1 June 2015

TO: Gilles Bousquet, Chair, Department of French and Italian

FROM: John Karl Scholz, Dean

RE: Completion of L&S Review of French and Italian Programs:

- French (BA, BS)
- Italian (BA, BS)
- Master of Arts – French
- Master of Arts – Italian
- Doctor of Philosophy – Italian
- Doctor of Philosophy – Italian
- Not included: Undergraduate Certificate in French (implemented Fall 2014)

On March 3 and April 7, 2015, the L&S Academic Planning Council considered the materials submitted in fulfillment of the mandated review of the academic programs offered in the Department of French and Italian. These materials included the department’s self-study, the review committee report, and comments offered by the department to correct errors of fact in the report.

As you and your colleagues are well aware, humanities departments are grappling with falling enrollments and diminishing resources. These challenges, and the adoption of a new resource allocation model, make it all the more important for departments and programs to use the process of program review to engage in candid consideration of strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. Careful evaluation can help us all respond strategically and innovatively to concerns identified in the review process. This year, the L&S Academic Planning Council has engaged in a dozen program reviews, and still more discussions of changes arising from thoughtful, substantive review. Council members note that exemplary self-studies avoid focusing only on strengths and shying away from challenges: instead, they provide data, identify where departments fall short, and weigh the merits of various routes toward remediation or improvement. The council greatly appreciates studies that consider seriously the careful measurement of student learning outcomes, discussing the formal and systematic assessment of student achievement of outcomes and efforts to reevaluate and realign curriculum in response to data obtained about student learning.
I mention this because the APC found these virtues lacking in the French and Italian self-study. Certainly, the self-study provided a wealth of information about the department and program strengths; however, it did not, in the council’s collective opinion, reflect the sort of sober and critical introspection the APC expects to see in program review. This is particularly disappointing since the department was granted multiple extensions and ultimately submitted the self-study a full year later than the original deadline.

Certainly, there is much to praise about the academic programs in French and Italian. The department is building interest in the undergraduate majors by developing certificate programs to bring new students to the department, it is fielding a strong and innovative professional master’s program, and it is creating new courses designed to appeal to broader audiences outside the department. Nevertheless, there are key aspects of the administration of academic programs requiring improvement.

Notably, the area of assessment is one the council found challenging to understand, in part because there appears to be no current assessment plan to convey clearly the learning outcomes for each program, as well as how and when those outcomes are systematically measured. The self-study lacked concrete information about student learning, and the focus on only positive aspects of programs suggests there has been little reflection on how programs will be affected by a shrinking faculty and reduced enrollments. The self-study did include extensive description of how traditional academic milestones and work normally associated with evaluation of individual students (exams, papers) were used in the past to understand and improve the program when the undergraduate curriculum was revised nearly ten years ago; however, there appears to be no current work under way to evaluate learning across all programs. Despite detailed discussion of individual student evaluation at the graduate milestones, the APC could not see how guidance to individual students or improvements to individual courses is approached from a broader, more program-wide perspective.

The council agrees with the review committee’s recommendation that the department must develop a systematic assessment strategy to aid in long-term planning for all of its programs. While the review committee recommends the use of surveys, APC members note that such indirect measures (particularly when they focus on student satisfaction) are not sufficient for understanding student learning in academic programs.

Efforts to improve assessment planning and reporting on campus are already underway, and rather than make a recommendation calling for an additional layer of reporting, the council recommends that the department:

1. Comply with the Provost and Graduate School mandated reporting of learning outcomes via the online tool for reporting learning goals (http://provost.wisc.edu/assessment/). These learning outcomes are due on July 1, 2015.
2. In the coming year, prepare a complete assessment plan, using the “template” for assessment plans available on the above website. The next stage of the campus project concerning assessment will be to file updated assessment plans, and you and your colleagues should create an assessment plan and process conforming to the template. The complete assessment
plan, with learning outcomes articulated for all FRIT programs at all levels, and with both direct and indirect measures for evaluating them, will be due July 1, 2016.

To repeat myself, there are a lot of good, exciting things happening in FRIT. The report does a nice job highlighting these, informing the APC and me. The College needs all units, however, to do the very difficult work to assess the structure of their current undergraduate and graduate programs, do the introspection necessary to identify shortcomings as well as strengths, and then grapple with ways to create outstanding student experiences by doing less of some things in order to preserve true quality in others. The FRIT review fell short of this aspiration.

Finally, as you know, the review committee also made a number of recommendations concerning the addition of new resources for the department. The APC and I recognize that the lengthy program review process means these recommendations were likely formulated before the depth of current budget difficulties became apparent. Yet the recommendations are nevertheless jarring, given the broad, well-known financial challenges facing higher education.

After discussion, APC members approved a motion to consider the review complete. They directed Associate Dean Zaeske and Assistant Dean Klein to follow up with you (on my behalf) concerning the required assessment reporting. They of course are also available as the Department continues to grapple with fiscal realities facing the University and College and its implications for FRIT. We collectively want the best for the Department, given the constraints we face.

xc:

Elaine M. Klein, Assistant Dean for Academic Planning, L&S
Daniel Kleinman, Associate Dean, Graduate School
Jocelyn Milner, Director of Academic Planning and Institutional Research
Susan Zaeske, Associate Dean for the Humanities, L&S
INTRODUCTION

We have drafted this evaluation of the degree programs of the Department of French and Italian at the request of the Dean’s office in the College of Letters & Science. The report reviews French and Italian’s 2014 Self-Study Report, evaluates the degree programs’ strengths and weaknesses, identifies particular challenges and opportunities in preparing for the future of the programs, offers recommendations to the department for specific actions, and provides counsel to the Dean and the Academic Planning Council.

In the course of our evaluation, we reviewed materials prepared and provided by the department. We also conducted extensive in-person interviews, meeting with the department chair, the chair of undergraduate advisors, the co-chair of fellowships and admissions, the executive director of the Professional French Masters Program, the associate chairs of French and Italian, a panel of undergraduate students, a panel of graduate students, the chair of course chairs, the associate course chair for Italian, a former department chair, the chair of undergraduate advising, the director of French Graduate Studies, the Academic Department Supervisor, the department’s administrator, and several other faculty and staff who attended an open meeting for interested parties.

Our overall assessment of the department’s programs is quite positive. Despite declining enrollments, the department serves a large number of undergraduates through language and literature training, and maintains an excellent placement record for its strong cohorts of graduate students. The department is also responding to declining enrollments in innovative ways, which our report details below. Yet the department also faces significant challenges. This report outlines these challenges, particularly concerning faculty lines, divisions within the department, and the difficulties of applying teaching metrics to language instruction, which by definition requires small course sizes.

Undergraduate programs

The undergraduate majors in French and Italian have witnessed declining enrollment in recent years. This is partly a reflection of enrollment declines in the humanities more broadly, and partly due to a trend toward enrollment in less commonly taught or strategic languages such as Chinese and Arabic. Yet the undergraduates surveyed in the course of this review indicated a strong identification with the department and a broad satisfaction with the major. They
reported high satisfaction with class sizes and instruction by both TAs and faculty in the department, as well as high satisfaction with advising in the major.

The undergraduate major in French currently enrolls some 100 students, which is down from a high of 200 in recent years. Yet the number of majors is only one reflection of the teaching role of the department. Many students take courses in the department through the intermediate level in order to satisfy the L&S language requirement without declaring the major.

There has been a nationwide decrease in undergraduate enrollments in French, and the department’s faculty are engaged with colleagues at peer institutions to develop appropriate strategies to increase both enrollments and major declarations. One faculty member cited Georgetown’s German program as a model, where a genre-based curriculum integrates literature and language from the first through the fourth years. Other strategies to draw students to the program include the development of new courses that teach French in translation and the launching of an undergraduate certificate in French. A major asset of the department is the French House with its 26 residents, which is a center for undergraduate community-building that fosters productive interaction and peer learning among French majors as well as among students, faculty, and visitors in French.

Undergraduate students in French indicated that they are aware of the usefulness of French as a global language. They also noted that the department is good at promoting study abroad, but they also lamented the scarcity of financial resources for study abroad, as well as the difficulty of study abroad for double-majors (and in particular, those in the sciences). They also spoke of a desire for more opportunities for career development within the major.

The major in Italian has fewer enrolled students (with roughly 25 declared majors), and proportionally fewer resources. Whereas French has an academic staff member who conducts advising, in Italian the faculty conduct the bulk of advising, which leads to a higher service burden for Italian faculty. Faculty in Italian also spend more time in language instruction than their colleagues in French, exacerbating a divide in the responsibilities on each side of the department. Italian majors have access to the Piazza Italia, a residential learning community that mirrors the function of the French House, but on a much smaller scale, with only four resident students.

In both the French and Italian cohorts, several instructors signaled a division between the teaching of language and of literature as a potential problem in the department, with (mostly) TAs and academic staff engaged in language instruction, and (mostly) faculty engaged in literature instruction. One faculty member indicated that this structure might dissuade some students from continuing from language to literature courses. On the French side, students might be lost to the major given the second-year sequence, where an engaging course (203) is followed by a more rigorous one (204); when students experience that disconnect, they may be reluctant to stay in the department. Some also signaled that there is not enough
communication between language and literature instructors in terms of expectations of the literature faculty about language preparation for more advanced courses.

The department has developed important strategies for boosting undergraduate enrollment. Offering more courses in translation is one measure the department is considering. This would not only increase enrollment in advanced courses, but also bring the department into parity with its peers nationally, where such courses are the norm. Another strategy is the development of an undergraduate certificate in French, which promises to draw students from a range of disciplines who do not have sufficient time to commit to the major. Italian is also discussing a certificate program. One faculty member in Italian suggested that a revision of the curriculum so that the catalogue and course titles better reflect the nature of course offerings may also well increase enrollments.

Finally, the interviews indicated that assessment of undergraduate learning is somewhat sporadic in the department. The department weighs teaching evaluations heavily in the consideration of promotion and tenure cases, but there is little in the way of routine or exit surveys to determine the outcome of what is clearly a strong program. The committee urges the department to develop a systematic assessment strategy to aid in long-term planning for the undergraduate majors in French and Italian.

**Professional French Masters Program**

The Professional French Masters Program (PFMP) is a highlight of the department’s offerings. It serves as a model for Educational Innovation programs as a highly successful academic degree program as well as a source of revenue for the department and the university. Now fifteen years old, it has been self-funding since its third year of operation. It is a small program with an outsized impact on the campus, and offers an important model.

The program admits eight to twelve students per year, who take core courses together and then take a number of credits outside the department. Students take 12 credits in Madison in the fall, and then take 12 further credits in spring, usually in the course of an internship in the field in the Francophone world. The entire degree takes 1.5 to 2 years to complete, and is interdisciplinary in nature. Students enter the program intending to study French in addition to another field: business, law, science, education, and health are critical examples. They therefore take courses in other campus units as well as the Department of French and Italian.

This program offers a critical service, as most of the department’s undergraduate majors are in a similar sort of stream: they are majors in French and another discipline, with the intention of using their language skills toward a pragmatic end. The program also has important assessment measures in place. There is an external advisory board of alumni who consult regularly with the program through an
annual symposium that brings them back to campus. There is also a very high response rate to surveys of alumni through the listserv. The program has also issued two edited volumes of essays by alumni, demonstrating that there is an important space for work in French that is not purely academic.

We have only praise to offer to this program, which has demonstrated that a small, high-level academic program can achieve excellence if allowed the flexibility to develop in an entrepreneurial fashion.

**Graduate programs**

Graduate degree programs include the Professional French Masters Program, as well as the MA and PhD in both French and Italian. Because of its distinct nature, we treat the PFMP separately from the other programs (see above). Given that the vast majority of students in the MA and PhD programs are on a doctoral track, we do not distinguish between them, but instead consider these programs as a whole in terms of admission, administration of the degrees, financial aid, professional development, and job placement.

There are typically 30-40 students enrolled in French graduate programs and 20-25 enrolled in Italian. Graduate students are drawn to both French and Italian because of the strong reputation of the programs. Many faculty and students indicated that Wisconsin competes in both language programs with institutions that have far more resources at their disposal, including Ivy League universities as well as major public institutions such as Berkeley and UCLA. As a recruitment measure, the department used to bring prospective students to the GAFIS (Graduate Association of French and Italian Students) symposium, an annual conference curated by the department’s students, but financial difficulties have made this impossible in recent years.

GAFIS is an important institution for the graduate students. In addition to the annual symposium, it is one of the few venues that brings students on each side of the department into contact with one another, bridging the gap between French and Italian. The organization includes representatives from each side of the department, including some who attend department meetings, others who coordinate professional development activities, and others who serve on department committees.

Financial aid comes primarily in the form of teaching assistantships. The department offers four years of support to students entering without the MA, and three years of support to those who enter with the MA. Yet average time to degree is eight years. Although the department would like to offer more support, its hands are tied financially. Due to resource constraints, these are typically at the 33% level, which is a poor reflection of the time commitment such appointments require. TAs in French and Italian are not merely discussion leaders and graders: they are full-fledged language instructors who are responsible for the teaching, assessment, and administration of entire courses. Indeed, they are responsible for the vast majority
of credit-hours taken by non-majors within the department, with gross undercompensation.

The department engages in a variety of formal and informal professional development activities, including workshops on preparing a CV and teaching statement, mock interviews, practice job talks, and publication workshops. The department is planning a workshop on employment outside the academy.

Job placement has been a strong suit in the department, with nearly all students finding employment at least in visiting assistant professor positions if not better. A critical reason for the department’s high placement record in both French and Italian is that the students undergo a rugged apprenticeship. The department prides itself on, and is widely admired for, its broad historical and geographical coverage of literary and cultural traditions. The pedagogical training of graduate students is strong, and the students have historically had extensive coverage in their education, so that they have been employable primarily as generalists in small teaching colleges. Yet this aspect of the department’s training program is now under threat due to a loss of positions. With several retirements and other departures, there are key areas of the programs in both French and Italian that remain uncovered, leading to an erosion of the graduate programs’ major strength in broad historical coverage. Of particular note are the gaps in medieval French, Francophonie, and Italian linguistics. The declining number of senior faculty in the department also creates a workload imbalance: junior faculty do not typically direct dissertations, so the few remaining senior faculty—and in particular, those who attract large numbers of students—have an outsized workload compared to others. We address these concerns more extensively in our closing comments and summary of recommendations.

The department underwent a rough period for the past two years due to the departure of a long-term graduate coordinator. Filling this position is a promising development that will likely improve the climate for graduate students in the department. That said, there remain significant challenges at the levels of financial aid and job placement.

**General remarks and summary of recommendations**

A critical challenge facing the department—which affects each of the areas above but does not fit neatly into any of these categories alone—is the loss of faculty lines. We are particularly dismayed to hear of the loss of a French medievalist. This position had filled a vacancy left by the retirement of Keith Busby, and was funded through a Mellon line. Indeed, the Mellon committee saw support for a French medievalist as crucial. It is therefore surprising, and seemingly contrary to the spirit of the L&S Mellon grant committee’s recommendations, to learn that the College has refused to authorize a new search for this position after the departure of a recent hire.
We were also disturbed to hear of an apparent misunderstanding between the College and the department regarding the funding of CCF salary adjustments. It is our understanding that the department had requested the liquidation of one faculty line in a pending retirement to cover the costs of CCF adjustments. Yet the College has apparently claimed two lines from the department in return for the adjustments, and indicates that the department is still in debt to the College. While revenues from the PFMP have covered some of this debt, this is an unsustainable solution. We therefore encourage the College and the department to engage in a conversation that might rectify this misunderstanding.

The loss of these lines—as well as pending losses in another crucial area, Francophonie—place the graduate programs in serious danger. Graduate students cited the broad intellectual coverage provided by the department as well as its high job placement rate as critical factors that brought them to Wisconsin. That high placement rate is directly linked to the department’s ability to provide its students with a broad historical foundation in both French and Italian. These losses will jeopardize the department’s ability to claim the formation of strong generalists.

We therefore offer the following summary of recommendations:

1. We urge the College to marshal the resources to allow the department to fill at least one of these two vacancies, and to provide support for a line in Francophonie in the event of a future departure or retirement. The restoration of Mellon funding for a medievalist represents one possibility; shared lines with other departments or campus units (History, Philosophy, GWS, Linguistics, International Studies) could provide another source of support.

2. We also urge the College to work with the Graduate School to provide increased support for graduate student instructors in the department. Appointments at the 33% level are a poor reflection of the tireless labor these students pour into the teaching of significant numbers of undergraduates.

3. We think it is important for the department to engage in a sustained conversation about potential divides between the teaching of language and the teaching of literature at the undergraduate level. While many of the instructors who work primarily with language training saw a significant rift between these two endeavors, the senior faculty who engage primarily in literature teaching seemed unaware of this tension.

4. The department must also engage in dialogue about bringing together faculty and students in French and Italian. Broad curricular reform represents an important means of increasing undergraduate enrollments, but is difficult to achieve in the current structure.

5. We encourage the department to undertake regular and systematic assessment of all its programs, for example through annual exit surveys of graduating students and regular surveys of undergraduates enrolled in department courses.
6. In the event of the rollout of a new activities-based budget, we urge the College to devise appropriate teaching metrics for language departments, which require small class sizes by definition.

7. The Professional French Masters Program appears to be an important model for department-level entrepreneurship and innovation. While not translatable to every department in the College, it has demonstrated remarkable success, and we urge the College to work closely with the EI office to tout this program as a model for others to follow as they develop their own professional masters programs.