

**Outcomes Assessment**  
**Department of Spanish, Italian and Portuguese**  
Prepared by Profs. Silvina Montrul and Elena Delgado  
April 30, 2008

**Introduction**

In the past three years, the Department of Spanish, Italian & Portuguese has been working on the modernization and redesign of their undergraduate and graduate curricula. In the Fall of 2005, when Prof. Diane Musumeci took over as Head of the Department, two major committees were formed: the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, which I chaired as Director of Undergraduate Studies, and the Graduate Curriculum Committee, chaired by Prof. Elena Delgado (also Associate Head). The goals of these committees were to assess the state of the Spanish curricula, which had been in place since the 1980s. The committees worked for two entire years in consultation with all the faculty of SIP. As of today, the undergraduate curriculum revision for Spanish has been approved by all levels of campus administration. Implementation will begin in Spring 2009. In what follows, I will briefly describe the changes we are implementing at the undergraduate level and their justification, followed by the new outcomes we will be assessing for both graduate and undergraduate programs. I will end by establishing a tentative departmental plan for outcome assessment once the curriculum is in place.

**Brief Summary of Changes at the Undergraduate Level**

The current major in Spanish requires 32 hours in Spanish beyond completion of the basic language sequence (SPAN 140, 141 or 142), including at least 24 hours of required ‘core’ courses, 8 hours of electives, and a minimum of 15 hours of supporting course work. Currently, two ‘basic skills’ courses (grammar and composition) are required and are prerequisites to all advanced required courses. One ‘basic skills’ course (reading) is a prerequisite to required advanced courses in literature, but currently does not count toward the major. Four of the required six ‘core’ content courses are in literature. Only one course in linguistics and one course in culture are required for the major. Given the scant number of courses at the 300-level, students must complete their major by taking courses at the 400-level.

The revised major requires 33 hours in Spanish beyond the fourth semester, including 18 hours of required ‘core’ courses, 15 hours of electives, and a minimum of 15 hours of supporting course work. The major differences between the old and the new major are 1) All three ‘basic skills’ courses (reading, grammar and composition) will count toward the major; 2) All undergraduate majors will complete three “Introduction to the discipline” courses that stress the development of analytical skills in each of the disciplinary areas represented in the unit (literature, linguistics and culture); all three courses are required and each is the prerequisite to more advanced coursework in that area; 3) The total number of required courses will be reduced by two and the number of electives will be increased by two; 4) Students will be able to complete the major by taking courses in any/all of the three disciplinary areas (literature, linguistics, and/or culture); and 5) The proposed revision will include moving a number of courses from the 400-level to the 300-level with modifications to make them appropriate transitional courses to more specialized work at the 400-level, which will be reserved for honors credit, very advanced undergraduates, and beginning graduate students. The majority of the courses will continue to be taught in Spanish. However, due to the more interdisciplinary nature of the proposed curriculum,

students will be able to take up to three courses (1 required and 2 electives) that are taught in English. These changes will also affect the BAT in Spanish and the Spanish minor.

The redesign of our current curriculum was motivated by two major, interrelated and complex factors. First, over the last decade, the Humanities in general and departments of foreign language in particular, have been undergoing significant transformation. There is a growing move towards decentralizing a predominantly literature-based curriculum and placing the study of languages and cultures other than English at the center of many related disciplines. A comparison of our curriculum with those of peer institutions in the Big Ten placed Illinois clearly behind when it came to re-conceptualization of intellectual mission and object of study.

The second major factor relates to current demographic and social changes in the world around us, and especially in the U.S, where it is projected that by the year 2050 one quarter of the population will be Hispanic. Not only has this demographic explosion endowed the Spanish language with increasing visibility in U.S. society, but it has also generated growing interest in issues particularly relevant to the extremely diverse Hispanic population. For our department, this translates into increased enrollments and high demand for Spanish.

In accordance with the Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1999), the BA in Spanish needs to provide high quality content-based courses which cover five fundamental areas for successful foreign language learning: Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. Moreover, it should also provide students with the critical and analytical skills (in both Spanish and English) crucial for a successful professional life, whatever their chosen field might be. Furthermore, our program should also foster a sense of responsible citizenship and civic engagement that can only be attained with solid trans-cultural competency. The goals of the BA program are to expose students to fundamental knowledge of various areas related to Spanish studies while helping them acquire critical analytical skills, cross-cultural competency and advanced proficiency in the language.

### **Outcomes of the Undergraduate Degree in Spanish**

Upon successful completion of the BA program, our students should have acquired competence in four areas: linguistic, cultural, content and analytical skills.

1. In terms of **Spanish language proficiency**, students should be able to

- understand someone else speaking about a discipline-related topic and be able to engage that person in discussion;
- speak with few errors in grammar and pronunciation about topics related to their particular area of study and to develop and articulate positions in Spanish;
- produce clearly organized and coherent written texts in Spanish on topics related to their discipline within Hispanic studies;
- use appropriate sociolinguistic registers in written and oral modalities;
- write with minimal errors in grammar, spelling and the mechanics of writing in Spanish.

2. In terms of **cultural competency**, students should be able to

- demonstrate an understanding of the perspectives and products of the culture studied;

- acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the study of a foreign language and texts produced in different cultural contexts;
- recognize different patterns of interaction that are relevant in different cultural settings;
- reflect on their own cultural frame of reference and their own cultural conditioning.

3. In terms of **content**, students should

- possess broad knowledge of the disciplines that comprise contemporary Hispanic studies (cultural, historical, literary and linguistic studies); and if the student chooses to specialize, possess fundamental knowledge of one or more disciplines within Hispanic studies;
- possess knowledge of the three basic populations represented by Hispanic studies (Spain, U.S. Latino/a, and Latin America) as well as of their languages, cultures, and literary production;
- possess basic knowledge of the structure, form and variation of the Spanish language;
- establish comparisons and connections between the material studied and similar materials available to the monolingual English speaker.

4. In terms of **critical and analytical competencies**, students should be able to

- use critical thinking skills when approaching texts and other cultural manifestations (visual arts, movies, music, etc.);
- sustain thoughtful evaluative judgments and analysis of literary and non-literary texts;
- critically assess and evaluate competing ideas and experiences;
- recognize, understand, and evaluate normative value issues.

### **Outcomes of the Graduate Degrees in Spanish**

#### **General Outcomes for the M.A. in Spanish (all disciplines)**

An overall goal of the M.A. in Spanish is to go *beyond* the basic knowledge and abilities acquired in the B.A. Important to the M.A. is the concept of developing *thorough* knowledge and greater ability related to various sub-areas of Spanish studies. At this level, the aim is to lay adequate groundwork for continued advanced study at the doctoral level. Specifically, upon completion of the Masters degree in Spanish, successful students should:<sup>1</sup>

- possess knowledge of the three major populations (Spain, U.S. Latino/a, Latin America) as it pertains to cultural production;
- possess a solid command of the formal registers of spoken and written Spanish;
- understand the writing and research tools of their particular disciplines including discriminate use of bibliographic sources and mechanics of style for research papers.

#### **Specific Outcomes for the M.A. in Literary/Cultural Studies in Spanish**

---

<sup>1</sup> Incoming MA students are assumed to have met the proposed outcomes for the B.A. as described above.

In addition to the outcomes for all disciplines in the M.A. program in Spanish, the successful M.A. student of literary and cultural studies should:

- possess broad knowledge of a set of representative literary texts from all genres, different historical periods, and the different geographical contexts corresponding to the three populations listed above (list of selected texts provided by the department);
- possess general knowledge of critical theory and the ability to engage in the analysis of written, oral or visual texts;
- be able to identify, analyze and discuss a text's formal configuration (e.g., tropes, rhetorical strategies, genres) as well as its historical context.

### **Specific Outcomes for the M.A. in Linguistics in Spanish**

In addition to the outcomes for all disciplines in the M.A. program in Spanish, the successful M.A. student of linguistics should:

- possess basic knowledge in all sub-areas of Hispanic linguistics including syntax, phonology, morphology, dialectology, sociolinguistics, diachronic linguistics, and second language acquisition;
- understand the major critical issues and problems in all sub-areas of Hispanic linguistics.
- be able to conduct a linguistic analysis in syntax, phonology and morphology related to Spanish;
- possess thorough knowledge of two particular sub-areas of Hispanic linguistics.

The outcomes listed above for the MA in all disciplines are currently assessed in a tri-partite method: (1) students will take a broad array of required courses to ensure exposure to basic knowledge in the various areas stated for the sub-disciplines; (2) students will take in-class exams and/or write papers that demonstrate critical thinking skills, analytical abilities, command of the subject matter, and command of the Spanish language; (3) students will take a comprehensive examination upon completion of coursework.

### **General Outcomes for the Ph.D. programs in Spanish**

The overall goal of the Ph.D. is to develop *in-depth* knowledge and *scholarly abilities* related to a specific area of concentration. The aim is superior professional performance in academic research. Specifically, upon completion of the Ph.D. degree in Spanish, successful students should:<sup>2</sup>

1. possess in-depth knowledge of the three major populations (Spain, U.S. Latino/a, Latin America) as it pertains to cultural production;
2. be able to make original scholarly contributions that engage previous research and advance the field;
3. be able to critically analyze and evaluate scholarly works and debates produced in different contexts;
4. be able to produce publishable quality research by the beginning of the dissertation stage;
5. be able to articulate a critical position both orally and in writing in Spanish and English;

---

<sup>2</sup> Incoming Ph.D. students are assumed to have met the proposed outcomes for the M.A. as described above.

6. possess professional-level ability in Spanish;
7. possess professional-level ability in English.

### **Specific Outcomes for the Ph.D. students in Literary and Cultural Studies**

In addition to the outcomes for all disciplines in the Ph.D. program in Spanish, the successful doctoral student of literary and cultural studies should:

1. possess in-depth knowledge of a particular literary/cultural area of specialization beyond the canonical texts (i.e., reading lists), including knowledge of critical scholarship on that area;
2. possess in-depth knowledge of critical theory of a general field of inquiry as well as use of theoretical approaches to frame their original scholarly work;
3. possess knowledge of a third language other than Spanish and English sufficient to read and interpret texts in that language;
4. be able to critically analyze and evaluate scholarly works produced in a variety of contexts (linguistic, historical, geographical, cultural).

### **Specific Outcomes for the Ph.D. students in Linguistics**

In addition to the outcomes for all disciplines in the Ph.D. program in Spanish, the successful doctoral student of linguistics should:

1. possess in-depth knowledge of three sub-areas of Hispanic linguistics as well as in-depth knowledge of the theoretical approaches and research methodologies in those areas;
2. be able to critically analyze and evaluate scholarly works in the three sub-areas chosen in (1) above;
3. possess grammatical knowledge of a third language (other than Spanish and English) sufficient to be able to make comparative statements about English, Spanish, and the third language.

In addition to coursework and research papers, the Ph.D. students will be assessed by comprehensive examinations upon completion of coursework, and the completion of a doctoral thesis that includes successful oral defenses at two points: (1) the idea initiation stage (proposal) and (2) the final completed thesis.

### **Departmental Plans for Outcomes Assessment at the Undergraduate and Graduate Levels**

The new undergraduate Spanish curriculum will be in place in spring 09. We expect to develop three on-line surveys for outcomes assessment: one for entering students, one for continuing students and one for exiting students. The first survey for entering students will be administered in Spring 2010, a year after initial implementation. The survey for continuing students will be conducted in Spring 2011 and 2012, and the exit survey for the first cohort of students graduating under the new curriculum in Spring 2013. We will also later develop an alumni survey, to monitor whether our curriculum has served the needs of our graduates. The content of the surveys will be developed by the graduate and undergraduate curriculum committees in consultation with the rest of the faculty. As we gather the data, the results of the surveys will be analyzed and presented to the faculty for discussion.