

Assessment Report of Programs
Department of Spanish and Portuguese
June 2008

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 programs, 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.

Graduate Programs

The Department of Spanish and Portuguese administers five graduate programs: MA programs in Spanish and in Portuguese, and PhD programs in Portuguese, in Hispanic Literatures, and in Hispano-Romance Linguistics. The Graduate Studies Committee of the department produced an internal assessment of these programs which was approved by the department committee in the spring semester of 2007. This assessment is based on that report, with updates as available. It should be noted that an important obstacle in producing assessment reports is the fact that data available from the Graduate School are in many cases out of date, sometimes by years, and at the time of writing are in fact totally unavailable. It is therefore impossible to generate accurate information for such reports on anything less than a five-year basis, since the data accessible are not statistically significant. For purposes of the assessment, the Graduate Studies Committee attempted to gather 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 department in 1997, and revised in 2007.

In the current assessment, the data gathered include:

- the number of applications for entrance to the MA and PhD programs
- the percentage of applicants admitted
- the percentage of those admitted who enrolled
- the mean number of years students take for completion of the MA
- the mean number of years students take for completion of the PhD
- the number of MA candidates who pass the PhD Qualifier

- the number of successful MA candidates who enroll in the PhD program
- information from surveys sent to alumni who completed a graduate degree and left the department between 2003 and 2005.

The data gathered point to the following conclusions. The department's graduate programs have attracted largely similar numbers of total applicants each year over the last five years, a higher number than in previous years (AY 2003-04 is included for comparison):

	Spanish MA	Spanish PhD	Portuguese MA	Portuguese PhD	Total
2003	33	28	3	2	66
2004	46	29	2	3	80
2005	45	29	2	2	78
2006	51	31	5	2	89
2007	41	37	1	4	83
2008	25	39	2	3	69*

[*The totals for AY 2008-09 do not yet include applications for admission in the Spring semester.]

The relative proportion of applications in the Spanish MA and PhD programs has, however, shown a switch in the sense that more applications are now being received for our PhD programs than for the MA (especially in Spanish), probably as a result of the fact that more and more smaller institutions are beginning to offer graduate studies in Spanish, but they do not go beyond the MA level. Our PhD programs therefore attract more and more applications from students who did not go through our MA program. This is significant in the sense that, generally speaking, more course work is required of these students in the PhD and they therefore take longer to complete the degree. In the period 2002-2005, the number of Spanish MA applicants admitted was around 25-30%, and the number of PhD applicants around 10-15%. There is much more fluctuation in the percentage of candidates accepting offers, however. In the same period, this was between 50% and 75% for MA applicants, and between 35% and 50% for PhD applicants. Since the number of applicants for the Portuguese programs is much smaller, percentages fluctuate greatly, but on average we make offers to more than half of all applicants, with acceptances from half of those. Since 2005, the percentage of applications accepted has risen somewhat, though exact figures are unavailable for the reasons outlined above.

The average time taken for graduate students to complete the MA degree is between 2.0 and 2.2 years, which the department judges to be satisfactory. According to Graduate School statistics, the average time to degree for the PhD was a little more than 8 years; given that this figure is based on the enrollment period both for students who joined our PhD program from outside and those who received their MA in our department, and that many of our PhD candidates are in the latter category, the real time for the PhD is

probably nearer to 6 years. This is still a figure we would like to see reduced, though it is not too excessive.

Within our department, the MA is granted by a final examination, which also functions as a qualifier for the PhD. In recent years, approximately 70-80% of MA candidates have passed the qualifier and been admitted to the PhD program, and of those, between 65 and 80% have entered the program. This indicates a high degree of success in terms of MA candidates meeting the level of learning and performance required by the program, and it reflects well on our programs that such a large percentage prefer to enter our PhD tracks rather than transferring to other institutions. It should also be noted that candidates may only pass the qualifier the first time they take the MA examination; most of those who do not retake the exam in deficient areas, and so the total percentage of success in the MA degree exceeds 90%.

Included in our internal assessment completed in 2007 were the results of a survey sent out to alumni of our graduate programs. The responses showed particularly high scores (above 4.0 out of a possible 5.0) for questions regarding teaching (both in the way students felt they learned to read critically and analyze material, and in the way they were trained as instructors), and the appropriateness of material taught to the academic field. The lowest scores (below 3.0) showed some dissatisfaction with the length of reading lists for the MA, with the accessibility of some faculty members, and advising, both regarding academic progress and professional placement.

When the assessment document was approved by the department, the following recommendations, among others, were accepted as part of it:

1. the department needs to continue to concentrate on recruitment efforts, particularly by reaching out to applicants who have been accepted and encouraging them to accept our offers;
2. the department needs to consider ways to help PhD candidates complete their degrees in a shorter time;
3. the department should work to maintain MA reading lists at a reasonable length;
4. faculty should be aware of the importance of their role as graduate advisers, and intensify contact with students.

The Graduate Studies Committee has a continuing commitment to address its efforts to these areas. Recruitment is regarded as a priority: committee members contact all accepted applicants by phone, and encourage them to come back to us with questions or to discuss our offer. Candidates are also encouraged to visit campus, and the small amount of funding made available by the Graduate School is dedicated to making these visits possible. The single most important obstacle to recruitment efforts is financial: we compete with high-quality programs at a large number of institutions, not only on the national level, but also locally in the Mid-West (Indiana U., U. Illinois, U. Minnesota, U.

Iowa, U. Michigan, and Ohio State U. all have strong graduate programs in Spanish, and some in Portuguese too). Applicants report that, even taking into account tuition remission, our financial packets simply do not compete, and some candidates have told us that they will accept offers from programs which are less attractive to them than ours simply because of financial considerations.

The second major obstacle hindering the department from addressing these recommendations adequately is the critical lack of faculty our programs are currently suffering. The obvious way to enable PhD candidates to complete their degrees more expeditiously is to offer more classes on the graduate level. Unfortunately, the enormous demand for undergraduate teaching in our department requires that we balance very carefully faculty distribution between undergraduate and graduate teaching. Faculty have taken steps to ameliorate the situation by permitting overenrollment, teaching more independent studies, and teaching overloads, but these are no more than stopgap measures with a temporary effect.

The Graduate Studies Committee continues to encourage open communication with students. In addition to the presence of elected student representatives on the committee, the chair has met with groups of students at their request to discuss policy issues, and also ensures that faculty in general are kept informed of advising concerns. Each year, the committee offers assistance to all graduate students who are completing their degrees and looking at professional openings. This assistance includes advice on the preparation of CVs and letters of interest, and mock interviews.

In conclusion, and despite the difficulties that face our graduate programs, one clear measure of their success is that our graduates enjoy full employment. Many of our PhD students accept academic appointments even before defending their dissertations, which, though a very positive situation for them, also contributes to lengthening their enrollment period in the program. In national rankings, our graduate programs remain within the top ten, most of the programs with higher rankings being at private institutions whose resources to recruit students and retain faculty far exceed our own.

Undergraduate Programs

The undergraduate Spanish major provides students with a variety of classes in language, linguistics, culture and literature, which provides students with 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. As of Fall 2007 there were 457 Spanish majors on the books. This semester Spring 2008, 153 majors graduated and prior 129 graduated in the Spring 2007 semester. The number of majors continue to grow due to the importance of the Hispanic language and culture and more and more students combine the major with other areas of student and the vast majority consider Spanish important for their future career.

The object of the undergraduate major is to provide students with 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.

The Undergraduate Program in both Spanish and Portuguese is varied and, especially in Spanish has tracks that specialize in language/linguistics or literature. It is extremely difficult to assess the success of courses in literature or linguistics, since the analysis is somewhat subjective. The only way we have to quantify an assessment of undergraduate learning is through language skills, which we carry out on a sampling of essays from 300-level culture courses every two years. It is important to note, however, that both the linguistic and literature tracks do show great success among the majors, since in both Portuguese and Spanish we have a proven track record of Hilldale scholarships in the literary field (one or two each year over the past several years); and Spanish linguistic courses are in high demand and sought after by our own majors as well as by majors in Education and LACIS. Our most popular (and demanded) courses are in Hispanic linguistics and advanced culture courses in all areas.

During the Spring 2008 semester, the Undergraduate Studies Committee carried out an assessment exercise involving writing samples from advanced undergraduate students in Spanish 363 (Spanish American Civilization), both in Spring 2007 and Spring 2008. The twenty samples were chosen randomly by the instructor of the course. Although official declaration of the Spanish major was not used as a criterion in the sampling, most students enrolled in Spanish culture/civilization courses at this level are majors.

As was stated in our April 2006 assessment report, “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.”

The scale used in the evaluation is based on the guidelines for evaluating writing developed by ACTFL (Association of College Teachers of Foreign Languages). A set of descriptions of the categories used is appended to this report. We were interested in judging both the proficiency and correctness of the students’ sentence construction, use of grammatical structures, and vocabulary, as well as their ability to articulate ideas in response to the essay questions posed by the instructor.

Since each evaluator was to examine 10 samples, we divided them into two groups (1-10, 11-20) and each sample was examined by three members of the committee.

For tabulation purposes, the following numbers were assigned to the ACTFL categories:

- 1—Novice-Low
- 2—Novice-Mid
- 3—Novice-High
- 4—Intermediate-Low

- 5—Intermediate-Mid
- 6—Intermediate-High
- 7—Advanced
- 8—Advanced Plus

The results of the evaluation were as follows:

Group 1

Average Rating: 6.43

Average range of variation between the ratings of the three evaluators: 2.4

Group 2

Average Rating: 6.56

Average range of variation between the ratings of the three evaluators: 2.3

Average rating of the whole set of samples: 6.5 (halfway between Intermediate-High and Advanced)

The evaluators were invited to indicate, after their evaluation of each sample, any aspects of structure, vocabulary, etc. which they believed to be most in need of improvement. The following aspects were noted, listed below in order of the number of times they were mentioned by the evaluators (in descending order of frequency):

<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Nature of problem</u>
25	Adjective (or article)-noun agreement
15	Lexicon (invented words based on English or false cognates)
9	Misuse of moods and tenses
8	Misuse of <i>gustar</i> and verbs of like structure
8	Conjugation of basic (especially irregular) verbs
8	Mistakes in direct object, indirect object, or reflexive pronoun use (including substitution of prepositional phrase [e.g. “a ella”] for object pronouns)
7	Expression of the passive voice (including overuse of <i>ser</i> + past participle)

7	Problems in articulating sentences through prepositions and conjunctions
6	Spelling mistakes (including those of probably native speakers with limited training in orthography)
6	<i>Ser-estar-haber</i>
4	Subject-verb agreement
4	Mistakes in part of speech (e. g., adj. for adv.)
4	Misuse of relative pronouns (e. g. <i>quien</i> for <i>que</i> , <i>que</i> for <i>lo que</i>)
4	<i>Por-para</i>
4	Reflexives (especially substitution of clarificative or emphatic phrases such as “a sí misma” in place of true reflexive)
3	Insertion of English words when Spanish vocab. falters
3	Syntax based on English patterns
3	Accentuation
2	Unnecessary repetition of nouns or phrases (including inability to substitute with pronouns)
1	Use of definite article
1	<i>Hacer</i> + verb
1	Overuse of subject pronouns

The list of most frequently cited errors indicates that even our most advanced undergraduates have not mastered as well as they should some basic structures of the Spanish language. While the samples were written under the pressure of time, still one would expect students to achieve a greater degree of accuracy in writing than is expected in speaking. Although this is an ongoing (one could almost say eternal) problem, department will continue to explore better ways of training our undergraduates in forming sentences that express their ideas, but which will be understandable and acceptable to the native speakers of Spanish with whom they will come in contact.

That said, the 2008 assessment of writing samples from Spanish majors about to graduate shows an acceptable and, in many cases, above average level of written Spanish on the part of our students. It is all the more exceptional because the samples come from exams written in class. This type of sample is probably the best for assessing the students' ability to compose spontaneously, for if the samples had been prepared outside of the classroom, the level would undoubtedly have been higher. Given the quality of the written assessment, our level of recognition through Hilldale awards for literary and linguistic undergraduate research, the department can be proud of its success, even if qualified in the area of composition.

Overall, in spite of pressures of increasing undergraduate enrollments, difficulty in attracting graduate students due to less than attractive financial packages, and reduced number of faculty in the Spanish & Portuguese programs, progress was made in areas of undergraduate education and graduate studies since our last assessment and the department continues to maintain its quality of excellence.

Guidelines for assessing writing samples of Spanish and Portuguese majors

(based on ACTFL guidelines: Writing)

<http://www.sil.org/lingualinks/languagelearning/OtherResources/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines/contents.htm>

Novice-Low

Able to form some letters in an alphabetic system.

Novice-Mid

No practical communicative writing skills.

Novice-High

Writing limited to fixed expressions, memorized material and some recombinations thereof. Can supply information on simple forms and documents. Can write names, numbers, dates, own nationality, and other simple autobiographical information, as well as some short phrases and simple lists.

Intermediate-Low

Able to meet limited practical writing needs. Can create statements or questions within the scope of limited language experience. Material produced consists of recombinations of learned vocabulary and structures into simple sentences on very familiar topics.

Intermediate-Mid

Able to meet a number of practical writing needs. Content involves personal preferences, daily routine, everyday events, and other topics grounded in personal experience. Can express present time and at least one other time frame or aspect consistently, e.g., nonpast, habitual, imperfective. Evidence of control of the syntax of non-complex sentences and basic inflectional morphology, such as noun-adjective agreement and verb conjugation. Writing tends to be a loose collection of sentences or sentence fragments on a given topic and provides little evidence of conscious organization. Can be understood by natives used to the writing of non-natives.

Intermediate-High

Able to meet most practical writing needs and limited social demands. Can write brief synopses and paraphrases, summaries of biographical data, work and school experience. Inflected verb forms are produced rather consistently, but not always accurately. An ability to describe and narrate in paragraphs is emerging. Rarely uses basic cohesive elements such as pronominal substitutions or synonyms in written discourse. Writing, though faulty, is generally comprehensible to natives used to the writing of non-natives.

Advanced

Able to join sentences in simple discourse of at least several paragraphs in length on familiar topics. Can write cohesive summaries as well as narratives and descriptions of a factual nature. Has sufficient writing vocabulary to express self

simply with some circumlocution. May still make errors in punctuation and spelling. Good control of the morphology and the most frequently used syntactic structures, e.g., common word order patterns, coordination, subordination, but makes frequent errors in producing complex sentences. Uses a limited number of cohesive devices, such as pronouns, accurately. Writing may resemble literal translations from the native language, but a sense of organization (rhetorical structure) is emerging. Writing is understandable to natives not used to the writing of non-natives.

Advanced Plus

Able to write about a variety of topics with significant precision and in detail. Can describe and narrate personal experiences fully but has difficulty supporting points of view in written discourse. Can write about the concrete aspects of topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. Often shows remarkable fluency and ease of expression, but under time constraints and pressure writing may be inaccurate. Generally strong in either grammar or vocabulary, but not in both. Weakness and unevenness in one of the foregoing may result in occasional miscommunication. Some misuse of vocabulary may still be evident. Style may still be obviously foreign.

Superior

Able to express self effectively in most formal and informal writing on practical, social and professional topics. Can write short research papers and statements of position in areas of special interest or in special fields. Good control of a full range of structures, spelling and a wide general vocabulary allow the writer to hypothesize and present arguments or points of view accurately and effectively. An underlying organization, such as chronological ordering, logical ordering, cause and effect, comparison, and thematic development is strongly evident, although not thoroughly executed and/or not totally reflecting target language patterns. Although sensitive to differences in formal and informal style, still may not tailor writing precisely to a variety of purposes and/or readers. Errors in writing rarely disturb natives or cause miscommunication.