

## **2018 Assessment Report for the Spanish Section of the „Department**

### **Narrative of Strength**

The faculty of the Spanish section closely looks at students' performance and maintains a set of direct assessment tools utilized to change curricula and pedagogy to better serve its student population. In response to the fact that several students were placing high in placement exams due to diverse background knowledge on general vocabulary and cognates but were not fully equipped to take the courses they were placing into, we decided to change the placement exam a few years ago to a more grammar-oriented one, changing the cutoff numbers for placements. Along with changes in the structure and leveling of the placement exams, we have conducted other changes and restructuring attuned to today's interests, learning styles, and needs. In that same vein, the faculty of the Spanish section met to discuss the future of the Spanish program. With the new addition in 2013 of Prof. Vidal-Torreira and the retirement of Prof. Arms in Spring 2016, the Spanish Program has had to restructure the courses offered, the minor and major, and the basic language sequence.

#### **Placement Exam:**

The new exam that we created carefully represents what we currently teach at each level of the basic sequence and beyond. The current exam is divided into four sections, and with each, the level of difficulty increases. The first section covers the material that is necessary to pass the first semester of Spanish, Spanish 110. The second section does the same for the second semester of Spanish, Spanish 120, placing special emphasis on the subjunctive, which is one of the main concepts students are required to understand to pass the course and fulfill their LA requirement. The third section includes a reading comprehension, which is a common goal of what our Spanish 210 and 220 courses emphasize. Finally, the fourth section invites the students to write an essay, something that will determine if they should be recommended to be placed in a 200 or in a 300 level course.

We evaluated the efficiency of the new placement exam by administering it to the enrolled students at the end of Spanish 110 and 120 (across all sections). The results allowed us to set standards for placement, and we are happy to use it now as a precision tool to recommend Spanish courses for each student's level.

Our plan is to continue working on fine-tuning how the results of the placement exam determine our recommendation for students. During the first weeks of classes, we determine through coursework and conversations with the students themselves if we have placed the students in the appropriate level class. We then proceed to look at their placement exam to determine why they were placed at that particular level and how this informs the process. The first time we implemented the new placement exam was in the Fall of 2016, so (and as such,) we are still in the process of changing how we act on the results based on direct evidence of the student's performance.

#### **1. Spanish 110 and 120:**

The whole Spanish section participated actively in the creating of the placement exam, and in doing so, we were able to clarify the goals that we expect our students to meet at each level. As part of these conversations, we discussed the pacing of the courses and what we thought needed more attention. In this conversation, we noted that the teaching of the imperfect subjunctive in SPAN 120 was made more difficult by the lack of confidence the students had with the preterit. This was visible in the scores received in quizzes and tests on the topic. In response to this, we changed when we introduce the subjunctive in our curriculum and instead of introducing the concept at the Spanish 110 level, we now present it in full in Spanish 120. This allows the students to spend more time on the preterit and the imperfect, tenses that they will need to build upon later in Spanish 120. Through direct assessment (exams, essays and oral skills) we have determined that our students are better prepared after implementing this change.

## 2. Course distribution & major and minor requirements:

Previous (Prior) to this change, tenure track professors taught six upper-level courses and had total freedom to teach any number of 300- and 400-level courses, resulting in a large disparity between the number of 300- and 400-level courses that each professor offered. Because there were no graduation requirements mandating students to take 400-level courses, students had been more attracted to the 300-level courses. Therefore, enrollment in the 400-level courses had been low, and students were not being encouraged to be challenged in the upper-level courses.

In order to prevent this, we agreed to make some changes in the curriculum:

1. All three tenure-track professors that teach upper level courses will offer six upper-level courses, three of which will be at the 300-level and three of which will be at the 400-level—including one survey<sup>1</sup> per professor, as has been tradition.
2. To prevent too many or too few 400 courses offered per semester, our offerings in the Fall and Spring (each year) will be as follows:

<u>Fall</u>	<u>Spring</u>
A Survey (300 level)	A Survey (300 level)
B 300	B Survey (300 level)
C 300	C 300
D 400	D 400
	D 400
<u>Total:</u> 300 (x3)	<u>Total:</u> 300 (x3)
& 400 (x1)	& 400 (x2)

<sup>1</sup> Span 310 (Survey of Spanish Literature to 1800) – Dr. José Vilahomat  
Span 320 (Survey of Spanish Literature since 1800) – Dr. Garbiñe Vidal-Torreira  
Span 330 (Survey of Latin-American Literature) – Dr. Lilian Contreras-Silva

Instructors will continue to teach 100- and 200-level courses. All three tenure-track professors will then teach each year: three basic sequence classes or 200 level courses, one predesignated 300 level survey course, and two upper-level courses –most likely one 300 level class and one 400 level class.

In creating a structure, we hope to provide students with a clear system of rotation of courses, one that is predictable and will aid them in the selection of courses. Our aim is to encourage students to be challenged and exposed to upper 400-level courses. We hope that by offering a similar number of 300- and 400-level courses, students will choose to take courses from all professors, resulting in a more enriched perspective of the language, its literature, and culture.

There are also new requirements for majors and minors:

<u>Majors</u>	<u>Minors</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must take the 3 Survey courses</li> <li>• Minimum two 400 level courses</li> <li>• 1 course in Peninsular or Latin American Lit that is NOT a survey at either the 300 or 400 level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum one 400 level course</li> <li>• 1 course in Peninsular or Latin American Lit that is NOT a survey at either the 300 or 400 level.</li> </ul>

Previously, the only requirement for majors was to take the three surveys, and there were no requirements for minors other than taking five courses at the 200-level or above. Through analysis of the senior comprehensive examination process and results, the Spanish faculty decided that changes in the major were in order. The changes seen above are the response to some of the tendencies we saw a percentage of our graduating seniors display. The changes in the curriculum will result in more prepared majors and minors that have taken classes on both Latin American and Peninsular literature and culture, as well as upper-level classes at the 400-level.

These changes will be in constant evaluation, and we will revisit them if and when it is needed. We are relying on our senior capstone exam to evaluate how these changes have affected our student outcomes. The changes were implemented in the Fall 2017; because of this, the outcomes of our graduating class of 2021 will be the first to show us if they have had the desired effect. Our capstone consists of a final Comprehensive exam that includes the three surveys and two more courses of the students' choice. We firmly believe that our students will graduate with a better understanding of Latin American and Peninsular literature and culture, as well as with a stronger capacity to connect both with a transatlantic approach.

It is still early to assess our changes in our curriculum, but in a smaller scale we are noticing the positive effect. In conversations with students they have responded well to the changes and in our courses, through the use of rubrics<sup>2</sup> and other direct assessment, we have seen an improvement in the students' capacity to connect and develop concepts.

### 3. New Caps:

In addition to this, and with the intention of assuring a redistribution of students, we also agreed to hold caps firmly and to lower the cap of our class offerings in the following manner:

<u>New Caps</u>
Basic Level (Span 110 & 120) – 22 students
Level 200 (210 & 220) – 14 students
Surveys – 25 students
300-Level Classes (not surveys) – 18 students
400-Level Classes – 12 students

With this new change we aim to give students more “air time”, or time to practice their Spanish in conversation with other students and with the professor. This change is aimed to maximize the conversational opportunities but also to facilitate a more constructive flow of ideas and feedback between the students and the professors.

We aim to assess the positive impact of this change in class sizes by analyzing the data of students' performance in exams, essays, and particularly in the development of their oral skills. Comparing the new data to past outcomes will help us determine if this change is having the intended effect.

### **Action Plans for Improvement**

We have the following primary action plans for improvement:

- A continuous assessment of the changes that we have implemented over the past two years as previously detailed.
- During the next academic year, we will reevaluate the current textbook that we use in SPAN 110 and 120. The following academic year will be spent largely evaluating the different materials currently available to students of the basic sequence -and choosing a new textbook and program of study-. We will proceed to order several desk copies of the different options that exist and we will meet several times to discuss the possible contenders. We will be searching for a textbook that emphasizes not only the grammar, but also other capacities such as oral interactions and written work. We will take into

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<sup>2</sup> Upon request we can provide rubrics for: essays and oral presentations, exams, etc.

consideration the changing digital resources available for each textbook, as well as the cost to the student.

- At the 200-level, we continue working on our own version of a textbook. For the last four years, four of the five members of the Spanish section have been working on the manuscript of a textbook for this level. We have been using it in our classes since Fall 2017, and we plan on continuing to do so in the near future. We take student feedback very seriously and ask our students about their impressions of the textbook orally and in written form. We are also using the tests and papers to see how this text is aiding in their language acquisition.
- We are working on making the classroom an even more inclusive and inviting space through updating our readings in the upper 300- and 400-level courses.