

Annual Report of the Undergraduate Advisor

Department of Languages & Cultures of Asia
Academic Year 2011-12
May 2, 2012

The undergraduate program in LCA is healthy and stable. Although the total number of majors in LCA did not grow as it had for each of the past two years, the total remained steady. Almost all majors are now fulfilling the requirements of the curriculum implemented in Fall 2009. The profile of students in the department also remains similar. Typically, LCA is part of a double major and students tend to find the department sometime late in their sophomore or in the junior year. Many learn about the major through languages courses and most majors are still completing the language track.

The third incarnation of the Capstone seminar was offered in Fall 2011. The course has evolved since its inception and now consists of a fairly tight structure with the first third of the seminar devoted to challenging theoretical readings about “principles of Asian humanities.” The remainder of the seminar is then devoted to scholarship that exemplifies one or more of the principles and draws on all disciplines and geographic areas represented in LCA. Students responded positively to the principles articulated in the courses, the goal being to give them unique to say about their experience in LCA. As always, the diverse backgrounds, knowledge bases, and linguistic skills of the Capstone students made for good discussions. It is my sense that a measure of common understanding and experience is facilitated through the Capstone. It is successfully achieving our goals to require a rigorous, common culminating experience that considers both theoretical and methodological approaches used in Asian humanities.

As in past years, LCA 273 (Hansen) was offered in the Fall and LCA 100 (Davis) in the Spring. One common problem for students concerns the timing of the introductory requirement within their overall degree progress. Far too many students fulfill the LCA introduction requirement in the senior year, often in their last semester. In part, this is due to the fact that students tend to find the major late in their undergraduate career, having already taken several language courses or other LCA courses, not usually one of the introductions. The explicit goals of the introduction and capstone are to ensure that they take at least two courses that consciously cover more than one geographic area of Asia. I have regularly granted exceptions to students for other courses that also cover multiple regions. This year, three or four students have the problem of needing the Capstone and the Intro at the same time. Since 273 and 600 overlap in the Fall Timetable, this makes it hard. We should try to ensure that the Capstone and Intro courses don't conflict.

The issue mentioned in last year's report, namely the small crediting problem created for students in the language track by the fact that other electives must be 300+, has not remained a big issue, although no action was taken on this question. In brief, the potential problem is that important 200-level courses offered in LCA cannot count at all for students doing the languages track. LCA could still consider changing the requirement from 300+ to “intermediate,” but we would want to consider also the potential downside of allowing too many credits in lower-level courses.

In the Fall 2011, the Madison Initiative for Undergraduates funded a new advising position in part due to a joint proposal generated from LCA and EALL. The International Directions advisor was hired in early Spring and it happens to be a recent MA graduate from LCA. The ID advisor works out of the Language Institute and is tasked with two primary

objectives: 1) to act as a supplementary advisor for students in language-centered majors, especially providing information on the use of “language for life,” and 2) to provide career advising for students in language-centered majors, something that takes much too much time for faculty advisors to keep up on. LCA students were notified of the ID advisor’s roles as a resource in late Spring and the Undergraduate Handbook incorporates information about the position as well. I hope the position will both generate additional interest in the major and provide a go-to person for career advising.

The final issue I want to raise is the potential over-identification of the undergraduate major with me personally. As of this report, I have completed three years as undergraduate advisor, have taught the Capstone seminar for three consecutive years, and have taught LCA 100 for two of the last three years. Only Profs. Hansen (273 x 3) and Elder (100 x 1) have also taught a required LCA undergraduate course during that same time. The responsibility for the required elements of the undergraduate curriculum and program must somehow be shared by all LCA faculty. This report serves as my request to the department that I be excused from teaching any of the required courses for LCA and from serving as undergraduate advisor during the AY 2013-14 (the year after next). I think this is important particularly for the students.

In summary, the LCA undergraduate program maintained a steady state. We did not continue to grow in terms of overall majors, nor in other markers that we aspire to build up, e.g. honors theses. At the same time, all aspects of the major seem secure and well received by students. We should consider additional recruiting efforts beyond the majors fair (once again staffed by myself, Dee, and four students from the Capstone) and more explicit encouragement of undergraduate research.

Statistics

Total number of LCA majors at time of report: 45

Number of LCA majors graduating in Spring 2012: 12

Number of LCA majors graduated in Fall 2011: 2

Number of students in LCA 600, Fall 2011: 19

Number of Phi Beta Kappa nominated LCA majors in 2012: 2 (Bennett, Soon)

Number of Undergraduate Honors Theses guided by LCA faculty: 1 (Pisarski)

Respectfully submitted,

Don Davis