

External Review

Department of Languages and World Literatures (UBC-O)

October 2019

I Introduction

We are pleased to submit the external review of the Department of Languages and World Literatures (LWL) at the University of British Columbia's Okanagan campus (UBC-O). Following the invitation extended by Dr. Bryce Traister, Dean of the Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies (FCCS), the site visit took place on October 1-2, 2019, and included a series of meetings with the Provost, the Dean of the Faculty of Creative and Creative Studies, the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies, the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Associate Vice-Principal, Research, and various members of LWL, including the Head, instructors of all ranks, and students currently attending WRLD courses.

We would like to thank the Department and the Dean's Office for their generous hospitality. We are especially grateful to the Department Chair, Dr. Anderson Araujo, for his work in preparing the self-study report, as well as to Sheila Andrulovich and Jen Novy for preparing our visit.

II Scope

The review team is grateful for the chance to review a new entity, the LWL, which gave us a chance to consider the formation of a young unit that shares traits with other units that have begun to form in a number of comprehensive research universities over the last fifteen years. These units have come into being both to create fiscal and curricular efficiencies, as well as to draw attention to their important role in a 21st-century university. Multilingualism, cultural and intercultural competences are highly (and increasingly) sought-after attributes of well-educated people working in every field, despite the view of some that the study of languages, literatures and cultures is a luxury item that is expendable in the face of tightening budgets.

In his letter of invitation of May 30, 2019, the Dean asked for a "candid assessment" of how LWL "expresses and practices the disciplines language, literature, and cultural teaching and research within an interdisciplinary unit tasked with quite different teaching and research

missions.” With regard to the “World Literature” component, the letter stressed that committee input will prove valuable to the unit “as it develops this new program with the goal of creating a Major.” This is a forward-looking mission. The Dean stressed that “the chief value of the assessment is in its future orientation”; the next few years will be pivotal ones when it comes to setting a new course for the unit.

We would like to note at the outset that we share the optimism we encountered on several occasions during our visit. This is a great opportunity for a smaller, flexible unit to adapt to a changing academic environment and carve out its niche by advancing a pioneering agenda in line with its strengths. While our report will try to highlight some of the challenges, it is -- in line with the Dean’s request -- very much weighted toward the future and will include many recommendations.

While this review cannot be about Dean Traister or Department Chair Arajuo, we wish to underscore that they both draw praise for their leadership. They are seen as diplomatic, caring, and forward-looking by colleagues. It was clear to us that colleagues feel Dean Traister’s and Department Chair Arajuo’s support.

III General Assessment

The organizational chart outlines LWL’s structure and governance. The Department chair has two direct reports: 1) the Languages Coordinator and 2) the WRLD Committee Chair. The Languages Coordinator has four reports: the Area Advisors (French, German, Japanese Studies, Spanish), who advise the Languages Coordinator on all matters concerning their individual areas. The WRLD Committee Chair does not have reports, but chairs this multidisciplinary committee, which is made up of faculty members of FCCS.

In our interviews we learned that the departmental meetings of colleagues in the LWL are held at least once a semester. It was not clear to us which colleagues have voting rights and thus how inclusive the meetings are and therefore to what extent shared governance is promoted. (Do sessional academic colleagues and administrative staff colleagues have voting rights? Are student representatives included?) We also learned that meetings are called on an at-need basis, rather than on a regular basis. We respect that none of us wants to add another meeting to our responsibilities on campus, yet planned monthly or bi-monthly meetings each semester, which are scheduled and announced no later than the first week of the academic year, would provide productive arenas for policy, curricular, and programmatic discussions. Meeting

agendas and minutes of previous meetings should be shared ahead allowing members to contribute to the discussion and feel that they participate fully to the life of the unit. Summaries of meetings should be posted on a secured site to which members of the department have access.

We understand also that work is being carried out to make more structured the interaction and reporting of the Areas. This step is an important one, because it would clarify processes and timelines for decision-making about course timetabling and teaching assignments, as well as student advising and, perhaps, Area meetings.

LWL's governance structure and process should invite participation from faculty, staff, and students. It is clear that LWL, like all similarly constituted units, is dealing with the balance between program autonomy and department-wide identity. Presently, there is some tension in finding this balance, but this is to be expected. Thanks to the overall good will that has developed since the arrival of Dean Traister and the appointment of Department Chair Arajuo, the reviewers are confident that the department will find the equilibrium that best serves its needs.

In purely administrative terms LWL is a rookie unit. It came into being in January 2019 as a result of splitting off the four language sections from the former Department of Critical Studies. During our visit we did not come across anybody who regretted that decision. Indeed, the external review of the old Department of Critical Studies of October 2014 had been highly critical of the internal imbalance and internal culture. Senior administrators are often under pressure to enforce mergers and consolidate units with a view toward greater financial and administrative efficacy; we therefore applaud the decision to go the other -- no doubt, better -- way.

But young as it may be, many of the challenges that LWL faces -- such as enrolments, internal communication, competing curricular visions -- precede its constitution by several years. Above all, LWL faces the strange situation that its name refers to a degree program which does not yet exist, and for which there are competing visions. We will say more about this situation below.

At the time of our visit, the department consisted of two programs – French and Spanish – and three program areas (i.e., disciplines for which there is not a major or minor) – German Studies, Japanese Studies, World Literatures. It offers a major in French, a combined major in French and Spanish, a minor in French, and a minor in Spanish. The total number of majors and minors in five years has been steady, decreasing from 18 majors in 2014 to 17 in 2018, and increasing from 26 minors in 2014 to 27 in 2018. We note that in 2017 and 2018 Spanish had only two

majors, whereas it had 5, 6, and 4 in the previous three years, and in addition that the major in Spanish has been suspended. Undergraduate course enrolments in five years have increased in French (728 in 2014 to 910 in 2018), in German (66 in 2014 to 82 in 2018), and in Japanese Studies (168 in 2014 to 281 in 2018), and have decreased in Spanish (942 in 2014 to 803 in 2018). In addition, World Literatures enrolled 38 students in its one course in 2017 and 80 students in its two courses in 2018. In total, undergraduate course enrolments in these years increased from 1904 in 2014 to 2156 in 2018. Across all programs, for which there were courses throughout this five-year period, there was a decrease in enrolment in 2016. All the programs recovered quite well from this decrease. Through these years, we also note, by our rough count, that the number of courses offered by the Department has been relatively steady:

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
FREN	45	45	45	37	41
GERM	3	4	4	4	5
JPST	14	18	12	16	18
SPAN	25	27	27	27	23
WRLD				1	2
Total	87	94	88	85	89

Again, we recognize that our numbers might be rough ones, but these results propose overall that in 2018 colleagues in LWL were reaching more students than in previous years with relatively similar resources. With regard to French, we note that these numbers are particularly encouraging since in many other institutions across the country, enrollments in French have been on a slight decline. In addition, though, these results propose that a larger discussion about strategic planning and resource allocation should be undertaken. Having said this, we respect that it can be difficult to be in a usual state of wondering about the future and discussing it.

The discussions and proposals to amend matters have been underway for so long that one member spoke of the department as suffering from “innovation fatigue.” The inevitable result of prolonged curricular debates is a combination of weariness and fractionalization. After a while you tend to stick to those with whom you think you can get things done; as a result, others will think that you are excluding them and trying to impose your particular vision on the entire unit. This is our first red flag: It is our impression that the commitment to curricular innovation is outpacing the department’s internal communication structure. For example, we learned that courses proposed as WRLD courses must engage literatures from two continents, yet, though there might be strong curricular reasons for such a requirement, it was not clear to

us that this requirement was founded in open, cross-departmental conversation and a shared vision of what WRLD courses are intended to do.

More generally, it was obvious to us that the department has energy and ability, and that colleagues are willing and able to direct this energy and ability in meaningful ways to advance WRLD courses and an LWL program. However, there does not seem to be a culture of regular and structured communication, particularly communication that addresses programmatic and curricular questions and concerns in an inclusive way that enables discussion and that addresses the seeming lack of policies and procedures in the department. For LWL to move forward in a productive and inclusive fashion, it will have to break up entrenched perceptions and create a climate of greater transparency, and such regular, structured, and intentional meetings will help the department move toward these goals.

We wonder about two other possible causes of “innovation fatigue.” One cause might result from the lack of clear WRLD program outcomes or framework, and, as a consequence, colleagues might not have a big picture in which to focus their ideas and proposals. As we spoke with colleagues about their efforts in curricular innovation, we did not have a concrete sense of the extent to which the proposal and establishment of WRLD courses align with clear and agreed-upon program learning outcomes or a program framework. Creating such outcomes would give work on the program clearer direction and structure, provide colleagues with understandable goals and steps in the program’s design, and present team-building opportunities across the department. In addition, the creation of Program Learning Outcomes, Course Learning Outcomes, and a Curriculum Map would provide a strong foundation for subsequent strategic thinking and prioritizing at the departmental level. Such work could be started through a Departmental Retreat focused on curricular (re)design and led by an external member who is well versed in such work and understands the value of language education.

Another cause might result from the uncertain roles that language courses in the department will play as the department continues to develop, and then develops, a WRLD major. There does not seem to have been a concerted and collective effort to wrestle with this question. These uncertainties can be easily addressed during a departmental retreat (as per our recommendations below) that will help the entire team to focus first and foremost on a general vision for the WRLD major and on what precise objectives it is trying to achieve. Such vision has to answer the question: why would a student decide to enroll in a WRLD major? What specific skills would students acquire through this new program?

Though the review team did not have an opportunity to dig into the substance of the curriculum in detail, we were provided enrollment data and information on programs from the

perspective of faculty, as well as undergraduate students. We also had the chance to see a few course outlines for the new WRLD courses, and discuss the content of particular programs – such as the French major – with some of the faculty members. In general, we felt that the unit offered a wide range of courses but that some courses could be reimagined. The French program constitutes a considerable share of the enrollment and, for reasons related to the political role played by French in Canada, needs to be protected. While we noted clear enthusiasm from some faculty members to redesign the language courses in order to better align the skills acquired to the Common European Framework for Languages, we also feel that several courses are still anchored in a fairly traditional view of what a French major should entail. While there are many values to 17th or 18th century literature courses, a retreat focused on course redesign could help faculty members imagine new ways to package these courses, rethink their approach to pedagogy, and embed some of the content into new courses that are more geared towards the development of (inter) cultural and critical thinking competences. The French major could also be re-imagined in relation to the skills needed by future French teachers. In this regard, communication with the Faculty of Education could lead to positive collaboration and help to increase the flow of students taking French courses. When re-envisioning the French major, the department needs to be realistic of student current needs and interests, and embed the notions of language development within content-based courses as well. In fact, we felt that for the WRLD major and French major, language courses form an integral part of the overall structure of these programs. When rethinking programs and courses, we also encourage the unit to think of experiential learning opportunities that may be provided within the courses and/or programs, as well as include critical literacy, digital literacy and even visual literacy skills.

From faculty we heard complaints of curricular gaps owing to shrinkage of faculty lines. We also heard from some the need to rethink courses in order to better address students' needs and interests. We note in particular that members tend to think of "their" courses while a general vision needs to precede the process of reimagining and creating new courses. As implied above, we can only urge the unit to take the time it needs to discuss as a group in order to mitigate these individual feelings. Such reflection should also include research on existing programs in the country, and a broad consultation of the student body.

In the course of our meetings, some members advised us of the possibility that -- as a kind of linguistic counterpart to the envisaged WRLD program -- the various language programs could offer a combined degree (maybe called LANG?). We believe that this is an opportunity worth exploring. The overall goal would no longer be the old -- in some cases, unrealistic -- benchmark of competence that lives up to outdated models, but multilingual functionality that exposes

students to more than one language. Such a program could rely on many existing language courses and allow some language courses to flourish.

We were very impressed by the enthusiasm of the students we interviewed. It became clear that they are grateful for the purposeful pedagogies and high-impact practices that are being implemented in the WRLD courses so far. Clearly, students appreciate these courses; some of them said they would enroll in a WRLD Major if it were on the books. We note that the praise was not restricted to content but also included teaching methodology, the instructors' enthusiasm, and the class size. Financially, lecture-type classes that approach triple-digit enrolments make sense; but the popularity and impact of these courses is tied to the fact that they still allow for a degree of direct interaction and one-on-one attention. We believe that these courses can claim valuable and valued roles across campus for developing knowledge and important skills in the UBCO undergraduate education. (One colleague spoke of crafting one WRLD course around experiential learning, and such an effort, if successful, would add to the range of high-impact practices that could set apart these courses and this program on campus.)

Research

Some members are known in their fields both nationally and internationally, producing rich research which is presented and/or published in high quality venues. This success so far is promising. We encourage LWL colleagues, because they are in one unit together and housed in close proximity to one another, to take advantage of ways to support one another and to leverage the fact that they are well positioned for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research. There is grant earning success in LWL already, but of course even higher success would always be better. Grants to organize conferences (such as SSHRC Connection grants) can also raise visibility of the work that LWL is doing (in cultural and literary research, in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning). We recommend continuing and preferably expanding the successful efforts to obtain grants, as well as continuing to enlarge the sources of such funding beyond SSHRC and UBC grants, perhaps including applications to DAAD (Germany) and AECID (Spain) to bring professors and instructors to teach and work with students, as well as to such other foreign government support agencies as the Japan Foundation for curricular and co-curricular programming. The unit could also be in contact with the French Consulate in Vancouver to see about inviting some of the French Scholars who regularly visit the main UBC campus. The special agreement between France and Canada might be a venue for some colleagues to seek additional funding.

Facilities and space

In order to feel as one unit, LWL members need of course to be housed together, and it seemed to us that members were indeed in reasonable proximity. In addition, we had the opportunity

to see the three classrooms which “belong to” LWL: ART 220, ART 222, CCS 142. These classrooms are bright; they consist of movable furniture, computers, projectors, and wifi access; they comfortably accommodate 30-40 students; and, because they are LWL’s classrooms, colleagues and students can claim them with wall hangings and other materials, creating a sense of belonging and comfort in the day-to-day work and more generally in the programs. We understand that these classrooms also provide space for departmental meetings, and this sense of “own” space for these important meetings reinforces the department’s importance and permanence. We heard a number of times, from colleagues and students alike, that the Creative and Critical Studies building lacks common spaces, even small ones, at the end of corridors or elsewhere in the building, where students can study alone or in groups, gather with others casually, and also meet with LWL colleagues. The Arts building seemed to make such spaces and opportunities more available, and students and colleagues – our brief tour indicated – were taking advantage of them. These spaces that bring students in proximity with their teachers (and the Dean!) can play a quiet but meaningful role in creating a sense of belonging and purpose.

IV Recommendations

As noted above, we share the optimism expressed on several occasions during our visit. This is a great opportunity for a smaller, flexible unit to adapt to changing academic environment and carve out its niche by advancing a pioneering agenda in line with its strengths. With this in mind, we would like to offer the following recommendations:

A. Future Reviews

We recommend that LWL be reviewed **in five years**. For the purpose of future reviews, we have a set of specific recommendations (please note that some of the points were already raised in the 2014 Review):

1. On-site visits should commence with a short meeting with the Dean (or a designate) to reiterate the scope (and possibilities) of the review, assess the mandate, and inform the committee of last-minute developments.
2. The department must undertake an effort to recruit continuing academic staff from all faculty ranks, sessional colleagues, administrative staff representatives, as well as students, for the interview beforehand. (In our experience, free lunch will attract students.)

3. The department should consider cohort interviews rather than meetings between individual colleagues and the review team. The latter are often more revealing in providing insight into departmental culture and mentoring, and especially earlier-rank members may feel more comfortable speaking in the presence of their peers.
4. In addition to the material that was included this time around, the next Self Study should also contain
 - (a) course syllabi;
 - (b) a brief list of course titles or course descriptions;
 - (c) a Summary Assessment that goes beyond review criteria for Merit and PSA and addresses Point 4 of the Elements of a Departmental Self-Study (quantitative and qualitative principles “used to determine/rank the quality of teaching/learning outcomes of its programs,” and a summary assessment of this methodology).
 - (d) titles of the projects that earned grants.
5. The Self Study should be a collaborative departmental product that allows for input and review, through electronic and face-to-face processes, from colleagues. This approach enables the Self Study to be, to the extent that all colleagues contribute to the writing and revision processes, a shared representation of the unit because it is the product of collective work.

B. Internal Culture and Communications

As noted above, there does not seem to be a culture of regular and structured communication, particularly with regard to communication that addresses curricular questions and concerns in an inclusive way that enables discussion, or that has addressed the seeming lack of policies and procedures in the department. Such regular and structured meetings also would allow for social opportunities to establish and strengthen interpersonal and inter-program relationships. It would also mitigate possibilities of erroneous interpretations of individual’s views or ideas. While technology is a good enabler for document sharing and videoconferences, it cannot replace the value brought about by face-to-face meetings.

We specifically recommend:

1. Establish planned monthly or bi-monthly meetings each semester, which are scheduled and announced no later than the first week of the academic year. If they do not already exist, LWL should create written guidelines to identify which colleagues have voting rights, and which other community members are included (sessional academic colleagues, administrative staff colleagues, student representatives).

2. Arrange for at least one visit per year by the Dean, at which he or she can make presentations and also be available for questions, thus creating a direct link with colleagues and removing some pressure from the unit head.
3. Arrange for an annual retreat (with plan and agenda presented at a previous departmental meeting) that could provide a committed time to engage meaningfully in curricular / pedagogical topics, perhaps in tandem with a guest speaker / consultant. Such a guest speaker / consultant could reduce the pressure on colleagues (especially if they are vulnerable – pre-tenure) to promote change and lead discussions in their programs / areas.
4. Consult with other units on campus to see how programs and/or courses could help other programs meet their learning outcomes. We particularly recommend that a serious conversation be initiated or continued with the Faculty of Education and the Business programs.

C. The LWL Major

We agree with the statement in the Self-Study that much of the success of LWL “moving forward will depend on successfully implementing a Major in WRLD, a project currently underway in earnest.” However, just as the name of the department precedes the existence of the program it announces, the WRLD courses created and envisaged also precede a clear vision of the program. A program cannot be based on -- and will not spontaneously emerge from -- an accumulation of courses, no matter how popular and successful. We therefore recommend to slow down course creation initiatives and devote the energy to developing a mutually agreed-upon program outline. In this endeavour, the following two points must be kept in mind:

1. Regardless of whether or not the individual language streams remain independent or are amalgamated into an overall LANG degree, the first “L” in the unit’s name must be handled on the same level as the second. Language teaching is an integral and indispensable part of the program. It is vital -- and for the internal culture of LWL nothing less than a matter of survival -- that the promotion of the WRLD Major *not* be accompanied by a demotion of existing language courses to mere service courses. There is no reason why the two branches cannot co-exist and interact on similar levels.
2. It must be kept in mind that with the consolidation of the language programs on the one hand and the build-up of the interdisciplinary and trans-national literature program on the other, a gap will open up that may swallow the more traditional nation- or language-based course offerings. While the committee is doubtful whether these courses can

ever recoup student interest, there is no reason to simply drop them. Rather, just as not all WRLD courses must contain the same amount of trans-national content, more traditional literature courses should be encouraged to create themes and topics that allow for greater connectivity with WRLD courses. We feel that this is an opportunity to review the French major and reassess the future of the Spanish programs.

D. Hiring

In our meetings with the Dean and the Provost we were heartened to find a full sense of commitment to support the Department as it grows into its name. With this in mind, we strongly encourage all participants to think big. LWL has to hire not only with a view toward upcoming retirements, but in order to create a cohort momentum that will help the unit realize its potential. We therefore recommend multiple hires in the immediate future. While we understand the dangers that may arise from neglecting the Japanese and German sections, we do believe that priority should be given to the French and Spanish sections. However, we also encourage LWL to consider the possibility of open hires (i.e., inviting candidates from all four language backgrounds) in order to benefit from a greater applicant pool.

In proposing multiple new hires, we encourage the Dean and the Department to consider the following options:

- (a) Bridging appointments (do not wait for retirements but bank ahead);
- (b) LWL should enter the competition for a Principal's Research Chair;
- (c) It was recently announced by President Ono that a considerable amount of money will be made available via the PAEF (President's Academic Excellence Fund) for hiring up to 250 new faculty positions, of which around 50 may be slotted for UBC-O. This would be an ideal situation to increase the faculty contingent.

E. Further recommendations

The committee notes that LWL is considering offering 1st-year Chinese. In line with the new BA language requirements, 6 credits of a given language -- and one of such importance -- is a good choice. However, we recommend that the initial appointment be limited and that the

Department closely monitor enrolment patterns to ascertain that this effort does not endanger the other languages offered. We were told by several instructors that a high percentage of Japanese learners are Chinese, who may well migrate to Chinese classes.

The committee further recommends that LWL offer anglophone content courses in the German section to complement the current language classes. In all our respective home institutions these courses -- be they film courses, courses on the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich or the Holocaust -- tend to be very successful. Likewise we encourage the French section to include cultural content courses in French that permit non-degree students with some background in French (such as immersion students) to write assignments in English.

With the positive student feedback in mind, we recommend to keep the enrollment to 40 and lower, so that such pedagogical efforts continue to be instructive and productive: direct interaction between instructor and student on writing assignments; intentional peer review in writing assignments; classroom discussion format (vs. lecture) that builds students' communication skills and recognizes and respects their voices and agency; critical thinking exercises that call on students to employ and apply what they are learning in both classroom discussion and writing assignments.

V Final statement

Overall, this newly created department has a lot to offer to the UBC and UBCO community at large. It shows many promising initiatives, plans, and goals that need to be carefully nurtured and examined. The department and Department Chair Araujo will be called upon to make important and at times difficult decisions, and thus they will need support in these challenging yet significant efforts. It is clear to us, however, that the Faculty and University embrace these efforts and the impressive stand that the Department already is making on behalf of the humanities and internationalization on the UBCO campus. This indeed is a great opportunity for this smaller, flexible unit to adapt to a changing academic environment and carve out its niche by advancing a pioneering agenda in line with its strengths.

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