

University of Tennessee Chattanooga
Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures

External Review

April 15, 2016

Campus Visit: March 28-30, 2016

Michelle Scatton-Tessier, Chair, World Languages and Cultures
University of North Carolina Wilmington

Introduction

This report is based on my visit to the University of Tennessee Chattanooga from March 28th to 30th 2016. I derived my findings and recommendations from my reading of the Program Review document and from a class visit, conversations with members of the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures (MCLL), as well as with various members of the administration, faculty, students, and staff who work closely with this department. The agenda for the visit included official meetings and meals with faculty, administrators, students, the Dean of the College, and the Provost.

Part I-Learning Outcomes

The Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures has a clearly articulated mission statement that aligns well with the mission of the university as a whole. Their goal “to prepare students for employment or for graduate studies in modern or classical languages ... for professional job market by teaching them to think critically and to communicate effectively, as well as gain a broad worldview” also aligns with guidelines set forth by the Modern Language Association (MLA) for students in language majors. According to the MLA:

The language major should be structured to produce a specific outcome: educated speakers who have deep translingual and transcultural competence. Advanced language training often seeks to replicate the competence of an educated native speaker, a goal that post-adolescent learners rarely reach. The idea of translingual and transcultural competence, in contrast, places value on the ability to operate between languages. Students are educated to function as informed and capable interlocutors with educated native speakers in the target language. They are also trained to reflect on the world and themselves through the lens of another language and culture. They learn to comprehend speakers of the target language as members of foreign societies and to grasp themselves as Americans—that is, as members of a society that is foreign to others. They also learn to relate to fellow members of their own society who speak languages other than English.

This kind of foreign language education systematically teaches differences in meaning, mentality, and worldview as expressed in American English and in the target language. Literature, film, and other media are used to challenge students' imaginations and to help them consider alternative ways of seeing, feeling, and understanding things. In the course of acquiring functional language abilities, students are taught critical language awareness, interpretation and translation, historical and political consciousness, social sensibility, and aesthetic perception. They acquire a basic knowledge of the history, geography, culture, and literature of the society or societies whose language they are learning; the ability to understand and interpret its radio, television, and print media;

and the capacity to do research in the language using parameters specific to the target culture.¹

The Curriculum is continually assessed and adjustments made. In particular, the annual assessment of each class's SLO's are directly addressed and instructor's classroom performance reviewed. When weak scores by a particular instructor have been documented, strategies are shared at faculty annual review. The department's adoption of ACTFL standards align with student proficiency expectations at the national level. Faculty in the department have also developed a clear set of expected learning outcomes in the majors along with an assessment plan and appropriate rubrics. The outcomes of the 2013/2014 assessments included in the Program Review document show that most students meet or exceed expectations in most areas. Furthermore, an 85% rate of students meeting ACTFL expectations appears steady since the previous assessment. The expected learning outcomes have been carefully designed and rigorous, though the results could be improved, as in the General Education classes, with smaller class sizes fostering increased class time for student language production. The programs' consistent expectations in written and oral language production help students achieve the skills necessary for such success at end-of-year evaluation or during exit exams. The commitment of MCLL to adhere to discipline standards is commendable as this entails great time, training and resource commitments from the department. With this in mind, I recommend charging a departmental committee with rotating faculty to further engage faculty with the various steps in assessment and the program review process, both external and internal.

Part3-Student Experience

I met with three bright, motivated, and engaging students who represented all of the department's majors. Each provided very positive input. The students were very pleased with the amount of attention and feedback that they get from the faculty, and they also appreciated the diversity of the faculty (e.g., native and non-native speakers, as well as faculty representing different areas of expertise). Each student also noted that she feels that she has developed a close relationship with her professors and knows they are willing to help her at any time. In particular, a transfer student spoke highly of the individual mentoring and independent study research she has been able to experience in the department. Students felt that they have regular communication with faculty on post-UTC opportunities, yet thought the program could benefit from a career night for majors and minors where faculty would share their own career paths and recent students would provide suggestions for how to beset sell their language and cultural competency on the job market. Students may be unaware that these types of events are already happening on campus. Students also expressed their participation in the language honor societies and student organizations, when time permitted. They appeared aware of and able to articulate the need for study abroad and appreciate the many opportunities they have

¹ Michael Geisler et al. "Foreign Languages and Education: New Structures for a Changed World." *Profession, a publication of the Modern Language Association*. May 2007. Web. March 10, 2015. <<http://www.mla.org/flreport>>.

for faculty-led programs. Two of the three students whom I met expressed a desire for more culture and media studies in the traditional literature-based upper-division curriculum. I would suggest reviewing each course to see if an appropriate amount of cultural background is included in the syllabi. Through a university initiative, all students supply feedback on each course in which they are enrolled. Then, this feedback is reviewed annually by department head and faculty members in the EOG process (evaluation and development by objectives).

Overall, the students I met were enthusiastic and appeared motivated to learn. The high level of participation in MCLL faculty-led study abroad programs, the ample opportunity to participate in independent study producing student research, and high achievement on assessments conducted by the department are evidence of the high quality of students in these programs and speaks to the reputation and level of excellence of the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures at UT Chattanooga.

Part 4-Faculty and Staff

MCLL has a rich, diverse group of faculty diverse in profiles and areas of expertise, offering a wide range of viewpoints and geographical representations, equal distribution among genres, and courses infused with canonical and non-canonical texts. This diversity will be further developed with the incoming Professor of Francophonie in August 2016. It is clear that there is collaboration and collegiality among department members. Faculty at all ranks and status convey solid support for their department head and peers, offering specific examples showing a continual attention to faculty mentoring and to excellence in teaching, research and service. A departmental faculty mentoring program supports the head's initiatives for faculty retention and success.

The wide array of research specialties allows for diverse upper-division course offerings. Furthermore, despite a high teaching load, faculty have been able to maintain a truly impressive level of scholarship, with both conference presentations and publications in peer-reviewed journals. Faculty have the appropriate degrees and graduate credit hours to teach in their discipline. The tenure-track faculty's CVs are full of conference presentations, published articles, and other notable activities. The lecturers to whom I spoke expressed a loyalty to the department and its students, demonstrating a great pride in their contributions to the department's success in organizing and providing support services for co-curricular activities. Some felt, however, that better promotion for such events could be solicited from tenure-track faculty teaching upper-division courses.

The primary staff member of the department is an administrative associate, Evelyn Murray, who appears effective and independent, and has good relationships with colleagues and students. A concern is that she is the primary responsible for staff services for both MCLL and PAR with whom she works at a distance. I suggest that the main office take better advantage of the talents of the work-study students, working as a student focus group, and have them organize bulletin boards near the main office and Language Lab to highlight recent faculty

publications, faculty-led study abroad, student internships, independent studies, upcoming courses, and major/minor career opportunities.

Currently, the department is dramatically understaffed in tenure-track faculty, with one TT professor of French covering all upper-division courses and advising, and one TT Spanish professor for more than sixty Spanish majors. Next year will be a pivotal year for the department. Due to recent vacancies and a sabbatical, the department has seized opportunities to address diversity in the curricula and in its faculty makeup. This is not without great stress on the faculty. It must be noted that the continual searches, turnover and understaffing are particularly hard on junior faculty who are expected to be building an ongoing research agenda at this stage of their careers (see MCLL bylaws). Their department head and senior faculty must be commended in their ability to hold high faculty morale and solidarity in face of such stresses and a July 2015 administrative merger with a second department.

From all conversations, I heard solid support of the department head and colleagues. Mentions were made particularly to the annual performance evaluation conversations regarding EOG which review teaching, research and service. The annual assessment of each class's SLO's are directly addressed and instructor's classroom performance reviewed. When weak scores by a particular instructor have been documented, strategies are shared at faculty annual review. In regard to service to the community, the department's connections to the community (cultural programming, internships, volunteer translating and interpreting, etc.) are appropriate to the institution's setting. As UTC's QEP (quality enhancement plan/ applied learning) gets flushed out and supported, one will see even more service learning and internship connections between MCLL and community populations.

Part5-Learning Resources

During my review, I visited the MCLL Language Lab. As faculty members expressed, this space increases learning opportunities for students by providing student-centered space for tutoring, co-curricular events, student organization activities and informal moments with faculty. The space has recently been refashioned to accommodate film screenings and student organization happenings. The flat screen television and lounging area in the Lab, often used for co-curricular activities, is a great addition to help students increase community building and language proficiency with authentic materials. This space surely has a positive impact on program recruitment and retention, as well as overall student success at UTC. The faculty are also using the space for end-of-year student feedback moments and as occasional classroom space. The Lab houses a library of student resources (books, DVD's, etc.) linked directly to course offerings and chosen by the faculty and Lab coordinator. The students with whom I met expressed their appreciation and use of the Lab. In order for the Language Lab to continue to fulfill its mission and address upcoming program and co-curricular needs, its traffic and usage will need to be tracked. Next year's project to track types of usage is a priority for the Lab coordinator. This data will surely spark further inquiry into the ways in which the Lab can be best integrated into

the department's mission and visibility. A clear practice has been set on the update and maintenance of the Lab's equipment.

My visit includes a guided visit to the library by the Dean of the Library, and a frank conversation of continual collection development. The department head of MCLL assiduously allots funding to faculty, precision on student resources, course development and course-related scholarship. As the faculty mentioned that they rely heavily on Interlibrary Loan, I suggest additional funding to collection development in order to avoid ILL reorders, saving funds in the long run. Even more so as new faculty will demand further diversification of the collection in their continued research projects and course variety.

Students, in language basic studies courses and in upper-division, currently can acquire tutoring through a volunteer or paid-tutor listing house in the department with the Administrative Associate. I suggest that the Center for Advisement and Student Success centralize and resource tutoring for students in the basic studies language courses. Since the CASS already offers tutoring in math, chemistry, biology and physics, it would be appropriate to house tutoring here. This opportunity has several immediate benefits: while redirecting student tutoring traffic, it provides applied learning (QEP) credit as well as CV experience for strong upper-division language student could possibly, offers critical thinking moments in peer evaluation, and increases student success and retention. On a related matter, with increased emphasis on QEP, one would expect to have a stronger connection to donor recruitment from the UTC's Development Office and International Programs to secure more scholarship to relieve tuition for students studying abroad.

Part 6-Support RESOURCES

Already gifted at difficult conversations, the recently-appointed department head of both PAR and MCLL could use additional support from the College. I recommend that funding be allocated to support his professional development. Such national seminars at the American Association of Departments of Foreign Languages and the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences provide workshops and peer-mentoring at the chair level to refresh strategies and initiatives, while building networks from which the entire university benefits. These types of professional development seminars have long been endorsed by leading professional associations in HigherEd.²

My visit with the Director for the Center of Teaching and Learning revealed a strong and growing relationship between her Center and MCLL. My suggestion from this conversation is to require Quality Matters at university level, as we do at UNCW where faculty receive their DE development stipend after their course has been scored using Quality Matters rubrics. Such a requirement fosters faculty confidence and credibility with students, uniformity across

²"A Letter from Upper Administration in Support of Seminar Attendance." <[https://adfl.mla.org/Seminars/A-Letter-from-Upper-Administrators-in-Support-of-Seminar-Attendance.](https://adfl.mla.org/Seminars/A-Letter-from-Upper-Administrators-in-Support-of-Seminar-Attendance)> Consulted April 12, 2016.

disciplines and course sections, encourages faculty to step up for distance education classes and provides opportunities for lecturers (non-tenure track faculty) to engage in funded professional development. As some MCLL faculty members are currently creating more general education DE courses, I believe this is a timely initiative to support both MCLL and UTC faculty teaching online (while bolstering the department's SCH's). Increasing applied learning opportunities off campus will certainly bring forth more DE requests from third and fourth year students engaged in internships, regional or international service learning, and practica.

Though it appears that the operating fund has recently been adjusted, I suggest a closer review of operating budget in relation to current staffing numbers, taking into account the importance of professional development funds to support the success and retention of junior faculty. This is especially important given the low salaries and increased cost of living in Chattanooga.

PART 7- Summary Recommendations

STRENGTHS

The main strengths of these programs consist of a mostly full-time faculty dedicated to meet student needs inside and outside the classroom. Part-time faculty members appear to be well integrated into the fabric of the department by having access to necessary teaching resources, space and by having attentive department head feedback on performance. While the part-time faculty with whom I spoke seemed generally satisfied with their working conditions, there is one concern worth noting. Their compensation for the amount of work they do is low compared to peer institutions.

Moreover, hires since the last external review include a full-time lecturer in Latin to cover the department head's classes, two tenure-track faculty in Spanish, one lecturer to start AY2016-2017 in a tenure-track line, and one in tenure-track professor in French allow for strengthened major programs. I wish to acknowledge that these hires are mostly replacement hires, leading to an increase of only one growth position in Spanish. The department has been in communication with the dean's office on the perceived teaching need of retaining the lecturer line in Spanish. It is unclear if the dean's office has yet made a commitment to retain the lecturer line in MCLL.

The recent selection of a Chair of Excellence in the Humanities housed in this department, whose area of expertise is Classics, has the potential to afford more visibility to the department, while providing opportunities to increased independent study and research in upper-division students. The faculty's research productivity is commendable, especially if one considers that they practice a 4/4 teaching load and heavy departmental service expectations. Although due to time constraints my visit did not include the Office of International Programs, I can comment that the department engages in study abroad programs and faculty members' recent initiatives have led to increased numbers of students studying on faculty-led programs as well as a new cross-campus Summer Paris program with professors in Economics and French. This type of faculty engagement goes beyond the required university service and almost always proves to have a positive impact on program recruitment, student success and retention.

The department's response to its last external review by Dr. Kathleen Doig (Georgia State) in AY2009-2010 is exceptional. As their program review report details, they have been responsive and proactive in strategies to address changes in university-wide initiatives in student-credit hour review and major/minor expectations. Of note here is their attention to grow their local community connections in increasing their internship programs and number of internship sites. The department continues to be cost effective and to allocate resources in an efficient manner (Library, Faculty Travel, PT budget). Though only data to 2014 was reviewed on the website of UTC's Office of Planning, Evaluation and Institutional Research, the department's data proves the department is consistent or increasing credit hour production. The heavy overload and PT budget, app. \$55,000 per year, could be relieved by the hiring of more FT faculty member who would continually engage in service and recruitment. As expressed in the section on Curriculum, the department offers a rotation of courses that fits with undergraduate expectations in breath and coverage for Spanish, French and Latin majors. Of particular interest, again here, is the regular MCLL faculty offerings in independent study and student research. This one-on-one upper-division work prepares students best prepares students for graduate school success. The only suggestion I would have would be a potential DIS/INT showcase of student poster presentations or research talks open to fellow majors and faculty. These have been successful for recruitment, student-CV building, and donor solicitation.

AREAS OF CONCERN

A primary area of concern is faculty workload. Full-time faculty are teaching four courses per semester (4/4), often with three preparations. This is of particular concern for tenured and tenure-track faculty who have an expected ongoing research agenda. In addition, faculty receive no credit for supervising independent studies, student internships and directing honors theses. Faculty have taught teaching uncompensated overloads. During my campus visit it seemed clear that there was a campus conversation on setting university policies for faculty workload.

The MLA recommends that class sizes where the four skills and culture are emphasized not exceed 20 students. Class sizes in Spanish classes at UTC are currently capped at 29, and thus have 45% more students than the recommended maximum. Equally notable is the difference between workload in the department and the Modern Language Association recommendation, which directly impacts student learning outcomes. The recommendation is as follows:

Foreign language faculty members should spend no more than twelve hours per week per semester in the classroom. If there is an expectation of ongoing research, they should not be required to teach more than nine hours per week (three courses). Institutions that require publication for tenure and promotion should lower teaching loads, especially for junior faculty members.³

³ Association of Departments of Foreign Languages. "ADFL Guidelines and Policy Statements." Web. March 10, 2015. <http://www.adfl.org/resources/resources_guidelines.htm#class>

Faculty workload in this department should be adjusted to fall within these guidelines, especially for the tenure-track faculty whose teaching burden is high and who are also expected to maintain an active research agenda and perform service to the department, college, university and community.

I suggest that the department track their faculty's independent study courses, internships, and direction of honors theses and compare these numbers to those of other similar departments in the college, if this is not in progress. Such an initiative will recognize the faculty's non-compensated teaching, valorize their efforts, and help the faculty champion for recognition of faculty credit-hour equivalent work (CHE). At UNCW, this initiative has been successful in allowing flexibility in faculty time related to teaching workload and research productivity. It has also aided improving College-wide low faculty morale. In university-wide conversations, recognition of CHE has encouraged faculty to embrace our quality enhancement plan, more individualized student-research, and opportunities for experiential learning so important to the study of a language and the culture or cultures where that language is spoken.

My recommended strategies have been formatted as follows and listed in priority. I strongly believe that these actions function together to achieve stronger departmental presence, increased faculty morale in regard to recognition of faculty workload, further MCLL major/minor engagement outside the classroom.

Zero-based Recommendations

- Track Language Lab types of usage, as planned in AY2016-2017 to better assess and then meet student and department's current needs
- Charge a departmental Curriculum or Assessment Cmte with ensuring entire faculty involvement in all stages of assessment and program review(s)
- Use work-study students and related student organizations as a focus group for updating the presence/visibility of MCLL (research/program bulletin boards, website with more student presence and student org. links, Lab space, tabling, etc.)
- Organize with related student organizations occasional career-centered events
- Consider organizing with related student organizations an annual MCLL student-research showcase
- Create a departmental liaison to connect with the new development officer for the College of Arts and Sciences
- Message MCLL graduating majors and minors on donating their senior gifts directly to the department, during the senior giving campaign
- Request the Center for Advisement and Student Success offer tutoring in basic studies language classes and consider hiring strong majors and minors in MCLL
- Review classrooms and list repairs to Facilities (cracked wall, noisy thermostat, etc.)

Recommendations for Use of New Resources

- Reduce by dean and provost approval all full-time tenure-track faculty to a 3/3 load
- Secure the lecture line in Spanish and authorize a search in order to continue to meet the current service and teaching demands in this language program
- Reduce class sizes closer to the maximum of 20 recommended by the MLA
- Fund department head professional development over the next fiscal year
- Resource through the Academic Affairs or the CAS faculty initiatives in service learning and applied learning for academic credit

CONCLUSIONS

Even as the University of Tennessee system is facing financial challenges and making decisions to redirect funding based on student credit hour production and numbers of majors in a given graduation period, this generation of American college students needs a solid liberal arts education that includes a high level of language proficiency in order to remain competitive in an increasingly global market place. In a recent report on American education, the Council on Foreign Relations warns:

The lack of language skills and civic and global awareness among American citizens increasingly jeopardizes their ability to interact with local and global peers or participate meaningfully in business, diplomatic, and military situations. The United States is not producing enough foreign-language speakers to staff important posts in the U.S. Foreign Service, the intelligence community, and American companies.⁴

It appears that the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures is ready to meet this challenge and requires investment of resources and the good will of the administration and all members of the faculty at UT Chattanooga in order to do so. In sum, the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures is to be lauded for designing and delivering programs intended to produce informed and active citizens who have enhanced employability, make responsible choices, and are better prepared for the world ahead.

⁴ Klein, Joel, et al. *U.S. Education Reform and National Security*. Task Force Report No. 68. Council on Foreign Relations Press, March 2012, 11.