

To: Isabel Asensio, Chair Foreign Languages

Three reviewers (Sally Bishop Shigley, WSU English, Jeff Steagall, WSU Economics, and Ray Clifford, BYU Director of Language Programs) met with faculty, students, and associated programs of the Weber State Department of Foreign Languages, February 26, 2020. The review team was impressed by many aspects of the department.

The following is our assessment of strengths, weaknesses, needs, and opportunities in the department.

The strengths of the Department of Foreign Languages are as follows:

Collegiality and unity of purpose are the positive hallmarks of this department. The faculty respect each others' work and support creativity and flexibility in curriculum design. Faculty and students appreciate the ability to offer new electives that match student and faculty interests. The department chair and the associate dean echoed this support, praising the faculty for ingenuity and response to student needs. Students who were interviewed feel supported by the faculty both in class and in advising situations. They find the faculty accessible, knowledgeable, and fair in their advice and assessment.

The faculty are dedicated to making the language learning experience relevant and successful for students both during their studies and after they leave the university for jobs or graduate schools. This is especially true of the localization and translation programs and the internships available for all department majors. The department is also working to provide students with formal credentials (e.g., certificates, minors, majors) that can help them demonstrate competency in the job market.

A number of students were very grateful that the faculty is particularly sensitive to all the versions of Spanish that are spoken in the world: students appreciate that there doesn't seem to be a hierarchy of regional variants or accents and that all Spanish is treated equally, noting that this openness leads them to learn more types of Spanish than they otherwise might.

The department has formed an advisory board, many of whose members are prominent in local industry and the community. In further reports we encourage the department to list board members and their affiliations and relationships with the department. We also encourage the department to make full use of the talents on the board, using them to advise on curriculum and program design.

The language Bridge program along with the DLI and concurrent enrollment work are vigorous and popular programs. This kind of innovation and outreach is consonant with the department's goals for growth. We encourage them to continue to reach out to high school students.

The department should be lauded for the success in achieving thresholds of the learning outcomes 1-3: speaking and listening proficiency, writing ability, and writing in different styles.

The adjunct faculty with whom we spoke said that they felt supported in their teaching and that full-time faculty were willing to share ideas and curriculum, which the adjuncts found very helpful. Adjunct faculty also expressed appreciation that they are invited to attend and participate in meetings, such as the department opening meeting at the beginning of each academic year.

The challenges facing the department are as follows:

Enrollment is the main challenge. It is noteworthy that all department faculty seem to understand this challenge and exhibit a willingness to work hard to achieve growth. We recognize the department's awareness of the need for growth, but we encourage them to stay the course and keep executing their plan for recruitment and retention of both faculty and students, especially in French, German, and Mandarin. We recognize the extra advising, curricular, and extracurricular work that faculty are doing in the smaller programs to keep them together, and we hope they will keep perusing new faculty lines.

Students expressed some frustration with the Mandarin program in recent semesters, citing the turnover in faculty, lack of articulation between classes, and faculty members' lack of knowledge of student proficiency as the main problems. As the department grows, we encourage you to think about the role that Mandarin might play, especially in conjunction with possible minors or certificates that would be attractive to the Goddard School of Business and the wider Northern Utah community.

All faculty interviewed reiterated frustration with the tension between publishing in order to meet promotion, tenure, and post-tenure publishing and the need in the smaller language programs to do an extraordinary amount of service and advising in addition to full teaching loads (4/4). One serious concern is the lack of adequate funding to support a full-fledged scholarly program (e.g., conference fees and travel). Faculty also expressed concern about the new requirement from the dean that repeated conference presentations without a resulting publication can lead to the withdrawal of even the meager funding available. Faculty noted that attending and participating in conferences helps them to keep their courses and pedagogies current.

Recommendations for change include:

Students, faculty and the technology specialist expressed concern that the technology (particularly the computers) in the classrooms needs to be updated. Students in the localization and translation program were especially concerned that they could only use required Trados software while they were in the lab. On occasions when they cannot finish the in-class assignments with Trados, they are unable to complete the work on their own. Since Trados is only available on university-controlled computers, the university may have to increase the number of concurrent users authorized in its site license.

The website for the department is outdated. For example, it does not reflect the most current personnel and happenings in the department. Students also expressed frustration with its lack of organization. We understand that a major remodel of the website is in place, although nobody seems clear about the timeframe for completion. We suggest that you keep in touch with the CAH marketing director and, if necessary, the dean to prioritize renovation of the site. Additionally, both administrative staff and students remarked that the process used to buy credits is not intuitive and needs to be streamlined. Ideally, it would be possible to buy credits through the new website. We encourage the department to revisit the process and try to make it easier for students and staff.

Adjunct faculty suggested that observations of their teaching might be done on a more regular, rotating basis and that the feedback be provided in writing. They value the feedback that they have received in the past. However, they don't want the observations to become too intrusive or frequent. Once per semester or once per year for seasoned adjuncts is likely appropriate.

Learning Outcomes 4 and 5 showed lower assessment scores than the first three. We suggest creating a rubric that allows faculty and students to see what constitutes an appropriate artifact for these LOs.

Faculty should also be trained on how to ensure their students know how to select appropriate artifacts of each type. In addition, faculty might investigate using WSU's new Portfolium platform to help students collect artifacts as they produce them, rather than having to find them in their files during their final terms at WSU.

Study abroad is stated as a major department initiative, but study abroad numbers seem relatively low, if that is the case. We encourage the department to specify goals, metrics/thresholds, timelines, financial resources required and responsible persons in the strategic plan to maximize the impact of its study abroad programs.

Scholarship is not mentioned in the current version of the mission statement. Moreover, the list of scholarship included in the self-study includes items, such as teaching presentations and teaching awards, that are not normally considered scholarship. Therefore, and also in response to faculty frustrations about finding time and financial support for certain kinds of scholarship, we encourage the department to amend its mission statement to identify explicitly the kinds of scholarship that the department excels in and values – and how that scholarship supports its mission within the context of WSU's mission as a teaching university..

Finally, we encourage the department to implement a long-range strategic plan listing goals, metrics, thresholds for success, timelines, required resources, and responsible parties for accomplishing the goals. Goals are already in place, but according to best practice in strategic planning, the lack of information about the other factors such as resource constraints and success metrics, typically leads to the inability to achieve goals..

It was delightful to interact with your department. Please feel free to contact us with questions.

Sally Bishop Shigley, English, Chair

Jeff Steagall, Economics

Ray Clifford, BYU