MEMORANDUM

To: Ian Orchard, VP Academic & Provost,
   Associate VP Academic

From: Monica Leoni, Chair
       Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies

Date: October 27, 2014

Subject: Two Year Progress Report of Spanish and Latin American Studies

In October 2011 the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies hosted a team of external consultants who came to assess and comment on the status of the programs in Spanish at the University of Waterloo. The External Review Team was made up of Dr. Marjorie Ratcliffe (University of Western Ontario), Dr. Luis Torres (University of Calgary) and Dr. Ricardo Sternberg (University of Toronto).

The Review Team’s reflections on their visit were received on November 7, 2011.

The consultants found our program to be strong and comprehensive, and their interviews with students revealed a satisfied student body who valued the plans and courses offered.

Indeed, on several occasions the Review Team commented on the sound preparation of our students, noting that “UW Spanish graduates who have gone on to further studies at the MA and Ph.D. levels are of a very high caliber. The faculty of the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies are to be commended for the efforts they have invested in their very talented and hard-working graduates”, and that “a considerable number of graduates have received academic recognition, awards, and scholarships”.

Moreover, the assessors found “the Department to be in line with the University of Waterloo’s priorities in academic excellence in teaching and research” and “all four faculty members are active and have on-going research projects. They maintain this research profile despite what the RC (Review Committee) believes is a heavy teaching and administrative role, caused in part, by the small pool of faculty”.

Members of the team offered various recommendations that would help strengthen the program, and the following is an update on the progress we have made in the areas identified.

It is difficult for this report to offer a “time-line” as to when certain initiatives can be achieved, or when certain recommendations can be addressed. Since the report was written, the Department has not received any additional administrative support that would be required to effectuate any substantive change. Despite the Review Team’s recommendation to hire a fifth faculty position and to reduce our course load, we remain a department of four, with a regular teaching load of five courses, and with only a half-time administrative assistant. Without increased support, specific areas of concern cannot be properly addressed.
Recommendations Made by the Review Team

Several recommendations were made by the Review Team, most of which the Department has been able to act upon, or at least begin to consider for future implementation. Other recommendations, however, remain outside of the Department’s control, and so no action can be taken at this time.

For example, the consultants found the “abundance of programs offered by the Department confusing”. Unfortunately, it was not always evident to the consultants that the programs in question belong to the Faculty of Arts, and not to the Department itself. Particularly confusing for them were the Co-op, Regular, and Arts and Business streams. We did our best to clarify these distinctions, but it seems we could have done more to clear up any confusion.

It is noteworthy that plan prioritization in the Faculty of Arts is currently underway, and we are happy to be currently streamlining our program, while maintaining regular communication with our colleagues at WLU, who are making similar changes to their own program requirements.

On several occasions the consultants were reminded that the Spanish courses appearing in the calendar at that time (this has since been revised by the Undergraduate Office) reflected not only UW’s offerings in Spanish, but also those offered by WLU. At first glance the number of courses did seem overwhelming to them, but the number of courses reviewed by the Review Team did not all belong to UW, but appeared in our calendar because of the joint program existing between the two universities.

The consultants commented that “the arrangements with WLU, though, require a higher level of coordination than the present one”. It was unclear to us how our present level of coordination could be lacking in any measurable way, since students are happy with the current arrangement, and collaboration occurs regularly. The Review Team noted in its report that “Students appreciate the flexibility gained by the Department’s collaboration with WLU. This allows them, among others, to take courses in Modern Spanish literature and culture, film and language”. The team also recommended that the two units meet twice a year, but we have found that meeting more than once a year is not always feasible. However, it should be stressed that the two departments are in frequent contact every term, particularly when course scheduling, or curriculum initiatives are taking place. The two departments are careful not to offer core courses at conflicting times, for example, so as to ensure that students are not faced with conflicting options. Fluid movement between the two programs is a priority, and has been regularly achieved thus far.

Moreover, members of both departments enthusiastically support events hosted by each institution. The Spanish and Latin American Lecture Series, as well as more social events, are always attended by faculty members at both institutions, allowing for interaction on both formal and informal levels.

Finally, it should be noted that Dr. Maria del Carmen Sillato and Dr. Mario Boido are also active members of the Center for Memory and Testimony Studies directed by Professor Marta Marin from the Department of Languages and Literatures at WLU. With this, the collaboration between the departments, students, and colleagues exists beyond curriculum offerings, as many research interests and projects are also shared.

The Review Team also observed that there “is an urgent need for better coordination between language instructors and the undergraduate student TAs to reflect weekly activities and expectations”. Our language instructor, Professor Vera-Quinn closely oversees the work completed in the language labs, and provides the TAs with various training opportunities throughout the term. Teaching assistants are in regular contact with the program coordinator, Professor Vera-Quinn, and the labs seem to be running smoothly.

With that said, the Department is always happy to revisit the systems it has in place and regularly seeks ways to improve the student experience. The discussions held with the Review Team prompted us to initiate important action on our part, which is outlined below.
Progress on the Recommendations Made

The consultants offered some important observations that the Department has been eager and happy to address.

What we have achieved is the following:

1) Revised Mission Statement

The Review Team suggested that we revise our mission statement, in light of the changing needs and expectations of students. Acting upon this recommendation, the following statement was drafted and has guided our decisions and focus:

The mission of the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies is to provide an academic environment and a specialized body of knowledge designed 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.

As we enter an era of global interdependency we are increasingly faced with problems that are global in scope and that require different cultures to work together and cooperate in ways they have not in the past. The Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies prepares students for this globalized world by developing a deep intercultural understanding of the Luso-Hispanic world (broadly defined so as to include indigenous cultures) that gives them the necessary knowledge and skills to work ethically and respectfully across cultural difference.

Our program is intended for students interested in examining the intersections of society, power, and culture, and in acquiring critical interdisciplinary skills in cultural analysis and communication. It explores multiple forms of Spanish, Latin American and transatlantic cultural practices including film, television, music, journalism, visual arts, and performance, as well as literature, testimonials, essays, and cultural critique. In addition, the program offers students the possibility to bridge language divides and integrate the study of Spanish-speaking Latin America, with analysis of Brazil, the Caribbean, and indigenous Latin America, while it also encourages critical inquiry from transatlantic perspectives that combine examinations of the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America.

Although the contours of the field are constantly being debated and redefined, there is a general consensus that cultural studies is distinguished by both its critical interdisciplinary approach and the kinds of texts it interrogates. Cultural Studies in Latin America and Spain has been shaped by questions about the relations between cultural production, power, and society. Topics of interest generally include the relations between culture and political economy, between the North and the South, and between culture and the state, as well as the construction of racial, gender, and class identities. These problems are explored through a variety of texts, ranging from established cultural expressions such as literature and essays to forms of popular culture such as film, video, and music.

The Spanish and Latin American Studies program is relevant for students considering careers in teaching, media work, advertising, creative arts, multimedia, as well for those looking to pursue graduate studies. It should be considered for a double major with International Development, History, Political Science, Environment and Resource Studies, Visual Culture, History, English, French, German, or Linguistics.
2) Curriculum Reform

On December 8, 2011 members of the Department held a half-day retreat to discuss the various issues that were highlighted in the consultants’ Report, and it was agreed that some calendar reform would be undertaken immediately.

On December 14, 2011, a joint meeting between the two groups was held at UW. Scheduling issues for the upcoming academic year were clarified, and a general spirit of collaboration was rekindled.

Four plan requirements have been collapsed into two (this was done in consultation with WLU so that our shared senior students would continue to enjoy a joint program that is fully functional and robust). With these changes, students pursuing a Plan in Spanish and Latin American Studies will more easily fulfill their requirements and can move fluidly between courses with ease. The reduction in plan requirements will also open up the number of electives students can pursue. These changes have been approved at UGAG, and will come into effect as of May 2015.

The Review Team also encouraged the Department to offer “some courses related to culture, literature, film, etc. offered in English at the 100 level [that] might encourage students to become interested in Spanish and Latin American Studies and then take more Spanish language courses. Such courses could also serve the university community as a whole by providing courses for students in, for example, literature, history, political science, art history, film studies, women’s studies, international development, etc., especially at a university where there are no other available courses related to Latin America.”

The department has implemented this advice with the creation of a new culture course, to be offered in English:

SPAN 150

**The Hispanic World Through Literature and the Arts**
A study of Hispanic cultures as represented in their literature, film, and visual arts with particular attention to issues of race, gender, sexuality, and cultural and national identity.

This new course will be offered in Fall 2015, and we are confident that the nature and scope of the topic will draw a healthy number of students from across the university.

The Department also addressed the Review Team’s suggestion that it “find ways to focus its program and project a stronger sense of identity”. To that end, faculty members have created / redesigned / updated the following 7 courses:

SPAN 326 - Theatre of the Spanish Golden Age: Texts and Cultural Contexts
SPAN 350 - Poetry of Tango
SPAN 366 - Aesthetics of Rupture: Latin American Avant-garde Movements
SPAN 386 - Memory and Performance in Latin American Literature
SPAN 387 - Gender, Power, and Representations in Latin America
SPAN 400 - Memories and Representations: Constructive Truths and Competing Realities
SPAN 415 - The Hispanic Transatlantic
The areas of study represented in these course offerings strongly link faculty research profiles to the student experience, and will expose students to the work we do, hopefully inspiring more of our students to continue their education at the graduate level.

3) Teaching Load

Faculty members in the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies continue to carry a teaching load of 5 courses, which was considered heavy by both the External Review Team, and by our own administration. We have 4 faculty members in the department (1 Full, 2 Associates, 1 Assistant), and with such a complement, offering a full program can present its challenges.

We were encouraged to consider reducing our load to 4, with those people carrying major administrative posts receiving further course relief (ie: the Chair would teach 2 courses per year, and the Associate Chair would teach 3).

During our departmental retreat we carefully considered various scenarios, and modelled teaching schedules with 4 and 5 courses. It is noteworthy that it is very rare to have a year when one member of our department is not away on a sabbatical or on a leave of some sort, so most years the department is covering all its bases with only 3 regular faculty members on campus.

We concluded that if we are to protect the integrity of our program, reducing our load to 4 is only feasible with additional investment from the University.

We reiterate that the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies currently enjoys a successful collaboration with colleagues at Wilfrid Laurier University. With this arrangement, senior students from UW can take certain required courses at WLU, while senior WLU students are required to complete program requirements at UW. The Review Committee noted “the students are extremely pleased with the opportunities that are opened to them with this collaboration”.

The collaboration between the two universities has been in existence for over 40 years and functions very well, but this does not assuage our needs for a fifth faculty position.

4) First Year Experience

The external consultants confirmed the importance of having more faculty presence at the first-year level, so as to have more contact and impact with potential majors. We have consistently required faculty members to teach all course levels. We are all involved in first, second, third and fourth year courses. More than half of our student body is taught by faculty, and not by sessionals. A reduction to a course load of 4, with every faculty member involved in language teaching at all levels, leaves little room for faculty involvement in more advanced language, literature and culture courses, and highlights once again the need for a fifth faculty position.
5) Outreach Initiatives

The consultants also recommended that the Department take on “a more proactive role in the local high schools”, and that people in both the Hispanic and Portuguese communities be encouraged to participate in the intellectual life of the department through lectures, film series, etc.

The Department regularly contacts local high school Spanish teachers and invites these groups to attend lectures and participate in departmental activities.

Moreover, the Department has been offering a lecture series for several years that is attended by members of the UW community and beyond.

In 2012-2013 we enjoyed a successful film series that was attended by students and members of the K-W community.

In 2013-2014 we held a successful Alumni Speaker Series, and our current students enjoyed and benefited from learning what graduates from Spanish and Latin American Studies have gone on to pursue after their chapter at UW was completed.

We reiterate here our translation students’ volunteer involvement at World Accord and the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support.

6) Use of Social Technologies

As language-learning tools evolve, so has the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies. All of our language classes have adopted the most recent technologies. Students are involved in online learning, chat room and blog functions.

Moreover, in 2013-2014 we were fortunate to hire one of our former students to help us cover a sabbatical leave. After graduating from UW, Ms. Camelia Núñez went on to pursue graduate studies at Western University. She also took time to complete UW’s MBET program. She has since gone on to launch her own company –MILAO-- which developed a language learning tool that can be downloaded as an app on any personal mobile device, and can simulate and evaluate with an avatar conversations in Spanish in real time.

We were proud to beta test the program in our first-year courses. Ms. Núñez took advantage of the excitement our students had for the software, and invited some of them to be involved in the research she was conducting. This resulted in several of our students presenting their findings, under Ms. Núñez’s tutelage, at conferences in Ontario and Quebec.

The opportunity to participate in research and to be exposed to the intellectual rigor of a conference has inspired these undergraduate students to continue their studies at the graduate level.
7) Translation Program

The external consultants highlighted the importance and uniqueness of our Translation Plan, and encouraged us to do what we can to strengthen and expand the program since it combines theoretical, practical and experiential learning. Students are required to volunteer a specific number of hours working at World Accord and at the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support. Both organizations are located in the K-W area. Students find the time spent working with the people here very inspiring and the experience valuable to their growth as potential translators.

A study-abroad opportunity at the University of Holguín is also available for students registered in the translation program and, following the advice of the Review Team, we have opened this opportunity up for those students who are not pursuing a specialization in translation, but who still seek the study-abroad experiences in Cuba.

The Review Committee also suggested that the administration invest some of the monies currently spent on sessionals on a fifth position in the area of Applied Linguistics. Such a candidate would be more suited to be involved with and expand the Translation Program.

As an interim solution the Department hired a certified Spanish-English translator, who developed a preparatory course for students in our translation plan. The course was designed as a workshop where each student was asked to launch a translation “start-up”. Students were taught to develop a business model and were also prepared to eventually write the translation exam given by the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario (ATIO).

The Department has been unable to re-hire a similar person with this expertise, due to financial constraints.

The Review Team noted that “the Translation Plan is unique in Ontario and has produced very fine students. It is an important source of experiential learning, especially when combined with the exchange program in Cuba. It is a skills-based option for those students wishing to rely on a set of practical options upon graduation from UW.”

A faculty member with a specialization in translation studies or applied linguistics would play an integral role in helping to grow this program.

8) Response to Student Feedback

Students who were interviewed by the Review Team suggested that we consider ways to increase interaction and conversation in language courses.

The Department has addressed this and has developed two initiatives:

1) Students Offering Support (SOS): Through this initiative students in our third year program are invited to develop teaching modules that review key grammar concepts. These modules are graded by the professor and are then offered to the first year students at the end of term, as they prepare for final exams. The initiative has been well received, and offers our senior students a unique experience to be involved in peer support and teaching.

2) Community Service Learning: In 2015 we will give students in our Intermediate and Advanced courses the option to replace the conversation class component with an opportunity to engage with members of our K-W Latin American Community.
Community Service Learning is a form of experiential education in which students engage in structured community service designed to meet the identified needs of non-profit organizations, and the specified learning objectives of a university course. CSL aims to connect the classroom with the community in a way that is mutually beneficial to all participants: students, faculty and community partners. The community can contribute in multiple and meaningful ways to student learning objectives and students can contribute knowledge and skills towards developing sustainable solutions for community-identified needs.

The following objectives were identified for our students’ participation in the CSL program:

1. To understand the sociocultural setting of the Hispanic community in K-W.
2. To practice what they are learning in class in a real life situation.
3. To establish friendly relations with members of the K-W Hispanic community.
4. To identify similarities and differences between Canadian and Hispanic cultures.

9) Areas Still Requiring Implementation

- First-Year Online Learning

The Review Team applauded the Department’s involvement in online education, noting that both SPAN 101 and SPAN 102 are offered online, along with multiple sections offered concurrently on campus. Given the success of our online courses, the consultants suggested that the “Department should then consider offering all sections of SPAN 101 and SPAN 102 online”.

The Department does not wish to fully embrace this suggestion, as all faculty members recognize that the online experience, while offering a valid alternative, can never truly equal the experience offered in a classroom environment. Not all students learn well in an online setting, and the success of and demand for our on campus courses lead us to believe we are doing a fine job in this area.

Moreover, the implementation of this recommendation would require a discussion that would need to address course management, grading assistance, and pedagogical outcomes. The Review Team did not suggest ways to implement this change, and so the Department has decided to continue offering a healthy combination of learning experiences to its students, and to thus satisfy various learning needs and styles.

We are always open to having a discussion with the administration to consider other options that may be available.
• Development of an Advanced Online Course in Literature

The Review Team encouraged the Department to develop an online course in literature so as to provide students seeking courses in the spring term with an opportunity to move forward in their Spanish and Latin American Studies plans. The Department is currently able to offer only first-year language courses during the spring term.

Such an online course would be interesting to develop, and could be used to better represent the research interests of faculty members. The development of such a course requires time, and consistent with UW practice, provides 2 course reliefs for the instructor involved in the preparation.

We are open to implementing this idea, and are currently considering the prospect of creating a joint offering, possibly with the University of Guelph, or Western University.

We have also begun investigating the possibility of creating a joint online course that would satisfy requirements for our Translation Specialization. We have recently reached out to Western, Guelph and Glendon, and are currently awaiting a response to our proposal.

• Creation of an Honours Thesis Option

The consultants also suggested that the Department “consider the possibility of offering the option of writing an Honours thesis” to advanced and/or graduating students. The Department was grateful for this recommendation, but at this time this remains an idea that we are still looking at implementing. Because plan standardization in the Faculty of Arts has become a priority, we have chosen to consider this recommendation in the coming months.

Conclusions

In their final remarks, the assessors noted that “four individuals cannot be expected to be all things to all people in a discipline that spans two continents over at least a thousand years of literary and artistic production. It is a disservice to the members’ research profiles to have them teach outside their areas of specialization. It is also not fair to the excellent students at UW to be taught by faculty who cannot be dedicated to their specific research interests”.

Every attempt has been made to follow the recommendations made by the external review team. We were grateful for the discussions held, and for the assessors’ honesty.

We are pleased with the progress we have made in our various initiatives, and will continue to offer a solid, comprehensive program to our students. We look forward to collaborating further with the administration to seek ways to secure its growth.