

Languages, Literatures and Cultures

An department in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts offering the M.A. in Chinese; the B.A. in Chinese Language and Literature; the B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in Comparative Literature; the B.A., M.A., and M.A.T. in French and Francophone Studies; the B.A. in German; the M.A. and Ph.D. in Germanic Languages and Literature; the M.A., M.A.T. and Ph.D. in Hispanic Literatures and Linguistics; the B.A. and M.A.T. in Italian Studies; the M.A. in Japanese; the B.A. in Japanese Language and Literature; the B.A. in Portuguese; and the B.A. in Spanish.

■ The Review Process

This was a standard AQAD review. Reviewers were:

Jeannine Blackwell, chair (University of Kentucky)
Karen Gould (University of Cincinnati)
Marie-Hélène Huet (Princeton University)
Jorge Guitart (University at Buffalo)
Joshua Mostow (University of British Columbia)
Paul Ropp (Clark University)
Haun Saussy (Yale University)

■ Main Issues

The visiting team observed that “many of the problems and challenges of the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures are occurring in departments all across America.” Budget cuts and faculty losses have been stabilized, and there is “a change in the air.” The team urged the institution to position itself for renewed recognition of the importance of world languages and cultures. In this context, the team expressed the hope that the faculty might “take the moments of introspection in the self studies and make them a springboard to exciting intellectual collaboration.” The visiting team organized its review around two sets of issues: 1) the transition from five previous departments (Asian Languages and Literatures, Comparative Literature, French and Italian, German, and Spanish and Portuguese) to a single department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures (at the time of the review the consolidated department was in its first year); and 2) specific comments about the various programs within the department.

The team noted that the consolidation “has not been easy,” and that “integration of the ‘units’ into a whole will continue to pose challenges.” In order to “build an administrative rubric into an intellectual community,” the team’s “most urgent” recommendation was to quickly conduct national searches for faculty positions that had been delayed pending the completion of the consolidation. Moreover, in approaching faculty hiring, the team suggested that “new habits and institutions” directed toward building departmental coherence “should be primary:” ensuring that search committees are representative of the whole department, and developing a department-wide faculty renewal plan.

Other issues related to the success of the department as a whole included:

- **Instruction.** The team’s “second-highest priority” was reducing class size, which it found “remains a problem.” The team also argued against the practice of scheduling language classes for only two sessions a week. The structure of teaching appointments was found to be

a “complex web of individual appointment histories” that should be “replaced by a structure that is transparent and seen to be fair,” and teaching loads, especially among senior faculty, should be reduced. The team cited “difficulties in getting support for information technology,” and reported being “taken aback to learn that the University lags so far behind its peer institutions in providing IT services that are taken for granted elsewhere.” Measures to improve instructional technology were urged, in part because of instructional technology’s potential to “bind up the different areas” of language, literature, culture and film.

- **Physical facilities.** Related to increased support for instructional technology, the team urged the development of “smart classrooms” (and noted a Provost’s Office initiative toward that end), and called for the development of a digitally-based multi-media language learning center, which be managed in a decentralized way through a web-based interface. The team also suggested a reconfiguration of space in Herter Hall to place the departmental office and advising functions on the first floor, in part to help “materialize the role” of the department chair.
- **Diversity and Mission.** The team noted that “a department of languages, literatures and cultures has an intrinsic interest in keeping open the door of the university to cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity,” and urged that the department be “more strongly supported in continuing its tradition of recruiting a diverse and international population.”
- **Recommendations for the new chair.** To help build community and cohesiveness within the new department, the team recommended “regular, frequent meetings with all levels of instructional staff;” establishment of common standards with respect to administrative roles across units, course placement policies, and distribution of graduate teaching assistantships; and assessment of staff support roles with an eye toward improving efficiency and communication.

■ **Remarks on Individual Units.**

The team assessed current status and prospects for each of the areas within the department. Growth in Asian languages was anticipated, and a modest resurgence of interest in French was noted. Several areas were identified as being understaffed relative to demand (Asian, French and Italian, Spanish and Portuguese), and recommendations were made to add positions and/or convert current lecturer positions to tenure-track lines. The team recommended clearer focus and a careful faculty replacement plan in German, as well as conversion of some positions. In terms of specific degree programs, the team supported restoration of a redesigned Ph.D. in French and Francophone Studies and development of a new M.A. in Italian Studies, but said it is “not clear” that the addition of a Ph.D. program in Japanese would improve the program’s profile.

■ **Response to the Review**

The department chair expressed strong agreement with the team’s highest priority of nationwide, tenure-track searches, and indicated that this priority will be reflected in departmental hiring plans. General support was expressed for other personnel-related recommendations, but the chair pointed out that conversion of lecturer positions would take time given the duration of current appointments, and that the issue of conversion is being studied by the departmental executive committee. The chair also indicated a desire to bring teaching loads for all tenure-track faculty to two courses per semester (which would reflect a reduction in four of the five units), and to increase lecturers’ salaries. In combination, these shifts would require new resources for the department. The chair concurred with the team’s recommendations regarding information technology, and

described several efforts within the department to define and address these needs. The various recommendations to build intellectual cohesion in the department were noted, and the chair reported on a series of in-house faculty talks and future plans for an invited speakers series. The development of department-wide courses in areas of common interest was also mentioned. In terms of the teams remarks on individual units, the chair reported that many of the recommended actions are under way or will be considered when feasible.

The Dean expressed appreciation to the team and to the members of the department who have helped secure a successful transition to the new organizational structure. The Dean concurred with the recommendations relating to greater consistency in terms of teaching loads, graduate student appointments, common standards, and the like, and noted that “the details and particulars will need to emerge from close and long consultation, reflection, and deliberation of the faculty.” The Dean described several ongoing efforts to improve access to and support for instructional technology. In terms of assessing and responding to resource and other needs arising from the various units, the Dean noted the “rich data sets” available on the campus to inform decision making, and indicated that a “logical step” will be to ask that requests originating in the various units “be evaluated at the departmental level in a consistent, fair, and transparent way.”