

Assessment in Spanish and Portuguese

Update 2009

To assess the undergraduate programs in Spanish and Portuguese, we have established a system to evaluate periodically our students' written and oral proficiency. Each semester, 20-25 writing samples from our Spanish majors are randomly selected from classes that require extensive writing (Spanish 361 or 362) and that are required by our majors. Majors in Portuguese submit a portfolio of 3 writing samples prior to graduating. Every two years, these writing samples are analyzed by the Undergraduate Studies Committee, composed of faculty members from the department. This same committee also conducts oral proficiency interviews with our graduating majors every two years. This system has enabled us to assess our students' written and oral proficiency. With few exceptions, students graduate with intermediate to advanced proficiency levels in spoken Spanish or Portuguese, although the written competency is not as strong for all students. Because of the number of students that we teach in our Spanish classes in particular, we are aiming to standardize proficiency at the advanced-intermediate and advanced language level: that is, in Spanish 226 and 311. Our goal is to ensure all students are exposed to the same amount of writing practice and level of instruction by determining specific standards and guidelines for each class. This is one of the current projects of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, in consultation with the coordinator of Spanish 226.

The internal assessment of graduate programs in Spanish and Portuguese is designed essentially to examine whether the students we admit are capable of completing our programs successfully and in a timely manner; to what extent that success is reflected in their professional careers after graduation; and to ensure that the content of our programs is in tune with current academic requirements among our peer institutions. To this end, we gather data on the number of applications for admittance to the graduate programs, together with the percentage admitted and the percentage enrolled; the number of MA students who subsequently enter the PhD programs; the time to completion of their degree; and information culled from surveys sent out to graduate alumni. The Graduate Studies Committee in the department then makes recommendations based on analysis of these data. In the most recent assessment, for example, data have shown us that there is a certain lack of smooth articulation between the MA and PhD programs, and we are addressing this issue by proposing a series of changes in the MA which will ensure a more focused progression for students who complete the MA and continue into the PhD with us. In response to what we observe in the job market, we are also developing a double-emphasis MA in literature and linguistics. Finally, the Graduate Studies Committee recommends updates to MA reading lists on a two-year basis. This application of assessment results, we believe, contributes to maintaining our success in ensuring a very high rate of placement for our graduates in professional positions of their choice.