

Dean's Response to the Foreign Language Program Review
Scott Sprenger, Dean of the Lindquist College of Arts & Humanities
May 6, 2020

I have carefully reviewed the Program Review Report of the Department of Foreign Languages and the Departmental Response, prepared by Sally Shigley (WSU, English), Jeff Steagall (WSU, Economics) and Ray Clifford (BYU, Language Center Director). My purpose in this document is to add the dean's office perspective on the analysis and departmental response.

First, let me say that the Foreign Language Department has a creative and proactive chair; the department is actively seeking to improve the curriculum and student experience; the faculty have found interesting ways in recent years to maintain the department's literary and liberal arts traditions while building career pathways for students. The department has taken many of the necessary steps to position its programs for long-term vibrancy and sustainability.

As for the review team: the three members are of the highest caliber and have both academic and professional interests in foreign languages. Ray Clifford, in particular, is one of the top researchers in language acquisition internationally and he comes with a wealth of experience in program design and review. I say this to underscore the credibility that the team brings to the review process and in their generally positive review of the department.

I agree with the overall assessment of the Program Review, both in their observations of strengths and weaknesses, and in their recommendations for improvement. Rather than reiterate point-by-point all of the strengths, weaknesses and remedies, let me briefly touch on a few key areas:

Recommendations

- 1. Enrollment.** The smaller programs have historically had some challenges with enrollments, following national downward trends, but also because of personnel instabilities and turnover. There has been a trend upward of late due to improved recruitment and retention efforts, curricular updates with a career focus, improved internship possibilities and, in general, heightened focus on strategic planning around enrollment. The department is on an upward swing overall and positioned to grow in the future once we get past the C-19 uncertainties. In response to the comments on Mandarin: the new Senior International Officer, Yimin Wang, has found a good, low-cost solution for instructors. Given that the pipelines of DLI students in Mandarin (but also Spanish and French) who will be coming soon to Utah campuses, enrollments should pick up, especially if we design interdisciplinary career paths with

other colleges (health professions, business, education, criminal justice, etc.).

2. **Technology.** Keeping up with technologies, such as up-to-date language labs and relevant software is a challenge given the lack of college-level or departmental capital equipment budgets. At the same time, the department has been wisely generating funds (via course fees) to cover replacement costs. The dean's office, with the assistance of the college director of advancement, has also raised private funding to assist with tech purchases, in particular with the installation of a brand new language lab in fall 2019. Now that the department is offering translation studies and localization programs, the technology needs are likely to increase. We should budget for these costs. But we should also not be shy about asking for donations from members of the professional advisory board, especially members like David Utrilla or Aaron Alder, who have access to free industry resources.
3. **Adjuncts.** This challenge was adequately addressed by the review team and responded to by the department.
4. **Learning Outcomes.** This challenge was adequately addressed by the review team and responded to by the department. This is an area that needs constant attention and revision as we close the loop on student learning and reflect on missing elements in the curriculum, in pedagogical approaches or in technical resources.
5. **Study abroad.** Study abroad is a challenge at Weber State due to cost and the inability of many students to leave their families and jobs. Given the value of study abroad as a transformative experience not only for language learning but global competency, it would be worthwhile to devote time to thinking through fundraising or other creative solutions to this challenge. As for returned missionaries, the higher value experience for them is international internships rather than a traditional study abroad. This too should be added to the strategic plan for future action in order to cultivate this unique Utah resource of returned missionaries.
6. **Scholarship.** I agree with the reviewers that scholarship should be added to the strategic plan and better emphasized in order to move faculty in a timely manner through the ranks. On the complaints about faculty development funding, I understand the frustration, but believe that there is a misunderstanding. Three key points, for example, are missing in the commentary: 1) Annual development funding -- a very limited resource -- was actually **increased** 25% from \$1000 to \$1250 two years ago. This increase was in direct response to faculty suggestions. The point is not mentioned in the report. 2) The decision to encourage faculty to publish an article after 4 years of inactivity was not a unilateral decision; it was taken by the council of chairs based on the idea that a published article after 4 years of inactivity is more useful to encourage faculty advancement through the

ranks; 3) The decision was taken in order to remedy a couple of problems simultaneously, including generating funds for the increase from \$1000 to \$1250 and to align faculty scholarly activity with the PPM requirement of 1 publication for every review period.

7. **Strategic planning.** I understand the reviewers' criticisms of the departmental strategic plan and especially the missing element of KPIs. These plans are only two years old and were generated quickly in response to a provost's initiative. Now that the department has a better sense of the direction it wants to go and the resources needed to achieve the strategic goals, it is perhaps a good time to add KPIs and think more carefully about a strategic deployment of existing resources to reach those indicators. I think that one of the big challenges going forward will be to figure out if the department wants to keep all of the language offerings or to allocate resources to key growth areas. The department will also need to figure out the place of DLI and its future for the department, college and university. DLI has potential to attract new stream of students, but only if thought about in advance and strategically.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on the review process. It is clear that the department is deeply committed to student learning and is actively executing on a strategic plan that delivers on the WSU, A&H College and Departmental missions.

Sincerely,
Scott Sprenger
Scott Sprenger