

EVALUATORS' REPORT FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURES AND LANGUAGES, LEHMAN COLLEGE

April 30, 2022

Dear Colleagues,

Dr. Ana María Díaz-Marcos (Professor of Spanish, University of Connecticut) and Dr. Valérie Orlando (Professor of French, University of Maryland) spent April 7-8, 2022 on Lehman College's campus visiting the Department of Languages and Literatures. During the two days, we met with faculty (tenure-track, tenured and adjunct), students (BA and MA), administrators, joined a campus tour, and visited the facilities. Our conversations, in addition to our reading of the Department's Self-Study, we believe allowed us to gain a full and accurate picture of the Department's needs, goals, and vision for the future. As impartial evaluators, we hope to provide here below comments that best reflect the reality of the Department while also recommending how changes/enhancements could be made in order to improve the quality of instruction, the working environment for faculty, and the educational engagement of students. In the spirit of accomplishing this, we offer a report that encompasses 1) overall observations, 2) assessment of current structures/systems within the department, 3) recommendations.

Overall observations

After our visits with faculty, students, and administrators as well as a thorough reading of the Department's Self-Study, we have concluded that despite the department's amazing faculty and their dedication to their students as far as instruction and mentoring, the department as a whole suffers from lack of investment and guarantees by the College and the broader CUNY university system in terms of funds, faculty staffing, and faculty research time off. These aspects have immensely hindered the Department's growth and potential vitality and seriously jeopardized its future goals. An overburdensome teaching-load (3-3 and 3-4 in some cases), underfunding of staff support for the department, and a lack of viable tenure-track and full-time lecturer positions (particularly to replace retirements) to ensure quality instruction are contributing to the Department's challenges, making future plans and visions exceedingly difficult to ensure.

Assessment of current structure/systems in the department

Despite steady numbers in terms of enrollments at the undergraduate level (and that there is a language requirement for most students attending Lehman College), faculty numbers have declined due to retirements. This has resulted in the Department's significant reliance on adjunct instructors to fulfill teaching duties. Despite this hindrance, as the Self-Study report notes, the "assessment goals and objectives have been satisfactorily achieved across all Languages and Literatures programs since its previous 2010-2011 self-study report". Overall enrollments in

elementary and intermediate language courses have remained strong across in-house language programs, including Spanish, French, Italian, Japanese and Irish. On the other hand, though, there was a noticeable decrease in offsite-consortium courses (Chinese and Arabic) in 2020 and 2021. However, these declines are probably due to the ongoing health crisis.

Points raised in the Self-Study note the following as essential for understanding the overall situation of the Department. We also would like to reiterate these items here as we also concur that they are the most significant to address as the Department moves forward:

The Department in general:

- The Department has seen a substantial reduction in its professorial ranks. In 2012 Languages & Literatures had 21 full-time faculty positions compared with 13 today; that is, the Department is operating with 8 fewer full-time teaching staff today, equivalent to a reduction of 38% of its full-time instructional workforce.
- In Spring 2022, the Department is offering 63 class sections. Of these, only one third (21) are being taught by full-time faculty, with 42 sections being taught by adjunct faculty – 66% of courses.
- Since the previous self-study report (2010-2011), the Department has lost 4 language programs because of faculty retirements and low enrollments: Russian, Hebrew, Latin and Greek.
- The Department has carried out a search to hire a language coordinator, a critical role in the Department that had been left vacant for the past three years. This hire has been successfully made and will help remedy some of the advising burden placed on faculty in the Department. However, the Department is still in urgent and immediate need of at least three additional full-time faculty appointments in Spanish.

Spanish programs:

- The demand for courses for heritage speakers of Spanish has increased by approximately 33% since 2012-2013.
- Spanish M.A. programs have likewise exhibited a healthy growth rate, from only 1 student enrolled in 2017 to 14 in 2022.
- Lehman's Spanish B.A. programs are among the strongest in CUNY. In the last 5 years, only Queens College has surpassed Lehman in the number of Spanish B.A degrees awarded. In 2010 the Department had a total of 48 students majoring in Spanish; in 2020, that number had increased to 89, evincing a growth rate of approximately 85%. The number of faculty teaching Spanish, however, has diminished and is currently unable to meet the demands of its increasing number of majors. The Department has had to rely excessively on adjunct faculty to cope with ever increasing demands. In the current semester, for instance, of the 10 upper-division 300-level courses being offered to majors in Spanish, only 3 are being taught by full-time faculty, the other 7 being taught by

adjunct instructors. The consensus in the Department is that Spanish majors are not being served as well as needed.

The French program:

There has been a noticeable increase in French majors as well. In 2015, there were only 3 majors enrolled whereas in 2020 there were 9. The French program has three full-time members; however, one of them is a linguist who cannot teach most of the French major courses, which are in literature; another faculty member plans to retire in the coming years. In order to take advantage of growing populations of French-speaking African and Caribbean communities in the Bronx, we strongly feel an additional full-time line in French (a hire focusing on these geographical regions) is crucial. The staffing shortage has made it difficult for full-time faculty in French to teach outside the department (not only at the CUNY graduate center, but also in Lehman's LEH and Lehman Scholars programs which, in the past, have served as a good venue for attracting French majors and minors).

The Italian program:

Although Italian has seen a substantial decrease in terms of both majors and minors (there were 5 Italian majors in 2016; today, there are "0" Italian majors in the department) this is primarily due to the fact that there is only one full-time tenured faculty member. One professor retired in 2015 and had been away from teaching since 2014 prior to retirement. Therefore, in order for the Italian program to grow again, it will need additional full-time faculty. Due to the significant Italian heritage population represented in NYC, we feel it behooves Lehman College to invest and foster the language and its culture.

The Linguistics Program:

The program, incorporated into the Department in 2012, has seen the number of its majors rise from 10 in 2012 to 32 in 2022, a growth rate of 220%. This is a positive going in the right direction. However, this program is an interdepartmental one, so relies on contribution by faculty from multiple departments. Participating in the program is viewed as a "service" which is already added to busy schedules. The result is that there are fewer opportunities to improve and strengthen the program.

The Japanese Program:

The number of minors in Japanese has increased steadily over the past decade. The Japanese program started with only a Saturday class and that anecdote accurately represents the potential of a language program to grow and excel if it gets the appropriate support. In Fall 2021, the program offered five sections of first-year courses. The program also offers at least two advanced-level courses every semester, regardless of enrollment. Even if the courses do not make enrollment, faculty offer tutorials. However,

this is not an ideal situation and, therefore, we strongly see a need for additional full-time faculty in order to ensure the growth of the program in the coming years.

The Program in Irish:

The Irish program seems to be in good health and offers students the possibility to complete the language requirement (4 semesters) with a sequence of courses on Irish language while also offering content courses on Celtic Studies and Irish Film. This program has grown stronger in the last decade with the support of the faculty. It is important to highlight that this program attracts honors students, and students in Comparative Literature. The Department has managed to obtain and renew a coveted annual Foreign Language Teaching Assistant Stipend Scholarship.

Recommendations

Lehman College's mission is focused on cultivating the "world citizens" of tomorrow. Multilingualism is essential in this aspiration. Due to its diverse student population, Lehman is well-placed to be a leading campus for the fostering and intellectual growth of students in the world's community.

With the goal of maintaining quality and forging a vision for the future, the Department must be assured the replenishment of faculty lines to curtail its diminishing numbers. Certainly, to accommodate significant losses in Italian, Spanish, and French, we recommend that at least 4 new tenure-track lines and, at the very minimum, a full-time lecturer be accorded the Department to accommodate staffing issues. French has been sustained but could grow to accommodate an increasing student heritage speaker population from Africa and the Caribbean if a new line was added to the existing roster of instructors. Additional staff in Spanish, French, Italian and Japanese (what seem to be the "anchor" languages of the Department) would benefit the sustainability of the Department long term.

Students voiced aspirations for more upper-level literature/culture courses, summer courses and Saturday classes to be offered in French and Spanish. Students strongly advocated for those needs as those offerings will provide more flexibility in order to complete their degrees. This can only be achieved if more faculty are added to the Department's ranks. In the meantime, the Department should perhaps consider offering more asynchronous major courses to accommodate students with special scheduling needs.

Increased opportunities for Study Abroad, assured by tenure-track and tenured faculty (instead of by adjuncts) would be beneficial to enticing students to study language.

Lastly, it is very clear that the office personnel currently assigned to the Department is unable to provide faculty the support they need to perform their various duties. The Department is in dire need of an office staff that is more efficient, resourceful, and responsive to the needs of both faculty and students alike in order function adequately.

Conclusions

Our conversations with faculty, adjuncts and undergraduate students, our assessment of the report, and our conversations and reflections after the visit have led us to the conclusion that the Department of Languages and Literatures at Lehman is at a critical point and the College must invest in this Department in order to meet the 90x30 initiative. The courses, activities, and projects carried on in this Department are essential for that project and they strongly support the core values and initiatives at Lehman. The language program shows some signs of growth despite the many challenges (including the pandemic) but shrinking faculty numbers in the Department will significantly hinder additional aspirations for expansion. We strongly believe that the Department is about to reach its tipping point if it does not receive the funding and resources that it so urgently needs. As we were informed about an ambitious hiring plan of lecturers, we urged the administration to make sure that some of those hirings benefit this Department directly. Apart from that, and considering possible upcoming retirements, the administration needs to establish a viable long-term plan for tenure-track and full-time lecturer positions.

Our meeting with undergraduate students was truly inspiring, we also talked to adjuncts who expressed that they could better contribute to the University if they were hired at the rank of lecturers or in more permanent positions. The fact that only 30% of courses are being taught by full-time faculty members is truly concerning as it is evident that, if this tendency is not rapidly corrected, it will be impossible for the Department to serve the community of very competent and passionate students who could become bilingual professionals and give back so much to the Bronx.

We urge the administration to open several tenure-track positions: at least 3 in Spanish, 1 in French and 1 in Italian and offer outstanding adjuncts the possibility of becoming lecturers so they can teach the courses for which students so strongly advocated: a wider selection of courses in literature and cinema, languages for the professions, Saturday classes and summer courses.

Respectfully submitted,

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