual faculty teach a wider diversity of courses; teaching the same set of courses not every year but perhaps every two years. Granted, this would require faculty to develop new courses perhaps somewhat beyond their specific area of expertise, but that is a reasonable, even healthy, challenge.

- b) The College of Arts and Sciences has endorsed a policy of differential teaching loads depending on the quality of scholarly activity. Another partial solution to the lack of course offering diversity could be to have faculty who are less productive in the quality of their scholarly output or less active in graduate training do more teaching.
  - c) Any requests for additional faculty should be supported by a thorough review and analysis of departmental priorities and curricular commitment to other programs (e.g. film).
- 9) The PRC supports the idea forwarded in the self-study to increase the number of graduate students in Spanish, who would teach at the introductory levels and contribute to making the graduate program more substantial.
  - 10) The Dean of Arts & Sciences should appoint and charge a committee to investigate alternative technological approaches to the language-lab. Representatives from GREAL, Romance Languages, Teaching and Learning in EDHD, and other affected units, should serve on this committee. The committee charge should include, at least, a close look at Web-based language instruction and consultation with experts in the technology of language learning. The committee's task will include some amount of faculty development, so that faculty become conversant with the various technologies for language instruction now available. The committee should make its recommendation to the Dean of Arts & Sciences by the end of fall semester, 2001. The Dean should engage the Provost and the Development Office in a discussion of funding of the proposed facility.
  - 11) The academic year abroad programs seem highly successful. However, there is no dedicated assessment vehicle to measure what students are actually learning while they are away. The PRC recommends that the Department develop an assessment mechanism(s) to evaluate learning outcomes of the academic year abroad experience.
  - 12) The Department should participate vigorously in the International Programs Council, when it is formed. The Department of Romance Languages should promote international education in a variety of venues.

*The Department of Romance Languages should report annually to the Dean of Arts & Sciences, with a copy to the Provost, on the implementation of these recommendations.*