

**Program Review Team Report
Department of Foreign Languages
Weber State University**

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Overview of report: We have organized this report according to the university's eight standards for program review. Under each standard, we have noted program strengths and challenges as well as specific recommendations where appropriate. We have numbered these recommendations consecutively throughout the report for ease of reference.

Standard A – Mission Statement

Program Strengths

The department's mission statement, which has been revised since its 2010 review, is clearly articulated and supports the goal of the College of Arts and Humanities to "produce students who are . . . creative and critical . . . communicators," as well as the university mission statement's emphasis on "valuing diversity" and on research and written expression.

Standard B – Curriculum

Program Strengths

The department's curriculum appears to be the result of a planning process that supports program-level learning outcomes. Core courses are offered on a regular basis to allow students to complete the program in a timely manner, with classes available both during the day and evening. Notable strengths of the department include:

- Major and minor programs with the option of traditional, commercial, or teaching emphasis
- Flexible majors that allow students to take up to eight elective courses
- An impressive variety of courses at the upper-division level which faculty members teach in their area of specialty
- The participation of both full-time and adjunct faculty in teaching 1010 courses
- A hybrid model for teaching Span 1010, which has been highly popular with students
- The availability of two upper-division teaching methods courses online

Program Challenges

Due to limitations in numbers of faculty, the department struggles to offer enough courses in French and German to attract students to these majors. Faculty described a “Catch 22” situation in which the department cannot always offer enough courses for students to be confident that they can graduate in a timely manner, and yet cannot hire more faculty to teach these courses due to low enrollments. The department has explored various alternatives, such as changing lower-division courses from 4 to 3 credits so that more students can fit these courses into their schedule, and allowing students to take cross-listed courses such as European Studies, in which they can earn foreign language credit by writing papers in the target language.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Consider expanding opportunities for students to take cross-listed courses. In addition to European Studies, there may be courses in other departments, such as English or History, that deal with French or German literature and culture, in which students could write papers in the target language and possibly even read literature in this language. Another alternative might be for faculty who teach Spanish cinema classes to offer an international cinema course featuring subtitled films in various languages, for which students could earn credit toward a French or German major or minor or a Japanese minor. We recommend that the department continue to explore these options.

Recommendation 2: Consider offering hybrid lower-division courses in languages other than Spanish. Given the popularity of hybrid courses in Spanish, as evidenced by full sections and waiting lists, we suggest the department consider offering hybrid lower-division courses in other languages, especially French and German, to attract more students to these languages. Rather than saddle full-time faculty with the extra work of administering these courses, we recommend hiring additional adjuncts, if necessary, who could collaborate with Spanish faculty that teach hybrid courses. In addition, the department might consider offering hybrid lower-division courses in Japanese, Chinese, and ASL for the benefit of minors and A.A. students, or even in non-degree languages such as Italian and Portuguese. Wherever possible, an effort should be made to avoid scheduling courses in smaller languages at unpopular times, such as early morning hours, in order to maximize enrollments.

Recommendation 3: Consider offering Institutional Certificates in French and German. A certificate in French or German that appears on students’ diplomas, similar to the Spanish certificate, could help attract students to upper-division courses in these languages. This strategy has been used successfully at other universities; for example, BYU’s certificate program, which requires 9 credits (one course each in language, literature, and culture), has significantly increased enrollments in upper-division foreign language courses.

Standard C – Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

Program Strengths

The department has a set of five clearly-articulated learning outcomes for its majors, which are assessed with student portfolios containing direct measures of performance. The assessment system has been periodically modified to improve its functionality. In addition, the department is

in the process of assessing its fourth-semester General Education course. Student performance appears adequate on all but Outcome 4, “Write an analysis of a literary or cultural work in the language,” on which students have not consistently met the 75% threshold established by the department.

Program Challenges

Both full-time and adjunct faculty appear to lack awareness of program learning outcomes. One faculty member stated, “We know learning outcomes exist, but we couldn’t tell you exactly what they are.” This raises questions about faculty members’ ability to articulate learning objectives for specific courses that are aligned with program-level outcomes. The lack of faculty awareness of program goals may explain students’ performance on Outcome 4; in relation to this outcome, the department’s self-study states, “The department will need to better communicate expectations with instructors, and particularly define the kinds of writing expected from students in literature classes and culture classes.”

A related concern is that the portfolio that students assemble in 4990 appears to be somewhat disconnected with from their coursework. Although the portfolio functions adequately as a tool for assessing program-level outcomes, both students and faculty seem unsure how the portfolio fits in with what students do in individual courses. In addition, the structure of 4990 seems to provide little incentive for students to approach the portfolio assignment as an opportunity to showcase their best work. As a result, the full potential for portfolios to serve as a chance for students to reflect on their learning, as well as to provide diagnostic information to faculty members on how to improve teaching, has yet to be realized.

Recommendations

Recommendation 4: Increase faculty investment in learning outcomes. Perhaps in the Fall Retreat, faculty could be involved in helping define the writing assignments in literature and culture courses, with an eye to Outcomes 2 through 5. In addition, the department may want to explore ways of increasing involvement of all faculty members in assessing students’ writing. Attention should also be given to helping faculty articulate learning objectives for individual courses that align with program-level learning outcomes.

Recommendation 5: Consider reconceptualizing student portfolios as a learning tool. In addition to serving as a capstone assessment, portfolios could serve as a tool for helping students work toward program outcomes. Portfolios could be introduced to students at the time they declare the major, along with an explanation of their purpose and the learning outcomes for which they are intended to provide evidence. Throughout their coursework, faculty could help students select and polish samples of writing assignments for inclusion in the portfolio. In 4990, students could be asked to reflect on why they chose certain artifacts to include in their portfolios, as well as on how their skills have developed throughout their time in the major. Such an approach would encourage both faculty and students to attend to learning outcomes, as well as avoid a last-minute scramble to upload papers in 4990 and eliminate any doubt as to the authorship of papers. Portfolios could also serve as a showcase of students’ work when they apply for jobs or graduate school.

Standard D – Academic Advising

Program Strengths

Academic advisement is a particular strength of the program. Faculty members advise students in their specialty areas, and students are now required to consult with a faculty advisor before declaring a major or minor. A college-level academic advisor provides advisement on choosing a major, fulfilling general education requirements, and qualifying for graduation. Faculty advisement loads appear manageable, and students appear quite satisfied with the advisement they receive.

Standard E – Faculty

Program Strengths

Faculty members are well qualified academically and committed to the program. Most appear passionate about teaching. Faculty members exhibit considerable diversity, with a high proportion of women and native speakers of the language that they teach. Training and support are provided for faculty members, including a new faculty retreat and an annual departmental retreat addressing methods of language teaching. Appropriate procedures are in place for the regular review of faculty members and for student evaluation of courses. Particular strengths of the department include the following:

- All full-time faculty, as well as some adjuncts, have attended training workshops on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and Oral Proficiency Interview. Such a uniform level of professional development is rare among foreign language faculty at other universities, and contributes to a strong orientation toward developing students' language proficiency.
- Adjunct faculty members are unusually well qualified in terms of academic preparation, professional experience, and longevity in the department.
- Recently-hired faculty members report receiving excellent mentoring.
- Students regularly say they develop strong relationships with faculty members.

Program Challenges

The department has lost a full-time faculty slot in French since its 2010 review. As a result, one faculty member in French runs all the major, minor, and AA programs, and another faculty member must teach lower-division French in addition to running the German program. Consequently, faculty in these languages have a large number of course preparations, and students are often exposed to the perspectives of only one faculty member.

Recommendation 6: Strategically plan for maintenance and growth of language programs.

We recommend that as part of the department's long-term strategic plan, attention be given both to maintaining adequate numbers of students to sustain its current majors and minors, as well as anticipating potential growth in other languages such as ASL and Chinese. Based on factors such as changes in numbers of returning LDS missionaries and students coming from dual language immersion programs, the department will need to allocate its resources so as to best meet the changing demand for majors, minors, and individual courses in various languages.

Standard F – Program Support

Program Strengths

The program is strong in terms of the numbers and capabilities of support staff. Staff include a department administrative assistant; a student aide who coordinates credit examinations; a college advisor for majors; a librarian for the Humanities; and a technical support team. In addition, instructional facilities and resources are excellent, with computers, DVD players and digital projectors in every classroom, as well as a fully-equipped Language Learning Center and Computer Lab.

Although the review team found the program to be strong overall in terms of support, the following suggestions were made by support staff and faculty:

- Increase library resources related to foreign language pedagogy
- Provide ASL materials in the language lab to give students an opportunity to practice signing outside class time
- Bring new students to the library for an orientation on how to conduct research in and about foreign languages

Standard G – Relationships with External Communities

Program Strengths

The program is unusually strong in its relationships with external communities. The department offers several courses with a Community Engaged Learning component, at least one of which is typically offered each semester. Examples of collaborative efforts with the local community include students of Medical Spanish providing translation services at local hospitals; Chinese students volunteering in local immersion classrooms; a German Language Day for high school students; a Spanish spelling bee for 4th to 8th grade students; and an ASL partnership with Davis Applied Technology College. Many of these activities also aid in the department's recruitment efforts. In addition to local activities, the department offers study abroad programs in six countries.

Standard H – Program Summary

The review team concluded that the department has adequately addressed the recommendations from its 2010 review. Among the actions taken by the department are a revision of its mission statement, a concerted effort to increase enrollments, and the collection of assessment data from FL 3060. For recommendations on which no action was taken, the department has provided reasonable justifications. Although the department lost a tenure-track faculty member, contrary to the 2010 recommendations, this issue was largely beyond the department's control.

General Recommendations

In addition to the above comments, the review team offers the following suggestions:

Recommendation 7: Study the effects of having changed lower-division courses from 4 to 3 credits. Although scheduling these courses only three days a week has apparently made it easier for students to fit the courses into their schedules, some faculty perceive that the change has resulted in decreased language proficiency, and that it is more difficult to teach all of the content that students need. In addition, review team members expressed concerns about making such a change for purely practical reasons, especially when the same courses are worth 4 credits at all other state universities. We encourage the department to examine the effects of this change on students' language proficiency, as well as on whether it has, in fact, increased enrollments.

Recommendation 8: Improve the department website. It appears that neither the AA degrees nor the Institutional Certificate in Spanish are mentioned on the department website, and only brief mention is made of the availability of courses in ASL, Chinese, Italian, and Portuguese. In addition, photographs of faculty members are of varying size and quality, and some are missing. We would suggest the following modifications to the website:

- Create links to information about the AA degrees and the Spanish certificate.
- Create a section with separate links to information on course offerings in ASL, Chinese, Italian, and Portuguese.
- Verify that links to important information about all degree and certificate programs and languages are easily accessible from the department's home page.
- Consider engaging a photographer to take updated photos of all faculty members for the website. (We understand that access to a photographer may be available through the Dean's office).
- Utilize the University Communications Department for assistance in updating the website.

We believe these modifications could improve access to information and potentially aid in efforts to recruit students to the department's programs and courses.