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FROM: Michael Bitter, Interim Dean, College of Arts & Sciences

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SUBJECT: Review of the 2020-2021 Department of Languages Program Self Study

The Languages Department self-study provides an overview of the program's past, current, and future status and contributions to both the University of Hawai'i at Hilo and the local Hilo community. The document recognizes the challenges faced by the Department in recent years and suggests some ideas that promise to promote student demand for, and enrollment in, language classes and certificates, as well as increase the number of students majoring and graduating from the program. The program's importance to the University's place with regard to General Education and within the Hilo community are significant themes throughout this self-study.

Assessment

Involving all the language certificates and departmental faculty in student assessment within the Languages Program continues to be a goal of the program. The Japanese and Spanish programs have participated in Core Competency Assessments for several years. These assessments have provided data and intentional faculty responses designed to "close the loop" in the areas of written communication, information literacy, oral communication, and diversity and multiculturalism. Specific programmatic assessment of service-learning was also undertaken in Chinese Studies courses, with the help of the UH Hilo ALO. This assessment provided very useful information used by the faculty member to clarify the guidelines and redesign the timing of the service learning events.

Recent positive movement with regard to assessment includes the development of three broad student learning outcomes that apply to all the certificate programs and the BA in Japanese within the Department. The use of these common SLOs across all the language programs will allow faculty to move beyond core competency assessment to develop sustainable assessment program. This recent progress is commendable and should be encouraged to continue, as recommended by the ALO, with institutional support for these efforts wherever necessary.

Course Scheduling

In the past, upper-level courses in some languages in particular have struggled with enrollment, with several of these courses at or below the traditional low enrollment cut-off minimum of ten students. As the University hired lecturers to teach 100-level courses at the same time, this situation made it difficult to argue for additional faculty resources. Recent tenure-track faculty involvement in some 100-level language courses, in Japanese language courses particularly, has increased SSH and benefitted the major, making additional resource allocation possible in the future.

While the COVID-19 financial crisis has placed increasing pressure on small programs, there are several areas related to course scheduling and enrollment that point the way to a brighter future for the department.

In general, 100-level General Education (GE) Language courses have healthy enrollments, and this is a significant benefit to the College and University in helping students to complete their General Education requirements. In particular, introductory Japanese, Spanish, Filipino, and Chinese classes are regularly fully enrolled, with multiple sections of these courses offered in many semesters.

Ongoing efforts to qualify additional courses for General Education requirements may have helped to increase enrollments in a number of these courses, and the faculty are to be commended for their initiative in this area. The department's continued efforts to increase the number of GE and, possibly, online courses will likely continue this positive trend toward higher class enrollments and, perhaps, an increase in majors.

In the face of the forced movement of all classes to online formats beginning in the spring of 2020, student enrollment in several language courses has held steady or actually increased, though in some areas the number of courses offered has decreased due to budgetary restrictions on the hiring of lecturers. This stability or increase in enrollment, particularly when campus-wide enrollment is trending downward, bodes well for the future of the program and its plans to enhance its GE and online offerings.

Financial

As with all CAS departments, most of the expense in this program is personnel. For several years, the program has had six tenure-track positions along with several lecturers that, in some years, were hired as full-time instructors due to strong student demand and budgetary considerations. In some years, the cost of an instructor to teach fully enrolled language sections was less than that of hiring lecturers for the same number of courses. Very recent changes to the way instructor costs are calculated have removed the institutional financial incentives that formerly encouraged full-time instructor hiring. At the same time, the current System-wide faculty hiring restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 budget crisis has made the hiring of full-time instructors significantly more difficult as well.

Positive trends in enrollment are evident in a number of Language areas. The department's efforts toward increasing the number of, and student engagement in, online courses, particularly in Spanish language, is likely to continue these positive trends toward higher class enrollments and, perhaps, an increase in majors, making the case for hiring full-time faculty stronger and more likely, both on the UH Hilo campus and within the UH System as the post-pandemic financial situation of the University improves.

Decreasing numbers of majors and low enrollments in upper-level courses made this program appear costly in recent years, however, these trends seem to be reversing with increasing enrollment in 100-level GE courses and a more targeted scheduling of courses as a result of the budget restrictions forced on the campus by the pandemic. As this reversal demonstrates, creative and successful adaptation in the face of these challenges holds enormous potential for all of the language programs going forward.

Faculty Service and Productivity

Currently, all six tenure-track faculty in the Department of Languages are expected to engage in scholarly activity and service. Based upon the information provided in the self-study, there are no concerns with faculty productivity at this time. Scholarly activity on the part of the Languages faculty is documented in the self-study and Appendix L. Virtually all full-time faculty members are also engaged in university and particularly in extensive community service. This is exceptionally beneficial for the Department, considering the program's importance within the local community and the unique connection and interaction it provides between the University and the members of the Hilo Japanese, Filipino, and Chinese communities in particular. The College and the University benefit significantly from the Languages program's interaction and engagement with the various communities located on Hawai'i Island.

Student Success

Students majoring in Languages and taking language courses are most often passionate about their program and strongly support the faculty and courses that make up their major and certificates. Performance data released in the Fall of 2020, indicate that the program generally ranks in the top four when compared to other UH Hilo programs with regard to six-year graduation rates of its majors.

The new student learning outcomes recently adopted by all the certificate programs and the BA in Japanese language will help significantly with programmatic assessment going forward. In addition, this unification of student learning outcomes may encourage greater collaboration across languages in the future, resulting in a more cohesive and stronger program overall.

The data provided in the self-study show that many of the students in the department's classes are not Languages majors. This demonstrates the program's substantial contribution to the success of students not only in other Arts & Sciences departments, but to the success of a wide variety of students across the entire University. This level of service teaching of General Education courses is a substantial benefit to the College and University, though that value may not be reflected in the growth or student demand for the major itself.

Recommendations

The Languages Department has already recognized many of the issues that have potentially been suppressing its major numbers and upper division language course enrollment, and has held discussions and taken steps toward improving student success and its own efficiency. The current pandemic has compounded the challenges faced by the program, as it true of most other programs in the College, yet enrollment in lower-level language courses has held steady and even increased in some areas. Steps already taken with regard to online instruction, programmatic assessment, and curricular revision demonstrate a commitment to and path toward a more student-focused and assessable major.

Not mentioned in the self-study are discussions and plans already underway to revise the program under an "Asian Language and Culture" umbrella major that would include tracks for each of the languages that currently offering only a certificate. This revision has the potential to increase the number of students declaring a major, as they would be able to focus on the language of their choice (Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, or Spanish) as a major, rather than as a certificate. It is also likely to remove administrative scrutiny of the Languages Department as a "small program" that requires additional justification in an era of severe budget crisis.

The proposal to revise the major, creating tracks for each language under an "Asian Language and Culture" umbrella is a very positive move on the part of the program faculty and should aid in completion of the degree for student majors and encourage more students to consider a first or even a second major in Languages. While the details of this proposal have yet to be fully approved, creative curriculum revision such as this demonstrates the ability of the Languages faculty to innovate and overcome issues that may have affected student demand in the past.

As the ALO review of this self-study outlines, programmatic assessment and continual improvement are important goals for the department at this time. While significant progress has been made with regard to assessment, the key to creating a genuine culture of assessment within the department will be continued and energetic attention to the recommendations of the ALO to use what is already being used to assess student language skills and to make use of collective assessment to create a foundation for collective work among the faculty of the Languages Department. The recent creation of universal SLOs can serve as the basis for programmatic assessment for upper and lower division courses, and particularly for online General Education courses that attract the highest student enrollment, that will engage all of the Languages faculty in productive interaction around student success.

While some additional program quantitative data has been made available as a result of the COVID-19 budgeting process in the summer and fall of 2020, I agree with the recommendation of the ALO that additional quantitative data would be useful for this and all future program review self-study documents. In fact, greater institutional support for departments completing self-studies as part of program review is necessary in general.

The use of quantitative data for programs would be much more valuable to departments and reviewers if it were readily available in a standardized form that the institution could certify was correct and uniform across all units of the University. References within the self-study to disparities within the data, as well as some seemingly incorrect information noticed by this reviewer, call into question all reviews and conclusions based upon it. Greater efforts should be made to provide an agreed upon set of quantitative measures for each program as a starting point for self-studies and all subsequent reviews.

In addition, and with regard specifically to assessment, I recommend that the institution provide a centralized mechanism for collecting student artifacts and assessment information for each department and program. It is clear from this self-study and others that assessment at UH Hilo has been progressing slowly, in part due to the fact that each small department is expected to maintain and move its process forward on its own and, essentially, without much institutional support. This decentralized, do-it-yourself mechanism for programmatic assessment has been slow to create a culture of assessment on the UH Hilo campus. Greater institutional support in the form of a centralized mechanism to collect, schedule, interpret, and archive assessment artifacts and results for all programs would help to create this culture on campus and move all programs forward in their assessment engagement and activities.