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Convergences and Transdisciplinarity in the Foreign Language Department: A Response to the MLA Report<sup>1</sup>

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*This paper takes a specific university Department of Romance Languages as a case study to examine how the measures it adopted in view of increasing enrollment in Spanish in the nineties coincide with the recommendations in the MLA's 2007 report; it also examines how they have fared after some 12 years of implementation, advances explanations for their success or failure, and offers suggestions for improvement. While examining well-established language programs, it discusses issues of governance, faculty and curriculum pertaining to the overall field of foreign languages and cultures. The initiatives proposed here aim at placing language study in a field of interacting factors to better adjust to the "inter-" and "trans-disciplinarity" of today's world.*

The dramatic increase in enrollment in Spanish classes in the nineties (1990-1995 and 1995-1998, Goldberg & Welles, 2001, p. 174) prompted some language and literature departments in higher education to revise curriculum and departmental governance in a way resembling the call in the recent MLA (2007) report for "new structures for a changed world."<sup>2</sup> Although this recent call, prompted by the 9/11 attacks, responds to a far more tragic social climate than enrollments, in both instances external events have been the stimulus for new initiatives in our profession. Critics like Kramsch (1989) and Stanton (2005) have noted previously in what contexts schools and universities have been challenged by government officials to review and improve their language programs for the sake of national security. The Carter Commission, for instance, recognized the country's backwardness vis-à-vis the pragmatic use of foreign languages and thus urged a better system to achieve linguistic competency; and, after the Russian Sputnik was launched in 1958, the National Defense Education Act reacted to the crisis with what would eventually become the current Title VI programs. It is in such critical situations that officials realize the overall inability of the country to communicate with many parts of the world and the subsequent need to develop better language skills.

The MLA's report (2007) takes note of recent political events, urging the profession to give a fresh look to the existing situation so that the field of foreign languages and literatures can remain relevant. In this response to the MLA's report, I take a specific university-level Department of Romance Languages as a case study to examine how the measures it adopted in

view of increasing enrollments in Spanish coincide with the MLA recommendations. I will also examine how they have fared after some 12 years of implementation, advance explanations for their success or failure, and offer suggestions for improvement.

Increasing student enrollment in Spanish meant a re-structuring not only of the Spanish program but also of other languages affected by it. Likewise, the current demand for better competency affects all languages, both those traditionally taught – French, Spanish, Italian, and German – as well as less commonly taught languages, such as Arabic. These challenges call into question the conventional organization of language departments, their curriculum, faculty, and governance. While external events may trigger these revisions, the profession's response needs to be in accordance with the best educational standards. The challenge lies in providing linguistic competency that does not reduce the language to a mechanistic exercise, but rather encompasses the rich cultural field of which it is a part. It is in the convergence of all the various elements of the field – language, culture, literature – and in the transdisciplinary outreach to other disciplines that the needed revisions should take place. Although this essay examines well-established language programs (French, Italian, and Spanish), it discusses issues of governance, faculty and curriculum pertaining to the overall field of foreign languages and cultures. It should also prove useful because of its model-like nature: by focusing on a department that has already put to practice some of the recommendations in the recent MLA report, it facilitates the discussion of their efficacy or failure in a pragmatic sense and explores changes when necessary. Spanish and other less commonly taught languages are undergoing critical times each in their own way, while the decline in other programs, such as French, is equally concerning if the profession wants to pursue its goal of promoting a wide learning and awareness of other cultures and languages.

### **Staffing and Curriculum: Brief Background**

The Department under examination is one of the two largest academic units in an undergraduate College of 4,300. It has three well-established programs in French, Italian, and Spanish, and one new course offering in Portuguese. As in many other language departments, French was still holding on to its traditional predominance at the time of increasing Spanish enrollments in the nineties. This situation was reflected in the high number of French tenured faculty in comparison to other programs, especially Spanish where a much lower number of tenured and tenure-track faculty was struggling to cope with pressing student demand. Although the increase in Spanish enrollments had been gradually surpassing those in the French program, the Administration was slow to respond and when it did, it met the demand by hiring non tenure-track or temporary faculty. This approach resulted in an excessively high number of non tenure-track positions in the Spanish program, which continues to this day. Other approaches did not fare any better, such as moving a French tenured position to the Spanish program. The absence of a well thought-out hiring process caused friction overall: Spanish faculty resented the growing number of non tenure-track faculty and the slow administrative approval of more permanent positions while French faculty resented the loss of its standing. Smaller programs such as Italian, which in this case is not supported by a local Italian population, nevertheless experienced some increase due to students leaving the French ranks or wishing to learn a second foreign language. This situation relieved some of the pressure placed upon the Spanish program and justified the addition of a new Italian tenure-track position.

When Spanish enrollments began to soar, this Department responded with a comprehensive set of changes. Previously its curriculum had corresponded to what the MLA

(2007) report describes as a “narrow model” (Transforming Academic Programs section, para. 1): a two-year language sequence followed by a set of courses focused mainly on literature. The traditional divide between language and literature had been very acute with an equally acute hierarchical divide between non tenure-track faculty teaching first- and second-year language courses and tenured and tenure-track faculty teaching mainly advanced literature courses. As enrollments decreased in French, the need for non tenure-track faculty had decreased as well, a situation which at first appeared to be negative but ended having positive results as it called for all ranks to be involved in teaching all levels. The same situation existed in small-sized programs like Italian. In the area of study abroad, French and Spanish had been offering a one semester program (fall and spring, respectively) and a limited number of exchange scholarships and programs with universities in France and Spain. Because of student demand, the Spanish study abroad program was expanded to both fall and spring semesters. Italian did not offer any study abroad program focused on the language itself although it benefited from an existing University Humanities program in Italy for which applicants were required to take at least one semester in Italian language (all other classes were and continue to be taught in English).

To address the curricular divide between language and literature, in 1997 the Department agreed on a revision involving the infusion of culture and literature in all levels and the continuation of grammar and language study at the advanced literature levels. Extracurricular activities covering film, art, social and political topics, and popular culture were also added, and participation in at least two extracurricular activities was required in all courses up to the advanced curriculum. Coordination was also implemented as the best way to insure uniformity among different sections of the same course. This was particularly necessary in Spanish where the number of beginning and intermediate language courses increased considerably. All programs paid renewed attention to the University foreign language requirement, a third semester course introducing students to the literature of the respective countries. The importance of this course was well-recognized since it is required for all students and it should/may spark their interest to continue studies in the respective language. The main goal of the revision of this important course was to assert the role of languages in a humanities curriculum and, in the process, to dispel the notion that a department of foreign languages mainly and simply teaches technical issues related to the learning of a foreign language.

Other important curricular changes involved the broadening of traditional courses on canonical literature to encompass women writers, film studies, the Francophone world, transatlantic topics, and to emphasize the thematic over historical or generational approaches. New certificate programs were created in innovative fields, such as interpretation and translation and language for business and the professions. The minor in Linguistics was also a focus of this curricular revision with most of the teaching positions being staffed by faculty in Romance Languages. Another innovative approach to the curriculum was the creation of programs following the intensive immersion model. Spanish created two to be offered during the summer, one on campus and one in a Latin American country. Because of demand coming from the pre-med program, the abroad intensive summer program developed a course and internship on medical Spanish. French offered a similar intensive summer program on campus and in France, but failed to recruit enough students. Italian, however, was successful in recruiting students for an intensive summer program offered in Italy. Languages across the Curriculum (LAC), another of the MLA recommendations in its recent report, was implemented under the leadership of the Department of Romance Languages. The model most commonly adopted then and now is the add-on component where a faculty member conducts a one-hour course in the target language

related to the three-hour course in a subject area such as history, politics, or creative writing. These LAC courses have proved very successful in the University requirement of a First Year Seminar.

How has the Department fared with the implementation of these changes? Are there other changes or adjustments to be made in response to the recommendations in the MLA report? The rest of this essay will address these questions.

***Staffing: Gains and Losses***

The current staffing situation in the Department is quite positive for French and Italian and less positive for Spanish. The French program consists of a total of nine faculty members of which five are tenured, one is tenure-track and three are non tenure-track. French also enjoys the assistance of a native graduate student from the University of Burgundy, France, who teaches live-labs and organizes and assists with cultural activities. Italian has three faculty members, two tenured and one non tenure-track. Spanish has a total of thirty faculty members split right down the middle, with fifteen non tenure-track and fifteen on the tenure line (ten tenured and five on tenure-track). Enrollment figures, taking both fall and spring semesters in the 2005-06 academic year as an example, show that French served 599 students, Italian 288 students, and Spanish a total of 2153. Computing the ratio between the number of students and faculty in each language program results in an average of: 66.5 students per year per each faculty member in French; 96 students per year per each faculty position in Italian; and 69.2 students per year for each faculty member in Spanish.

While Italian is at a disadvantage in terms of numbers, its ranks are well-balanced. French enjoys a low student/faculty ratio as well as a low number of non tenure lines. The situation in the faculty/student ratio in Spanish is slightly higher than in French and lower than Italian, but the rank distribution of its faculty is quite disadvantageous vis-à-vis both French and Italian. In terms of the number of majors and minors, the imbalance among the language programs remains acute. French majors range between 27 and 36 and minors between 28 and 30; Spanish majors range between 157 and 183 and minors between 130 and 140. Italian only grants minors, whose numbers range between 10 and 11. These figures show that overall the situation in French is positive on all counts –student/faculty ratio, faculty ranks and number of majors/minors granted; Italian is positive in rank distribution for the number of minors it serves but less positive in student/faculty ratio; and Spanish is positive in student/faculty ratio but much less positive in faculty rank distribution and the number of majors and minors it serves with its present faculty. French has recovered from the loss it previously experienced with the growth in Spanish; Italian has also increased its staff, while Spanish has made gains in the number of faculty but has not caught up in faculty ranks.

In its present situation the Spanish program is well-equipped to cover the basics at the lower level curriculum, but it falls short in the “translingual and transcultural competence” (The Goal: Translingual and Transcultural Competence section, para. 1) that the MLA report identifies as the desired outcome for language majors. Such outcome may result only when teaching throughout the program, but especially in the beginning and intermediate levels, moves beyond mechanical, technical language skills to integrate cultural aspects in a systematic way. This “transdisciplinary” approach is not possible overall due mainly to the existing divide between tenure and non tenure-track lines and the equally acute resulting divide in teaching assignments. In spite of their enthusiasm and dedication, Spanish non tenure-track faculty who staff large classes requiring the teaching of basic skills have little opportunity to widen students’ experience of linguistic and cultural competence. Faculty members on tenure-track lines, in turn, have little

or no contact with the lower curriculum, nor do they get involved with extracurricular activities where their experience and knowledge would enrich the learning process. The more advantageous rank distribution in the French and Italian programs, however, offers a better chance to achieve such competency as all faculty ranks are directly involved with students at all levels. If it is to overcome the “service” goal only, the situation in the Spanish program calls for support from the Administration to convert more of the non tenure-track to tenure-track position lines, as the MLA Committee on Professional Employments has long determined (MLA, 2004, p. 219).

Considering the demand for Spanish in today’s society, and according to the MLA recommendations, this Department needs to go from preparing majors who can communicate in the language to educating speakers with transcultural and translingual competence able “to operate between languages ...[and] educated to function as informed and capable interlocutors” (The Goal: Translingual and Transcultural Competence section, para. 1). Furthermore, a better integration between non tenure and tenure line faculty will expose students to different teaching styles and levels of experience and preparation. It will allow for a program where students explore “alternative ways of seeing, feeling, and understanding things” (The Goal: Translingual and Transcultural Competence section, para. 2).

***Curriculum: Teaching Assignments and Governance***

Although the assignment of advanced courses to tenured and tenure-track faculty prevails in the three language programs, the size of the French and Italian programs and the constitution of their faculty allow for a more equitable distribution of courses among all ranks. Since it does not grant a major, Italian offers a reduced number of advanced courses which are taught by the two tenured faculty members who also teach first- and second-year courses and participate in curricular discussions and governance with the non tenure-track colleague. Advanced classes in French are also assigned to tenure lines but not exclusively, as non tenure-track faculty are encouraged to suggest and teach new courses. They are also included regularly in discussions on curricular matters. Spanish presents an entirely different and undesirable situation. The first- and second- year curriculum is taught for the most part by non tenure-track faculty. The only instance in which a tenured or tenure-track faculty teaches the beginning and intermediate levels is in summer school or when s/he begins teaching at Wake Forest and offers instruction at those levels as part of building up his or her tenure portfolio. The non tenure-track faculty is excluded from all discussions on curricular or other matters pertaining to the governance of the program. This system, as the MLA report notes, segregates non tenure-track faculty to working outside departmental power structures. The hierarchical divide is deep as the tenured and tenure-track faculty is entrusted with the teaching of advanced courses, while non tenure-track faculty take care of beginning and intermediate levels mostly. Besides hierarchies, this divide grants prestige to a portion of the curriculum while reducing the other portion to the level of mechanical, basic skills. While there have been attempts to redress this situation, resistance from the tenured and tenure-track ranks has been strong, and proposals to change have been repeatedly voted down.

The reasons adduced for upholding this situation are: the difficulty in making inclusion work due to the large number of non tenure-track faculty; the supposed absence in the non tenure-track faculty ranks of appropriate preparation for productive participation in program discussions; the entitlement to more prestigious teaching assignments on the basis of rank and seniority; and the need to uphold the University’s teacher/scholar ideal which requires tenured and tenure-track faculty to teach, research and publish while non tenure-track are expected to

teach but not to conduct research. In the following paragraphs I will address each of these four points, first assessing the situation and then making some recommendations.

*Inclusion vs. Size*

The large size of the Spanish program makes it difficult to conduct effective and productive discussions involving everyone, a situation I suspect arises at other institutions as well. The easiest way out of it, and the one in existence in this Department, is for tenured and tenure-track faculty to meet to discuss all curricular and governance aspects of the program. Excluded non tenure-track colleagues are informed of decisions a posteriori and expected to implement them according to specifications determined by the other half of the staff. Considering that the non tenure-track faculty is forced to accept this state of affairs, the message about their diminished importance is far from positive.

The disconnect between the two halves of the program is reinforced at every turn; collegiality is fragile as it is based on a subtle but real disparity in category and power, and room for open expression is seriously curtailed. This situation is also detrimental for the program because it keeps half of its faculty outside of the deliberations leading to decisions that affect the overall unit and that everyone, including those excluded, are expected to implement. It is also doubly unfair to the non tenure-track faculty since this group, while being excluded from deliberations, is assigned to teach advanced courses and direct programs when tenured and tenure-track faculty are unable or unwilling to do so; to direct and organize extracurricular activities with which tenured and tenure-track faculty do not become involved because of personal preference or research obligations; and to advise students on a curriculum in whose development they have been excluded. Furthermore, this hierarchical situation demarcates some program areas as more important than others. For instance, extracurricular activities, honor societies, and student clubs are at a disadvantage in the overall program evaluation because only the non tenure sector of the faculty is involved with them. It is also disingenuous to require or even urge student participation in activities to which the tenured or tenure-track faculty is not committed. In the case of honor societies, while the best students in the program are highly interested in being inducted, and these ceremonies should be the occasion to recognize student achievements, senior faculty members do not usually attend. The lack of support from senior faculty automatically affects the value of these programs.

I would argue that inclusion is not only feasible but the most desirable route to take. The meeting logistics may require some planning, but the time involved is worthwhile for the positive effects it would have on both program and departmental relations. Meetings should be planned according to the nature of the discussion topic(-s): lower/upper-level curriculum; honors; study abroad, etc. Some topics may benefit from having the whole group present at the meeting with a good leader – someone who is respected by the group, has organizational skills, and can keep the discussion focused and moving – to ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute; others may call for splitting the group into smaller units who will later present the outcome of their discussion to the whole group; while other topics may be better handled by ad hoc committees who would then present their proposals to the entire faculty. Having everyone's opinion heard and validated can only result in a greater sense of involvement and ownership of the program, a more professional and respectful social atmosphere, and better-informed program decisions.

*Preparation or Lack Thereof*

Some non tenure-track faculty hold a MA degree, some are ABDs, and some hold a PhD. The first group responds to a profile of individuals highly committed to teaching; they may get involved in professional meetings and do presentations on pedagogical topics although their main focus and interest is in teaching. The second group is usually composed of people close to defending their doctoral dissertations and for whom teaching as professionals, rather than as graduate students, gives valuable experience and better pay than the graduate stipend; they often participate in professional meetings with papers on their own research. The third group may be in transition from graduate school to a more permanent tenure-track position, and its members also participate in professional meetings and some have publications.

While non tenure-track French and Italian faculty belong mainly to the second and third groups, non tenure-track faculty in Spanish come from all three and mostly from the first. It is also common for non tenure-track Spanish faculty to be hired at the last minute to meet student demand. The three groups are entrusted with advising, the teaching of beginning and intermediate language, the 200-level required introductory course to literature and, depending on their background and expertise, the direction of study abroad programs and advanced courses when tenured or tenure-track faculty are unavailable or unwilling. As study abroad directors, they are in charge of all aspects of the program just as a tenured or tenure-track faculty member would be. When teaching advanced courses, requirements and value are the same as when a tenured or tenure-track member teaches an advanced course. On the basis of the wide array of responsibilities that non tenure-track faculty members assume, their exclusion from the decision-making process seems unfounded and counterproductive for the program. Even in the case of the least prepared faculty who will not be able to teach advanced courses, participation in meetings and discussions would be quite beneficial. This group of faculty has a great deal of contact with students at the early stages in their learning process. By being informed of the rationale behind program decisions and requirements, this faculty will be better equipped to advise students in their courses and encourage them to continue beyond the beginning levels. They will overall do a better, more professional job and in the process help students and program.

#### *Rank and Its Privileges*

The existing system for teaching assignments is as outdated as the faculty divide just described. As it is based mostly on rank, it contributes to furthering the hierarchical divide between the two halves of the faculty while disregarding what is best for the program in question. For instance, the intensive summer language institutes require a great deal of involvement and time with students, as well as ongoing and open discussions with other teaching colleagues. These teaching positions have been traditionally assigned to non tenure-track faculty because the strong “language” and “skill” focus of these programs fits with the objectives of the courses this group usually teaches. Also, non tenure-track faculty may have fewer time commitments as the rank does not involve research demands. However, if a senior faculty member wishes to teach in these intensive programs, s/he has priority over non tenure-track faculty. Without a tradition of open exchanges, the mixing of tenure and non tenure lines in this kind of program inhibits communication and creates tension stemming from power hierarchies.

If this type of cooperation is to succeed, as it should, the department needs to reconsider the existing divide and to foster integration. Open exchanges among ranks should start with the types of meetings suggested earlier. The MLA has been clear on this point in the recent report and in its earlier statement on non tenure-track faculty members which came out of an action taken by the 2002 Delegate Assembly. The pertinent section of the statement reads as follows:

“Non TT faculty members should be incorporated into the life of the department to the fullest extent possible, short of participation on department committees pertaining to the evaluation of TT faculty members” (2004, p. 221).

*Teacher/Scholar Ideal*

The teacher/scholar ideal is certainly a key issue in the faculty divide under consideration and one that departments may not be able to address fully without the support of the higher administration. It is untenable to require faculty to uphold the ideal while allowing programs like those in Romance Languages to function with such a large number of faculty who, because of their non tenure-track status, are not required to conduct research. Although it is valid to argue that research demands get in the way of participation in extracurricular activities and/or teaching the beginning and intermediate curriculum, a well thought-out system of teaching assignments involving everyone as much as possible in all courses and in the direction of extracurricular activities would certainly offer a laudable model for faculty integration and for the validation of all departmental programs. At present, outdated models based on rank, hierarchies, territoriality and prestige continue to get in the way both of fluid and open exchanges among all ranks and of greater equality and integration of all aspects of the program. The existing situation is marked by exclusion rather than inclusion and by justifying with arguments of academic standards the convenience of those in the higher ranks. If the result is not frustration, as the MLA report notes, it is surely one of inequality and disconnect between the two halves of the faculty.

**Integration and Multiple Paths to the Major: Language as Field**

The integrative approach for the curricular reform proposed by the MLA report was also a focal point in this Department’s discussions and decisions at the time of increasing Spanish enrollment. While linguistic competency remains a major goal now and then, faculty recognized then the need to provide a cultural understanding involving historical, artistic, social, geographic and cross-cultural competencies. As noted, one of the first measures adopted was the integration of language with culture and literature in the lower curriculum and the incorporation of language and grammar in the advanced curriculum. It was expected that this fusion would join the emphasis on the communicative approach with cultural and literary content, thus combining “a proficiency-oriented teaching approach with a discourse-analytical interpretive approach” (Kempf, 1995, p. 40). While we may still choose to explain this fusion with the well-known argument that language is culture and culture is language, the call now is to approach language as a network of relations, a field of reciprocal exchanges. Just as the field in physics refers to “a spatial and/or temporal model or representation in which all constituents are interdependent and in which all constituents participate and interrelate without privilege” (Vargish and Mook, 1999, p. 105), the field in foreign languages involves the convergence of language and culture, form and meaning, learning and reflecting.

Bourdieu’s notion of “field” is also applicable to languages. For Bourdieu, the “field” corresponds to a structured system ... that it is porous and open to negotiation, conflict and change” (cited in Moran, 2002, p. 71, 73). Hence, for Kramsch (1993a), the classroom should be a “privileged site of cross-cultural fieldwork” (p. 29) where learning occurs together with reflecting upon the learning process itself. For Byrnes (2002), the field “refers to the social activity that is taking place as well as the institutional setting in which a piece of language occurs” (p. 30). The exchange in the field involves an understanding that traverses cultures thanks to the multiple literacies of this integrative approach. Literacy is a highly social process to

be understood as a “metacognitive awareness of the connections among language, language use, and socioculturally mediated knowledge of the world” (Byrnes, 2002, p. 31). For Kern (2002), literacy “facilitates discussion of all the reciprocal relations of readers, writers, texts, culture, and language learning” (p. 22); such reciprocal exchange provides the ability to bridge the gap between language, culture and literature teaching. And as in physics, this linguistic field takes into account the space separating the participants or action as a distance (face-to-face or letter writing) or the distance of the speaker/writer from the events the language is talking about (language in action versus language in reflection). In our field, as in physics, we are being called to move from a Newtonian to an Einsteinian worldview. In this paradigm, language is no longer the means to transmit reality but to create it, and meaning is not fixed or static as it depends on register, tenor and mode (Byrnes, 2002). If in relativity, space and time no longer function independently or in absolute terms as they become dependent on measurements and the observer, language teaching can no longer disregard the network connecting its various aspects. The need to continue to explore ways to improve this integrative approach and to avoid the risks of superficiality and stereotyping, particularly at the lower levels, makes the existing divide in the faculty, curriculum and governance even more untenable. The following is a discussion of four integrative approaches to achieve this cohesive field model of language, literature and culture education.

### ***Study Abroad***

Most if not all language programs agree with the MLA report that “classroom study and study abroad should be promoted as interdependent necessities” (Continuing Priorities section, para. 1). Even the institutions most reluctant to promote study abroad are now opening up study venues all over the world. The traditional study abroad program, offering courses on language, literature and culture, is widely accepted in most US institutions of higher learning. However, there are still areas in study abroad that remain unexplored while others are proliferating to such a degree that the value of the whole enterprise is undercut.

While study abroad is commonly interrelated with language and literature courses taken on campus, study abroad experience is not. Students return to campus with new experiences and knowledge, but the existing campus structure lacks the means to integrate and feature such knowledge in any substantial way. Language departments and offices of international studies should work together to develop ways for returning students to put to work their newly acquired knowledge and experience. LAC components could offer a forum for returning students to share their views with other peers; departments should identify courses in which the outlook of returning students could enrich the teaching and learning process. In turn, study abroad returnees should be expected to produce some kind of portfolio documenting their experience in accordance to guidelines developed by departments and international study centers.

Study abroad programs should enlarge their scope by including internship offerings and service learning. Some institutions, my own included, are already offering these opportunities to students. The drawback tends to reside in departments not counting these credits towards the major/minor degrees, in the lack of qualified faculty to oversee these offerings, and in the lack of compensation for this work. A prevailing perception is that internships and service learning are attractive opportunities but do not fit altogether within the scope of an academic major/minor. This outdated perspective will be surpassed only if and when departments and universities invest in developing solid links with well-established agencies as internships and service-learning sites, set down guidelines involving a solid academic component, and provide the staff support to insure the quality of these programs.

The field of sciences remains quite distant from study abroad. Science students are often deprived of this opportunity because of the strict requirements in their field or because they fear a semester abroad will harm their preparation in the scientific field. However, scientific language is quite similar in different languages, and in some non-English speaking countries students use textbooks written in English in their science courses. The scientific community is also international by nature as scientific research is often pursued with several individuals or laboratories collaborating together. That being the case, the university under consideration has initiated contacts with the departments of biology, chemistry, and physics here and in Spain in order to offer a curriculum of science courses to be taught in Spanish which students may take to meet requirements while studying abroad. This initiative also has the potential of establishing faculty exchanges between departments at home and abroad and promoting the internationalization of the curriculum.

As the MLA report indicates, a major danger for study abroad resides in the proliferation of programs in English. Particularly for small language programs, English offerings abroad, with just one or more courses in the target language, guarantee that some students will sign up. Some schools own residential houses abroad where courses are taught in English and students live together and speak English. It is a fallacy to think that these are study abroad experiences since most frequently students do not venture beyond their comfort zone, continue to speak English throughout the entire stay abroad, and seldom learn the foreign language beyond the very basics. Universities should not expand their participation in study abroad with programs of this nature. Language departments and centers for international study should work to discourage this proliferation and to insist on the need to focus on the language and culture of the abroad country. One of the major achievements of study abroad, besides language proficiency, is in heightening cultural sensitivity. The proliferation of abroad programs in English does not help alleviate ethnocentric fears envisioning the other culture as threatening. It does not contribute either to the self-actualization that study abroad represents (Kempf, 1995) as it maintains students in a sort of ghetto in which English as the language of instruction blocks all possibilities of getting to know the “other” culture. From all counts, homestay seems to be the most effective way to heighten cultural sensitivity as the student remains in close, ongoing contact with a family sharing meals and everyday life. Also implemented in some study abroad programs are exchanges with local native students for purposes of practicing the language and learning about the culture. As American students meet with people their own age who are also learning a language, they exchange views that go beyond linguistic problems to include customs, likes and dislikes, political and religious views, etc. Internships and service learning opportunities place students in real life settings where they have to interact with a variety of people, attitudes, and circumstances in ways that no textbook explanation about cultural differences may duplicate. Including native students in the activities of the group, such as trips and social gatherings, could also be an effective way to ensure that students use the target language and that the group keeps focused on the culture of the host country rather than falling back on topics related to “back home.”

### ***Intensive/Immersion Programs***

Language teachers are often frustrated to see how quickly students forget grammar rules and vocabulary from one day to the next, while for cultural learning, the traditional 50 minute lesson three or four times a week affords a very limited and somewhat artificial exposure to the richness of the countries under study. Because of the intensity and overall level of exposure, the immersion setting provides the right environment to learn better and more quickly. Intensive immersion summer programs, which may take place in a country under study or on campus

where students and faculty members pledge to speak the language exclusively during the eight or more hours of daily instruction and activities, allow students to be engulfed in the language and culture under study and in a sense approximate the experience of longer study abroad sojourns. From quite humble beginnings in enrollment numbers, the immersion summer programs in Spanish in Cuernavaca, Mexico or on campus and Italian in Venice, Italy in my Department have grown over the years. Their success is due to their positive results: students come away with a more solid preparation in the language and knowledge of the culture. Above all, the immersion approach infuses learning with enthusiasm as students see their progress. Grammatical rules become useful tools to communicate rather than material to be memorized without an obvious link with a “real” context. Through immersion, students experience the direct application of material in context and observe their increasing ability to operate in two cultures and languages as they are, as the MLA report notes, “trained to reflect on the world and themselves through the lens of another language and culture” (The Goal: Translingual and Transcultural Competence, para. 1). While in the conventional classroom setting it is hard for the teacher to recreate a real-life situation in which to apply the theory and to reveal the meaning and significance of the language and culture, the immersion setting envelops students in the overall linguistic and cultural field, thus bringing forth its relevance and validity for communication and as ways of thinking and feeling.

Since immersion programs grant a high number of credit hours, they tend to be expensive, which may be a deterrent for some students. Students are also concerned about the impact the grade for this program may have on their GPA because of the many hours involved. University Administrations should facilitate the participation in these programs by compensating the high number of credit hours involved with adjusted tuition cost. As for grades and their impact, immersion almost guarantees against failure as students are fully involved with the learning process and in very close contact with their teachers. The all-enveloping language and cultural atmosphere of the program translates into a high potential for a successful outcome.

***Languages across the Curriculum (LAC)***

Mainly taught as an add-on component to a “main” course, Languages across the Curriculum (LAC) was adopted as a way to promote the learning of foreign languages and cultures across campus, as interdisciplinary collaboration, and for the internationalization of the curriculum. The add-on LAC component, the most commonly applied model of this teaching initiative, involves close cooperation among faculty from different disciplines, the use of a language other than English in any area of the curriculum, and the discussion and exposure to authentic documents (magazine articles, documentaries, films, essays...) related to the topic of the “main” course. LAC is certainly one of the most effective ways to achieve translingual and transcultural competence across campus. Although LAC has achieved some excellent results in my campus, they have been sporadic for a number of reasons. To promote LAC across campus requires time as it involves meetings with individual prospective faculty and with department chairs to explain the nature of the program and ways it could be incorporated in current departmental offerings. In actuality, however, the LAC Committee Chair is expected to carry out these duties as an overload. LAC also requires strong and well-defined support from the higher administration and from the various academic units, particularly from language departments. Since this is not fully the case at the institution under consideration, the LAC individual administrator’s effort to promote LAC is not always successful.

Administrative support should also translate in workable compensation for LAC instructors. Presently, a LAC component is normally taught as a 1.5h overload. Only after

accumulating three LAC components, will the person receive one course reduction. Since the teaching of LAC components is not necessarily consecutive, the course reduction may be long in coming, a fact that discourages people from taking on the LAC overload. Furthermore, administrative support should involve a clearly stated endorsement of LAC across campus. Departments should be encouraged to participate even to the point of insuring that there is at least one LAC offering in their curriculum. This will surely result in some resistance as departments tend to be territorial about their offerings and suspicious of interdisciplinary collaborations. Opposition to LAC involves arguments about the integrity of academic standards, as some fear that disciplines may become diluted when mixed; about departmental autonomy and control; and about the lack of faculty resources, time to develop new collaborations, and compensation money. Furthermore, LAC needs to be recognized academically. Presently, no department, including Romance Languages, counts LAC components towards the major or minor. This results in LAC being considered as an attractive but non-essential option. For LAC to become viable in the manner suggested by the MLA report, the following are needed:

- Official support from the higher Administration in the form of a LAC committee whose members would be elected by the faculty across campus. This body would be charged with reviewing LAC proposals, promoting LAC, and supervising its implementation. LAC should achieve a standing on campus similar to initiatives like entrepreneurship, ethnic studies, women's studies, etc.
- More agile compensation for the teaching of LAC components. Some possible models could involve the following: 1. a LAC instructor could be assigned two LAC 1.5h courses in the same semester to count as one course; 2. two 1.5h courses, one being LAC, would count as one course; or 3. the instructor could receive financial compensation for an LAC teaching overload.
- Language departments should give serious consideration to the inclusion of LAC in their major/minor by way of carefully developed LAC content to accompany specific courses across campus. Only when language departments officially value LAC will this initiative be given the serious consideration it deserves by other academic units.

Kempf (1995) provides a good example for LAC in the Bard College model. Each semester, foreign language faculty at Bard identify the courses in the semester offerings which lend themselves to a LAC component or language tutorial, as Bard calls these courses. Afterwards, the course and LAC/tutorial instructors convene to discuss their collaboration and design a reading list. Following these initial exchanges, both units maintain an independent schedule although they both contribute to the same educational goal. LAC would certainly address the problems identified by Scullion (2005), namely, the insularity of our discipline due mainly to teaching in a foreign language and the skill-type reputation our departments have versus the more theoretical content of others such as English. It is thus surprising that among the various solutions Scullion explores to these problems, LAC is not one of them.

#### ***Translation/Interpretation and Languages for Business and the Professions***

Many departments across the country have adopted programs focused on non-literary areas in response to student demand for courses with more practical applications than the traditional literature offerings. The potential of these non-traditional programs for developing transcultural and translingual competence is identified in the MLA report. However, these offerings tend to split faculty into two camps, each opposing or defending them for the same reason -- their practical application -- which those on the opposing side perceive as a threat to the

integrity of humanities. One way to bridge the distance between these two groups is by insuring that these programs carry a strong humanities component in the form of content related to the culture and literature of the countries involved. Translation/interpretation, in turn, requires a well equipped and well-supported language laboratory and good connections with local agencies where students may work as interns or volunteers. Not only do community relations improve with these programs, but campus relations as well. Academic units across campus need interpreters and translators at one time or another. The University museum may need captions in two languages, film studies may work with subtitles in conjunction with translation students, or foreign visitors may be escorted by students in the interpretation program.

The programs in Language for Business and the Professions present a special challenge as the teacher is usually someone whose main degree is not in business or other professional endeavor, but in the humanities. It is then imperative for teaching faculty in this area to initiate contact with the business, law and medical and pre-med schools and programs. This collaboration may take the form of LAC components, guest lectures with simultaneous interpretation if the lecturer does not speak the language, and any other way the teacher may devise to insure that the course content in the business or professional portion is up-to-date. Community professionals should be invited to come to class, particularly if they belong to the culture involved in the course. These offerings may confront resistance from science departments involved in the pre-med program and from the business departments, for these units tend to perceive business and professional courses in language departments as courses focused mainly on teaching the vocabulary, language, and the culture of the foreign country and less on teaching content on business or any other profession. It is ironic that while medical, business and law schools recognize the need for their students to learn foreign languages, especially Spanish, so very little is done in the way of collaborations at the undergraduate level when that need could be integrated with the rest of the curriculum and addressed in a more timely fashion. Likewise, graduate programs in language and literature should revisit their offerings, for while demand calls for fields other than literature, PhD granting programs continue with the traditional literature degree. As with LAC, it is imperative for higher Administration to reflect world changes by promoting a global perspective that surpasses national borders and curricular offerings where English is the predominant language.

### **Other Integrative Initiatives**

#### ***Film studies***

Film is a well-recognized teaching tool as it portrays the values and cultural identity of a particular country. Its visual nature is closer to the culture of today's student and the heavy visual nature of the media to which they are exposed. Film courses provide a valuable complementary curriculum and should be taught by faculty with specific preparation in the field. They tend to attract students who are not particularly interested in literary studies but from these courses learn about foreign films and filmmaking and the culture that they portray. The addition of these courses also facilitates collaborations with other departments through the film studies major or minor. Courses with a transatlantic focus are another way to accomplish transcultural competence as they show how cultures surpass frontiers and connect at their roots.

#### ***Service learning***

Service learning is a recent addition to the departmental offerings as a component attached to some courses. The identity of this program is still somewhat vague on the campus under consideration as there are still questions about the academic basis of service learning components. To ensure that these components perform academically, several extra responsibilities fall on the shoulders of the faculty member teaching the core course. By adding a service learning component, the teaching faculty is responsible for overseeing the student's work and experience in service. This in itself adds time and work to the faculty member's existing teaching load, extra responsibilities which are not compensated financially or otherwise. Furthermore, with the exception of Spanish for which community service learning possibilities are multiple, faculty in other language programs will need to invest a great deal of time and effort to identify service learning sites and develop the necessary community sites for this teaching approach.

Concerns regarding the academic value of service learning may be assuaged by adopting the approach Grobman (2005) suggests, that is, by fusing service learning with literature. Grobman believes that service learning and literary texts may work reciprocally to "heighten (and in some cases introduce) awareness of complexities of race, gender, and class as they intersect in people's lives – in literature and in the real world" (p. 133). Although Grobman recognizes that in the service learning-literature pairing, literature runs the risk of losing its literary, artistic power, and that literary texts do not provide solutions for social problems, nevertheless "[b]y joining community service with classroom theorizing our students enlarge their vision of the society they *want* to live in" (p. 137).

### **Closing Remarks**

The various initiatives discussed in this essay aim at placing language study in a field of interrelating factors in response to the "broad, intellectually driven approach to teaching language and culture in higher education" (Background section, para. 1) that the MLA report supports. As immigration and globalization in our world question the rigidity of boundaries, and as the political climate demands better communication, language programs need to reorganize their curriculum offerings, staffing practices and departmental governance to adjust to the "inter-" and "trans-disciplinary" characteristic of today's world. If, as Berman (1994) notes, the focus has been on communicative skills on one hand, and the analysis of canonical texts, on the other, it's time to "envision a strategy designed to elicit active producers who engage in a culture rather than merely receive it" (p. 10). This "cultural literacy" will insure "the ability of the student to operate effectively in a different cultural setting" (Berman, 1994, p. 10). The challenge for language departments is to review their administrative structures, curriculum, and staffing profile to achieve what Zipser (1992) defines as "a full-service foreign language department" (p. 28), one that goes beyond the self-contained traditional nature of foreign language programs to reach out to the academic community. Although political pressure calls for competency in the foreign language, among the various critical essays consulted for this paper there is a high consensus about the need to question the emphasis on linguistic competency at the expense of content knowledge and cultural literacy. Learning a foreign language is no longer limited to acquiring certain linguistic skills but rather to achieving what Halliday (1989) calls "a social semiotic," that is, "language as one among a number of systems of meaning that, taken all together, constitute human culture" (p. 4). Kramsch (1993b) explains such a semiotic as involving three main goals of foreign language education: communicative competence, cultural

knowledge, and cognitive growth. There is a “new definition of language” where traditional margins are expanding to include the diversity of linguistic content plus the cultural and artistic (Jarvis cited in Kramersch, 1989, p. 4). Language is “a holistic network of various signs in the environment, including gestures, silences, body postures, graphic and other visual and acoustic symbols which shape a context of meaning and invite us to respond to it” (Kramersch, 2002, p. 5).

Just as Mach (1838-1916) paved the way for understanding the “viscous” nature of our relativistic world with his view of the functional relations of elements, language can no longer be taught as independent structures only but as a set of functions. Haliday & Hasan (1989) speak of a “functional grammar” and Kramersch (1989) of “discourse” as “the expression, interpretation and exchange of intended meanings” (p. 5), a notion proposed to bridge the many splits still existing in our profession between language and literature, tenured and tenure-track and non tenure-track faculty, language for pragmatic purposes and language for aesthetic purposes. Teaching another language and culture not only involves the memorization and recognition of certain features but requires students to evaluate these facts critically and put them in relation to their own experience (Kramersch, 1993b).

This semiotic approach to our discipline involves transcending the learner’s traditional receptive, passive attitude toward his/her active participation in the production of the language and culture. The high level of reciprocity that results from this approach between learner and material should facilitate the reaching out to other disciplines. The convergence of the various educational ingredients – literature, culture, language – should also transcend/trespass disciplinary borders through a trans-disciplinary and international approach. Just as the linear world of independent units in Newton was replaced by the interconnectedness of Einstein’s relativity, teaching is no longer carried out at the word or sentence level but in a field of interrelated skills. This “intercultural communication” (Kramersch, 1989, p. 8) is a daunting but exciting enterprise requiring for us and our field to view the learning experience as incorporating insights from other disciplines. Byrnes (2002) calls for a reciprocal exchange between specialists in language and literary cultural studies, finding support for her project in the Martin’s (2000) notion of “transdisciplinarity” and the “functional approach” by Haliday & Hasan (1989). The contextual should supersede the traditional formalistic approach. As Martin (2000) points out, an interdisciplinary approach may not be enough since, by dividing up a topic so that it can be approached by different theories, dialogue is not necessarily promoted. Instead, Martin (2000) calls for transdisciplinarity, that is, moving “beyond difference towards overlapping and intruding expertise” (p. 121). This cross-pollination would bring a very much needed flexibility in discipline boundaries and overcome our own insularity. This call is not only one needed to survive, but, as Phillips (2003) states, is a necessary one to thrive.

In the case study here examined, the revisions and additions took place at the time of critically high Spanish enrollments and continue to serve well for the present situation. Some obstacles remain, specifically those concerning faculty governance and the notion of a functional inter/trans-disciplinarity. The existing split in faculty ranks, particularly in the Spanish program, affects governance and curriculum, while curricular innovations still face opposition from those concerned about maintaining the purity of literary studies. The “centripetal formalist discourse” in linguistics that Martin (2000) finds untenable under “the marketing pressures of economic rationalism” (p. 122) is applicable to a still hegemonic position of literature in our programs. As for inter/trans-disciplinary projects, field autonomy still presents obstacles which the existing university organization, of clearly demarcated departments, does not help. Just as the dramatic increase in Spanish enrollment jolted this department with productive results in its overall

structure, the present situation should be seen as an opportunity to spur a more cooperative, dialogic structure.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> The term “transdisciplinarity” comes from Martin (2000) who discusses it in the context of applied vs. theoretical linguistics.

<sup>2</sup> The report, “Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World,” makes a number of recommendations regarding reform of curriculum and teaching in the field of foreign language studies and departmental governance. Among curricular recommendations, the report calls for an end to the two-tiered system splitting instruction between language at the lower-level and literature at the upper-level; to design a curriculum that prepares students for translingual and transcultural competence; and, to develop a major that integrates different educational areas (cultural, historical, geographic, artistic). In governance, the report calls for an end of the two-tiered system between non-tenure and tenured faculty.

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