

Assessment Report of Graduate Programs
Department of Spanish and Portuguese
May 2013

As stated in the “Plan for Assessment of the Undergraduate Major and Graduate Programs” in our Policy Handbook, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese plays a crucial role in preparing students for an increasingly diverse and interdependent world. Our educational purpose, therefore, is to strengthen our students’ potential for communication with and understanding of other cultures, languages, and literatures, preparing them for success in the global workplace of the humanities, sciences, business, or in whatever field of endeavor they choose. One overriding goal is to contribute – within our modest means and together with other departments across the country – to shaping citizenship in the United States. To fulfill its larger mission, the Department must excel in several areas:

- 1) exercise leadership in teaching, research and service at the campus, state and national levels to promote awareness of the rapid social change in our multicultural world;
- 2) offer a balanced and integrated program of study in literature, linguistics, culture, and language training to emphasize high quality, creative research and instruction at both the graduate and undergraduate levels;
- 3) continue to pursue new knowledge through research and investigation within our fields of study.

Through our graduate programs, we offer advanced training at the MA and PhD levels in Spanish linguistics, Hispanic literature and culture, and Luso-Brazilian literature and culture, to enable our graduates to become 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 as well as engaged research, provision of various services related to our fields, and 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. During spring semester, 2013, the Graduate Studies Committee gathered a wide range of information for the purposes of this report, and also – in anticipation of this report – produced in April 2013 an extensive response to recommendations made by the Graduate School and the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee.

For the purposes of this assessment, the Graduate Studies 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 department in 1997, and revised in 2007 and again in 2013. The Department’s Associate Chair also provided very pertinent information for this report. In the current assessment, the data gathered include:

- admissions statistics including the number of applications for entrance to the MA and PhD programs in both Spanish and Portuguese, the number of applicants admitted, and the number of those admitted who enrolled;

- a 10-year history of graduate courses and enrollments in Spanish;
- statistics and other information concerning the time to degree for MA and PhD students;
- the number of MA candidates who passed the MA exam (which also serves as a PhD Qualifier), and of those who enrolled in the PhD program over the past five years;
- information from surveys sent to alumni who completed a graduate degree between 2008 and 2013;
- information from a survey of graduate students, conducted by graduate student representatives of the Graduate Studies Committee;
- job information for PhDs who graduated between fall 2008 and fall 2012.

This report, requested by the Chair, has been produced by the Graduate Studies Committee, composed of eight faculty members, two student representatives, and the Graduate Coordinator. A draft has been circulated for comments to all faculty in the department.

The following grid shows graduate admissions figures from AY 2007-08 to AY 2012-13, divided vertically between Spanish and Portuguese, and within each of these categories, subdivided between MA and PhD students:

Academic Year	Spanish		Total Span	Portuguese		Total Port	Total S&P
	MA	PhD		MA	PhD		
2007-2008							
Applicants	26	42	68	2	3	5	73
Admitted	16	17		1	2		
Matriculated	5	4		1	0		
Notes: Includes 1 Re-entry in Spanish							
2008-2009							
Applicants	47	30	77	5	1	6	83
Admitted	22	13		3	1		
Matriculated	14	8		2	0		
2009-2010							
Applicants	46	34	80	3	4	7	87
Admitted	20	14		1	4		
Matriculated	13	8		0	1		
2010-2011							
Applicants	49	31	80	4	6	10	90
Admitted	23	8		3	3		
Matriculated	10	1		1	1		
Notes: Includes 2 Re-entries in Spanish, 1 Re-entry in Portuguese							
2011-2012							
Applicants	35	27	62	2	5	7	69
Admitted	14	11		2	2		
Matriculated	7	3		0	0		
2012-2013							
Applicants	36	32	68	6	4	10	78
Admitted	17	14		3	2		
Matriculated	6	5		1	1		

These figures indicate that the department's graduate programs have attracted largely similar numbers of total applicants each year over the last five years, comparable to the numbers of the previous six years (whose numbers were 66, 80, 78, 89, 83, 69, respectively). As economic conditions change, the effect of the boom years within the middle of the past five years has tapered off somewhat. While the number of students accepted into our programs has remained fairly constant except for a lower number in 2012, the number of those who accepted our offer is a source of concern. For Spanish, these numbers over the six years covered in the above table are 9, 22, 21, 11, 10, 11: whereas the rates of acceptance during those two boom years were over 60% (in fact a very exceptional percentage in the long view), they have dropped to 35-40% over the past three years, despite very active recruitment efforts on our part, with lengthy phone calls made to all accepted applicants, often with follow-up conversations, and encouragement that they visit our campus. Although Portuguese has a smaller program whose percentages are thus statistically less reliable, the number of accepted applicants who in turn accept our offer has likewise been fewer than anticipated.

This points to our major concern: the financial situation of our graduate students, an issue that has a strong impact on student morale, on recruitment, and on the question of years to degree. From the information we have at our disposal, our UW TAs are dismally inferior to those of other peer institutions (not to mention those of wealthier institutions), and since 2008 there has been no increase in TA salaries. Deductions such as the segregated fees and health care, together with the relatively new co-insurance system for health care, reduce the already meager salary. This undercuts our recruitment efforts, since almost invariably those students who accept our offers do so despite their being offered better financial packages elsewhere, and we lose very good students because UW-Madison is not financially competitive in comparison to other institutions to which these students apply. Time and again applicants decline our offers saying that Madison is their top choice, but our financial package is so much lower than any other institution that they can't accept. Since ours is a "service department" in view of the large number of TA-taught language courses we offer, we are particularly vulnerable to the substandard wages that dissuade applicants from coming and place those who do enter our programs in financial hardship, obliging them to find jobs in the summer, take additional jobs during the semester (thus delaying their progress), take out more loans, plead for an extra section to teach (when there are often not enough to accommodate such requests), and so on. This situation has been continually emphasized by our Graduate Studies Committee student representatives and was also the negative note in the survey of recent alumni, one of whom explained it in graphic detail over an entire page. The lack of competitiveness of our financial offers was noted as an important concern in our previous assessment report in 2008, but has been greatly aggravated since then.

Even students who are offered generous fellowships such as the University Fellowship, the Chancellor's Fellowship, the Advanced Opportunity Fellowship or the Helen Firstbrook Franklin Fellowship tend to factor in the lean years, and often end up declining our offers. It has become common knowledge among colleagues from other universities around the country that UW-Madison offers so little that they wonder how anyone ends up choosing to study here, despite the drawing power of our faculty – all the surveys returned by recent alumni emphasized the quality of our faculty – and the quality of the university as a whole. Much the same thing

happens in Portuguese, where applicants are highly attracted to our faculty but most often decline because competing institutions such as Brown University offer them far better financial packages. We have been very proactive in requesting fellowships and grants for our applicants, and have been fortunate to receive a good number, but even this is insufficient, and does not address the fundamental issue of not being financially competitive. We are aware that this is a widespread problem, although its effects are unevenly distributed across divisions and departments, and that an adequate solution would take complex and painstaking negotiation, but we urge the Graduate School and the university as a whole to prioritize it as a major problem to be resolved.

Our department strives to provide as rich and diverse a set of graduate course offerings as possible, including many courses that connect with faculty members' research endeavors. This includes the Portuguese program, which, while bringing together upper-level undergraduates with graduate students, manages to offer an array of courses that cover the literature and culture of the entire Luso-Brazilian world, historically and geographically. The following chart shows the last ten years (20 semesters) of exclusively graduate courses offered by our own faculty in Spanish, together with enrollments and the specific fields offering the courses:

- SA1 is Spanish American literature and culture from the earliest colonial times through the 19th century;
- SA2 is Spanish American literature and culture of the 20th and 21st centuries;
- MED is Spanish Medieval literature and culture;
- GA is Golden Age, i.e., Early Modern Spanish literature and culture of the 16th and 17th centuries;
- MP is Modern Peninsular Spanish literature and culture;
- LIN is Linguistics, either Descriptive or Applied.

	F04	S05	F05	S06	F06	S07	F07	S08	F08	S09	F09	S10	F10	S11	F11	S12	F12	S13
501 SA1			16				17				17				24			
502 SA 2				18				19				24				19		
503 MED	22				17				15				18				14	
504 MED		22				16				21				18				10
505 GA	25				17				12				24				14	
506 MP		25				18				16				26				16
541 LIN				17				24						23				10
543 LIN			17										20					
544 LIN																19		
545 LIN	7		15		17		18		10		13		15		13		7	
548 LIN									12								10	
564 SA 2								20						19				
605 SA 2	10																	
627			5				8				10				15			
628				10				10				23						16
630 LIN		6								9							10	6
701		15	9				19			6	11				20			
715 MP		4					16					4				12		5
716 SA 2		4		9	14	15	10		14	17	11		10					
718 MED				5							11					6		
801 SA 1	10			7	11				13		8		7	14		8	12	5
802 SA 2		18	14	4		8	16	9	5		6	12	10	14	12	15	9	
811 LIN	11						7											
813 LIN												11						
815 LIN		12				5		11				13		13	11			
830 LIN									10	8								
831 LIN				5	3						8					10		
841 MED												8						
842 MED			5				9								5			7
850 GA				11												11		
851 GA	16					13				17			12					16
853 GA								13				13						
861 MP			9		12				8		13		15		14		7	
862 MP								11										
982			13 SA1			13 SA1						9 SA1						11 SA2
courses	7	8	9	9	7	7	9	8	9	7	10	9	9	7	8	8	9	9
Total	101	106	103	86	91	88	120	117	99	94	108	117	131	127	114	100	99	86

The first observation to be made from this chart is that a great variety of graduate courses in Spanish has been offered over the past ten years, and that enrollment numbers have generally been good. Recently the number of enrollments has dipped to levels similar to those of 2006 and

2009, and the department is accordingly reducing its future offerings to 7-8 graduate courses in Spanish and devising a concrete rotation plan for the different fields until such time as enrollments increase. The criteria for such a rotation include the needs of students who specialize in any of the fields, the number of students specializing in any particular field, the number of faculty members in each field, and the enrollments that different sections have had.

Since Fall 2007, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese has awarded a remarkable number of graduate degrees: 50 masters degrees (46 in Spanish, 4 in Portuguese) and 28 doctoral degrees (26 in Spanish, 2 in Portuguese). Around 90% of the students obtain their MA degree in 4 semesters, i.e., 2 years, which in fact matches the two-year cycle of survey courses set up for this purpose. The remaining few usually obtain the MA degree in 5 semesters, and the percentage of students who take 6 or more semesters to obtain the degree is insignificant. The average time to the MA degree – which in both Spanish and Portuguese requires 26 credits of coursework in a wide range of fields – is around 2.2 years, the median being 2 years minus a summer. According to Graduate School statistics, the average time to degree for the PhD has been around 8.5 years. Given that this figure is based on the enrollment period both for students who came directly into our PhD programs from outside and those who started in our MA programs, and that many of our PhD candidates are in the latter category, the real time for the PhD is closer to 7 years. Over the past two years there has been extensive discussion about this internally and in dialogue with the Graduate School, and both faculty and students have become highly aware of the need for students to proceed as expeditiously as is reasonably possible toward completion of the doctoral degree. Among other measures taken in the past few years, it has become standard practice for advisees to take an independent reading course (Spanish 899) with their advisers during the last semester of their PhD classwork in order to work towards a dissertation proposal beyond prelims; a deadline of 8 months has been set for students to have their dissertation proposal approved by a three-member committee; and it is recommended that students map out in their proposal a tentative timeline of their anticipated dissertation progress.

Our MA programs culminate in an MA exam which likewise serves as a PhD qualifying exam. In the past 5 years, 50 students (46 in Spanish, 4 in Portuguese) took the exam. In Spanish, only one failed the exam, but successfully retook the exam and obtained the MA degree. In Portuguese, of the 2 that failed, one retook the exam and passed, while the other did not retake it. Thus only 1 of 50 did not receive the MA degree, due to not retaking the MA exam; otherwise said, 98% of the MA candidates received the MA degree. Of the 47 students who were eligible to proceed to the PhD program, 29 of 45 (64%) of those eligible in Spanish continued, and 2 of 2 eligible in Portuguese continued. Of these 31 students (66% of those eligible), 3 in Spanish have since dropped out, but all 31 at least took courses for some time as PhD students. These figures apply to the 5-year period spring 2008-fall 2012. Obviously, the spring 2013 results are still not clear as to how many will continue, although all 8 students who took the exam for the first time passed and were admitted into the PhD program (7 in Spanish and 1 in Portuguese), and, as mentioned, the one student who retook the exam in Spanish came away with a terminal MA degree. 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.

We regard the breadth and rigor of our programs as distinguishing features that speak highly of the quality of the programs and prepare students extremely well for the job market and professional world specific to our fields. Our MA programs are only 4 credits short of what will apparently become the 30-credit norm for Masters programs, and thus very little adjustment will be necessary in that respect. Regarding the job market for doctoral students, many advertisements for positions ask for both breadth and depth, an ability to teach a wide range of courses, as well as interdisciplinary interests and competence. Neither students nor faculty in our department have favored reducing our program requirements, which in the doctoral programs include a 4-course PhD minor – which can be in a specific discipline or distributed across more than one according to certain criteria – and a reading knowledge of two languages other than English and either Spanish or Portuguese. Many of our students have received FLAS grants for language learning during the summer (often in other countries) and during the school year. Our students typically choose languages that give them access to texts and archives related to their thesis topics and endow them with an unusual “capital” for the job market and for their professional development far beyond; over the past five years these languages have included other major Romance Languages, Latin, Arabic, Turkish, other languages within the Iberian Peninsula, and native American languages of Central and South America. In no case does our language requirement require more than two intensive courses, although students sometimes choose to further their studies in a particular language. Regarding interdisciplinarity, many PhD dissertation committees include a faculty member from another department who was involved in the PhD minor, and it is not uncommon for dissertations to include theoretical orientation and methodology from another discipline.

The Graduate Studies Committee continues to encourage open communication with students. The graduate student representatives have in fact taken initiatives that have resulted in several policy changes and a heightened awareness among faculty of the kinds of support and advising needed by graduate students. In the past two years a new system was established whereby the student representatives of the Graduate Studies Committee would consult with their fellow students and determine what kinds of advisory workshops would be most useful. Every semester there have been one or two sessions of this kind, sometimes general and sometimes specific to particular interests such as the job market or proposal preparation and the writing of dissertations. Faculty have led every one of these sessions, usually guided by questions previously communicated by students. These sessions have been very well attended and favorably received. They have also been very instructive with regard to the specific concerns that students have, and these have been communicated at faculty meetings. In addition, 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.

Another measure of success is that all 23 of our PhDs in the past 4.5 years (21 in Spanish and 2 in Portuguese) from fall 2008 through fall 2012 are employed or are further pursuing their careers: 9 as tenure-track Assistant Professors, 2 as Visiting Assistant Professors, 6 as full- or part-time lecturers, 3 as administrators in fields related to their doctoral work, 1 as a post-doctoral fellow; 1 has opted for continued studies in the Law School, and only 1 is employed in an unrelated field. Given the state of the economy and the depressed job market in the humanities over the past 5 years, we regard this as a substantially positive result. Over the years

the Department of Spanish and Portuguese has acquired an excellent reputation for forming graduate students to be able to teach the kinds of courses required by curricula in institutions across the country ranging from colleges to research universities. Such institutions see in our programs a guarantee that candidates from our department have a mastery of a wide range of subject matter and an ability to do sound research in their fields of specialization.