

UNM Academic Program Review – Department of Spanish and Portuguese External Evaluation, March 6-8, 2017

Review Team:

David William Foster, Arizona State University

Carol A. Klee, University of Minnesota

Anita Obermeier, University of New Mexico

Introduction

We necessarily begin with what is most singular about UNM's Spanish and Portuguese program (hereinafter referred to as the Program), which is its deep sociohistorical and cultural embeddedness in the New Mexico historical experience. Perhaps no other similar program in the United States can point to such a circumstance of embeddedness, and it is no exaggeration to say that, as a consequence, we are speaking of a program that has something tantamount to a legendary status in the Hispanic Studies profession in the United States.

There are three singular dimensions to the Program that have contributed historically to its status, that continue to be its pillars, and that, adequately defended and promoted, will continue to augur well for the status and recognition of the Program nationally: The Southwest Studies component, the Spanish Heritage Language component, and the Hispanic Linguistics component. Without in any way meaning to diminish the importance of other components of the Program, these three components deserved to be highlighted upfront because of their quality and because of their distinctive role in providing a unique characterization for the Program. All three are integrally related and, synergistically, constitute a prominent brand for the Program. Solidarity among members of these three components is high (most notably among the linguists, a reflection of the high level of appointments made over the past 8-10 years), constituting a model for the Program to follow as a whole.

In the following sections, we will comment briefly on each of the review criteria, describing the many strengths of the Department as well as current challenges it faces.

1. Program Goals – MET

The Department clearly meets expectations in defining and publicizing program goals. In particular, the faculty should be commended for their careful development of Student Learning Goals and Outcomes for each of their programs at the B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. levels. The Student Learning Goals and Outcomes are included on their course syllabi and can be found on the departmental website, in the Graduate Handbook, and the website of the College of Arts and Sciences. The program goals are consistent with the broader mission of the University of New Mexico, and we especially highlight the essential role that the Department plays within the institution given the singularity of its Program, as described above, and the university's designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution.

2. Teaching and Learning Curriculum - MET

Strengths: The Department's faculty systematically rethink their course offerings and workshop new approaches to delivering the curriculum. While the upper-division undergraduate Portuguese curriculum is already thematically based, recently the faculty specializing in Spanish and Spanish American literatures have developed five literature/culture courses with a thematic focus, such as "Topics in Cultural Geographies" and "Topics in Race, Ethnicity, Class and Gender." These new courses will be submitted for curricular approval in Fall 2017 and are likely to broaden the appeal of the Spanish major to undergraduates, while at the same time drawing on the research strengths of literature faculty. Another notable curricular initiative of the Department is the development of a dual BA in Spanish and Portuguese, which will allow students to develop expertise in the languages, literatures and cultures of both programs. This program mirrors at the undergraduate level the successful Dual MA in Spanish and Portuguese.

Another strength of the Department is its curricular contributions to other units at the University of New Mexico, including Linguistics, the Latin American Studies Program, Chicana/o Studies, the Medical School, and the Business School, among others. Its Medical Spanish program, in particular, is a unique feature of the Department and attracts undergraduates with majors in the Health Sciences who have declared a second major in Spanish (rather than a Spanish minor). Nonetheless, its integration with the other department programs remains an area of concern as noted below.

Considerations/Challenges: First and foremost, we note the imperious need for integration of Medical Spanish in the curriculum of the Department. The Department is aware of this issue and has begun to consider ways to integrate Medical Spanish better into the undergraduate major through the development of advanced literature courses that integrate literary study with the approaches of Narrative Medicine. The first of these courses, a pilot SPAN 307 Introduction to Hispanic Literature section focused on health discourses, literary and non-literary, will be taught by Professor Kathy McKnight in Spring 2017.

Another area that requires attention is the lower division Portuguese program. This program is currently in transition following a change in leadership and has significant structural issues to be addressed by the Department. A proposal for restructuring courses to address the drop in enrollments is being developed by the Director of Language Programs, Professor Eva Rodríguez González, and will be presented to the faculty before the end of the academic year. The Business School supports the development of a new "Portuguese for Business Course," which will strengthen ties and perhaps encourage more business students to enroll in higher levels of Portuguese courses.

In addition, significant placement issues beyond the control of the Department need to be addressed. Students are too frequently enrolling in first semester Spanish courses in either the Spanish as a Second Language (SSL) or Spanish as a Heritage Language (SHL) track in spite of the fact that they have sufficient proficiency to place higher in the sequence. The Department needs the assistance of the Registrar's office to enforce reasonable placement policies. The SSL Coordinator, Professor Eva Rodríguez González, has developed a series of step-by-step procedures for the Banner web registration system based on students' Spanish AP or CLEP exam

scores, which would require students to enroll in the appropriate level course. The implementation of these procedures should help address some of the placement issues. Additionally, it is essential that advisors provide students with the accurate information about placement and that students be encouraged to build on their previous experience with Spanish and enroll in higher level courses. The Department may want to consider prohibiting students who have had two years of high school Spanish during the past five years from enrolling in first semester Spanish.

A related issue is how to encourage better placement of students in the SSL vs. SHL tracks. The SSL track is much more structured, and some heritage language students prefer more structure and opt for the SSL track for this reason. The SHL track is a signature component of the Department, and it would be important to examine the curriculum to ensure that it is meeting the needs of students. In addition, as pointed out by Professor Damián Wilson, continued advertising and the organization of splashy events will help spread the word about the SHL track and draw in students.

A final issue is the underrepresentation of Hispanic linguistics in the upper division undergraduate curriculum. Although there is apparent demand for courses, the Hispanic linguistics faculty is stretched too thin to provide more offerings due to their other responsibilities as language coordinators and joint appointments of two faculty members in Linguistics.

3. Teaching and Learning: Continuous Improvement – MET+

Strengths: The Department's assessment plans and processes are exemplary and provide a model to other programs of how to carry out assessment effectively. Department faculty, specifically Professor Eva Rodríguez González and Professor Damián Wilson have provided leadership in this area outside the Department as Assessment Coordinator for the Latin American Iberian Institute and as a member of the College Assessment Review Committee respectively. The SSL, SHL, and Portuguese lower division programs have developed Student Learning outcomes for each course together with assessment tools that provide direct measurements of student performance, such as in-class essays and video speech samples, and in the SSL program also indirect measurements, such as self-assessment (i.e. LinguaFolio's Can-Do statements). Furthermore, 50 students in SPAN 101 and 102 were randomly selected to take a national assessment of proficiency from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) with support from Title VI grants through LAII. This testing provided additional evidence that the vast majority of students (i.e. 89%) are attaining the student learning outcomes that have been defined by the Department. In addition to the assessment of lower division courses, the Department also engages in program-level assessment for the B.A. in Spanish, the M.A. in Spanish and Portuguese, and the Ph.D. in Spanish. For each program, Student Learning Outcomes have been defined and appropriate assessments have been developed.

The Department's annual assessment activities have resulted in a number of actions to address concerns and improve the curriculum. For example, both the SSL and SHL programs have received internal grants, such as "Infusing Writing Through the Spanish Language 100-200 Curricula" and "Developing and Assessing Pedagogical Materials for SPAN 111 and 112."

Considerations/Challenges: The Department notes that there have been some deficiencies in reporting assessments results for the B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. programs, but has proposed a new three-year cycle of assessment which should address this issue.

4. Students – Met

Strengths: The graduate students in Spanish the review team met with were enthusiastic about their programs and committed teachers of their undergraduate courses. In addition, we especially commend the national and international recruitment of graduate students by the Hispanic Linguistics program through a specialized web page and campus visits of top candidates and encourage the other graduate program tracks to enhance their graduate recruitment in similar ways.

Considerations/Challenges: A major shortcoming involves the workloads and the stipends for graduate assistants, making the Program less competitive nationally than it has the potential to be. Summer teaching support and funding for participation in national and international scholarly conferences is imperative for graduate students. Also discussed was the possibility of finding outside funding that would provide all incoming doctoral students with a modest but symbolic amount of startup funds. For example, Arizona State, one of UNM's peer institutions, provides \$500 during the first semester for all incoming doctoral students in Spanish.

The review team also met with two very dissatisfied graduate students in Portuguese. One alleged poor advice from his/her mentor and the other the intimidation that stems from having only two faculty members in Portuguese who have a personal relationship that keeps students from being frank with one about problems with the other. Yet, one of the students was quite dithyrambic as regards his/her experiences in the Portuguese program.

5. Faculty – Met+

The Review Committee finds that the faculty in general meets expectations admirably and, indeed, wishes to assign an M+ designation for this rubric.

As outlined in the introduction, the particular strengths of the Program lie with Southwest Studies, Spanish Heritage Language, and Hispanic Linguistics. All three of these components (although in descending order: the first more than the last) dovetail to enhance teaching and research with respect to the unique socio-historic and cultural circumstances of New Mexico with reference to centuries-old Hispanic roots and concomitant identities, the continued prevalence of the Spanish language and the awareness of the need to contribute to its preservation and unique contributions to the self-image of the state of New Mexico, and the role of Hispanic linguistics in overall international importance of the Spanish language as, along with English, one of the two truly global languages of the contemporary era. While Southwest Studies is squarely centered on the cultural traditions of the state of New Mexico, Heritage language studies principally, although not necessarily exclusively, involves the Spanish of the state and the Southwest in general. Hispanic linguistics is not primarily focused on the Spanish of the state or the Southwest, but on its international status as a global language of enormously complex diversity. Thus, although these three programs are not exactly co-terminus, they share a

synergetic overlap that promotes communication among the various faculty members involved. Concomitantly, the solidarity within the three components and the shared commitments among them contribute to a notably united front for the Program that will ensure solid leadership for the future of the Program. Yet it is important to note that there is a possible negative consequence arising from program solidarity, and that is the way in which such a unified front may make it difficult to accept constructive criticism from those outside the group.

Special note should be taken of hires with the past 8-10 years and the impressive level of productivity that these individuals have been successful in maintaining, thereby providing name recognition for the Program as a whole, but also for the unique branding in socio-historic and cultural embeddedness enjoyed by the overlapping three components that we have identified as especially unique to the Program. Their combined activities unquestionably represent a model of collegiality.

However, shortcomings do exist, and they require effective address.

There is an imbalance in rank distribution, and it appears that the, with the beginning of AY 2017-18, the Department will have only one full professor and, aside from non-tenure-track faculty, everyone else as the associate professor level. Such a model is untenable, both for immediate and future leadership, and it is therefore imperative that proactive efforts be made not only to mentor all associate professors along the due course to promotion, but also that those with exceptional promise be considered for so-called early promotion.

The Portuguese/Brazilian Studies component of the Program currently consists of two tenure-track faculty members, both of whom are solid scholars with recognized reputations. Portuguese has long been a valued component of the Program, reflective of the long relationship between the two languages and cultures in the Iberian Peninsula and in the American conquest and colonization. Internationally, Spanish and Portuguese are customarily—and productively—intertwined, and there is an enormous current emphasis being placed on the academic integration of the two languages and the teaching and research components they represent. Thus, there is every reason to ensure that the historical presence of Portuguese/Brazilian Studies as a component of the Program does not falter. Yet, there presently exists a cluster of conflictual relations between faculty and graduate students that beg for prompt resolution.

Of considerable importance is the medical Spanish component of the Program. Such a component has enormous import in the current Spanish-language teaching profession, and it is of exceptional importance as regards the community embeddedness, both on the local and state levels, of the UNM Program. It would be regrettable, therefore, that the Program ignore or underplay the need to make a commitment to the pursuit of this component, and resistance in some quarters to its presence in the Program, whether as a major track, a minor track, or a certificate, needs to be addressed. Qualified personnel are already involved in the component, and their role in the Program needs to be confirmed and promoted. Indeed, medical Spanish constitutes an important revenue source for the Program that cannot be downplayed. This would involve both due professional respect for the personnel and the recognition of their importance through the utilization of appropriate personnel classification, such as clinical assistant professor or something similar.

6. Resources and Planning – Met with Concerns

Strengths: Like other departments at UNM, Spanish and Portuguese is doing an excellent job with strained resources due to UNM funding difficulties. Of special note is that the website is in great shape and superiorly up to date.

Considerations/Challenges: The department, however, is woefully understaffed with only a Department Administrator, Administrative Assistant, and Graduate Academic Advisor. Due to the confluence of hiring restrictions and the Administrative Assistant position have first been advertised as a temporary position, this Admin II position is being threatened with cancellation. This cancellation, which could happen as soon as April 2017, would be especially detrimental to the lower division language programs and the department's web presence, a presence that is vital to help attract students to the program.

As also mentioned in section 4 above, graduate workloads and stipends are not competitive and make recruitment difficult.

The department elaborates in the APR document on a very democratic governance structure. Nevertheless, issues have been raised with regard to administrative transparency, communications, and decision making process. The department could address this issue in the series of retreats suggested in section 9.

7. Facilities – Met

Strengths: Even though the Department is spread across all four floors of Ortega Hall, in general, facilities are adequate for both teaching and research needs. Administrative offices are on the 2nd floor; faculty and TA offices are on the 3rd and 4th floors. Computer and information infrastructure is adequate. Of note is the Language Learning Lab, effectively used, in part through collaboration with other units, such as the Department of Foreign Language and Literatures. It is a cultural and linguistic hub outfitted with fairly up to date equipment. Additionally, there is the Spanish Linguistic Laboratory that houses the NMCROSS corpus and that will receive new computers with psycholinguist and statistic software.

The University library was singled out for praise for its response to scholarly needs of both students and faculty, including through interlibrary loan.

Considerations/Challenges:

Ortega Hall is serviceable but not a prize. The restroom facilities should be updated to be compliant with recent regulations.

8. Program Comparisons - Met

UNM's Program compares favorably to identified peer institutions, and as a consequence merits an M designation.

Once again, the primary basis for such a favorable comparison lies with the three previously identified pillar components of the Program, and any attempt to promote the Program in the Spanish-language profession in the United States will inevitably return to these three pillars.

Another point of favorable comparison is the integration between the Spanish and Portuguese components, with special note taken of the dual M.A. the Program provides.

Although currently problematically situated in the Program, the medical Spanish component is particularly noteworthy and, properly nurtured, has the potential to be a distinctive component in the matter of program comparisons.

9. Future Directions – Met

The Program has done an exemplary job in identifying strengths, challenges, and solutions for its components. Maximization of current patterns of solidarity and collegiality will continue to make possible positive progress in contemplating and effecting future directions for the Program.

Our recommendation would be to continue this planning effort with a series of retreats to address, among other things, the improved integration of the components of the department. This would involve defining their own perceived identity, along with the bases for their contribution to the overall goals of the Program.

Of considerable importance is the pursuit of cross-campus connections, especially with reference to the Brazilian Studies and Iberian Studies components of the Program. Such connections would enhance productive inter- and multi-disciplinarity (more present at this time in Brazilian than in Iberian studies) and would contribute to their relative enrollment strengths. Iberian Studies in particular is concerned over the matter of attracting students (who might think first and foremost of Southwest Studies or Latin American Studies options). The pursuit of cross-campus connections and the development of certificate options may well increase interest in Iberian Studies and strengthen the already significant presence of Portuguese/Brazilian Studies in the Program.

While we recognize that recommendations for faculty hires may not be the most productive role of the Review Committee, we are nevertheless compelled to do so here in the context of the imbalance in ranks in the Program and, specifically, the dearth of full professors. Thus, we recommend a senior hire in one of the three pillars of strength in the Program we have noted throughout this report. In addition to all-important intellectual leadership such an appointment would provide, it would also contribute to some resolution for the impending vacuum in administrative leadership the Program is facing.