Two Year Progress Report for the Department of French Studies

The Department’s Self Study report was submitted in January 2012. A site visit took place on March 26-27, 2012 and the assessors’ report was received in May 2012. The Department’s response to the augmented review report was submitted in October 2012 and was subsequently considered by the Senate. This report provides an update on developments since then.

Context:

The reviewers overall impression of the Department of French Studies was that it was a “fully integrated research and teaching unit which also makes a major service contribution through its language courses to the broader university community” (p. 12). The report stressed the dual nature of the Department of French Studies, and the need maintain its quality both “as a research and graduate program” and as “a service provider” (p. 12). Undergraduate enrolment in French courses and programs was considered to be strong in 2012. Enrollments have in fact increased since then, with about 120 Majors. In addition, the graduate program was considered to be “sound, reflecting current standards and tendencies in the discipline, and designed to meet the program’s targeted learning outcomes (p. 3)”. Current graduate enrollments are: 11 M.A. and 12 Ph.D. students. The assessors were impressed by the Department’s commitment to the pedagogy of French as a second-language, and noted that a similar commitment to digital technologies in literary studies should be “maintained and fostered as a priority (p. 4)”.

Progress achieved on various action items:

1. The assessors recommended the reduction of the teaching load from 5 to 4 courses in order to allow more time for graduate supervision, mentoring and teaching, and to ensure a more equitable distribution of supervisory and administrative tasks in the Department.

   The Department has progressively moved, over the past two years, to a 4-course teaching load for tenure-track faculty members.

2. The report recommended regularizing the situation of the Staff Language Instructors, a highly anomalous employment category.

   The Department is moving to converting all Staff Language Instructor positions to Continuing Lecturer Positions (first advertised as Definite Term Lecturer Positions). The last Staff Language Instructor position will be converted in May 2015.

3. The assessors recommended offering Definite Term Lecturers longer contracts to provide greater stability within the department.

   Since 2012, two Definite Term Lecturer positions have been converted to Continuing Lecturer positions; a third conversion is in progress. Two Definite Term Lecturer positions are currently advertised in the Department, with two-year contracts, potentially renewable. This shift to a greater number of Continuing Lecturers and to longer Definite Term Lecturer contracts is
providing stability and continuity in the Department, and is enabling better planning of future course offerings.

4. The report recommended the addition of a third administrative position for the effective performance of administrative tasks.

A change in personnel and better coordination and communication between the existing administrative support staff has resulted in a more efficient administrative structure.

5. The assessors recommended carefully monitoring time to completion in the Ph.D. program, and implementing individual schedules for completion for each student to track progress in the program.

In 2013, the Department put into place tools to track student progress in the Ph.D. program. Also in 2013, with the help of the Faculty of Arts Graduate Studies Office, the Department worked to reduce the teaching load of graduate students from three terms to two terms each year, as per Faculty norms. This change should have a significant impact on completion times. In Fall 2014, the Department restructured the Ph.D. comprehensive exams in order to permit students to begin working on the thesis topic sooner, a change which will help students to undertake their dissertation research in a more timely fashion.

6. The report recommended strengthening Field 3 of the Department’s Ph.D. program, by hiring a specialist in 20/21st-century literature with a background in the field of Francophone Literature.

In 2013, the Department hired a colleague in the field of 20/21st-century literature with a secondary field in Francophone literature. This has enabled us to offer more graduate level courses in literature of the Francophonie, with a new graduate course on Sub-Saharan African literature on offer in Fall 2014.

Recommendations not acted upon but for which action is planned.

1. The assessors strongly recommended the hiring of an eleventh faculty member with expertise in Field 1 of the Ph.D. program: Digital Archiving, Editing and Publishing.

The Department has unfortunately not yet been able to hire in this field. The Chair will continue to pursue the possibility of obtaining the recommended tenure-track position.

2. The report noted that the full-time secondment of a faculty member to the Stratford campus has left the Department in a difficult position with regard to the integrity of the Ph.D. program.

The Department has an Assistant Professor on a three-year definite-term contract to replace the colleague now at Stratford. This contract expires on April 30, 2015. The Chair is working with
the Dean regarding next steps which -- should the secondment be extended--could lead either to a renewal of the contract or advertising a tenure-track position.

3. The assessors recommended reducing time to completion in the M.A. program by eliminating the Coursework Option and lightening the requirements in the Thesis and Memoire Options.

The Department attempted to streamline the M.A. program and terminate the Coursework Option in 2013, but was advised against doing so by the Faculty of Arts Graduate Office. The Department continues to work on examining options for lightening the requirements for the Thesis and Memoire.

4. The Report noted that the provision of dedicated graduate student space in or close to the Modern Languages Building should be an urgent priority.

Space remains a major issue for the Department. The creation of more student space is a key item in the Faculty of Arts Strategic Plan.

Recommendations no longer considered appropriate

1. The Assessors suggested that if the Department’s position in Linguistics were to fall vacant, it should be rethought as a position in applied linguistics.

There is no anticipated vacancy. Linguistics is not a priority area that requires investment at the current time.

Other Relevant Information

The Department of French Studies is currently undertaking a comprehensive review and restructuring of its undergraduate programs within the framework of the Plan Standardization initiative within the Faculty of Arts.

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