

Assessment
Department of Modern Languages
2005

M.A. Spanish

Goal 1: Comprehensive knowledge of literature, culture and linguistics as interrelated disciplines within Hispanic settings (Spain and Latin America) and across major historic periods.

Goal 2: Enhanced Spanish language skills in linguistic structures, oral proficiency, writing, reading and comprehension, research, critical and analytical thinking.

Goal 3: Appreciation of Hispanic culture worldwide, as it is experienced in everyday life and as it relates to the job market.

Goal 4: Awareness of the growing importance of Hispanics culture in the arts and humanities.

Goal 5: Prepared to seek employment in careers which may utilize the M.A. in Spanish and to demonstrate an advanced proficiency in both writing and oral skills . Specially, students become prepared to teach elementary and intermediate Spanish at school or college level, or to use the knowledge for other careers that might need a professional with advanced oral and writing skills in Spanish .

1. Introduction:

This assessment report includes data of **Summer** and Fall 2004 and Spring 2005. The following assessment tools were collected, in order to have a clear view of the performance of our students:

- research papers [one fi-om a research/methods class, two fi-om a linguistics class, two fi-om a literature class]

We compared the graduate entrance essay (written in Spanish) of four graduate students with a research paper written at least after a year in the program.
- portfolios [two portfolios fi-om SPN 502]

We examined all the written works produced by two students in the class in order to observe their progress and deveopment of skills during the semester.
- syllabi [all syllabi]

We included the evaluation of two syllabi to see that objectives, ways of grading, material assigned by the instructors was congruent with the objectives and expected outcomes presented in our departmental handbook.

During the current academic year we have incorporated some new ideas and guidelines to improve the quality of our department:

- meetings We had three assesment meetings during the year with the Spanish faculty. We had the opportunity to discuss as a group some of the areas of improvement. For the benefit of all the faculty (especially for the three new faculty members), we sent a memo with the different areas in which we set goals for the year for better communication with the students.

- syllabi We recommended all our instructors to write their syllabi in English (rather than in Spanish), so that outside reviewers will be able to read them. We also recommended all instructors include student goals or expected learning outcomes, to carefully explain the forms of evaluation, and to incorporate the CSU grading systems.

- rubrics We created **4** sets of rubrics (composition, research paper, oral presentation, project) in order to standardized our way of grading within the department. Most of our instructors are already using or have adapted these rubrics for their classes.

2. Syllabi:

We examined all the syllabi from Fall 2004 and Spring 2005, in order to see if the

guidelines suggested after the last assessment had been implemented. Specifically, we wanted to see whether the recent syllabi include the elements requested: English language (to allow accessibility for colleagues outside of the Spanish section); clarity regarding outcomes; and clear delineation of grading criteria

The majority of the syllabi were written in Spanish, with the exception of those prepared by two senior professors. Most syllabi showed **an** effort to present relevant course information to the student in a condensed, clear and comprehensive way.

A marked improvement can be noted in the Spanish faculty's presentation of the specific information requested. Nearly all syllabi describe the objectives of the course. In some cases, they are presented under the rubric of "goals" or "outcomes," and sometimes they are included in a general description of the course. Several professors refer directly to the department Handbook in order to describe the outcome. There does seem to be some significant variation in the way of understanding course objectives. One strategy for improvement in this area might be to make outcomes more concrete, avoiding such ideas a "developing skill" in preference of a description of the level of skill aimed at.

All syllabi clearly outlined the weight of different aspects of evaluation of students. Several included more specific rubrics applying to aspects such **as** homework and participation. Since the department faculty now have access to standard rubrics for different types of assignment, one area of improvement might be to refer to these in order to specify grading policies more precisely and emphasize the Department's attempt to make grading policies more uniform.

In general, our syllabi have improved markedly in their clarity and comprehensiveness.

We have been working to make them more useful to students and a better gauge of what participants in our classes can expect to learn.

3. Research Papers:

We selected one sample from SPN 501, two samples from SPN 584 and two samples from the complete portfolio of works produced in SPN 502. The complete portfolio of SPN 502 was helpful to see the improvements of the students throughout the semester. The sample for SPN 501 shows a rounded knowledge of Hispanic cultures, literature and linguistics congruent with our MA goals. The rubric provided with the sample shows that thorough criteria and evaluations were observed throughout the courses in order to help students improve their research and writing skills. For SPN 584, the samples show a sophisticated writing, literary analysis and research, and it is obvious that the instructor pays attention to develop students' knowledge of literary theory. The two samples from SPN 502 show outstanding improvement in students' knowledge, research and writing. The students were able to carry out diligent research in which they reflect about the status of Hispanic language and culture in **USA**. Samples also show that this course was designed to put in practice the knowledge acquired during the semester and to reach a consistent level of effective scholarly, analytic and free narrative writing in Spanish. This developing analytical and narrative skill was seen as contributing to the students' execution of research papers (typically 12-15 pages) in SPN 501 and other courses, thereby assisting them to meet the goal of high level language skills in linguistic structures, writing, research, critical and analytical thinking..

4. Study Abroad:

Study abroad is a requirement for MA programs. We have more than 20 years'

experience with a joint program in Cuernavaca, Mexico, and in conjunction with various programs over the years in Spain. Spanish teachers who are working toward professional development credits and are potential M.A. students also participate in these programs.

We analyzed the responses of three students from the student evaluation form provided by the Center for International Services and Programs at CSU. All students agreed that it ~~was~~ a very helpful and enriching experience, and that they would absolutely recommend it to other students on campus.

One of the concerns that some members of our faculty have concerns the mixture of off-campus and on-campus courses for the M.A. and the maximum number of credits we should accept from off-campus study for a student who is working on his/her MA with us. This situation presents us an opportunity to re-evaluate the structure of our program. We will be working on this issue in the near future.

5. Some changes, improvements, success' stories:

- During the current academic year 6 graduate students completed their MA in Spanish.
- Two of our graduate students were accepted to PhD programs in Spanish linguistics (one at the University of Pittsburgh, the other at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Both of them have been awarded TA'ships or scholarships.
- During the last two years our graduate students have been very active by presenting professional quality papers in national/international conferences such as the Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, and the Ohio Foreign Language Association's Conference.

- Through our connection with our sister school in Cuernavaca, Mexico we received two students for the MA program, and one more is expected to start this coming fall.

7. Conclusion and goals for the future:

This assessment report is an indication of how our goals for the MA program have been fulfilled in different ways. The classes we provide, the experiences (study abroad, conferences), the research focus is helping us to enhance knowledge of literature, culture and linguistics among our students. The writing progress in our students is an indication of the way we are enhancing Spanish language skills, and through the process of writing research papers our students are improving in their critical and analytical thinking. The popularity of our study abroad programs increases, without any doubt, the appreciation our students have for the Hispanic culture. Although we have insufficient statistical evidence to present at this point, we know our students have been successful in obtaining positions which utilize the skills they acquire in our program. In the case of our graduate students, some of them have been accepted in PhD programs, many others are teaching in community colleges and universities in the area, and others are teaching in high schools, including some of the most prestigious in Northeast Ohio.

We will continue improving the services we offer our students. It is also important for us to continuously develop the communication with all our graduate students. Our excellent communication with our graduate students from intake advising through exit exams is one of our main strengths. We will also continue encouraging our students to participate and present papers in conference. This experience helps them to mature as scholars and to learn from other researchers. Our MA program is preparing our students to have an excellent understanding of the Hispanic World and to seek meaningful employment in both traditional and innovative careers.