

**Assessment Findings and Curricular Improvements
Department of Modern Languages and Literatures
MA and PhD Programs in Spanish**

The Department of Modern Languages uses the following measures to assess departmental learning outcomes:

- Grades, portfolios and course evaluations in ML 521
- Comprehensive exams at the MA and PhD level
- Annual review of student progression through the program

Assessment Findings

Principles and Practices of Foreign Language Teaching Discussion

The Department of Modern Languages and Literatures admits a small cohort each year (usually 3-4 students) for studies at the MA and PhD level. The program does not currently have any course that is designated as a “gateway” course; however students entering with a teaching fellowship are required to take ML 521 Principles and Practices of Foreign Language Teaching. The course is not a requirement for students who will not be teaching in our program, and in rare cases the department has accepted an equivalent course taken at another institution. While grades and student evaluations for this course have been examined, the practical and pedagogical focus of the course, and the fact that it is conducted in English to accommodate students interested in teaching other modern languages, make it a less than ideal predictor of student success in the overall program. Student grades for the course are based on a combination of coursework, exams, the presentation of a teaching portfolio, and evaluation of teaching (using both direct observation and video). Of the 24 students admitted to the MA or PhD program in Spanish between Fall 2000 and Fall 2007, 22 have taken ML 521. All of these students exhibited very good to excellent performance with all grades falling in the A through B+ range. 64% received an A, 32% an A- and 5% a B+.

Because student persistence in graduate studies in the department is extremely high—only one student has left the program and a second, who failed comprehensive exams will return next semester to retake them—one is tempted to surmise that the high grades in this course reflect the seriousness of purpose and academic caliber of the students and faculty in the program.

MA Comprehensive Exams and Progression

Of the 16 students matriculating in the MA program between Fall 2000 and Fall 2007, 14 students have or will have completed MA course requirements and have taken or will have taken MA comprehensive exams by Spring 2009. One student withdrew from the program, and one student failed the comprehensive exams and is currently making arrangements to retake those exams in the near future. The department considers completion of the MA within four or five semesters to be good progress. Thus, 88% of matriculated students have successfully completed

the program in that time frame and the overall persistence of admitted students in the MA program is 94%.

PhD Comprehensive Exams and Progression:

Of the 14 students admitted into the PhD program between Fall 2000 and Fall 2007 (inclusive), 8 were holders of MA's from other institutions and 6 came out of our own MA program. 11 of these students have taken their PhD comprehensives. One failed and is now making arrangements to retake them. The pass rate for the graduate comprehensives is thus 91%.

Departmental expectations about how quickly students should proceed from the MA to the completion of doctoral work and doctoral comprehensives varies, and students receive extensive advising at this stage, taking into account the student's future plans, weaknesses that need to be addressed, the need for additional training in research languages, and other factors. However, the vast majority of students are able to complete the additional course requirements for the PhD in two to four semesters. Persistence in the PhD program from matriculation into the program to the completion of comprehensive exams has been at 100%.

6 of the students passing the doctoral comprehensives during this time were admitted to candidacy; 2 have already completed their dissertations. 6 of the 15 students who entered into the MA program are continuing (or have completed) the department's PhD program. 7 students holding MA's from other institutions were admitted directly to the PhD program. Of these, 2 have already completed their degree and the others continue to progress in the program.

Other measures:

Although the department has not kept statistics, student presentation of scholarly papers at national and regional conferences provides additional evidence of student achievement and program success. In recent years, students have presented research—done either in tandem with department faculty or under their guidance—at many conferences, including those sponsored by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and its Northeast branch (NECTFL), Northeast Modern Language Association (NEMLA), the Kentucky Foreign Language Conference and the Middle East Studies Association conference. Students have been awarded outside grants, including dissertation research funding from the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture, and prestigious internships, including one at the Hispanic Division of the Library of Congress. Our graduates (and indeed, even students who have not yet completed the program) have enjoyed enormous success in the job market, easily landing jobs in secondary and post-secondary education.

Discussion:

The review of enrollment, examination, and graduation data reveals a very high level of student persistence and success. Because of the small and close-knit nature of the department, in which students work closely with faculty members both as their teachers and as their supervisors for language teaching, faculty can follow student progress readily and provide advice and support as necessary. Nevertheless, discussions undertaken by the Spanish faculty in the crafting of program statements and this outcomes and assessments review has prompted the establishment of a new procedure to review student progress and academic strengths and weaknesses in a more systematic fashion. A panel of faculty will solicit input from all Spanish faculty and then meet

with the student to discuss his or her progress. It is expected that such a procedure will also aid the department in continuously evaluating course offerings.

Faculty are also currently reviewing certain programmatic details, concerning comprehensive exams, such as possible changes to its format, changes to the reading list and the possible addition of an oral component. A number of alternate proposals are currently under consideration, with the aim of better equipping students to do research in a fast-moving and increasingly fragmented field.

One aspect of the program that is difficult to assess with the data currently under consideration pertains to progress to degree after the successful completion of PhD comprehensives. Although students are encouraged to move expeditiously towards submitting a dissertation prospectus, in practice this can take as long as 5 or 6 semesters, which significantly slows progress towards the degree. Many factors are responsible for this delay, but chief among them for the vast majority of students is a move to full-time employment outside of CUA—either because CUA funding has run out or because other institutions can offer more generous terms of employment.