

October 23, 2006

To: Suzanne Ortega, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School  
Melissa Austin, Associate Dean for Academic Programs

From: Anthony L. Geist, Chair of Spanish and Portuguese Studies

Re: Response to the Report of the Spanish and Portuguese Ten Year Review

On behalf of the students, faculty and staff of Spanish and Portuguese Studies I would like to thank the review committee for their thorough and thoughtful evaluation of our department, our programs and our projects for the future. Their remarks have helped us see our strengths and our challenges from a different perspective, and will enable us, with the support of the Graduate School and the Deans Office, to move forward. Their endorsement confirms our conviction that we are on the right path.

In the comments that follow I will respond to the specific recommendations listed on pages 13 and 14 of their report, though I will also address several issues discussed at length in the report but not included in the recommendations for action. Given the thoroughness of the SPS Self Study and the review committee's report, my remarks here will be brief.

1. Establish the Division of Spanish and Portuguese Studies as a Department of Spanish and Portuguese, recognizing bureaucratically the reality of the splitting of Romance Languages. My colleagues and I wholehearted endorse this recommendation, for all the reasons the committee adduces.
2. Grant approval to change the MA program from provisional to continuing status. We are quite pleased with the success of our Masters in Hispanic Studies, as measured by almost any metric: admissions (more than doubled to nine new students this fall, due to aggressive recruiting), retention and completion rates, placement. This recognition means the validation of considerable enthusiasm and hard work by the graduate faculty over nearly a decade.
3. Support initiatives to develop a PhD program in incremental steps within the next five years. The goal of restoring a doctoral program has been one of the driving forces behind our efforts to rebuild over the last four years. While we recognize the financial obstacles to achieving this goal, the committee's endorsement gives us great hope. Their recommendation suggests three avenues toward the PhD:

- a. The creation of a “niche” doctoral program that builds on the department’s existing strengths. We agree that it makes little sense to recreate a traditional generalist PhD. What is called for is a degree program for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We do not yet know the exact configuration, but it will most likely be an interdisciplinary program in Iberian and Latin American Studies, heeding recent developments and new directions in the discipline: cultural studies, cinema studies and visual studies, in addition to more traditional literary studies.
- b. Leveraging existing resources to strengthen course offerings and faculty available to direct exams and dissertations. There is a core of faculty in allied departments, many of them former colleagues in SPS as well as more recent hires, who can contribute productively to a new degree program.
- c. No amount of leveraging, however, will change the fact that we need new faculty lines in order to build a healthy and attractive PhD program. A doctoral program will help attract and retain top scholars and teachers who, in turn, will draw in ever more qualified graduate students. But we must have the resources. We are working very determinedly on development and are gaining traction (as evidenced by the October 9 ceremony in which the Universidad de León [Spain] committed \$250,000 to endow a professorship of Spanish), but for us to succeed the College also needs to step up with increased support.

We are positioned, with a little help, to become a cutting edge Spanish program. The Spanish government has invested heavily in our department, first with the establishment of the Spanish Studies Center and, this fall, with the opening of the fourth Instituto Cervantes in the country. We have broad outreach into the Hispanic and corporate communities and increasing support from them. We have a growing network of international opportunities for our students and faculty. Now we need the College to believe in our mission and support us.

4. Last year we advertised two open positions. We were fortunate to make an excellent hire of an assistant professor of Latin American Colonial Literature, Kevin Donnelly, from NYU. However, our top candidate for the Language Program Director position did not accept our offer, and we have carried the search over to this year. We consider this appointment critical to the professionalization of our undergraduate language program, the largest in the College.
5. The “Portuguese instruction problem”: Last spring our longtime teaching associate responsible for the Portuguese program left the university. This year we have had to reduce our offerings in the language, and entrusted the teaching of all six sections of first and second year Portuguese to two TAs. We are so shorthanded in Spanish that it is very difficult for us to divert resources in that direction. However, we identified an exceptionally qualified candidate and requested a joint appointment with French and Italian. Unfortunately, we were not given permission to hire. Portuguese remains a problem.

6. The review committee suggests imaginative and creative ways for us to reduce our dependency on contingent faculty for lower-division language teaching, and trading lecturer positions for tenure-track lines. This might involve expanding web-enhanced language instruction, offering fewer 300-level required and elective courses and more 400-level classes for our majors. We might even consider following the lead of UC Berkeley and stop offering 100-level Spanish. By reducing our reliance on contract faculty, we could conceivably bundle lecturer positions and trade them for tenure-track lines.
7. As we point out in the departmental Self-Study, and as the review committee remarks, a number of individual SPS faculty are already very well networked across campus, with joint appointments or administrative roles in Comp Lit, Linguistics, Latin American Studies, AES, the Humanities Center, CWES, European Studies, etc. Yet there is little structural relationship between SPS and these units. Fostering those ties will not only strengthen course offerings for our undergraduate majors, it can also help us move toward the PhD.
8. Because our teaching and administrative loads are so heavy, I have been reluctant to ask SPS faculty for their active involvement in development work. As a consequence I have worked very closely with Luis Fernando Esteban, our Board chair and greatest champion. Together we have articulated an ambitious development plan and capital campaign. I thank the review committee for their suggestion that we streamline our efforts and create specific, targeted goals for private support: scholarship funds, study abroad, faculty development, etc.
9. Student advising: With over 4000 students taking our classes each year, academic advising is a nearly overwhelming task, particularly when handled by 1.5 FTE. Nonetheless, I take the committee's recommendations to heart, and have initiated an examination and reorganization of our advising services. The advisers are our public face to the world, and they must not only be knowledgeable and competent, but also polite and kind. I have been working with Central Advising and HR on this.
10. Because the number of tenure-track faculty in SPS is small, our mentoring has always been informal. However, as we make new appointments at the assistant professor level we need to create formal mechanisms to give our junior colleagues advice and guidance to make their progress toward tenure and promotion as transparent and trouble free as possible. We will be working with the Deans Office to improve mentorship in our department.

Other issues:

11. The undergraduate curriculum and major requirements: As we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century we bring with us a curriculum that reaches back to the middle of the previous century. We have constituted a committee this fall whose charge is

multiple: to rationalize and update our list of course offerings, removing those devised by faculty long departed; to reexamine the structure of our major, in light of the revisions suggested by the review committee; to make service learning a requirement for all Spanish majors; to consider the advisability of requiring study abroad for all Spanish majors. Our aim will be to streamline and strengthen undergraduate training in language, literature, and cultural studies. The curriculum revision committee will study closely the strategies suggested by the review committee. Of particular interest is the recommendation that we increase the number of Spanish majors by removing the obstacles to declaring a Spanish major.

12. Cádiz Study Abroad program director: We have followed the report's suggestion that we no longer send a department faculty member as resident director, thus limiting faculty strength on campus. This year we have hired a local resident director, and are confident that she will be successful.
13. Governance: Again, we take to heart the committee's suggestion that we simplify and streamline administrative work in the department. Our reliance on lecturers in administrative positions is a question of numbers. As the tenure-track faculty increases, we will be able to further professionalize our operations. At the same time, we are cognizant of protecting junior faculty from heavy administrative burdens in order for them to devote sufficient time to their research and professional development. As the ranks of senior faculty grow, we will increasingly transfer administration up the ladder.

The committee recommends less frequent faculty meetings. Given the troubled history of our department, I believe there is great value in all of us sitting around a table for an hour or two once a month, looking each other in the eye, and talking.

Finally, I would like to reiterate our gratitude to the review committee for recognizing that a strong and vital program of Spanish and Portuguese Studies in an increasingly globalized world will benefit both the University of Washington and the citizens of the state.