Preliminary Observations

Sources of Information
I base this report on information obtained from the CMLL self-study document, several review committee meetings, interviews with the relevant constituencies of CMLL faculty, students, staff, and chair, and consultations with the Graduate School and with staff in the Office of Institutional Research and Information Management (IRIM) at TTU.

I have also contacted the department chairs of five peer institutions and considered my own institution in order to assess the following specific areas: coordination of lower-level language courses and graduate level examinations for the MA and the PhD. The five institutions I contacted were listed in the self-study as peer institutions of the department. All have Spanish PhD programs. My own institution is also listed as a departmental peer institution in the self-study and it also has a Spanish PhD program. Therefore the six institutions I use for comparison are: the Universities of Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, and Oklahoma.

Organization of Report
As suggested by the “Guidelines for Reviewers”, I organize the report to focus on the following areas: (1) program overview and vision; (2) faculty productivity; (3) quality and quantity of graduate students; (4) curriculum and programs of study; and (5) facilities and resources. I provide a ranking at the end of my assessment of each area, and I conclude the report with a summary of my recommendations in order of priority.
Program Overview and Vision
The Spanish PhD program performs very well. With its large number of active faculty and graduate students, it could move definitively from being a strong regional program to an important national program. 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. The graduate students are very accomplished in terms of research, which is particularly evident in their editorship of a journal and their 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; and completion times are better than the national average.

Particularly impressive is the fact that the Spanish PhD program has performed so well in spite of serious resource limitations: a shortage of faculty positions, the surprising absence of departmental travel support for faculty, an insufficient number of graduate student instructors, anomalous and contentious lower-level language coordination, overburdened support staff, and a deficient webpage that hinders the division’s and the department’s visibility.

Regarding limitations unrelated to resources and staffing, the only concern I have based on my interviews of February 25 relates to division cohesion. There appears to be an ongoing and serious disagreement about curricular reform. In general contrast to other divisions of CMLL I helped interview, especially Classics and Applied Linguistics, it appeared that the members of Spanish and Portuguese were somewhat at odds with one another. This is not unusual for a division of its size, nor is it necessarily a drawback. Curricular reform is often a contentious topic precisely because it is vitally important to the health of a program. I cannot speak to the content of the proposed curricular reform since it is still under discussion. But I do recommend that the division leadership make sure that channels of communication among faculty are as open as possible and that every effort is made to promote an atmosphere that respects and includes all points of view regarding curricular reform in order to reach a reasonable degree of agreement on this topic.

On the whole I am convinced that the faculty is dedicated to improving an already strong program, and I believe that improvement in the areas outlined in the previous paragraphs will enable this highly productive and dynamic division to reach its full potential.

Rating: Good to Excellent

Faculty Productivity
CMLL self-study documents demonstrate consistency and some growth in the areas of publications and presentations and professional leadership roles. The high, and in some cases truly exceptional, level of productivity among the Spanish graduate faculty plays a very important part in the overall good health of the division and the department.
Spanish faculty are highly active as chairs or members of MA and PhD committees, with two faculty members having served as chair of a doctoral committee more than 10 times and one more than 20 times. Otherwise, the distribution of doctoral committee chairs is relatively even and the exceptions mentioned must be understood in light of disparate lengths of service. Overall, the teaching of graduate students in the form of graduate degree committees attests to a dedicated and well-balanced faculty. Also related to teaching are awards that Spanish faculty have received, including the Spencer A. Wells Award, and the President’s Academic Achievement Award. Though it must be noted that both of these awards were won by the same faculty member.

Particularly impressive are the publication and presentation records of the majority of Spanish faculty members, some of whom are exceptionally prolific, especially in the most significant areas of monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles, edited volumes, and national and international speaking invitations and conference presentations.

Further examples of the faculty’s dedication to scholarship include the winning of prestigious grants like the Fulbright and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities; the editorship of Hispania, a prominent journal in the field of Hispanic Studies; and active participation in professional organizations and editorial service to leading journals such as the Revista canadiense de estudios hispánicos.

The quality of awards and service to journals and professional organizations outside of Texas Tech is generally high, but it is spread unevenly among the faculty, with some performing at a much stronger level than others. This unevenness stands in contrast to the general consistency of productive publication records across the faculty.

Rating: Good to Excellent.

Quality and Quantity of Graduate Students and Graduates
Based on the calculations of CMLL, there were 33 graduate students enrolled in the PhD program in Spanish in Fall 2008. The division report submitted by Spanish and Portuguese for the self-study states that as of Fall 2009 there were a total of 55 graduate students enrolled in Spanish, without specifying whether they are pursuing MAs or PhDs. Based on these numbers, it appears that there are currently between 30 and 35 PhD students and 20 and 25 MA students in Spanish, by any account a very healthy size.

Completion rates for doctoral students have improved significantly in recent years. Self-study documents show, for example, that for doctoral students entering between 1990 and 1999, 17.5% and 27.5% completed their degrees in the fourth and fifth year, respectively. The most recent data available, for students entering between 2000 and 2004, indicate that 25% of students completed their degrees in the fourth year and 37.5% in the fifth. This is an improvement of 8 to 10% in each the fourth and fifth year, and the program should be commended for this important change. Furthermore, as I indicated in the overview, and as based on self-study data, attrition rates are below the national average and completion rates are above the national average.
The graduate students tend to be active in scholarship and their group contributes significantly to regional graduate student professionalization through the impressive work they do to publish a journal and host an annual conference. As a professor at the University of Oklahoma I am well aware of the high profile enjoyed by Texas Tech’s graduate student conference, since many of our students participate in it regularly and find it to be a particularly welcoming and stimulating introduction to the world of professional conferences.

Self-study data demonstrate that graduate students in Spanish at Texas Tech are consistently very active in the field. For example, in 2007 PhD students presented 22 papers at national and international conferences and completed six peer-reviewed publications. In 2008, they presented nine papers and published four. In 2009, they presented 25 papers and published one peer-reviewed publication. Despite shifts in numbers, these are impressive accomplishments and attest to a high level of dedication and the very good training they have received by their professors.

Placement data provided in the self-study demonstrate that of 26 students listed 19 have successfully found employment, and 15 of these are at academic institutions. Obviously there is room for improvement in this area but overall placement is quite good.

Funding is a serious problem for many graduate students in the department according to the divisional report submitted by Spanish and Portuguese to the departmental self-study, which notes that 24 students are unfunded. The reasons for this are unclear, but it must be addressed.

For the department and the university there is an urgent need for the funding of new graduate students. As indicated by the self-study documents and interviews with several faculty members, lower-level Spanish courses are consistently full to the point of having to turn away significant numbers of undergraduate students. This causes serious problems for undergraduate students who need a foreign language course in order to graduate on time. The Spanish program is well beyond its capacity in terms of fulfilling the needs of undergraduate students, which in turn affects the division as a whole. This is a problem that Texas Tech must solve. Funding new graduate students would improve the program from bottom to top, providing more opportunities for undergraduates to take Spanish as well as additional professional training for graduate students. In order to maintain a consistently good Spanish program, from the lower-level language courses to graduate teaching and professional development, funding must be made available to permit growth at all levels, which requires new hiring of regular faculty as well. The bottom-heavy Spanish department model is ultimately untenable, as the serious bottleneck of undergraduate Spanish at Texas Tech makes all too clear.

Enrollment and recruitment figures for the years between 2003 and 2008 are somewhat troubling. The division must address the fact that even though the number of admitted students is consistently around eight per year, the number of actually enrolled students is much lower, and in two years (2004 and 2006) as low as one new student. However, the last two years have demonstrated improvement, especially in the case of 2009. In 2008 three new students enrolled and in 2009, there were 14 confirmed to begin in the fall, six of them PhD enrollees. Although this is a very significant improvement, the inconsistency of new enrollments is something the division should monitor carefully. It must also be said that enrollment troubles could be related to staffing needs in the area of recruiting and admissions, which I will address below in the
section on facilities and resources. Finally, recruitment and enrollment of new graduate students is essential to the overall success of the division and the department in terms of undergraduate teaching, as outlined in the previous paragraph. A combination of additional resource allocation and more effective recruiting seems to be in order.

Rating: Good to Excellent

Curriculum and Programs of Study
Based on an examination of the course catalog and the courses offered during the spring and fall semesters of 2010, it is my assessment that the Spanish PhD in CMLL offers 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.

I recommend that the division develop courses on contemporary literature in the areas of Spain and Latin America, since the catalog listings currently stop with the twentieth century. This may seem premature in 2010, but it is my experience that the material covered in courses on the twentieth century, at different institutions, tends to stop several decades ago. So, courses on contemporary literature might also incorporate the end of the twentieth century. I also note that peer institutions tend to have courses on contemporary literature, for example in the case of the PhD program at the University of Iowa.

Although it is a minor issue, I also find notable the inclusion of a course dedicated solely to modernism in the Latin American section of the catalog. The reason this course stands out is because it is the only course dedicated to a particular movement in either the Spanish or Latin American areas. Its inclusion raises questions about why other movements or tendencies are not given a specific course, and these might include romanticism or realism in Spain, and the ‘boom’ or testimonio in Latin America, just to name a few examples. Adding such courses or removing the modernism course would give the course list greater coherency, either tending toward movements, schools, and tendencies or toward periodization and genre. The catalog’s emphasis lies in the latter tendency at the current moment, which seems reasonable and in accordance with providing solid training to graduate students.

I also suggest broadening the curriculum to incorporate courses on other media, such as film and visual art. This would bring the program more in line with a general incorporation of cultural studies into the field of Hispanic Studies.

The PhD examination format is sound and has the advantage of balancing broad field coverage with a narrower focus on the dissertation. This type of tailored PhD exam is the norm among Texas Tech’s peer institutions, with the exception of my own institution, where, frankly, I wish we had a format more like Texas Tech’s and others’.

I note that the PhD exam format is based on areas specified in the MA reading list, which leads me to mention that I find the MA list to be somewhat underdeveloped. Relative to peer institutions Texas Tech’s list includes significantly fewer texts. I suggest a few specific changes: more Golden Age literature; fewer selections of texts and more complete texts, as in the example
of Echeverría; and the addition of Guaman Poma and Balbuena to the Colonial list. Finally, I am struck by the short list of essays among the Latin American works specified. Bolívar, Martí, and Mariátegui, at least, should be added. Also in the prose tradition, the absence of Ricardo Palma is notable.

Rating: Good

**Facilities and Resources**

Staffing shortages pose serious problems to the continued growth of a strong PhD program with very high potential. New faculty positions must be created in order to meet several important goals: to maintain a graduate faculty/graduate student ratio more in line with peer institutions; to provide a more efficient rotation of graduate courses; and to provide for more graduate student instructors, whose services are urgently needed to cover the tremendous demand for lower-level Spanish instruction. The program has functioned remarkably well with limited resources, but the sheer numbers of undergraduate and graduate students make further growth with the same resources untenable.

The absence of regular travel funding for faculty is anomalous in comparison to peer institutions and it represents a serious impediment to professional development. Its incorporation would provide a highly motivated and productive faculty with more and better opportunities to maintain their already high level of research activities.

Advising and recruiting efforts are currently hampered by a shortage of staff positions. It is my understanding that one staff person is in charge of, in addition to general clerical responsibilities: the logistics of graduate applications, the supervision of MA exams, scheduling for the whole department, and undergraduate advising in Spanish. This is an impossibly difficult set of tasks for one person to handle and it must be remedied in order to better serve undergraduate and graduate students alike. Combining so many duties in one position is not the norm among Texas Tech’s peer institutions, which tend to separate positions such as processing graduate applications and undergraduate advising.

The staffing of lower-level language coordination is also anomalous. It is my understanding that a team composed of the chair, a group of graduate students, and an instructor who does not hold an advanced degree in Spanish, is currently in charge of coordinating lower-level Spanish courses. I am very pleased to see the increased conversion rates that indicate more Spanish majors coming out of introductory courses, and I commend the coordinating team for the positive results they have achieved under the current structure. Nonetheless, it must be stated that the coordination in CMLL is hardly the norm among the six peer institutions I surveyed. In every single case among these institutions (AZ, CO, IA, KS, KY, OK) coordinators at least hold an MA in the field of study and in many cases a PhD. Aside from their academic qualifications, they tend to hold positions in which they are almost entirely dedicated to coordination. Some coordinators at peer institutions are also regular faculty members. Aside from being highly unusual, the coordination structure in CMLL is a source of serious concern among Spanish

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* In order to verify this I have looked at the C.V. of the instructor in question, Janie McNutt, which is posted on the webpage of South Plains College, where she is a faculty member.
faculty and graduate students as it appears to cause problems with communication, clarity of expectations, and, according to many faculty members, quality of learning.

Staffing of technology-related positions also appears insufficient. A dedicated and clearly designated departmental webmaster, perhaps a language-lab employee, would enable the current webpage to become much more clearly and effectively organized. As it stands, it is difficult to negotiate and is remarkably incomplete, especially in terms of faculty profiles.

Rating: Poor

**Summary of Recommendations, in Order of Priority:**

Fund two or three new faculty lines, which would enable more efficient course rotation, to maintain a good ratio of faculty to graduate students, and increase field coverage, especially in the area of Heritage Spanish or US Latino.

Provide a budget dedicated to faculty travel support.

Provide additional funded graduate student positions to alleviate the pressure on lower-level language demands.

Organize a frank and open discussion about curricular reform whose goal is general agreement and that includes a revision of the MA reading list to bring it up to par with the lists from peer institutions.

Either fund a new position of lower-level language coordinator or organize a thorough and open discussion of the current coordinating structure with an aim toward revising it.

Fund a new staff position to help with the graduate-student application process and undergraduate advising.