



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

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Dean Phillip R. Certain
College of Letters & Science
102 South Hall

December 15, 1996

Dear Dean Certain:

During the Fall semester 1996 the Department of French & Italian devised a plan for Assessment of Student Outcomes, in response to your request. The Italian Instructional Committee, under the direction of Professor Christopher Kleinhenz, has produced a document, which I have combined with documents on the French side produced by the Undergraduate Studies committee, under the direction of Professor Richard Goodkin, and the Graduate Studies committee, under the direction of Professor Steven Winspur. The Department reviewed these documents and approved them during the December 9, 1996, meeting. I am sending (enclosed) the combined document.

Sincerely,

Ullrich Langer
Chair

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LETTERS & SCIENCE

Department of French & Italian

1. Undergraduate Major in French

The Department intends to assess the undergraduate major in French in three ways: 1) by an oral and a written examination; 2) by an ongoing evaluation by the Undergraduate Studies Committee of papers written for courses; 3) by a questionnaire that will be sent to about half of our majors each year. The anticipated cost of the assessment is \$2500 (start-up expense, to be renewed periodically) and approximately \$400 per year (details given below). It is our hope that we will receive funding for this additional expense, which cannot be absorbed by our budget.

A) Oral and Written Examination

ORAL EXAMINATION

Students with a French Education major--a degree that leads to teaching certification in the state of Wisconsin, as distinct from the more general French major--presently take an oral proficiency test, the MLA Cooperative Foreign Language Proficiency Test (Listening Comprehension and Speaking sections). We intend to use this exam to assess the comprehension and speaking skills of a representative number of general French majors every year.

The Listening Comprehension section has three parts: a) students hear a series of remarks or questions, then choose an appropriate response; b) students hear a dialogue and a news broadcast, followed by spoken questions to which they choose the correct answer based on what they have heard; c) students hear a conversation among several speakers followed by a series of statements which they must evaluate as true or false. The Speaking section has two parts: a) students read from a text and b) students use pictures to describe a scene, narrate a series of actions, and begin a conversation. Each student's test is recorded and sent to Princeton, New Jersey, to be graded at a cost of \$12.50 per student.

Since we aim to test approximately thirty students per year for the purposes of assessment--the number usually considered to be the minimum for a reliable sample in quantitative studies--this would amount to a cost of between \$350 and \$400 annually. In addition, we would need to obtain ACTFL certification for at least two additional faculty members to help carry out this testing (we presently have only one): the test will need to be given to far more students than presently take it, and those who cannot come to the regularly-scheduled sessions will have to be tested individually by certified faculty. The cost of the four-day certification workshop is \$790 per faculty member, in addition to travel and, in most cases, registration for the ACTFL meeting; this amounts to approximately \$2500 required at this time, and about half that amount required periodically (perhaps every five years or so) to certify new faculty as the need arises. Since the Assessment Plan is not intended to place onerous financial or administrative burdens on Departments, we assume that funds will be available to cover these unavoidable

costs.

WRITTEN EXAMINATION

We also intend to have representative majors produce writing samples under controlled conditions. The samples will then be evaluated by the Undergraduate Studies Committee.

B) Evaluation of Undergraduate Papers

The Undergraduate Studies Committee will ask instructors in approximately 5 courses, chosen to be representative of the different aspects of the major (language, literature, civilization), to ask permission of the French majors in their classes to submit one of their papers anonymously to the Undergraduate Studies Committee for the purposes of assessment. (We will check whether this constitutes a case of "human subjects" used for research purposes, and if so, will obtain the necessary authorizations.) The Undergraduate Studies Committee will assess these papers in three categories: language skills (correctness of French), literary or cultural analysis, and composition skills (effectiveness of presentation of ideas). This will give us a range of scores indicating the strengths and weaknesses of our training of French majors. Using the same process, we also intend to examine papers in at least one course that is a prerequisite for the major, probably French 271, Introduction to Literary Analysis. This will allow us to evaluate not only the level of the majors, but also the improvement between the level of prerequisite courses and the level of courses in the major.

C) Undergraduate Questionnaire

We plan to use email to administer a questionnaire that will aim to assess students' experience as French majors, as well as their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the organization of the program. Once again using the number of thirty for minimum reliability of the sample, we will contact a randomly selected list of majors and ask them to fill out the following questionnaire. Since anonymity might be a concern, we will have students reply by email to our departmental secretary, who will print the responses up without the names of the students. The Undergraduate Studies Committee will then read and assess the results and use them to propose necessary modifications in the major as they may arise.

REFLECTIONS ON YOUR EXPERIENCE AS AN UNDERGRADUATE FRENCH MAJOR

The Department of French and Italian is assessing the quality and effectiveness of its programs and courses. We ask you to help us by completing the following questionnaire. These questions are intended to help us evaluate the major as a whole and are not specifically directed at individual courses. Please feel free to suggest changes for improving the major as well as evaluations of your own experience.

1. Why did you select French as an undergraduate major?
2. How confident do you feel in your ability to communicate in French and to understand

others? Please comment on your speaking, oral comprehension, and reading and writing skills.

3. Do you have a general sense of the development of French and Francophone literature, including important texts and authors? Please be as precise as you can in your answer.

4. Do you feel capable of articulating different approaches to reading and interpreting a literary text? Have you developed your own critical approach? Please be as precise as you can in your answer.

5. How competent would you judge yourself to be as a writer of essays on literary topics?

6. Which courses have been most useful to you in developing your knowledge and understanding of French and Francophone culture and civilization?

7. Have you participated in the cultural activities sponsored by the Department and by the French House? Have you studied abroad in a French-speaking country? Please comment as precisely as possible on what you consider to be the value of these experiences.

8. Has your experience in French and Francophone studies led you to reflect upon your own first language and culture? What have you learned?

9. How do you expect your French major to help you achieve your life and career goals after graduation? Have your studies helped you to formulate these goals, or changed them in any way?

10. Is there any comment you would like to make that is not included in your answers to other sections of this questionnaire?

2. Graduate Program in French

A) How current assessment is conducted:

Two assessments are currently in place at the M.A. exam and also at the Ph.D. dissertation defence. In order to pass the M.A. exam, which is made up of a five-hour written exam and a one-hour oral exam, every student must demonstrate a familiarity with the major works of French and francophone literature from the Middle Ages to the present. They must be able to analyze some of these works in detail, and discuss their literary and historical importance. The written exam is done in French (with the exception of one optional question that may be written in English), and the oral exam is conducted completely in French, which allows successful candidates to also demonstrate that they have mastered the French language sufficiently to lead a technical discussion of literature and culture.

The Ph.D. dissertation defence is an in-depth oral exam in which the student must support or clarify arguments that are advanced in his or her dissertation. Since the dissertation is on a specific problem of literary interpretation or literary history, and since all dissertators have already had to pass rigorous exams in the areas of specialization covered by their dissertation, the assessment that takes place at the Ph.D. defence is of a detailed nature. The student is required to demonstrate either an originality of thinking and understanding (for literary interpretation) or else a complete comprehension of the historical and social contexts that influence the literary works under scrutiny. The combination of testing the students' breadth of knowledge at the M.A. level and the depth and originality of understanding at the Ph.D. level means that students graduating with a Ph.D. in French are specialist researchers who can apply their investigative skills to a variety of fields within French-speaking literature and cultures.

B) Plan for future assessment of student outcomes.

The main goal of our graduate program in French is to give our students as rigorous a training as possible so that they can secure teaching and research positions in universities throughout the country. Two proposed ways to broaden the assessment of our program's success in achieving this goal are: 1) The keeping of detailed records of student placement in university positions after their graduation (and updating these records when a student changes his or her employer) and 2) asking our new graduates as of May 1997 to fill out a questionnaire asking which parts of our program have best prepared them for the teaching and research jobs they found.

Since a significant number of our M.A. graduates and some of our Ph.D. graduates are now finding jobs outside universities, we also propose a second questionnaire that will be given to such students after May 1997, asking them to give details of the types of work they have secured and how their training in French helped them obtain such employment

.3. Undergraduate Major in Italian

The Department intends to assess the undergraduate major in Italian in two ways: 1) by evaluation by the Italian Instructional Committee of papers written for upper-level courses or of papers written as special projects (e.g., Senior Thesis, Independent Study) and 2) by a special questionnaire that will be sent to all of our graduating majors each year.

A) Evaluation of Papers and Special Projects

The Italian Instructional Committee will ask permission of the Italian majors in upper-level courses to submit one of their papers anonymously to the Committee for purposes of assessment. [We will check whether this constitutes a case of "human subjects" used for research purposes, and if so, will obtain the necessary authorization.] The Italian Instructional Committee will assess these papers/projects in three categories: language skills (correctness of Italian), literary or cultural analysis, and composition skills (effectiveness of presentation of ideas). This will give us a range of scores indicating the strengths and weaknesses of our

training of Italian majors. Using the same process, we also intend to examine written work in at least one of the lower-level courses that are required for the major (e.g., 321-322 "Introduction to Italian Literature).

B) Undergraduate Questionnaire

We plan to administer a questionnaire that will aim to assess students' experience as Italian majors, as well as their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the organization of the program. We will contact all of the majors and ask them to fill out the following questionnaire. Anonymity will be preserved. The Italian Instructional Committee will read and assess the results and use them to propose necessary modifications in the major as they may arise.

Reflections on Your Experience as an Undergraduate Italian Major

The Department of French and Italian is assessing the quality and effectiveness of its programs and courses. We ask you to help us by completing the following questionnaire. These questions are intended to help us evaluate the major as a whole and are not specifically directed at individual courses. Please feel free to suggest changes for improving the major as well as evaluations of your own experience.

1. Why did you select Italian as an undergraduate major?
2. How confident do you feel in your ability to communicate in Italian and to understand others? Please comment on your speaking, oral comprehension, and reading and writing skills.
3. Do you have a general sense of the development of Italian literature, including important texts and authors? Please be as precise as you can in your answer.
4. Do you feel capable of articulating different approaches to reading and interpreting a literary text? Have you developed your own critical approach? Please be as precise as you can in your answer.
5. How competent would you judge yourself to be as a writer of essays on literary topics?
6. Which courses have been most useful to you in developing your knowledge and understanding of Italian culture and civilization?
7. Have you participated in the cultural activities sponsored by the Department?
8. Have you studied abroad in Italy? Please comment as precisely as possible on what you consider to be the value of this experience.
9. Has your experience in Italian studies led you to reflect upon your own first language and culture? What have you learned?

10. How do you expect your Italian major to help you achieve your life and career goals after graduation? Have your studies helped you to formulate these goals, or changed them in any way?

Additional comments: please make any comments that are not included in your responses to other sections of this questionnaire.

4. Graduate Program in Italian

The Department intends to assess the graduate major in Italian in two ways: 1) by continuing the current modes of assessment and 2) by instituting two special surveys intended to gauge the effectiveness of the program. One questionnaire will be given to those students who are currently completing their graduate work, and the other, more extended survey will be distributed to those graduates (M.A. and Ph.D.) of the program since 1990.

A) Current Modes of Assessment

Two assessments are currently in place, at the M.A. exam and at the Ph.D. dissertation defense. In order to pass the M.A. exam, which is made up of a four-hour written exam and a one-hour oral exam, every student must demonstrate a familiarity with the major works of Italian literature from the Middle Ages to the present. They must be able to analyze some of these works in detail, and discuss their literary and historical importance. Parts of the written and oral exams are done in Italian, and this allows the successful candidates to demonstrate that they have mastered the Italian language sufficiently well enough to engage in a technical discussion of literature and culture.

The Ph.D. dissertation defense is an in-depth oral exam in which the student must support or clarify arguments that are advanced in his or her dissertation. Since the dissertation is on a specific problem of literary interpretation or literary history, and since all dissertators have to pass rigorous exams in the areas of specialization covered by their dissertation, the assessment that takes place at the Ph.D. defense is of a detailed nature. The student is required to demonstrate either an originality of thinking and understanding (for literary interpretation) or else a complete comprehension of the historical and social contexts that influence the literary works under scrutiny. The combination of testing the students' breadth of knowledge at the M.A. level, and the depth and originality of understanding at the Ph.D. level means that students graduating with a Ph.D. in Italian are specialist researchers who can apply their investigative skills to a variety of fields within Italian literature and culture.

B) Related Assessment Issues

Starting with the current group of M.A. candidates who will complete the degree during the course of the academic year and who are not continuing in the program and with the current group of dissertators who will defend their dissertations before the end of this academic year, the Department will ask these students to complete a survey asking them to evaluate their

training. The areas that we will ask the students to evaluate in this survey include: the breadth of training at both the pre-M.A. and pre-Ph.D. levels, the amount of training received in detailed research techniques, the help that they have received in developing their teaching ability, and suggestions for further improvement in training for the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees. We are currently developing this questionnaire.

We also plan to develop and distribute an expanded survey to those students who have received their Ph.D. degree since 1990. The additional questions will be directed toward determining the effectiveness of our program insofar as this can be measured: e.g., their own research productivity since receiving their degree (books, articles, book reviews, conference papers, etc.), the value that their experience in our program (as teachers and researchers) had toward their obtaining a position, their level of professional activity (organization of panels, leadership roles in organizations, etc.), and related points.