SPANISH AND LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

Review Process

The Department has been reviewed three times since it was established - twice at Senate’s request in 1982 and 1987, and once in 2003 as a result of the University of Waterloo’s (UW’s) undergraduate program review process. The 2003 review team was extremely favourable to the Department, especially its success in teaching, although it was noted that the heavy teaching and service workload could prove to be a detriment to research output and overall departmental morale.

The present self-study was prepared by the Chair of the Department. All regular faculty members had the opportunity to review and comment on the document.

The self-study for this review was submitted 5 July, 2011; the site visit occurred 20 and 21 October, 2011; the review team’s report was submitted 31 October, 2011; and the Department’s and Dean’s response was received 18 January, 2012.

Characteristics of the Program

Historical Overview

In the 53 years since its establishment, as a program (1958) and later as a Department (1979), UW’s Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies (S+LAS) has steadily gained strength, credibility, and respect as a program.

In 1958, Spanish, French, and Italian formed the Department of Romance Languages. Early in the piece, Spanish developed a major and an Honours program. In 1964, French separated and the Department was renamed the Department of Spanish and Italian. In 1967/68, the University Calendar listed four faculty members of Spanish and one of Italian. In 1968, there were more changes when the Department of Classics and Modern Languages was created. By this time, there were 24 courses offered in Spanish by four faculty members.

In 1979, when French Studies and Classical Studies each formed its own Department, Spanish was allowed to become a Department on the understanding that its program would be mounted jointly with the Spanish unit at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU). Today, S+LAS at UW still works in conjunction with the Spanish section in the Department of Languages and Literatures at WLU. Without this co-operation S+LAS would not be able to offer a complete Honours program with its current faculty complement.

In order to meet teaching targets, the Department ventured into the offering of Spanish courses by Distance Education. In 1981, it also began offering the Spanish/Applied Studies co-op program in order to serve students better by preparing them for the work place. However, the Department has never attracted many co-op students since it only offers high- demand Spanish courses in the spring term. In 1981, the faculty complement was reduced to three by the untimely death of a faculty member.

The Senate reviews were carried out in 1982 and 1987 and the results were favourable.

With the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993, Spanish became one of the most requested languages by students.

The last major change occurred in 1994 when the Department of Spanish became the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies.
In 1999, the Department received an additional faculty member. There has been no addition to the faculty complement in S+LAS since then.

There are 29 institutions offering a BA in Spanish in Canada. UW is one of 16 institutions only offering the undergraduate degree in Spanish. S+LAS at UW, with a full-time faculty complement of four, falls into the category of a small Hispanic Studies Department in Canada. Departments of similar size can be found at Dalhousie, McMaster, Montreal, Ottawa, Trent, and Victoria. Western and York are larger with nine faculty members and Toronto is the largest with 17 faculty members.

Even though the Sixth Decade Plan for UW calls for the creation of graduate programs in all UW Departments, there would be many challenges to overcome to create and manage a MA degree with only four faculty members.

**Program Objectives**

The mission of the Department is to provide an academic environment and a specialized body of knowledge designated to equip students with practical, cultural, and language skills through the development of the intellectual and personal capacities necessary to comprehend thoughts and situations, and to communicate and interact effectively with speakers of the Spanish world.

In the area of teaching the Department strives to acquaint the student with the historical forces, various philosophical contributions, and the aesthetic values in art and literature of the Hispanic world.

The programs and courses offered are in general alignment with the OCAV UDLEs. Indeed, the four learning outcomes for S+LAS are consistent with UW’s UDLEs and include: Spanish language skills; communication skills; research methods; and concepts of Hispanic literature and culture. In more detail, these comprise:

*Spanish Language Skills.* By the end of the degree, students will be able to:

- demonstrate a sophisticated degree of proficiency in the use of the Spanish language in both formal and informal situations, orally and in written form;
- participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world.

*Communications Skills.* By the end of the degree, students will be able to:

- articulate arguments clearly and reliably and analyse both orally and in written form to a wide range of audiences;
- evaluate the use of language to convey meaning, to inform, and to persuade.

*Research Methods.* By the end of the degree, students will be able to:

- demonstrate competence in the use of library resources such as online databases and catalogues;
- gather, synthesize, and evaluate information;
- evaluate the appropriateness and quality of critical sources;
- demonstrate competence in the use of professional writing guidelines.

*Concepts of Hispanic Literature and Culture.* By the end of the degree, students will be able to:

- analyse and critique a variety of Hispanic literary and cultural texts;
- recognise the impact of cultural production on society;
- work with a broad and concrete knowledge base of Hispanic literary and cultural traditions to integrate and develop new concepts and ideas;
- empathise with the Hispanic “Other” and demonstrate a complex understanding of the multicultural nature of the world.

**Academic Programs Offered**

At the time of the review the following plans were offered by S+LAS:

- Three-year General BA in Spanish;
- Four-year General BA in Spanish;
- Honours BA in Spanish;
- Joint Honours BA in Spanish with Department X;
- Honours BA in Spanish (Arts and Business, co-op and regular);
- Minor in Spanish;
- Specialization in Spanish/English Translation;
- Specialization in Latin American Literatures and Cultures;
- Option in Spanish/English Translation;
- Option in Latin American Literatures and Cultures;
- Diploma in Spanish/English Translation;
- Certificate in Spanish Language – Level I;
- Certificate in Spanish Language – Level II.

Overall, the Department offers the following courses in Spanish: two at the 100-level; 12 at the 200-level of which five are offered at WLU by WLU; 20 at the 300-level of which nine are offered by WLU at WLU; and 18 400-level courses of which eight are offered at WLU by WLU.

**Students**

Like most programs in the Faculty of Arts at UW, S+LAS is a second entry program.

Over the seven year period, 2004/05 to 2010/11 inclusive, 42 students registered in S+LAS in the fall term of year two; on average six each year. All of the 42, but three, were registered in the Honours plan. Few entered the co-op stream. Of the 42, 87% were female and 20% were international students.

The high school grades of students entering S+LAS in fall term of second year ranged from 70% to 94% with most students in the range of 80% to 84%.

Over the period 2004/05 to 2010/11 inclusive, the annual average number of student FTEs enrolled in the Department was five co-op and 59 regular students. The regular student FTEs reached a high of 85 in 2007/08 and fell to a low of 38 in 2010/11.

Over the last three terms, 1,050 students, many from other Departments and other Faculties, enrolled in Spanish courses. The use of upper-year undergraduates as teaching assistants in the first-year courses is commended by the review team, although more training and direction would be appreciated by the students. The average class size of the 100-level course sections was 45; 200-level courses averaged 18 students; 300-level courses averaged 14 students; and 400-level courses averaged eight students.
S+LAS students are eligible for Faculty of Arts scholarship support, both at the entrance and upper-year levels. In addition, the Department offers a number of scholarships and prizes.

Through the Department study-abroad program, students can spend one to two terms in Madrid studying at the Universidad Antonio de Nebrija. In addition, students in the Spanish/English Translation plan have the opportunity to study at the University of Holguín in Cuba.

The attrition rate between years two and three is low, averaging 6.5% over the period 2002/03 to 2008/09 inclusive.

Over the period 2003 to 2009, 81 students, of whom 16% were on the Dean’s Honours List, received degrees in Spanish. Most of these students graduated in four years since few are in the co-op stream.

Students, on convocation, regularly pursue graduate work. Others pursue careers in teaching, business, translation, or work for international government agencies.

Over the last seven years, three graduates from S+LAS have been named Faculty of Arts’ Valedictorian. In addition, in 2011, one of the Department’s graduates received the UW Governor General’s Medal for undergraduates. The Department clearly attracts some outstanding students.

The students the review team met were extremely pleased with their program and the support and guidance they received. The review team commented on the sound preparation of the students, noting that “UW Spanish graduates who have gone on to further studies at the MA and PhD levels are of a very high caliber. The faculty of the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies are to be commended on the efforts they have invested in their very talented and hard-working graduates.”

Faculty

There were four faculty members at the time of the review; one full professor, one associate professor, two assistant professors, and a full-time language instructor. The teaching load for the professors was six courses before fall 2009 but since then has been reduced to five. The review team considers this excessive when compared to other Departments at UW and other Universities. The language instructor teaches eight courses each year. The Department regularly hires sessional instructors to run the first- and second-year language courses.

The Department modeled several scenarios based on a teaching load of four courses, but found that with the current faculty complement such a strategy would jeopardize the integrity of the program and increase the reliance on sessional instructors. For the moment, the Department will continue with a work load of five courses. The Department is working on a clear rationale for an additional appointment in the area of Applied Linguistics. Such an individual would also participate in the Translation Program.

The faculty members are known for their excellent teaching. Student course evaluations, over the period fall 2007 to fall 2010 inclusive, averaged 4.34 out of a possible five. Each term during this period the evaluations for S+LAS courses were higher than that of the Faculty of Arts as a whole, except for the fall term of 2010 when the value for S+LAS courses was 3.95 compared to the Faculty’s rating of 4.2. The review team suggests that faculty members should be more involved in first- and second-year courses. In the coming year faculty members will teach more first-year language courses.

Since 2003, the faculty members of S+LAS have produced three monographs, two edited books, 20 refereed articles, six book chapters, four book reviews, and delivered 49 conference presentations.
Faculty members received the Faculty of Arts Outstanding Performance Award in 2007, 2008, and 2010. In addition, in 2008, a faculty member received UW’s Distinguished Teacher Award and the Outstanding Professor Award by the Ontario Undergraduate Students Alliance. Another faculty member received, in 1997, Best Book Award from the Canadian Association of Hispanists, and in 2000 received first prize for another book from the Historical Memory of Latin American and Caribbean Women.

**Strengths of Department**

The Translation Plan is unique to Ontario if not Canada. The practicum component of the translation courses is considered innovative by the review team.

**Concerns/ Opportunities for Improvement**

Although the quality of the program was found to be sound and comprehensive, the reviewers did consider that faculty members need to regroup after the collapse of the proposed MA and re-thing the Department’s focus. The Department needs to project a stronger sense of identity: of what it is at this time; of its academic goals; and of how it plans to attain them. The program has strengths: a capable and enthusiastic faculty complement and a devoted and enthusiastic student body. What is needed is a very clear objective of its mission. The review team commented on the importance and uniqueness of the Translation Plan and encouraged strengthening and expanding it while, at the same time, Latin American literature and culture could be accommodated alongside it.

Students appreciate the flexibility gained by the Department’s collaboration with WLU. Of the 52 courses in Spanish listed in the self-study, 30 are offered by UW and 22 by WLU. This allows students to take courses in Modern Spanish literature and culture, film, and language. The arrangements with WLU require a higher level of coordination than the present one. At a minimum, there should be regular meetings, perhaps one every semester to discuss course offerings, learning outcomes, methods of evaluation, and students’ expectations.

In December 2011, the Department followed up on this suggestion and held a joint meeting with WLU Spanish faculty members. Scheduling issues for the up-coming year were clarified and a general spirit of collaboration was rekindled. It was agreed that the group would meet at least twice a year.

The abundance of programs offered by the Department is confusing. The Department needs to determine how many students benefit from the various programs offered. The review team considers that some trimming is required. Fewer and more strategic choices would be an improvement. The same could be said of course offerings. The Department is currently updating/modifying certain courses. The review team considers that the Department is trying to do too much with too few people.

The Department has been successful in offering SPAN 101 and 102 as online courses, although these courses are also offered in the regular classroom format. Since the results for these courses are more or less the same the review team suggests that the Department should consider offering all sections of SPAN 101 and 102 online. An online course in literature at an advance level was suggested by the students. Such a course could assist co-op students in the program.

The Department has taken care to establish learning outcomes for its courses. In general, the outcomes are explicit and appropriate to each of the courses. SPAN 217 and 218, and SPAN 301A and 301B have the same outcomes suggesting no progression – is this what is intended? Furthermore, the lack of explicit
outcomes at the 400-level courses makes it difficult to comment on the learning outcomes of the program in the final year of studies.

Another area of concern to the review team is precisely how these outcomes relate to the modes of delivery of courses. One example is SPAN 101, which has a different set of objectives when offered as a regular course (five objectives) and when it is offered online (15 objectives).

In addition, there is no clear indication in the course outlines of how the outcomes relate to the method of evaluation.

The review team is of the opinion that the current faculty resources may not be used appropriately.

The Department might consider replacing the staff language Instructor position with a qualified PhD in second language acquisition. Also the Department might consider replacing the many (five or more depending on sabbaticals) part-time sessional instructors by a full-time faculty position holding a multi-year contract. Such an appointment would allow for more continuity from year to year especially within the language program.

The suggestion that a professional translator be hired was encouraged by the reviewers. As an interim step the Department has approached a certified Spanish-English translator (certified by both the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario and the American Translators’ Association) to explore options. In addition, the Department is developing a course to be offered in September 2012 which would connect students with real clients, and have the students work on real translations, in real time.

In no way should the positions envisioned by the review team preclude the Department’s expressed need for a fifth full-time faculty position.

In addition to the comments above, the review team has four specific recommendations:

1. There is an urgent need for better coordination between language instructors and the undergraduate student teaching assistants to reflect weekly activities and expectations.
2. The Department should investigate the use of new social technologies in culture, literature, and language course to encourage critical thought, discussion, and some limited composition among students.
3. The Department must seek some mechanism by which the “Latin American Studies” component of the Department can be enhanced by reaching out to colleagues in related disciplines or areas of interest.
4. The Department must focus on its undergraduate program and limit proposed course offerings to reflect faculty members’ research interests and areas of expertise. While the attempt in the past to cover all or most of the areas of the discipline is admirable, it is not possible or reasonable. Four individuals cannot be expected to be all things to all people in a discipline. Now is the time for the members of the Department to revisit all of their course offerings and programs to decide where they want to go from here into the future.