

French and Italian Studies

A department offering the B.A., the M.A., and the M.A.T. in French and Francophone Studies, and the B.A. and M.A.T. in Italian Studies.

■ The Review Process

This was a standard AQAD review. Reviewers were:

Ronald W. Tobin, chair (University of California, Santa Barbara)

Nina Garrett (Yale University)

Karen Gould (Old Dominion University)

Christopher Kleinhenz (University of Wisconsin, Madison)

■ Executive Summary

The team introduced its comments by noting that “departments of foreign language, literature, and culture have been in a state of ‘transition’” nationally for the past decade, and that departments have moved in several directions — the traditional focus on literary studies, cultural literacy, and “the world-wide use of and expressiveness in French known as *la francophonie*” — to find focus. In this context, the team concluded that this department “has proposed a series of curricular changes that will facilitate taking advantage of the best of all the approaches,” and “congratulate[d] the department on its willingness to follow Dean Edwards’ sound advice about transforming itself into a unit with an interdisciplinary mission.”

1. **French.** The team began with foreign language acquisition, and recommended that a Language Program Director (LPD) be hired to “direct and coordinate the wide variety of responsibilities relating to the basic language program”: course coordination, strengthening curriculum and pedagogy, training of TAs, “coherence” with such initiatives as translation and language for special purposes (e.g., French for Business). This would be a tenure-track position, with an expectation of research in the field of second language acquisition. While this position would help lead the more effective use of technology in language instruction, the team emphasized that “the department needs to make a clear and unambiguous statement ... that technology cannot substitute for language teachers and will not make language teaching less expensive.” To help promote the effective use of technology, the team recommended that all faculty members have up-to-date computers and appropriate software to assist in the development of computer-based course materials. The team made special mention of the need for better and more consistent supervision, training and mentoring of Teaching Assistants, and suggested that the LPD could be a key figure in

accomplishing this. Similarly, it was suggested that the LPD could provide needed leadership in textbook selection, and in articulation of courses from one level to the next.

The “Dean’s Committee on the Future of French, Francophone, and Italian Studies” had made an earlier recommendation that the Department offer several different “tracks” into the French major (e.g., emphasis on study of literature, emphasis on language use in business). The team endorsed this approach, but noted that it would likely increase enrollment in the Department and called for no further reduction in the number of faculty positions in French. The team also noted that course coverage has been complicated by a significant number of overlapping leaves, and recommended that the Dean and the Department introduce a policy on faculty leaves to prevent this problem in the future. The team supported the Department’s desire to reinstate a Ph.D. program in French and Francophone Studies as an interdisciplinary effort, but warned that this would require commitments from other departments that would contribute to the program. In general, the team called for “renewal” of the French faculty “through retirement and judicious, forward-looking replacements of high caliber,” but also warned that doing so will require the department to “raise their expectations in research — which we do not find to be as high as the department claims...”

With respect to advising, the team found that faculty members involved in advising were performing satisfactorily, but that more members of the department need to participate in advising, including mentoring of graduate students. The team also called for the development of “systematic feedback from students at all levels” to drive program improvement efforts (see “Student Outcomes Assessment,” below).

2. **Italian.** The team expressed concern that the Italian faculty no longer includes any individual with a 100% appointment in the department, with the consequence that “there are very few advanced-level courses in Italian” and “almost never a true graduate-level MA course.” While the team found “concern for the program and its well-being, there did not appear to be any clear sense of what could or should be done to make it functional.” Noting the importance of Italian as “the language of culture,” Italy’s prominence in the world economy, and the large number of Italian-Americans in Massachusetts and the Northeast, the team urged that the current situation be addressed. The team identified the first step as clarifying the commitments of current Italian faculty and, assuming that a core of dedicated faculty remains, adding one or two full-time positions in Early Modern and Modern Italian Literature. The team suggested that the department would then be positioned to “meet the great demand for well-trained K-12 teachers of Italian.”
3. **Governance and Morale.** Noting that the future of the department has been a topic of intense discussion for some time, the team urged a frank discussion between the Dean and the faculty leading to a clear agenda for change. The process of change should begin with the appointment of a permanent chair “sympathetic to the broad range of literary, linguistic,

and cultural activities of the department” and “willing to undertake developmental activity to supplement the departmental budget.” The team further urged that the new chair be authorized to hire immediately one new faculty member (in addition to the LPD) in anticipation of future retirements, and that hiring of other “committed teacher-scholars eager to contribute to all levels of the curriculum” should follow as retirements allow.

4. **Action Plan.** Discussions continue between the Dean and the department regarding the appropriate response to the team’s report. The Dean has provided her response to the department, with the following key elements:

- The Dean indicates that she agrees with the review team that “the establishment of a new kind of oversight in the areas of language acquisition and instruction is crucial to all language/literature departments,” and has organized a meeting involving all language departments to more fully develop a coordinated approach to language acquisition. She did not, however, agree that all positions involved in such work need be on the tenure track, and will propose that “the College develop a coordinated plan for hiring in the general areas of language instruction and pedagogy. Persons hired as directors or supervisors in this area will be expected to develop curriculum in one or more languages, be in the forefront of technological innovation, and supervise and train TAs and other language instructors. ... One of these hires, who will also serve as the Director of the Center, will need to be a senior position (tenurable ...), while the others will be either non-tenure-track lecturers or professional staff.” The Dean proposed that this effort be coordinated with ongoing efforts to develop a new Ph.D. program in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching.
- The Dean’s response suggests that, since language acquisition issues represent the most urgent challenge in the department, other recommendations regarding faculty hiring should await the outcome of these discussions.
- The Dean’s response expresses general agreement with the team’s assessment of the need to improve supervision and mentoring of TAs, and of the need for modernization of computers and software for faculty (and, in fact, reports that new hardware and software has already been authorized for all faculty members in the department).
- The Dean also reports concurrence with the recommendation for appointment of a permanent chair, and indicates that a committee is being organized to conduct an internal search with an eye toward an appointment by spring 2001.
- Finally, the Dean reports willingness to pursue the various proposals for curricular revision that have emerged in the past few years, but also notes that “whether or not these efforts will result in the institution of a new Ph.D. program in Francophone Studies it is ... too soon to say.”

■ Student Outcomes Assessment

The review team observed that both advising and curriculum planning would benefit from “systematic feedback from students at all levels,” and that the dialogue such feedback might engender “would also give the department the basis for developing student learning outcomes, an issue that was inadequately addressed in the AQAD Review document.” In its self-report, the department expressed an interest in responding to student needs and feedback, using their course evaluation instrument as the primary method for collecting this information. While the department did not directly articulate learning goals and objectives, one can infer many of its goals and objectives from the self-report text. Where the departmental learning objectives are most clearly stated is in the discussion of the relationship between the departmental curriculum and general education learning objectives – the department has developed a number of important links between the general education objectives and program offerings. This information could serve as the foundation for more program-specific goals and outcomes. The department takes the review of its curriculum seriously. It has compared itself with programs at similar institutions and used this information, as well as course-specific feedback from students and knowledge of disciplinary trends, to reshape the curriculum as warranted. This careful process of curricular review would be greatly enhanced by developing clearly stated learning goals and objectives, using more varied data sources to gather information on the student experience and post-graduation activities, and developing methods for directly measuring student performance.