FRENCH STUDIES

Review Process

This was the second undergraduate review of the Department of French Studies, the first was in 2004. The five recommendations made in this review were addressed. In 2005, the MA program was reviewed by the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS). It made three recommendations all of which have been addressed. The self-study for the present review followed the guidelines for an Augmented Review which is when both undergraduate and graduate programs are reviewed together. The self-study for the Augmented Review was completed January, 2012; the site visit occurred 26 and 27 March, 2012; the review team report was received 9 May, 2012; and the response from the Department and the Dean was received 16 October, 2012.

The self-study was written by the Chair with the assistance of the two Associate Chairs and the undergraduate and graduate assistants. In addition, the Department held a half-day retreat to discuss the report, and voted on its acceptance at a departmental meeting.

Characteristics of the Program

Historical Overview

The University of Waterloo (UW) offered its first French language courses in 1961 as a service to students in Science and Engineering. In 1962, with the founding of the Faculty of Arts, the University created a Department of Romance Languages (Spanish and French). A separate Department of French appeared in the 1964-65 University Calendar, offering a major in French language and literature. In 1968, an administrative restructuring occurred, and the Department of French joined the newly formed Department of Classics and Romance Languages. At that time, an Honours French degree was introduced. In 1981, the Department of French, home to 10 regular faculty members, regained its administrative autonomy. In 2007, the Department offered all three degree levels – undergraduate, Master’s, and Doctoral degrees. In fall 2011, the Department had eight faculty members, four limited term lecturers, and seven staff language instructors. At the time the self-study was written another two tenure-track positions were being advertised.

Today, in terms of its undergraduate and graduate enrolment and its research activity, the Department outperforms its nearest competitors and larger Departments.
Program Objectives

The mission of the Department of French Studies at UW is threefold:

a. To educate and to train undergraduate and graduate students to respond to our society’s need for fully bilingual individuals, knowledgeable about the history, literatures, and cultures of the Francophone world, with an emphasis on France and Québec, and develop their abilities to think clearly, critically, and creatively.

b. To serve as a thriving research community in all fields pertaining to the French Studies discipline, including literature, cultural studies, new technologies, language didactics, and linguistics.

c. To be a focal point for the promotion of Francophone cultures and French Studies in the community, through service, and action.

Academic Programs Offered

The Department of French Studies currently offers the following academic programs and plans at the undergraduate level:

- Three-Year General BA in French
- Four-Year General BA in French
- Honours BA in French
- Honours BA in French (Arts and Business, Regular and Co-op)
- Honours French, French Teaching Specialization (This is a partnership with Nipissing University whereby UW students who maintain an average of 75% in French and a cumulative average of 70% as well as participating in the third-year exchange program will be granted direct admission to the Faculty of Education at Nipissing University for their teacher training program)
- Joint Honours BA in French (in combination with most Honours Academic plans offered in Arts and with many Honours majors in other Faculties)
- Minor in French
- Certificates in French (French Language I and II).

At the graduate level the Department offers:

- MA in French
- PhD in French Studies
There are no fields in the MA program which can be completed either by coursework or coursework and a research paper or thesis.

The doctoral program offers three fields, namely:

- Digital archiving, editing, and publishing in a Francophone context;
- Early modern French literary studies and theory;
- Cultural Studies in a Francophone context.

Overall the review team considered the Department as a fully integrated research and teaching unit which also makes a major service contribution through its language courses to a broader University community. It is important, the reviewers state, that neither its quality as a research unit and graduate program nor its importance as a service provider be underestimated or compromised.

**Students - Undergraduate**

The Department of French Studies is a second-year entry program. Of the 195 students registered in the Department of French Studies in second year from 2004-05 to 2010-11 inclusive, 70.2% had a high school entry average of 80% or higher, while 20% had an entry average of 90% or higher. The students entering French Studies are well qualified.

The Department offers various scholarships and book awards to upper-year students although the monetary value may not be high.

Internationalization and cultural exchanges have always been an integral part of the French Studies’ curriculum. There are exchange programs at third-year level with the Université de Nantes, the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, and the Université de Paris through the Mission Interuniversitaire de Coordination Échange Franco-Américains.

The Department also offers online courses at first- to third-year levels. The average enrolment each term for the first- and second-year courses for the last three years has been 94, but ranged from 28 to 205 students.

The number of French Studies’ students pursuing the co-op stream through Arts and Business has fluctuated over the years but averages out about five to eight students. While on work terms, students are evaluated by their employers. On average, over the last five years, the students from the Department of French Studies have been ranked “Excellent” or “Outstanding”. These same students ranked their employers in the eight or nine category on a 10-point scale, where 10 is the highest grade.

A survey of former students of the Department, carried out in spring 2011, indicated that the alumni were very satisfied with their education in the Department of French Studies and indicated that they...
had chosen to study in this Department because of the third-year exchange programs, the reputation of the program, and the acceptance to Teacher’s College if they were successful in the French Teaching Specialization. A sample of comments indicates their appreciation of their instruction:

“It was the most beneficial, exciting, enriching learning experience of my life”. “This was easily the best experience of my undergraduate career”. From this survey 92.4% of the respondents indicated that they would “likely” or “very likely” recommend UW’s French Studies’ program to others.

Of the 39 regular students who entered French Studies in the 2001-02 to 2004-05 cohorts, 24 received a French Studies’ degree, 10 received a degree from another Department, one is still studying, and four students withdrew.

Over the period, 2003 to 2009 inclusive, an annual average of 32 students graduated from the Department of French Studies, ranging from a high in 2007 of 42 students to a low of 22 in 2003. Of these 224 students, 25% were on the Dean’s Honours List. This too had a significant range from 14.3% in 2007 to 37.8% in 2009.

The Department trains students to enter the work force as bilingual individuals, sensitive to the needs of Canadian society in terms of language competence, communication, and education. The spring 2011 survey of alumni indicated that 60% had chosen teaching as their career, others had chosen graduate school while others entered a career in communication, law, publishing, library science, marketing, federal and provincial civil service, translation, and international development.

In general, the review team considers the undergraduate program to be strong and well appreciated. Student satisfaction with the program and teaching performance, student enrolment, and student success provide confirmation of the current high quality of the program.

**Students - Graduate**

Over the period 2006-07 to 2010-11 inclusive, an average of five students annually entered the MA program. The total enrolment over the same period averaged 12 students varying annually from 10 to 15. Of the students enrolled in the MA over the last five years, 94% were female. During the same period 18 students graduated with the MA completing the degree, on average, in four terms.

The PhD program started in 2007. Over the last four years 13 students entered the program. The intake ranged annually from a low of one to a high of five. As of the time of writing the self-study, no student had graduated, although one is expected to graduate fall 2012.

Master students receive around $22,000 per year in funding support, and doctoral students at least $25,000, while they are within their time limits.
Graduate students have two exchanges available to them, one at the Université de Nantes and the other is at the Universities of Paris. These exchanges are seen by the Department as important in the future development of the graduate programs.

The Department, over the last three years, 2008-09 to 2010-11 inclusive, has offered each year between nine and 11 courses. These courses had an average enrolment of four, with a range of one to nine students. To offer these courses professors need to be able to teach two or three different graduate seminars, and normally teach at the graduate level every other year.

Six to eight graduate students have presented papers at national or international conferences. In addition, about one in five of the current doctoral students has published at least one refereed journal article while two have already published books.

The graduate curricula are broad enough to accommodate a variety of career paths, however, most students either pursue further graduate studies or enter the teaching profession.

Over the next seven years the intake of MA students could quadruple to about 22, while admitting about four doctoral students per year is considered optimal. The Department expects that the graduate enrolment by 2017 would be about 38 students. To facilitate this expected increase there would need to be an increase in faculty complement.

Faculty
At the time of the review the Department had eight regular faculty members – three Full Professors, two Associate Professors, three Assistant Professors, -together with four limited-term Lecturers and seven Staff Language Instructors. An additional two tenure-track positions are currently advertised.

There is a faculty member teaching French in the Department of Italian and French Studies at St Jerome’s University who participates in the life of the Department but does not report to the Chair.

There may be some retirements in the near future since one Full Professor and two Language Instructors are over 60 years of age.

The review team considers the faculty complement situation fragile, given the many leaves and absences, creating considerable pressure on the timetable, thesis supervision, and administrative functions. The reviewers suggest that the number of regular faculty members be increased which would result in fewer definite-term lecturers being required.

The regular faculty members normally carry a work load of five courses a year. This is higher than the norm in the Faculty of Arts. Each faculty member, in a typical year, teaches an average of 100 students while the Language Instructors and Lecturers teach as many as 200 students in a typical year.
The reviewers consider that teaching loads are heavy to the extent that they threaten research productivity. It would be preferable to reduce the teaching load from five to four courses. Such a reduction, however, would require, given the minimal resources available to the Department, very careful planning of program structure and course timetabling.

On average, undergraduate courses in French Studies are evaluated by the students at 4.29 on a five-point scale, where five is “Excellent”. These scores range from 4.25 for classes with over 30 students to 4.36 for classes with less than 10 students.

In terms of research, the Department is impressive for a Department of its size, with a level of activities superior to McMaster, Guelph, Dalhousie, or York, for example.

To foster a climate of active research, the Department has been able to organize regular international conferences (four since 2005) as well as “journées d’études”, and more focussed roundtables. In 2010-11, two major research grants were received by the Department, MARGOT (Moyen age et renaissance groupe de recherche – ordinateur et textes) and FREMIR (French Missions Research Group).

Between 2003 and 2011 inclusive, the faculty members in the Department received $611,758 in Tri-Council grants. Over the same period faculty members published seven books, edited 13 books, wrote 49 book chapters, published 35 refereed journal articles, and 30 refereed conference proceedings. In addition, they presented 166 conference papers. Furthermore, faculty members have been heavily involved as external scholarship and grant evaluators for OGS, SSHRC, KILLAM, and Canada Council as well as being involved with Faculty of Arts and University Committees.

The review team considered that most faculty members were performing appropriately for their rank and experience. In fact, the review team considered the research support from granting agencies outstanding resulting in a Department with a strong publication record.

**Concerns and Opportunities for Improvement**

Although the review has resulted in a highly positive view of the Department and its programs, there remains a number of areas that would benefit from further examination. Participants in distance education, for example, should be regularly monitored to ensure learning outcomes parallel those in traditional classroom courses. In addition, online courses require that attention be paid to the oral component of learning, something that is more difficult than in face-to-face contact. In fact, a perceived lack of oral work was a concern of students in general and the reviewers suggest that the Department review its general approach to ensure courses
(and out-of-course opportunities) address this need. One contribution to increased contact with oral work (production and reception) would involve expanded efforts to inform students of off-campus or media opportunities to engage with spoken French. As students themselves noted, however, if drop-in or conversation opportunities are not obligatory, participation is likely to be minimal, given the extensive demands on student time and energy.

Undergraduate students as well as instructors also commented on the mixed level of linguistic abilities in various classes. This is a universal problem in language Departments and one that is particularly intractable in the absence of enormous resources (and perhaps not even then).

A final comment on the quality of undergraduate programs is linked, yet again, to the lack of teaching resources in the Department. Students note that certain courses of general interest are not regularly available, needing to be offered in rotation because of pressures on the timetable linked to professorial numbers. Specific domains that were brought forward include material dealing with film and art, as well as early modern literature. Inevitably, a move to reduce teaching loads will compound this problem, so detailed planning, expanded resources (and perhaps a phased-in reduction in teaching loads) will be required.

Overall

The reviewers commented that the Department “sees itself as firmly committed to the highest standards in both teaching and research. Its status as a research department, to which the record of its faculty bears eloquent testimony, has been enhanced in recent years by the introduction of a PhD program in 2007...... Serving as a focal point in the community for the promotion of the French language and Francophone cultures, the Department also makes an important contribution to the University’s efforts to promote internationalization and cultural enrichment.”

The reviewers did however raise concerns which they summarized as follows: “The Department of French at Waterloo is an energetic, accomplished and successful unit, but its continued success is fragile, even in the near term. Heavy teaching loads, administrative and service duties threaten to have an impact on research productivity, on the doctoral
program, on the renewal of external research support and on career progress. We hope to have suggested appropriate ways of addressing and resolving these issues.”

Recommendations
The review team highlights the following recommendations being of particular importance:

Recommendation 1: The unfortunate combination of retirements, leaves of various kinds, and the three-year secondment of a faculty member to the Stratford campus has left the integrity of the program at risk. The following steps would help the Department meet its responsibilities across the board and bolster the PhD program in particular.

Recommendation 1.1: The teaching load should be reduced from five to four courses to allow more time for graduate supervision, mentoring, and teaching. This is probably the only way to ensure a more equitable distribution of supervisory and administrative tasks in the Department.

Recommendation 1.2: The goal of a stable complement of 11 full-time faculty members is totally reasonable in the context of the Department’s research profile, program and service commitments, and student enrolments. The Faculty of Arts should adopt and support such a target.

Recommendation 1.3: Two of the PhD program’s three fields need strengthening. Field Three, Francophone Cultures, is a particularly attractive area of studies for graduate students and should be reinforced by ensuring that the successful candidate for the advertised position in 20th/21st century literature has proven expertise in world Francophone literature. Field One, Digital Technologies, can be seen as the doctoral program’s distinguishing feature; it should be strengthened by a dedicated position whenever the next literature hire is approved.

Recommendation 2: Should the Department’s linguistics position fall vacant for any reason in the next few years, it might usefully be rethought and advertised as a position in applied linguistics/second language acquisition to bring it more centrally in line with the Department’s needs at the undergraduate level.
**Recommendation 3:** The support staff requires the addition of a third assistant for the effective performance of administrative tasks.

**Recommendation 4:** The situation of the Staff Language Instructors is highly anomalous and should be regularized as soon as possible. Since one of the two is close to retirement, this probably means the conversion of the remaining Staff Language Instructor position to a Continuing Lecturer position.

**Recommendation 5:** The definite-term Lecturers carry heavy teaching loads. They would do their jobs even better if instability and uncertainty were reduced through longer contracts.

**Recommendation 6:** The provision of dedicated graduate student space in, or close to, the Modern Languages Building must be seen as an urgent priority.

**Recommendation 7:** Efforts should be made to reduce times to completion in the MA program to three terms. The MA by coursework should be abandoned and the other two options should have their requirements lightened.

**Recommendation 8:** Times to completion in the PhD program should be carefully monitored with a view to bringing them down as close as possible to four years (to coincide with funding packages). An individual schedule to completion should be put in place for each student at the end of the second year, with subsequent monitoring of the student’s progress through regular reporting. These steps would help to address the occasional concerns we heard concerning the performance of doctoral students.

**Recommendation 9:** A final recommendation related to a confidential personnel matter, and is not reproduced here.

**Departmental Response**

The Department’s responses can be summarized as follows:
1. The Department agreed with the recommendation regarding complement. It hopes to move to a four-course load by a combination of curriculum review and the support of a three-year limited-term replacement for the faculty member seconded to the Stratford campus. [The Dean fully supports the move to a four-course teaching load which would bring the Department in line with the rest of the Faculty.] The Department is enthusiastic about an 11th complement position in digital technologies, and agrees that world Francophone literatures will be an emphasis of the currently advertised position.

2. No vacancy is anticipated in linguistics, and this is not seen as a priority area for investment.

3. Staff complement will be revisited, following a review of the Faculty structure and governance, which might modify workload (by undertaking some tasks more centrally).

4. It is agreed that upon retirement of the last Staff Language Instructor, that the position will be converted to a Lecturer position.

5. The Department has a plan for covering its teaching needs, while moving to a four-course faculty load, with five Lecturers and 12 faculty members (i.e. requiring two more faculty appointments).

6. Space is also part of the Faculty of Arts’ strategic planning process; a major renovation of the language labs is also being considered.

7. The Department is taking steps to reduce time-to-completion in the MA, and will take concrete steps on this within the next six months.

8. The Department is monitoring doctoral student progress. Reducing the teaching load of doctoral students from three to two courses per year will help.
Department’s Two-Year Plan (and Beyond)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Resources Required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012-15</td>
<td>Steps to meet our responsibilities across the board and bolster the PhD program</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>Four-course teaching load for professors</td>
<td>Chair/Dean</td>
<td>Change to MA program, cancellation of FR352; three-year definite term appointment; funding for additional positions</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>11th faculty appointment</td>
<td>Dean/Provost</td>
<td>Funding for additional professor position (11th)</td>
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<td>2012-13</td>
<td>Field of 10th faculty appointment</td>
<td>Chair/DACA</td>
<td>Funding was approved</td>
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<td>2014-15</td>
<td>Linguistic position*</td>
<td>Dean/Provost</td>
<td>Not a priority area</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012-15</td>
<td>Support staff</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Currently reviewed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-XX</td>
<td>Conversion of last Staff Language Instructor position after retirement</td>
<td>Dean/Provost</td>
<td>Funding to be transferred from staff budget to Lecturer budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012-15</td>
<td>Definite-term Lecturers’ situation (see development model above, answer to recommendation five); Request for 12th position*</td>
<td>Dean/Provost</td>
<td>Funding to secure four lecturer positions; Create a 12th position in Applied Language Studies and Didactics, organic to the development of the Department*</td>
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<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Dedicated graduate student space</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Faculty priority; currently working on renovation of language labs</td>
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<td>2012-13</td>
<td>MA completion time</td>
<td>Graduate Chair/ Chair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>PhD completion time and monitoring of student progress</td>
<td>Graduate Chair/ Chair</td>
<td>Working towards reducing teaching load of graduate students</td>
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</table>

*Indicates considered, but no commitment made by Dean at present.