

Graduate Program Review Appeals Committee
Informational Session: June 22, 2006

Spanish Ph.D.

Program representatives: Jorge Febles (professor and interim chair), Dan Jacobson (chair, Graduate Review Team, Humanities), Thomas Kent (dean), Patricia Montilla (assistant professor), Holly Nibert (professor)

Program's Appeal Summary

The doctorate in Spanish is a recently established program that is evolving according to the objectives underscored in the proposal approved by all appropriate university entities, including the Board of Trustees, as well as by the Presidents Council of the State Universities of Michigan. Since its inception in fall 2003, nine students have enrolled in the program, which complies with the objective of accepting three students per academic year in order to graduate an equal number annually. Several significant features of the program warrant its continuation:

- a. As attested by the most recent survey conducted by the Modern Language Association, the market for Ph.D.s in Spanish is stronger than for any other language, including English. The overall placement rate in tenure-track positions in Spanish was 60.5%, while the placement rate for English graduates was 42% and for other foreign languages, 37.6%.
- b. As presented in the graduate program review report submitted in January by the department and in our subsequent appeal, the success of the M.A. program in Spanish at WMU is indicative of the promising future of the Ph.D. program in Spanish. The Graduate Review Team report emphasizes that their optimism regarding the program's future is based substantially on the Spanish faculty's commitment to it as well as on their academic qualifications and strong research record.
- c. The Ph.D. program attracts a diverse clientele comprised by a majority (over 60%) of U.S. students. In his external evaluation, Professor Luis González-del-Valle pointed out the benefits of such a distribution when comparing the program with those of other American universities. In addition, our study-abroad programs in Querétaro, Burgos and Santander insure a consistent international student pool.
- d. The Spanish Ph.D. program is inexpensive due to the fact that it depends heavily on existing courses that would not disappear even if the program were terminated. The very strong M.A. program in Spanish requires that a vast array of classes be offered each year. The provost's evaluation implicitly recognizes this reality by emphasizing the need to resource further the Spanish M.A. program.
- e. Spanish graduate classes have invariably high enrollment.
- f. Advanced Spanish Ph.D. students provide needed pedagogical flexibility. They are able to teach 3000-level courses, thus freeing faculty members to teach classes across the entire curricular spectrum.
- g. The Spanish Ph.D. program fosters interdisciplinary cooperation because students take classes in other areas and because the department has begun to cross-list courses with other disciplines such as history. As of next year, Spanish professors will teach one graduate course in English per semester to enhance interdisciplinary opportunities for Spanish students and those from other areas. The Department of Spanish's long academic collaboration with Medieval Studies is furthered by the variety of courses on medieval Spain and Old Spanish that we are able to offer due to the existence of the Ph.D. program.

Committee's Questions *

1. Imagining a worst-case scenario in which you received no new resources, no new or replacement faculty hires, and no additional support for TAs, and had to self-fund 100 percent of your growth, what would your program look like three to five years from now?

There are fifteen of us. Two are faculty specialists, and the rest teach at the graduate level. We'd still be able to manage the graduate program without new resources. In fact, the Ph.D. was conceived with the worst-case scenario in mind: everything was predicated on that expectation, which is why we started out relatively small. We certainly don't see ourselves as mediocre compared with other Spanish Ph.D.s in the state. Of course, we do expect the University to replace faculty retirees, but the Ph.D. allows us the necessary flexibility. Many of the new young hires are competent to teach at the 3000 level, enabling more senior faculty to give their attention to the master's, etc. In the view of the Graduate Review Team, the M.A. in Spanish is a very strong program that actually enhances the Ph.D. program.

1. Given the congruity of courses between the doctorate and the master's, why shouldn't WMU terminate the Ph.D. and enhance the M.A.?
It's normal in all universities to have a set number of classes available to master's and doctoral students, but there are key differences. Seminars, for example, are much more intensive for Ph.D. students, and they're expected to achieve greater depth in their studies. If we enhanced the M.A. and eliminated the Ph.D., you'd be talking about a couple of classes—all the others would have to be taught regardless.
2. The Ph.D. is a relatively new program. What was the thinking behind it?
We created the M.A. in Spanish in 1990 to cater for a high school teaching clientele. As we developed our international and feeder systems in Michigan, the master's began to flourish. Our graduates wanted to continue their studies here, but we were sending them all over the country. The Ph.D. came about because we wanted to give those students a chance to get their doctorate from WMU.
3. You mentioned the interdisciplinary component. Would eliminating the Ph.D. have an effect on that?
Yes. We've created a quid pro quo in history, for example, and there's a course in medieval narrative, and another on Central America, being taught in English. The Ph.D. allows us to involve the faculty more, and that really helps interdisciplinary initiatives.
4. What do you say to the suggestion that the Ph.D. is inhibiting rather than synergizing the development of other foreign languages?
If the Spanish Ph.D. is eliminated, nothing much will happen in terms of resources or curriculum, but a lot will happen in terms of planning. The review team recommended bringing doctorates in Spanish, English, etc. to the Medieval Institute. Really, this isn't about enhancement; it's about making good on the promise to maintain programs.

* *Q&A text is not verbatim*