

Assessment Report
Department of Spanish and Portuguese
May 1, 2006

The Department of Spanish and Portuguese offers an integrated curriculum in introductory and specialized instruction in Spanish and Portuguese languages, literatures and linguistics for undergraduates to fulfill major, College, and campus requirements, as well as for those seeking fluency and a solid language preparation for other opportunities. Through our graduate program, we offer advanced training at the MA and PhD levels so that our graduates are well-qualified professionals in their chosen fields. By participating actively in the advancement of the profession at the state, national, and international levels, we make our knowledge and research available to the public through outreach activities; provision of various services related to our fields; and in cooperation with teachers and students in Ibero-American and Luso-Brazilian studies.

Overview of the undergraduate program. The undergraduate Spanish major provides students with a wide variety of classes in language, linguistics, culture and literature, which ensures critical knowledge and solid preparation for advanced study in any of the areas offered in these fields, as well as oral and written proficiency in the Spanish language. This is a popular liberal arts major in the College of Letters and Science, and there are currently 431 Spanish majors on the books (in the last report on the Spanish major in the spring of 2002 there were 312 registered majors, which represents an increase of approximately 37%). This past semester (Fall 2005), 40 Spanish majors graduated, and 152 plan to graduate this current semester (Spring 2006). Also, in the current semester 119 students declared Spanish as their major. This steady growth in declared majors can be attributed to two principal factors. Internally it is due to better access to upper level undergraduate courses (300-400), a result of faculty hiring in the last year. Externally, it expresses an expanding desire on the part of students to gain fluency in Spanish for professional opportunities (a survey conducted in November 2004 by the Undergraduate Studies Committee found that 62% of 1,362 students declared they thought they would need Spanish in their future career).

During 1997-98, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese engaged in redesigning its undergraduate major. The Departmental Committee was interested in better integrating all areas of Spanish, and in finding a way to respond to students' desires to have the option of concentrating on the study of language and linguistics, as previously the Spanish major was heavily concentrated on the study of literature. In several surveys carried out by this committee, many students expressed plans to use Spanish in fields outside the humanities after graduation. The Department thus created two options within its undergraduate major in Spanish: Track A: Language and Hispanic Studies and Track B: Literature and Hispanic Studies. Several courses on language and linguistics were created and pre-requisite courses for both tracks were redesigned. The Department and Curriculum Committee approved the new undergraduate major, which went into effect in the fall of 1999. The new undergraduate major has provided an effective means for the study of Spanish.

Objectives of the major. Students are expected to achieve solid skills of advanced proficiency in oral communication and written expression, critical understanding of key aspects of Hispanic cultures and literatures, and knowledge of the main aspects of Ibero-Romance linguistics.

Assessments and methods. (1) In the fall of 2002 the Undergraduate Studies Committee conducted a survey of the number of students majoring in Spanish over the previous ten-year period which documented an increase of approximately 74% (i.e., the number of majors grew from 179 in the spring of 1992 to 312 in the spring of 2002). The report concluded that the Department has been successful in recruiting undergraduate students for its major in Spanish, and in emphasizing the value of Spanish as a liberal arts degree. However, resources given to this department in terms of staffing did not keep pace with the increase in the number of majors, and the department lagged behind its peers in its ability to meet its demands in the area of undergraduate education. (2) In November of 2004, the Undergraduate Studies Committee conducted a survey in all sections of all undergraduate Spanish courses in order to find out key information about the entire range of students taking Spanish courses as well as about Spanish majors in particular. In particular the survey sought information regarding students' pre-university background in Spanish, their enrollment experience in Spanish courses in our department, and their goals regarding majoring in Spanish (as well as double-and triple-majoring.) (3) In the fall of 2002, the Undergraduate Studies Committee also changed the procedure for assessing students' learning in the redesigned Spanish major by replacing the expository writing portfolio required previously of Spanish majors with writing samples drawn from students' papers and exams written in the civilization courses Spanish 361 and 363. Faculty members teaching these courses were asked to photocopy one paper and one exam (before correcting or grading them) from every fifth student in the class roster, and these samples were placed anonymously in the assessment files (the names of students and faculty members were removed).

Spanish 361 and 363 are usually taken during the last few semesters of students' work in the major, and thus work done in these courses closely reflects their level of writing proficiency upon completing the major. Given our interest in *expository* writing, courses on culture / civilization are more likely to produce writing germane to this evaluation procedure than work done in language practice, linguistics or literature courses. While it is true that not all majors take these courses, given that the culture course requirement can also be satisfied by coursework taken abroad or by Spanish 468 / 469, a majority does take them, and for assessing student learning they provide a representative sample. This is the first assessment of student learning since we changed the method of assessment in 2002.

Assessment of Student Learning. The Assessment of Student Learning in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese has been carried out through an in-depth evaluation of sixteen sample papers produced by students in fulfillment of requirements for two advanced-level culture courses: ten papers (five midterm essays and five final papers) were written for Spanish 361 ("Spanish Civilization") and six midterm papers for Spanish 363 ("Spanish American Civilization"). The papers were submitted anonymously to the Undergraduate Studies Committee and subsequently evaluated for content and linguistic competence. It should be noted that the student-authors were in their junior or senior years and, therefore, had already completed several prerequisite courses in language, literature and culture. In addition, Spanish 361 and Spanish 363 are both culture courses and, as such, are taken by majors in both of the tracks offered by the Department, i.e. Language and Hispanic Studies and Literature and Hispanic Studies.

Regarding the content of the students' work, the evaluators considered the degree of relevance in the treatment of the topic as well as the coherence organization of material and competence in the conventions of written Spanish. Of the sixteen samples, twelve (75%) demonstrated a relevant discussion of the topic, while in two cases (12.5%) the degree of adequacy varied, and in the other

two (12.5%) the students treated the topic in a very thorough and relevant manner. With respect to organization, ten of the papers (62.5%) were fairly organized, demonstrating competence in the conventions of written Spanish. Two papers (12.5%), however, were poorly organized, without a solid command of standard writing practices. The remaining four papers (25%) were very well organized and demonstrated an excellent degree of competence in writing conventions and treatment of the subject.

As far as the students' linguistic ability is concerned, the evaluators considered vocabulary, syntax and spelling. The survey revealed that nine of the papers (56.25%) employed appropriate but limited vocabulary with occasional first-language interference. Only in one case (6.25%) was the vocabulary very limited and the first-language interference significant. Four papers (25%) showed a considerable breadth of vocabulary and two (12.5%) demonstrated a rich, precise expression and near-idiomatic ease. In terms of syntax, the majority of students demonstrated control of elementary grammar structures, although the number of errors in complex structures varied. To wit, in eight cases (50%) frequent errors occurred, while in six cases (12.5%) the errors were limited and in two (12.5%) merely occasional. Typical mistakes included pronoun, subject-verb, and noun-adjective and noun-determiner agreement. The use of prepositions and the Spanish *se* caused less frequent problems, as did the interference of the students' first language and the improper use of vocabulary. Sporadic errors stemmed from the use of *ser* and *estar*, the subjunctive, gerunds and spelling, while problems distinguishing the use of the imperfect and preterit verb tenses were only apparent in one paper, which was of a more narrative, rather than expository, nature.

As a final note, progress both in content and grammar was observable in those papers presented as final essays for Spanish 361 in comparison to those written for the midterm examination. In addition, some of the best papers revealed contact with the Spanish language outside the classroom, perhaps via study abroad programs.

Conclusions. The majority of students demonstrated an ability to write organized and well-focused analytical papers and their command of relevant knowledge of Hispanic cultures varied from the general to a nuanced, critical familiarity. In terms of linguistic ability, only one student showed very limited vocabulary and significant interference from the first-language. The assessment of students' expository writing shows that most students achieve a satisfactory range of advanced proficiency in written expression. Finally, the Undergraduate Studies Committee recommends that the next assessment of student learning include an oral proficiency component to be obtained by interviewing a number of students selected at random among seniors graduating in the Spanish major.

The graduate program assessment: The Graduate Studies Committee is presently concluding the second assessment exercise of the Department's M.A. and Ph.D. programs in Spanish and Portuguese; the first assessment took place during the spring semester of the 2003-04 academic year. For both exercises, the committee gathered data on the measures of success of the respective graduate programs, following the guidelines presented in paragraphs 2.B2-2.B4 of the Plan for Assessment of the Undergraduate Major and Graduate Programs that was approved by the Departmental Committee in 1997.

As such, the data gathered included: the number of applicants for entrance to MA and Ph.D., the percentage of those admitted, and the average GRE scores of incoming graduate students. We also have collected data on the average number of years that students take for completion of the M.A.

and Ph.D. degrees and on the percentage of MA students who continue for the Ph.D. in our programs. In the first assessment, it was possible to consult statistics provided by the Graduate School regarding the number of students who entered the respective graduate programs ten years earlier and were still enrolled. At present, however, this information is no longer available on the Graduate School's web page. Finally, we have sent surveys to students who have completed Ph.D. or MA degree and left the department during the period 2001-2005.

In the fall of 2006, the Graduate Studies Committee will analyze the results from the two assessments and make formal recommendations to the Departmental Committee. At the moment, two trends that indicate areas of concern have appeared: 1. the number of students accepted for our graduate programs who then chose to enroll has steadily declined, from over 50% in 2002-03 to approximately 30% in 2005-06; 2. the number of years it takes for a student to complete both the M.A. and the Ph.D. remains higher than expected: over two years for the M.A., and between eight and nine years for the Ph.D.