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THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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TO: Larry King, Professor and Chair, Department of Romance Languages  
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Hassan Melehy, Associate Professor and DGS, Department of Romance  
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Bill Andrews, Senior Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences  
Ron Strauss, Executive Associate Provost  
Carol Tresolini, Associate Provost for Academic Initiatives  
Steve Matson, Dean, Graduate School

FROM: Stephanie Schmitt   
Associate Dean for Academics, Graduate School

DATE: May 14, 2010

RE: Closure Meeting for Program Review Process:  
Department of Romance Languages and Literatures

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The closure meeting for the December 2-4, 2009, review of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures was held on April 21, 2010. Attending were Larry King (Professor and Chair, Department of Romance Languages and Literatures), Hassan Melehy (Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Romance Languages and Literatures), Bill Andrews (Senior Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences), Carol Tresolini (Associate Provost for Academic Initiatives), Steve Matson (Dean, Graduate School), and Stephanie Schmitt (Associate Dean for Academics, Graduate School). Stephanie welcomed the group and explained this meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the status of some of the reviewer's recommendations and departmental requests and plans for the future.

Larry opened with an umbrella comment for the whole review process and report. The Department feels they are on the verge of becoming a nationally renowned program again and they were pleased to see this idea recognized in the review team report. He hopes the University also appreciates the efforts taken within the Department to overcome past issues and move forward into the future.

The most significant recommendation from the review team's report dealt with additional positions for the Department. While they are a large Department, they teach more than their peers, and their enrollments, minors and majors have been increasing over time. The Department currently has 20 tenure track faculty and 40 fixed term faculty, many of whom have a significant instructional role in the language offerings for the undergraduate majors and minors.

They believe their majors are limited by the number of courses they can offer. Steve asked how this issue manifests itself, and Larry replied there is a discrepancy between the number of declared majors and the numbers they actually have graduate each year. Carol wanted to clarify that the issue does not extend graduation timelines, and Larry indicated he does not feel it does. Instead, they believe their increase in minors is the direct result because many interested majors may only be able to minor in one of the Romance Languages.

Larry wanted to recognize the support the Department has received from the College's Dean's office in recent years. They have been authorized to fill positions upon retirements or faculty leaving the University, even in difficult budget times, to maintain their size. He was also pleased to report that the College had already increased the contract length for fixed term faculty members. Larry shared that the Department was about to implement a change in the teaching load for fixed term faculty from six to seven courses with a corresponding increase in salary. The faculty will be offered this option when their contract is up for renewal. Stephanie asked what the reaction has been to this shift, and Larry responded it has been desired for some time. They believe it will serve as a way to maintain their course offerings and retain fixed term faculty. Steve complimented them on finding a different way to accommodate some growth in their undergraduate teaching.

Larry and Hassan both spoke to a willingness to increase their graduate program size. Their first priority is to increase the quality of their applicants and entering cohorts, and they believe they are on the right path toward this goal. Their nominations were competitive for Graduate School fellowships this year, and they are taking steps to increase awareness and visibility of their program nationally.

Hassan said their main issue with recruitment is offering competitive stipends for teaching assistantships, with which Bill agreed and shared anecdotal information about other humanities programs offering stipends upwards of \$30k/year. The Department recognizes the need to increase their endowments and private funds to supplement the state instructional budget. Steve and Hassan agreed that although we may not be able to match every peer university's offer, at least we can offer a positive environment and a range of support, including programs like summer support.

Steve said slow but strong growth was a step in the right direction and wanted to ensure time to degree and placements were still a focus for the Department. Larry said the faculty were comfortable with increasing their graduate program size but not at the expense of the fixed term faculty, i.e., they would not increase their graduate program to gain more TAs with the intent of reducing their fixed term headcount. Bill stressed that the College will not be moving away from a model where fixed term faculty are necessary and valued. He said 18% of the College's teaching faculty are fixed term, and they are dedicated and good at what they do. He believes the College and individual programs that rely heavily on fixed term faculty, such as Romance Languages, need to ensure this group has a sense of professional identity, feels part of the University, and has a future here by choosing this career path. Everyone agreed with this sentiment.

Bill shared that Romance Languages was a model for how to integrate fixed term faculty into the Department and address growing demand for coursework and undergraduate majors. Larry and Hassan both said that their culture is to facilitate fixed term faculty finding a niche in the Department, such as translation courses and the Minor in Spanish for the Professions. Stephanie asked about the review report observation that a high percentage of their doctoral program graduates were employed as fixed term faculty in the Department. Larry said this was the case at one time when they were attempting to increase course offerings and reduce class size. Because they are limiting new hires now, it is not as relevant. Hassan believes that the mentality among their graduate cohorts has shifted in recent years as well, so while in the past many students felt it sufficient to remain local and teach, now students have more professional development opportunities to help in broader job searches. Larry also shared that their placement record in recent years is strong, both to teaching colleges as well as one higher profile placement at the University of Chicago.

Bill asked about the review team's recommendation that the Department define better the focus of the graduate program. Larry said they must be unique in a specialty area to be a national player in their discipline, and they have some core area strengths now and a strong faculty overall. But Larry acknowledged they are rebuilding and still forming their intellectual portfolio identity. Bill said their recent, strong, junior faculty hires have aided in this regard. Stephanie asked about the suggestion for preemptively retaining the faculty, and both Larry and Bill indicated support for these efforts. Carol asked about salary levels, and Bill said the Department is competitive at the junior levels but probably less so at the higher ranks.

Next Larry updated the group about possible future plans for Portuguese. One of the report recommendations was to re-start the graduate program, and the Spanish and Portuguese faculty have discussed this idea. As a short-term solution, they are integrating some aspects of Portuguese training into the Spanish curriculum but with an interdisciplinary context. It is possible that the Institute for the Study of the Americas will create an interdisciplinary degree in this area in the future. The two Portuguese faculty have focused efforts on increasing undergraduate majors and minors and so there has been some growth in recent years. However, if the graduate program is to be "reincarnated" it will be done within the context of a more relevant and interdisciplinary program.

Bill praised the Department for their fundraising efforts, which go hand in hand with strengthening the Department overall and hiring strong faculty. These resources and stories can be leveraged with potential donors and integrated into the College's development efforts.

Stephanie asked about the plans for re-energizing efforts for a distinguished professorship within the Department. They have created a Faculty Development Committee focused on mentoring and nominating faculty for such honors. Bill said they would like to have two distinguished professorships – one in French (Hardre) and an external one in Spanish.

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***Goals Identified for the Future:***

- Monitor the size of the faculty, the distribution of tenure track and fixed term faculty, and the growth of the teaching capacity/demand for the Department. Ensure the desired balance is maintained even with pending enrollment growth.
- Continue efforts to increase the quality and size of the graduate program, including successful recruitment opportunities.
- Maintain the already-strong efforts to include fixed term faculty in the fabric of the Department. Seek opportunities for sharing best practices and lessons learned with other departments.
- Continue efforts to define the focus of the graduate program, including finding a specialty area or identity on which to foster a national reputation.
- Thoughtfully engage in discussions and efforts concerning the possibility of re-instituting a graduate program in Portuguese.
- Focus efforts on fundraising to supplement the graduate program and aid in finding funds for distinguished professorships within the Department.