

# **UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW**

## **DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES**

### **PROGRAMS REVIEWED:**

Bachelor of Arts in Arabic

Bachelor of Arts in Chinese

Bachelor of Arts in French

Bachelor of Arts in German

Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics

Bachelor of Arts in Spanish

Certificate in Teaching English to Students of Other Languages

Master of Modern Languages:

Emphasis in Languages (French, German, Spanish)

Master of Modern Languages: Emphasis in Linguistics

Master of Modern Languages: Teaching English as a Second Language

Site Visit: 1-3 February 2017

Submitted by:

Emilia Alonso-Sameño, Director of Institute for the Empirical Study of Language, Professor of Spanish, Ohio University; and Patricia Anne Simpson, Chair, Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, Professor of German Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Submitted to:

Noel E. Wilkin, Interim Provost & Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs;

Lee Cohen, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts

Submitted on 5 June 2017

## Part 1: Executive Summary

*Summary of the major strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats:*

The Department of Modern Languages (ML) demonstrates strengths in the robustness of its undergraduate programs, with particular emphasis on the Chinese Flagship Program (CFP) and the success of its Arabic program, which is modeled on the CFP. Additionally, the Intensive Arabic Program demonstrates significant interdisciplinary strength, supported by its relationship to the Croft Institute for International Studies, Intelligence Securities and Studies, and exemplary language training for ROTC. Moreover, the department benefits enormously from the collegial relationships, formal and informal mentoring, and professional generosity of the colleagues across 11 languages, 6 undergraduate degrees, a TESOL certificate, and Masters programs with 5 areas of emphasis. Faculty from the three tracks (regular/tenure stream, support faculty, and research faculty), display great dedication to the mission of the department, College, and University. They forge strong and supportive relationships with students, who in turn create language communities in their respective languages. The faculty members leverage their strengths in cooperation across the department and with the Croft Institute, with impressive results. In addition, ML is preparing the soft launch of a PhD program in Second Languages Studies. The new doctoral program, which has the potential to contribute significantly to the enhanced mission of the University of Mississippi with the recent elevation to R1 (highest research activity) designation, is poised to showcase ML's strengths and research expertise in Linguistics. Simultaneously, however, launching this program potentially exposes some weaknesses within the current departmental structure, workload distribution, and faculty research quality and quantity commensurate with a PhD program at an R1 institution.

The weaknesses include challenges to cohesion in terms of physical space, the high teaching load, and outlier programs that would benefit from being integrated into existing majors and minors.

Our recommendations are based on our site visit, extensive discussions, and research into programs at peer institutions in the Southern University Group (SUG) and Southeastern Conference (SEC). After completing the site visit, we generated a chart based on our research in which we characterize the graduate programs at peer institutions that have established graduate programs with similar goals to those in development at the University of Mississippi. We include that chart in the narrative (pp. 5-8).

Based on our findings, we have several recommendations. First, we suggest that the departmental and college leadership, in consultation with the ML faculty, identify graduate faculty with research of sufficient profile to attract high-caliber graduate students committed to a doctoral program. Further, we recommend that the committee set short-term goals (3, 5 and 7 year projections) and metrics for measuring success of the program. Toward the goal of enhanced faculty research profiles, we recommend course reduction (3/2-2/2 and eventually 2/2) for fully promoted or associate professors that recruit, retain, and mentor graduate students. In practical terms, PhD candidates could propose and teach upper-division courses, under the supervision of an advisor or teaching mentor who would receive the course release. To establish a truly robust SLS PhD, ML could incorporate LCTL skills at the graduate level. Any course reduction for the graduate faculty would offset the problem of scarce research and travel support for tenured professors. Further, the strengths of the undergraduate program would be enhanced with a more concentrated implementation of undergraduate research projects. With modest investment, such

as 2-3 graduate stipends annually, the challenge of implementing a Second Language Studies PhD is also an opportunity.

## **Part 2: Narrative**

*Based on the data/information provided in the self-study report or gathered by the review team, what are the department's overall strengths and weaknesses?*

The department has many strengths. Meeting with the chair and the faculty in the department we noticed they have a clear vision for the future – the department has embraced the development of highly proficient language learners and users; it has seen curricular expansions in linguistics, literature, and culture; and a healthy increase in the number of students and faculty, making it both interdisciplinary and international in scope.

The department has an outstanding cadre of permanent faculty and instructional faculty who cover an ample range of disciplines – linguistics, pedagogy, literature and culture, both at the undergraduate and the graduate levels (they offer master's programs in Modern Languages with emphases in French, German, Spanish, Linguistics, and TESOL); are successful at applying for and securing grants; and are actively collaborating with other programs on campus, i.e., the Croft Institute, the Honors College, Medieval Studies Program, Gender Studies Program, etc.

Departmental faculty members are also active collaborators with other institutions. For example, the associate director of the Linguistic Atlas Project, Alison Burkette, a faculty member in the department, is going to be in charge of a significant portion of the Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States that is being transferred from the University of Georgia to the University of Mississippi. Dr. Burkette is going to supervise the digitalization of original field records from the 1970s and hire UM students to help with the project.

The department houses two signature programs, which have national recognition. One is a federally funded Chinese Flagship Language Program with a five-year curriculum and whose students graduate with ACTFL Superior score in their proficiency exams. This program has seen a dramatic increase both in the number of students enrolled and in the number of faculty hired. The other program, the Arabic major, was created upon determining the positive outcomes of the Chinese program. The success of these two signature programs has impacted not only enrollment – as they attract academically strong high school students – but also how foreign language teaching and learning are tackled in the department, where the expectations are placed on student development of competitive oral proficiency skills. The programs' success has also been instrumental in the creation of a new language program in Korean, the expansion of the program in Swahili (to two years), and intensive summer programs in several other languages taught in the department.

In addition to the Chinese Flagship Language Program, the department has a reputation for maintaining an ROTC language program in Beijing, China, for cadets; and also for garnering ten \$100,000 grants to operate summer StarTalk programs for high schools with students interested in studying Chinese intensively in a residential program on campus.

The department has a national and international reputation for hosting conferences and other professional venues both in language, pedagogy, literature, and culture, attracting not only

faculty and students, but also community members to campus. For example, the Southeastern Conference on Linguistics (SECOL) for several years; the International Conference on Balkan and South Slavic Languages, Literatures and Folklore; the Southeastern Medieval Association; AMTESOL; the Central Association of Russian Teachers of America; and the Christopher Longest Lecture, which brings lecturers on a variety of topics to campus. Modern Languages faculty members have actively participated in the interdisciplinary Global South Program. Both graduate students and undergraduate majors have given joint presentations and co-authored papers with faculty.

Together with the Division of Outreach, since 2007, the Department has sponsored three intensive one-month summer programs in German, Japanese and Russian, and offered study abroad scholarships to those students who successfully completed the summer and registered in accelerated language courses the following academic year. This proved to be an excellent tool for recruiting minors in those languages. Similarly, the department has been very successful at supporting high school foreign language programs, particularly in Chinese and Japanese and in the northern section of the state of Mississippi. As part of the ALLEX Consortium (Alliance for Language Learning and Education Exchange), the department recruited, supported, and trained high school teachers who, in turn, became students in the graduate program.

The department takes pride in housing honor society chapters for most of the languages it offers, and also for the honor society of the general study of language and linguistics. The Residential College also offers opportunities for foreign language students to practice the language offered by the department at a more informal setting through their weekly language tables while enjoying a meal with faculty.

The department has several weaknesses. There is an obvious need for physical space for faculty, especially office space. Currently, several instructors share small offices with other instructors where there is no privacy for student advising. As the department continues to grow, this difficulty is likely to become heightened. Another cause for concern is the conditions of classrooms in Bondurant Hall, the department's building. Many classrooms need upkeep and/or lack the level of technology required to meet the demands of optimal language instruction.

The department currently provides very limited access to internal resources and/or seed funding for activities conducted by tenured faculty either to support on-going research projects or to undertake new projects. This has a negative impact on faculty's motivation for keeping an adequate active research agenda post-tenure. In line with this generalized lack of financial support, even though the department currently enrolls over 40 students in their four graduate programs, the amount allocated for graduate stipends is scarce. Typically, only 17 students receive graduate stipends per year, and the amounts are not very competitive to be able to attract a solid cadre of graduate students.

One genuine concern the department has to do its inability to hire permanent faculty to teach the smaller language programs where committed master's-level faculty members teach those basic language classes, thereby releasing both tenured and tenure-track faculty to focus on upper-level courses.

A common recent challenge colleges are experiencing nationally is the oversight of Intensive English (IE) programs. Academic departments usually supervise these programs, but other units

on campus are responsible for the financial and operational management. The IE program in the Department of Modern Languages here is no exception. Departmental leadership in decision-making, curriculum development, hiring, and supervision, is hindered, when these responsibilities are shared with the Office of Global Engagement.

*How well does the department meet its mission with regard to its academic programs, faculty, and resources?*

The department meets its mission with regards to its academic programs, as it promotes multilingualism and cross-cultural understanding through the Flagship program, its interdisciplinary collaborations with the Croft Institute, and its commitment to second/foreign languages and cultures. It also meets its mission with regards to the faculty by hiring a cadre of dedicated professionals, committed to developing a diverse intellectual community of critical thinkers and global citizens. In terms of resources, as discussed above, the department could benefit from additional office space; upkeep of classrooms and language laboratories; and access to internal resources/seed funding for tenured senior faculty.

*How would you compare this department with its peers?*

University	SL Studies PhD?	Department	Other PhDs?
Arizona State University	No	English Spanish	*PhD SLA PhD, Spanish, SLA 1 of 3 concentrations MA: ESL, MTESOL
Auburn University	No	English	Graduate TESOL Certificate
Clemson University	No		
Florida State University	No	Modern Languages and Literatures	Hispanic Linguistics; MA and PhD SLA, Language and Linguistics Track: Spanish MA and PhD
Georgia Institute of Technology	No		
Georgia State University	No	Applied Linguistics and ESL	Graduate TESOL Certificate
Louisiana State University	No		
Mississippi State Univ	No		
North Carolina State Univ	No	College of Ed Humanities and	Literacy and English Language

		Social Sciences	Arts Education (LELA); also MA in Foreign Languages and Literatures with Linguistics concentration
Oklahoma State University	No		
Texas A & M University	No	Hispanic Studies	PhD in Hispanic Studies; Several courses in applied linguistics
Texas Tech University	No	Classical & Modern Langs. & Lits./English	Track in Spanish Linguistics/Grad Certificate in Linguistics
University of Alabama	No	Modern Langs. & Classics	Linguistics Option/French or Spanish + Linguistics
University of Alabama, Bir	No		
University of Arkansas	No		
University of Delaware	No		
University of Florida	No	Spanish and Portuguese Studies	*PhD in Spanish Lit & Cult or in Hispanic Ling
University of Georgia	No	Romance Languages	*PhD in Literatures, Linguistics, and Cultural Studies (three concentrations)
University of Houston	No	Hispanic Studies	*PhD in Hispanic Literature or in Hispanic Ling
University of Kentucky, Lex	No	Hispanic Studies	PhD in Hispanic Studies
Uni of Maryland, College P	No	(School of Lang, Lit, & Cultures) French Lang & Literature; Germanic Studies; Spanish Lang, Lit,	PhD in French, German and Spanish

		Cultures (Spanish & Portuguese)	
Univ of Missouri (SEC)	No	Romance Languages & Literatures	PhD in French or in Spanish
University of N C, Chap H	No	Romance Languages & Literatures	PhD in French & Francophone Studies; Italian Studies; & Literatures, Languages and Cultures of the Iberian Peninsula and the Americas
University of Oklahoma	No	*Spanish *French	*PhD in Spanish and in French (both generalist)
University of S Carolina	No	Languages, Literatures and Cultures	*PhD in Spanish and Latin-American literary and cultural studies (interdisciplinary)
University of S Mississippi	No	Foreign Languages and Literatures	No (MALT only)
Univ of Tennessee, Knox	No	Modern Foreign Languages & Lit	*PhD in Mod Foreign Lang (with major concentration in Spanish; minor in Applied Ling, LA Studies or another lang
University of Texas, Austin	No	*Spanish & Portuguese *Germanic Studies	PhD in Iberian & Latin American Literatures & Cultures, in Luso-Brazilian Cultural and Media Studies, and Iberian & Latin American Linguistics
University of Virginia	No	Spanish, Italian & Portuguese	*PhD in Spanish (generalist)
Vanderbilt University (SEC)	No	Spanish & Portuguese	*PhD in Spanish, in Spanish &

			Portuguese, in French, and Italian (interdisciplinary)
Virginia Polytech Institute	No	Foreign Languages & Literatures	Mas
West Virginia University	No	World Languages, Lit & Ling	MA

### Part 3: Recommendations

In the departmental Executive Summary of the self-study, four priority recommendations were made.

#### **Recommendation 1:** Consolidation of faculty spaces, both offices and classrooms.

The dispersed spaces, not only offices and classrooms, but also labs, pose challenges to the cohesion of the department. In addition, the disparities in the condition of the learning environments range from the welcoming and bright classrooms of the Croft Institute to the rather grim basement offices for multiple graduate students and the lab. These disparities imply a hierarchy that implies the prioritization of “strategic” languages and the disadvantaging of task-based learning that takes place in the lab. That said, we realize that departments, even colleges, do not necessarily have the resources to change the allotment of spaces on campuses that are experiencing enrollment growth. While ML lists this as the highest priority, we recommend that the Department Chair work with the Dean to consolidate departmental leadership offices and improve the lab. This recommendation cannot be implemented at all by the department without additional resources.

#### **Recommendation 2:** New resources for graduate education.

We strongly agree that the new PhD program would benefit greatly from a strategic hire, preferably of a high-profile scholar with impressive credentials in Second Language Acquisition. While the strengths of existing faculty in linguistics are also impressive, the quality and quantity of competing programs in the SUG and SEC warrant an investment in a new colleague who would confer prestige on the department in order to enhance its profile and help roll-out an exciting new opportunity for graduate students from within and beyond Mississippi. Many of the competing programs have resources considerably in excess of those available in Oxford. The combination of comparatively heavy teaching loads with service and outreach perhaps contribute to the low or less than top-tier research production of some colleagues. While in-house publications have a value, the citation numbers indicate that much published research is not having a broad impact. One crucial hire could reverse that trend. This recommendation cannot be implemented at all by the department without additional resources.

#### **Recommendation 3:** Building language proficiency into curriculum at every stage.

We agree with this recommendation, and encourage that internationally recognized metrics be used (placement and exit exams, for example, from ACTFL, or national and international testing organizations with certification) to achieve this recommendation. The learning outcomes for each

stage of the curriculum might be implemented in multi-section courses, incorporated into graduate teaching assistant training, included at new faculty orientation, and published on syllabi. In addition, student teaching evaluations could be revised or written to reflect the logical progression in attainable learning outcomes throughout the program. This recommendation can be partially implemented by the department with current resources, but additional resources would improve outcome.

**Recommendation 4:** Building long-standing minor languages into majors, especially Italian and Russian.

The ability to incorporate Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL), such as Italian and Russian, is key to sustaining these offerings as more than outliers. The success of the undergraduate language instruction in all languages in ML is impressive; students do still need motivation to acquire linguistic and cultural knowledge and intercultural communication skills, and having choices that motivate undergraduates is a crucial component to the nurturing and growth of enrollments in LCTL. This recommendation can be implemented by the department with current resources.

In general, based on the data provided and gathered in finalizing this report, the recommendations selected by the department are reasonable. We do believe, however, that the precipitous approval of the PhD program presents both cause for celebration and caution. The outcomes and metrics for measuring the success of the program need careful consideration in order to avoid producing unemployable graduates and misguidedly investing precious graduate resources. The selection of graduate faculty with the necessary expertise and research with broad impact will be essential to the successful launch of the program. If it were possible, the inclusion of SLA expertise in a field and/or language other than Spanish, such as the LCTLs, or highlighting SLA for heritage speakers, could heighten the profile of ML's PhD program. We would encourage ML and the College to consider clearly and critically what resources and sets of expertise already exist within the learning environments that give the department distinction. Only then can urgent hiring needs be addressed.

With current or only slightly inflected resources, the department could strive to broaden the impact of its research. In examining, for example, the teaching load at Research 1 universities, we conclude that a 3/3 load is challenging. With curricular adjustments and course release for graduate faculty, moving to a 3/2-2/2 and eventually a 2/2 load would enable a deliberate program toward high-visibility publication and research.

Finally, it would be prudent to revitalize the relationship between language instruction and technology; a real commitment to online learning, or developing synchronous and asynchronous offerings, and integrating this type of learning into the SLA curriculum would distinguish the new PhD from the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Mississippi.