Texas Tech University Graduate Program Review for the Department of Classical and Modern Languages and Literatures in the College of Arts and Sciences, Spring 2010

Executive Summary

The graduate degree programs in the Department of Classical and Modern Languages and Literatures (CMLL) were reviewed and evaluated (pursuant to the periodic review policy of the Graduate School of Texas Tech University) by a committee comprised of Dr. Bruce Clarke (Professor of English, review committee chairperson), Dr. Cindy Akers (Associate Professor of Agricultural Communications), Dr. Steven Richards (Professor of Psychology), and one outside reviewer, Dr. Ryan Long (Associate Professor of Spanish at the University of Oklahoma). This report is based on information obtained from CMLL's self-study document, interviews conducted on February 26, 2010 with the relevant constituencies of CMLL faculty, students, staff, and chair, and staff in the Office of Institutional Research and Information Management (IRIM).

The charge of the committee was to evaluate the graduate degree programs in the Department of CMLL in terms of their quality, size, resources, effectiveness, and contributions to Texas Tech University. This review is organized to focus on (1) program overview and vision; (2) faculty productivity; (3) quality and quantity of graduate students; (4) curriculum; and (5) facilities and resources. In each area, we assess the quality and justify the ranking. At the end we summarize our recommendations for the future.

Program Overview and Vision – good to excellent

The graduate programs of CMLL are highly diverse. Altogether, these programs are doing all that can be expected of them—and in some cases, more—given the resources at their disposal. Their performance is good and their vision and potential are excellent. The curriculum is wide-ranging, the faculty is productive, the departmental leadership is dedicated, and the graduate students are being successfully placed in doctoral programs or in academic and other careers.

The vision of CMLL is to be one of the best graduate programs among peer universities with similar resources. CMLL’s mission statement envisions becoming a national leader in teaching and producing teachers of classical and modern languages and literatures: cultivating linguistic proficiency; the effective use of technology in language learning; inspiring critical thinking and cultural diversity; and fostering the participation of students in a global society.

CMLL offers a diverse array of specialized graduate programs in its divisions of Classics, French and Italian, German and Russian, Spanish and Portuguese, and Applied Linguistics, in addition to its non-degree Intensive English Program (IEP) and the International Teaching Assistant Workshop (ITA). For instance, the Spanish division—the largest specialty area and currently the only one with a doctoral program—has approximately 10-14 faculty, depending on how one counts those who serve in two specialties, presently serve in study-abroad programs or have major college, university, and professional assignments (e.g., journal editors) that entail teaching releases, and so on. Other specializations are relatively small, with 5 or less faculty. As a result, the depth of the graduate curriculum varies widely from one specialization to the next.
On one hand, there is some concern whether the department is being spread too thin across so many diverse areas of instruction and scholarship. On the other hand, some argue that given its unusual breadth, the department should be redesigned as a School within the College of Arts and Sciences. We recommend that CMLL’s constituencies and TTU’s higher administration keep the discussion open about the best means to refine and implement the department’s strong vision. CMLL’s quest for manifold excellence across a diverse spectrum of specializations is laudable, but will require ongoing commitment by all concerned.

**Faculty Productivity – good to excellent**

The instructional contributions of CMLL are good, and in some cases, outstanding. The faculty and graduate student instructors presented evidence that they take teaching seriously, work hard, and are dedicated and effective.

The CMLL graduate faculty has been in flux over the last six years. There have been many retirements and many new hires, at both entry and senior levels. The German division suffered through a productive colleague’s lingering terminal illness. Depletion of faculty in both the German-Russian and the French-Italian divisions have recently been redressed. Growth of student enrollments in Classics, Spanish, and Applied Linguistics has placed significant stress on those members of the CMLL faculty. Teaching load in CMLL tends to vary according to the press of student enrollments within each program. Here again Spanish and Applied Linguistics are currently under the most duress.

The growing pains of the Applied Linguistics division has generated some internal friction, as faculty in other divisions and other departmental resources have been directed to its build-up, centered on its preparation for launching a doctoral program. At the same time, the program in Applied Linguistics promises to provide CMLL with a measure of cross-program integration for a department otherwise necessarily divided along multiple lines of both historical and linguistic difference.

In the face of CMLL’s ongoing challenges, and adjusting our assessment for the developmental level of faculty careers, its faculty scholarship is strong. The greater part of the faculty is maintaining graduate-faculty standing with regular publications of scholarly articles and paper presentations at academic conference. Degree-completion rates in the graduate programs are satisfactory to excellent. A group of prolific researchers stand out for publishing recent books, receiving grants and fellowships, and bringing editorial offices of recognized academic journals to TTU. This productivity has continued throughout a difficult period during which departmental travel and research resources have not been available.

Our assessment is that CMLL’s faculty is performing very well. The most critical needs with regard to faculty numbers are currently those of the Spanish division, followed by Applied Linguistics, then Classics. Great demand for lower-level Spanish courses is ongoing, leading to the most severe bottleneck delaying graduation for TTU BAs. The department as a whole has made a compelling case for the need to acquire more funded graduate students and to hire the additional faculty that will require.
Quality and Quantity of Graduate Students and Graduates – good to excellent

The graduate students appear to be highly motivated and capable. Their academic records are generally good. The 19 CMLL graduate students we met with on February 26 evidenced good morale, a sincere commitment to the mission and vision of CMLL, and effective academic skills. Most of the MA graduates are placed in respectable doctoral programs or find teaching jobs in high schools and community colleges, government jobs, and industry jobs. Most of the doctoral graduates in Spanish are placed in faculty positions in colleges and universities, or find appropriate jobs in other settings.

Discrepancies between the Institutional Research and CMLL’s own statistics with regard to graduate enrollments make precise quantification difficult here. But it is fair to say that in the aggregate, graduate enrollments have undergone substantial increase since the last program review in 2004. Recruitment and retention are satisfactory. Comparisons with peer institutions are complicated due to the composite nature of CMLL’s departmental construction, and also to the built-in limitations for the smaller programs (Classics, French, German) relative to the larger programs (Spanish, Applied Linguistics). However, all programs merit continued and, in several cases, increased support.

Classics: The MA program has been receiving improved applicants and currently has 10 graduate students. They have an excellent graduation rate and a 100% placement rate. This program is positioned for significant growth in national reputation.

French and Italian: While overall enrollments dipped after 2001, there is a recent turnaround in MA enrollment, with currently 8 GPTIs. Coding problems appear to account for its report of low degree production, which is in fact satisfactory, while bearing room for improvement. The program has had good success placing its graduates in top-tier doctoral programs.

German and Russian: This division is rebuilding after several difficult years of understaffing. In Fall 2010 there will be a full complement of 8 MA students. Its placement record is good for students seeking either higher academic degrees or high-school employment.

Spanish and Portuguese: The graduate students in this division are very accomplished in terms of research, particularly evident in their editorship of a journal and dedication to sustaining a highly visible and successful annual graduate student conference. Degree productivity at the PhD level has increased significantly over the past six years; attrition rates are below the national average. Although some of the Spanish doctoral students take too long to complete their PhD—10 or more years in a few cases—completion times are still better than the national average.

Applied Linguistics: Due to its success recruiting its own as well as extra-departmental students, it has larger-than-ideal class sizes. ESL enrollments are also increasing among International Teaching Assistants (ITAs). The program will produce 15 graduates this year. This division reports strong internal demand for a PhD program. With more resources its currently good performance would likely convert into nationally-prominent excellence.
Curriculum and Programs of Study – good to excellent

The curriculum appears to be appropriate, thoughtful, mainstream, and open to regular assessment and revision. Classics currently has two program tracks—Language/Literature and Latin Pedagogy—and is working to establish a third, Archaeology, to make their MA fully-rounded and nationally competitive. The French program features a series of courses that provide an in-depth study of the emerging Francophone world that is unique in the region. The German MA program has had steady enrollments and graduation rates; it has enhanced its graduate numbers by offering a number of courses online, and plans to increase its offerings in this area in the future. The MA program in Applied Linguistics functions well but is currently stretched thin.

While there is valid concern over the Spanish division’s ability to meet fully its university service responsibilities at its current staffing levels, its graduate programs are performing well. For the most part, the faculty publication records are outstanding, demonstrating a consistent dedication to scholarship. Also significant are the opportunities for working abroad available to faculty and graduate students, especially those provided by the Seville Center. Based on an examination of the course catalog and the courses offered during the spring and fall semesters of 2010, it is our opinion that the Spanish graduate programs in CMLL offer a strong range of courses that will prepare students well in the traditional areas of Spanish and Latin American literary studies. The courses tend to correspond well with the areas in the MA list, which notably includes a section on US Latino literature, a particular strength of Texas Tech’s program.

Facilities and Resources – poor

The nature of the instruction in classical and modern language literacy lends itself to a strong need for multimedia classrooms. The department has only one instructional technology specialist who has responsibility for operation and maintenance of all classroom, faculty, and staff technology needs. A common concern among faculty, staff, and graduate students has been the shortage of classrooms, which becomes even greater with consideration of the department’s technology needs. Faculty was concerned with space to teach courses; they expressed a concern with canceling course offerings due to a shortage of classrooms both of adequate size and equipped with appropriate technology.

The department has a language learning laboratory. It appears that the technology support for that facility is handled separately from the rest of the departmental equipment. Cross-training or collaboration between those entities could be very beneficial to the department. This laboratory has high use and is necessity for instruction in the department. It is important to update and maintain this lab.

The department has grown in course offerings and graduate students in recent years. If they are going to continue growing, they will need additional office space as well as classroom facilities.
Recommendations:

For departmental programs:

- Enhance the national profile of the Classics program by expanding the Archaeology track. This will also enable the program to offer four graduate classes instead of three in both semesters and to carry an expanded corps of funded MAs.

- Alleviate the undergraduate bottleneck in Spanish instruction and better service TTU’s growing Hispanic population by allocating more resources to Spanish to hire new faculty and pay new graduate students.

- Enhance Tier 1 prospects for TTU by completing the current initiative to institute a PhD program in Second-Language Studies in Applied Linguistics. Hire faculty with teaching and research interests in discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, formal linguistics, and other areas applied to the second language context. No such Ph.D. programs currently exist in the lower tier of the United States. The division can emerge as a major player in this section of the country once it launches a Ph.D. program. This will also be the most effective as well as productive way to adjust the current funding imbalances among the graduate programs. Once that is accomplished, use this program to create effective synergies among all the modern language divisions.

Add to graduate student positions:

- More funded MAs in the Classics division
- More GPTIs in the Spanish division

Add to the faculty:

- A Roman archaeologist
- A faculty line in heritage Spanish
- A faculty line in Portuguese
- A specialist in Spanish Linguistics
- A specialist in Russian literature or a Russian linguist

Add to the staff:

- A departmental Graduate Studies office with a dedicated clerical and records person.

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