DePaul University Academic Program Review  

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT -- June 2001 Department of Modern Languages  
[P. Cheselka, chair]  


As a result of the third cycle of DePaul University's Academic Program Review Process (Cycle 3), the participants in the process enter into the following agreements. The participants understand that this document will be available to be made public once all the signatures are in place.  

Actions agreed upon for the coming academic year  

1. Redefine minimum standards of language proficiency.  

A subcommittee examined this issue as part of program review and concluded that the current language requirements at DePaul were not rigorous enough. As a minimal, incremental step towards raising the language proficiency standards at DePaul, the committee proposes that all students at DePaul take a language proficiency exam as part of their incoming placement testing. As a next step, the committee should meet with the organizers of Premiere DePaul to see what can be done about adding additional placement exam opportunities to the schedule. The department wants their subcommittee to continue discussing this issue in the coming year.  

The subcommittee formed to explore minimum language requirements at DePaul (Maria Beltran-Vocal, Pascale-Anne Brault, Nobuko Chikamatsu, Clara Orban) concluded the University’s standards were low in comparison to similar institutions, and did not assure our students had acquired second language skills sufficient to compete in the global marketplace. We believe that students must show at least an intermediate proficiency (the equivalent of the 106 level of language at DePaul) in order to be considered minimally proficient in a second language.  

In 2001-2002, the subcommittee contacted various individuals in charge of Premiere DePaul days. Unfortunately, the schedule is set very early in the year, and
we were told it would be impossible to include a mandatory placement test for all incoming students in summer 2002.

However, a very productive meeting with Brian J. Spittle, Ph. D., Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management, provided several alternatives to mandatory testing this year.

Dr. Spittle noted that the university has been collecting data on incoming students for some time, and with PeopleSoft, data analysis could be configured to explore correlations between the number of years of high school language, placement test scores, and grades in language classes. Presumably, we could include number of years of language taken. In the short term, the department could go forward:

--contacting Mike Mezey about the possibility of having someone assigned to LA&S provide data

--contacting Dr. Spittle’s office to provide data analysis on this issue

--contacting the OIPR (Joe Filkins) to continue updating the university database to include high school language, etc.

--asking for data analysis in time for the April 2003 college deadline for assessment activities

In the longer term, Dr. Spittle mentioned an interesting possibility. In summer 2002, a cohort of students took the writing and math placement tests on line. There might be a possibility of including on-line language placement tests for summer 2003. Also, already for this year, they may be able to ask students to include information about languages they took in high school on the form they fill out on-line when they take the placement test.

2. Develop a proposal for a new M.A. in Spanish.
The department will submit a proposal to the college curriculum committee in one year for the M.A. in Spanish. The degree will combine elements of a traditional language M.A. with the possibility of broader work in Latin American and Latino studies and cultural studies. The department will consider financial models when developing the proposal, and it will consider the potential constituencies, such as high-school language teachers or DePaul undergraduates who might want to stay for a fifth year to complete an M.A degree.

At its first meeting in September 2001, the Spanish Section decided that it would be wiser to put this project on hold for the moment. The section, in cooperation with other university units, was the recipient of a FIPSE grant to incorporate service learning and study abroad opportunities into existing course structures to enhance learning. The burden of creating a series of special classes and implementing grant provisions falls largely upon the Spanish Section of Modern Languages. It was felt that the section had too many tasks on its plate to proceed with the M.A. proposal.

In September 2002, the Spanish Section decided once again to put the M.A. proposal idea on hold. This year phase two of the FIPSE grant must be implemented on top of managing phase one that is now in progress. It was felt that the Spanish Section lacked the personnel and resources to create and sustain an M.A. program at the current time given its other commitments. Some section members were discouraged by what was perceived as a lack of support from higher administrative levels for new graduate programs at this time. The matter remains open for further discussion.

3. Explore creation of pilot program in language immersion and service learning.

The Spanish Section of the department is considering creating a pilot program that would combine language immersion and service learning with foreign and domestic study options in cooperation with the Latin American and Latino Studies Program. This pilot program is a very new idea for the section and needs more discussion and development. The Spanish section of the department will examine the possibilities and will start moving ahead with the idea next year.
This goal has been accomplished. The FIPSE grant obtained by the Spanish Section of Modern Languages in cooperation with other university units has given impetus to the implementation of this program. During academic year 2001-2002, planning was done to implement service learning courses at the intermediate Spanish level. These courses are now being taught during academic year 2002-2003 with pilot sections of Spanish 104-105-106 (autumn, winter, spring). Work has been done to implement other aspects of the program that will include special study abroad options and domestic home stays in addition to the service learning aspects of the courses. During academic year 2003-2004, another series of service learning courses tied to other levels of Spanish learning needs to be created; the Spanish Section will work on developing these courses during the current academic year (2002-2003). During the summer of 2002, some members of the Spanish Section attended a two-day workshop to obtain official OPI (oral proficiency interview) certification. Many Spanish Section members have devoted substantial amounts to this program: work on getting the grant funding and time spent in the creation of these new curricular offerings.

These new service learning offerings were given university recognition and held up as examples of excellence at the spring 2002 grant awards luncheon.

4. Reconsider the current curriculum structure, especially the first-year language sequence (pilot program in the Italian Section).

The Italian Section is studying a redefinition of its program toward a more broadly-based cultural studies model, and the department will discuss this plan to revise the curriculum so that it is easier for students to finish the core requirements and to move more quickly into advanced courses, thus making the undertaking of a major in Italian more attractive. A revised curriculum would combine intermediate and advanced courses for more efficient instruction, especially regarding contact hours. The Italian Section and department would need to more fully develop the proposal for curriculum revision and then propose it to the curriculum committee, since it would constitute a major change in the curriculum. The department agrees to develop this proposal within the next year.

During the academic year 2001-2002, the Italian Section worked on developing a proposal to present to the whole department of Modern Languages. The draft plan was discussed at a departmental meeting in winter 2002. The Italian Section revised the plan and presented it to the Modern Language faculty
at a September 2002 meeting. The plan has been approved by the Modern Language faculty pending some minor revisions and will soon be sent to the LA&S curriculum committee for their consideration.

In brief, the plan replaces the normal two-year language sequence (one year of beginning and one year of intermediate Italian) with four intensive courses with the intention of accelerating student proficiency and allowing students to proceed with the advanced level courses at a faster pace. It also provides for some modification in the major requirements that will allow students to count a limited number of related field courses from other departments towards the Italian major.

The next step will be to receive appropriate feedback from the college curriculum committee and the LA&S dean.

5. Implement a comprehensive assessment plan.

As a first step in assessing student learning next year, the department will require each section to identify an assessment project for the coming academic year. While the section may choose its particular focus for assessment, the assessment projects will be approved by the chair. Initially, these assessment projects will focus on curriculum assessment, then more specifically on student learning in relation to department learning goals (the department also takes into consideration the ACTFL guidelines for what students should be able to do at the end of key courses/levels). The departmental assessment plan will include elementary, intermediate, and advanced sequences, majors, and non-majors.

This goal has been met. Each language section devised an assessment project and carried it out during the academic year 2001-2002. A report of the results was provided to the LA&S dean during the spring quarter 2002; the results were also discussed at a departmental faculty meeting late in the winter quarter 2002. Each language section is now devising its new assessment project for 2002-2003.
6. Investigate the possibility of creating learning clusters.

The department has been in conversation with student life regarding the development of a possible language learning cluster, such as a living-learning community. In the coming year, the department will explore the possibilities with Student Life for creating a pilot cluster for the incoming class of 2002-03.

No additional progress was made in this area during 2001-2002. This item remains for additional future discussion and action.

In a similar manner, items 7, 8, and 9 (below) remain under discussion. The Italian Section's new curriculum plan can be considered a response to item 7.

Issues noted for further discussion


The department has been in conversation with Commerce regarding specialized language instruction—intensive language courses for students who are visiting other countries, or who need language instruction to complete other coursework in International Business, for example. While Commerce indicated to the department that it was no longer interested in piloting an intensive language course, the dean and the AVP suggested that DePaul as a university needed to find ways to ‘jumpstart’ students in modern language instruction. The dean and AVP encouraged the department to consider alternative models of language instruction beyond the year-to-year sequences of 101-103 and 104-106. The EVP noted that in the next year or two, DePaul will be in an especially good position (financially, and with increasing enrollments) to experiment with alternative language instruction. The EVP encouraged the department to consider the different levels of language proficiency (writing, reading, speaking) needed for different types of students with various needs for foreign language instruction.

8. Career opportunities related to computer-based activities
The APRC subcommittee suggested that the department consider developing a special course sequence or even a minor to allow students to explore foreign language career opportunities related to the internet and other computer-based careers. While the department notes that this issue had only been mentioned as a preliminary idea, the department is open to these possibilities and can explore the idea further. One concern is the number of foreign language majors who would be interested in such a specialty.

9. Reduced class size.

The department has been in conversation with the dean to find ways to reduce class size, particularly in the 101-106 sections, while streamlining its current curriculum structure. In introductory sections (Spanish, especially), enrollment is particularly high, while in upper-level courses enrollment tends to be relatively low. The dean suggested that the department examine class size in the intro-level courses in the context of an overall staffing plan that considers the ratio of part-time/full-time instructors in light of program enrollments. The dean encouraged the department to develop a proposal and agreed to work with the department to find creative solutions to the problem of class size.

University-level Issues and Commitments

During Cycle 3, the unit program review self-studies raised several issues that have important university-wide implications. In subsequent conversations about these major issues, the units, the deans, the Academic Program Review Committee members, and the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs all have recognized the need for university-level coordination in the following areas: a) developing appropriate staffing models to support growth; b) assisting units in the transition to the PeopleSoft student administrative system and in getting the maximum benefits from it, such as identifying and counting double majors, enforcing prerequisites, and securing better information and support for student advising; c) providing research assistance to units through university-level research offices; d) improving support for advising, especially in light of PeopleSoft; e) facilitating cross-college collaboration within DePaul with respect to new programs of study. To follow up on these common issues and determine the appropriate courses of action needed to address them at the university and unit level, the Academic
Program Review Committee and the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs agree to do the following:

1. The Academic Program Review Committee agrees to prepare a summary report on Cycle 3 to the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs which discusses these and other issues that have important connections to other university-wide initiatives. That report will be made public, along with the Memoranda of Agreement.

2. The Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs agrees to direct the appropriate university-level offices to work with the units and their deans to determine how to effectively address these issues.

3. The Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs will require a progress report in June of 2002 from the appropriate university offices that will be shared with the Academic Program Review Committee.

Acknowledgements

The APRC thanks the unit’s review committee for its good work in this cycle. The EVP also thanks those involved in APR for making this process work. It is an important part of the university’s monitoring and maintaining academic quality.