

Annual Report of the Undergraduate Adviser

Department of Languages & Cultures of Asia
Academic Year 2010-11
May 4, 2011

The current academic year was a time of consolidation for the still relatively new major curriculum in LCA. The trends that we saw last year have continued: most majors are choosing the Asian Languages track to complete their degree and most have a double major or certificate with another department or program. The flexibility offered by the current curriculum, therefore, has again proven to be an attraction for students. After the end of next year, all remaining LCA students will be under the new major requirements.

Two gateway courses were offered this year: Fall-LCA/Relig St 273 (Hansen) and Spring-LCA 100 (Elder). Information about the major was announced and/or distributed in both of these courses. As in the past, a few DARS exceptions were granted for Relig St 235, which covers a wide range of Asian religions similar to 273. Since 273 is a key course for Religious Studies, too, staffing this course is less of a problem. LCA 100 or 101 must continue to be staffed in the alternating semester. The other main requirement for the major, the LCA 600 Capstone Seminar, was offered in Fall (Davis) and had 16 students. As of this report, 19 students have registered for the seminar next Fall. This number is still comfortably within the range for the goals and format of the course. Students are made aware both when they declare the major and via an email in Spring that the Capstone is currently only offered in the Fall. This practice is critical until and unless we can offer the course in both terms.

In November 2010, I met with Christina Klawitter about advising practices in LCA. She is in charge of an initiative funded through MIU to examine and reform advising and the assistance given to departments for advising, including, for example, an idea to assign one professional advisor to a thematic group of departments to handle procedural matters. Although it was a very encouraging meeting, I have not yet heard about any LCA-specific changes that may be introduced.

One nagging issue about the current major requirements emerged over the course of the year. The rule for electives in the major have caused some students, mostly in the language track, to run into a crediting problem. Electives currently must be numbered 300 or higher to be counted for the major. Several important LCA courses, including ones labeled as intermediate, are taught at the 200 level. Without an exception, those courses can currently only count in the humanities track, and never as electives. This obviously discourages most of our majors from taking those courses. The department should reconsider this restriction and either a) renumber all intermediate and advanced courses with 300+ numbers, or b) rephrase the current rules to that of many other departments: "All students must fulfill the L&S requirement of at least 15 credits in upper-level work in the major completed in residence. Students may fulfill this requirement with any of the History courses designated as 'intermediate' or 'advanced.'" I would advocate the latter, which may require a short proposal to the Curriculum Committee. The following language for at the end of the major description should also be changed accordingly: "All students are required to fulfill the L&S requirement of at least 15 credits of **upper-level work in the major** completed in residence. LCA courses 300-699 (with the exception of first- and second-semester language courses) count toward this requirement."

One social event geared toward undergraduates was held. A fall potluck brought just four undergraduates, three graduate students, and a handful of instructors and faculty out to Vilas Park. We need to pick and announce the date for that earlier and to arrange it in September, in order to get decent weather. The spring departmental luncheon will also gather students together for social interaction. Students sometimes ask for more opportunities to meet with peers and faculty and the department should at least consider some additional department-wide activities to which undergraduates would be invited.

Although I was on sabbatical leave in the Spring, I decided in the end to continue as undergraduate adviser, mostly because the alternatives seemed confusing for students and unfair for faculty. Before her retirement, Sarah Atis, who had done the job before, had agreed to invigilate, but asking someone else to learn the ropes for just one semester didn't make sense. The workload remained about the same as last year, namely not unreasonable, but certainly demanding some extra attention in peak periods (registration times and graduation). On average, I would estimate that I received about two advising-related inquiries from students every week, twice that in peak periods. Half require a simple clarification to the student; half require some additional work (filling out a form, making a call to the Registrar or another advisor).

Overall, I would rate this academic year as a useful solidification of the new major curriculum. In terms of things remaining to be done and goals remaining to be addressed, I think we need to encourage more honors theses to be done in the department, to develop an exit survey for majors and some way to follow up with them after graduation, and to develop a short guide to the LCA major for print and web distribution. These practices will help us reach our current assessment goals for student learning within the major and help us think about a new set of goals to set for ourselves and our students in two or three years.

Statistics

Total number of LCA majors at time of report: 46

Number of LCA majors graduating in Spring 2011: 19 (3 under old reqs.)

Number of LCA majors graduated in Fall 2010: 7

Number of students in LCA 600, Fall 2010: 16

Number of Phi Beta Kappa nominated LCA majors in 2011: 1 (Fox)

Number of Undergraduate Theses guided by LCA faculty: 2 (Johnson, Naythons)

Respectfully submitted,

Don Davis