

**External Review Narrative Report for the Department of Modern and Classical Languages  
University of Tennessee-Chattanooga  
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**Part 1 – Learning Outcomes**

Program Overview

The Department of Modern and Classical Languages (MCLL) at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga compares favorably with peer institutions of similar size and mission in the region. MCLL faculty have designed engaging, relevant programs that attract motivated and high performing students. Through its focus on established high-impact practices (e.g., study abroad, undergraduate research, internships) and innovative pedagogy, MCLL offers students a menu of degree programs that prepare them for successful engagement with an increasingly global and multilingual society. Students can choose from a variety of study abroad programs carefully designed to help them achieve program learning outcomes – in the case of French and Spanish, students’ participation in study abroad is crucial in moving towards the goal of advanced-level proficiency. Moreover, MCLL stands out in its assessment practices, which evaluate student progress towards learning outcomes throughout the curriculum.

Program and Learning Outcomes

MCLL clearly identifies its mission, vision, and goals. Both grounded in the tradition of the liberal arts and appropriate to contemporary workforce and societal needs, MCLL’s mission strikes an excellent balance between the development of academic skills and the objective of forging connections to the community, conceived both locally and globally.

With their focus on rebuilding enrollments following the challenges brought on by Covid, MCLL’s goals are strategically sound. What is more, several developments position MCLL to attain these goals. First, the return of study abroad programming should boost recruitment, since these programs are essential vehicles for attracting students to the minor or major. In addition, new culturally-based and interdisciplinary concentrations in Classics and Latin American Studies are already showing promise and should grow the overall number of majors. Finally, the potential for languages to have a place in the redesigned general education curriculum could open up an array of new opportunities to connect with students from fields without a language requirement.

MCLL has invested well in faculty development by supporting conference travel and attendance at the annual meeting of the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), one of the main national professional organizations for the teaching of languages other than English. Both of these investments directly support program learning outcomes – critical thinking and the presentation of research, and proficiency benchmarks (that derive from ACTFL standards). MCLL may want to consider some targeted support for faculty teaching (or planning

to teach) courses on language for specific purposes (translation, business or medical applications etc.). Professional organizations such as the Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) offer excellent development opportunities. MCLL may also want to consider supporting departmental leaders who wish to participate in the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (ADFL) Summer Seminars, which provide good opportunities to network and problem-solve with colleagues from institutions across the country.

The department does not currently make extensive use of survey data from students, alumni, or employers, but I was pleased to see in their self-review that they are currently working to develop a list of alumni contacts, the essential first step in this process.

MCLL's assessment regime is well conceived and based on the collection of data from two sources: an externally administered proficiency exam (for French and Spanish) and student research projects completed during coursework (all programs).

## **Part 2 – Curriculum**

MCLL's curriculum is well suited to the needs and interests of twenty-first century language students. Graduates from their programs are able to deploy their language skills in professional or advanced academic settings, work in cross-cultural teams, and write and research effectively. These are all essential skills in an increasingly diverse and multilingual U.S. society.

The department regularly reviews its curriculum and during this cycle has introduced several important innovations. In order to better align itself to student interest, the classics major has shifted from a philologically based curriculum to one that focuses on cultural study and writing/research skills. Programs in French and Spanish have introduced a new conversation class through the Talk Abroad platform, and the department has begun its new program in Latin American Studies. I do not recommend that the department further update its curriculum at this time, since not enough time has passed for them to adequately assess operational outcomes (minors and majors graduated) for the new and/or redesigned programs. French and Spanish should see increased enrollment thanks to the return of their study abroad programs.

MCLL values and nurtures critical thinking, communication, research skills, and technology-related skills. Students regularly complete research projects in upper-level courses and MCLL curricula focus on critical thinking and communication from the beginning to advanced levels. Students must develop skills with specific technologies (Microsoft Word, Powerpoint etc.) in order to thrive in these programs, and because of the international nature of all MCLL degrees they have opportunities to explore and adapt to digital platforms and resources in global contexts. MCLL's redesigned language lab greatly facilitates this process. The aforementioned Talk Abroad initiative allows students to use a video platform to practice their language skills and deepen their cultural knowledge with peers from across the world.

## **Part 3 – Student experience**

MCLL offers a truly impressive menu of experiential learning opportunities and high-impact practices. During my visit I learned about five distinct study abroad experiences, all of which let students apply their skills and knowledge in experiential settings. Moreover, French and Spanish students have internship opportunities in the community, and all MCLL majors work on research projects that could be (and often have been) presented in university, regional, or national settings. MCLL students engage with diversity on a daily basis, in both small and large ways. The simple fact that they have chosen to become proficient in another language means that they must adapt to a new set of cultural and linguistic codes, to approach individuals from societal milieus different from their own on those individuals' terms. That is already a strong signal of cultural respect and meaningful engagement with diversity. In the case of the Classics majors, but this also applies to French, Spanish, and Latin American Studies, historical and geographical difference are tools students use to better understand their own cultural identity. This is visible from general education courses to 4000-level classes. Moreover, MCLL faculty have carefully developed their curriculum to expose students to a variety of perspectives from the cultures they study. For example, students don't just learn about Roman emperors and nobles, but also everyday life for marginalized (at least from a historiographical point of view) groups. Students in French and Spanish study texts from around the Spanish and French-speaking world, and texts by or about women, non-white authors/filmmakers and individuals from other underrepresented groups.

#### **Part 4 – Faculty**

Faculty credentials are in line with student needs. Most faculty specialize in literary studies, which corresponds to the degrees offered in MCLL. Several faculty also have demonstrated expertise in fields that could be important for future program growth, linguistics and translation especially. Sub-specializations qualify faculty to teach literature from various historical periods, from classical Rome and Greece to Neo-Latin literature in the Classics major, and from the Middle Ages / early modern period to the contemporary world for French, Spanish, and Latin American Studies. Moreover, specializations in French and Spanish ensure geographical diversity, with expertise ranging from formerly colonial regions to France and Spain. Overall, full-time faculty to adjunct ratios are appropriate, although given strong general education enrollments MCLL may want to consider hiring another full-time faculty member for the Classics program, especially if enrolled majors continue to increase.

MCLL boasts a diverse faculty, much more so than UTC overall, where 81% of full-time faculty are white. In MCLL, only 67% of faculty are white, with almost 30% being Hispanic. This could be a tremendous asset for the department as UTC grows into a more diverse campus, particular in terms of its Hispanic student population (6% of the most recent freshmen class, up from just 3-4% several years ago).

MCLL uses student and chair evaluations to consistently improve instruction, learning outcomes, and the overall student experience. Several changes to instructional methods and course assignments in recent years have resulted from a close consideration of evaluations. The current system seems successful, although employer and alumni surveys are not utilized.

MCLL faculty engage in a number of service activities, from the coordination of extracurricular events, to the design and management of study abroad programs, to service on committees. Some faculty also teach upper-level classes as “service courses” to maintain offerings in areas with temporarily low enrollment. While college and university-wide service work has been limited until recently because most tenure-stream faculty were not tenured, the successful tenure applications of three faculty (with a fourth in its final stages this year), means that the faculty can expand its service footprint meaningfully and strategically in the coming years. The organization of extracurricular and co-curricular events is a particular area of strength: the department hosts film events, an evening of poetry recitation, a week devoted to celebrating languages, a Spanish table, and French “pétanque” game, just to name a few. MCLL makes essential contributions to student life and an overall sense of belonging among the students while linking the activities to curricular goals. Links to the community can be found in MCLL’s internship program, which places students in local businesses and schools as part of mutually beneficial partnerships.

In terms of professional development, faculty in MCLL have assembled an impressive record of publication and presentations before scholarly organizations. This productivity, which includes the publication of books, edited volumes, book chapters, and articles, has brought considerable positive recognition to UTC and enhances the mentoring experience available to MCLL majors.

Within their sub-disciplines (French, Spanish, Classics), faculty are involved in reviewing student outcomes, both in terms of progress towards degree and achievement of learning targets. MCLL uses an external measure to assess language proficiency in French and Spanish, and faculty use those results to implement and monitor improvement plans. Now that the ranks of tenured faculty have increased considerably, there should be more opportunities for broader discussion of assessment results and ways to continuously improve outcomes.

### **Parts 5 and 6 - Learning Resources and Support**

MCLL has designed and overseen a useful and engaging learning space in its language lab. Students can use one of the 20 Macintosh computers to conduct research, gather to practice language skills, or check out one of the department’s many films or books. These materials supplement what is available to students through the library to provide an abundant store of learning resources. Budgetary resources seem sufficient, although more resources for study abroad would benefit students. That is the most important area of need for continued and, hopefully, expanded support. I could not identify any opportunities for savings, since the department is already very lean, with just one department head and one administrative support person for two academic departments (MCLL together with Philosophy and Religion).

Although MCLL has seen its number of majors decline during these past two years of covid, there are many reasons to feel optimistic about the next few years. 2022 has seen the return of MCLL’s study abroad programs, a major vehicle for recruitment, and despite the decline in majors the department has not seen a decline in graduates or credit hours, and they count the

fourth highest number of minors in the College of Arts and Sciences. A redesigned Classics major and the new Latin American Studies Major should also attract new majors (indeed, this is already happening in the case of the Classics major).

### **Summary Recommendations**

The Department of Modern and Classical Languages draws its greatest strength from the commitment and dynamism of its faculty and students. The former are highly engaged in their fields of research and bring those experiences into the classroom while also innovating pedagogically. In addition, faculty have responded to the needs of contemporary students by designing a variety of interesting study abroad programs, offering new opportunities for virtual linguistic and cultural exchange, and creating campus experiences that enrich the daily lives of students. Finally, the faculty have devised a rigorous assessment system that offers them an abundant set of data they can use, and have used, to improve student learning. This is an excellent foundation to build on. As for the MCLL students, on the other hand, I had the chance to visit with a group of them during my time at UTC. I was very impressed by what they had to say about their experiences in the classroom, the research projects they have undertaken under the guidance of MCLL faculty, and their post-graduation plans. Among the 12 students I met, law school, public policy, graduate school in their field, teaching English abroad, the Peace Corps, and language advocacy were just a few of ways they were planning to apply what they are learning at UTC.

Of course, the department also faces important challenges. The absence of study abroad programs in 2020 and 2021 meant they were deprived of a central learning experience (and unique recruiting venue) for majors and minors. They have also been affected by national trends showing declines in Humanities majors (down 25% in the past decade) and the reduction of language requirements in liberal arts degrees, including some Humanities programs. This has been visible at UTC, where the number of Humanities majors has decreased and some programs (Communications and Chemistry) have eliminated language requirements. I encourage MCLL to consider how they might connect to students in programs that do not have a language requirement, but who are interested in language study. A place in a redesigned general education curriculum could open up just this sort of opportunity.

- 1) Discuss the possibility of introducing a one-hour capstone course where students may do the following:
  - expand, revise, and present a research project;
  - take the STAMP assessment
  - develop a professional cv and statement of purpose
  - fill out a survey on their experience in the major, both related to program learning outcomes and overall perceptions

One advantage of this capstone course is that it would provide a data point at the end of a student's course of study. In the current system, data is gathered in select 3000 and 4000-level courses. While this has the important advantage of assembling a large and more useable amount of data, it can be difficult to measure a student's trajectory because courses can be taken out of sequence.

- 2) Building on the above recommendation, consider the feasibility of an indirect assessment instrument (e.g., a survey) given to majors in the term before graduation. Such a survey could offer a rich source of data on student perceptions of their learning and overall experience in the program of study. This instrument might also help demonstrate the value of language study for the purpose of advocacy to internal and external offices, since students often speak or write quite eloquently about what they have gained from their program. Such an instrument would complement the robust assessment system currently in place and correspond to best practices in assessment (combination of direct and indirect measures)
- 3) Related to the institution as a whole - Increase study abroad support for MCLL majors. MCLL leadership has already worked hard and effectively to allocate significant resources for this purpose, but additional funding would greatly benefit students. A distinctive feature of MCLL program learning outcomes is that they are based on either proficiency targets (in the case of French and Spanish) or engagement with international peoples and locations (all MCLL programs). For these programs, study abroad is not only a fascinating and transformative experience, although it is those things TOO. Studying abroad is also important, even essential, to the attainment of program learning objectives. Just as it's hard to imagine a STEM major graduating with no lab experience, or an Arts student graduating without having been given the opportunity to perform, we need to view study abroad as an integral part of a degree program for language students. With a relatively small investment, especially compared to the cost of equipment and infrastructure for programs like STEM and the Arts, UTC could greatly increase study abroad accessibility for majors and minors in French, Spanish, Latin American Studies, and Classics. This could take the form of increased scholarships to students and/or the use of departmental resources to fund faculty director travel and living expenses (so that they are not part of student costs). UTC should also consider working with its Foundation to develop enhanced scholarship opportunities supporting study abroad specifically, as there seem to be fewer donor-funded scholarships at UTC than at some peer institutions.
- 4) Related to the institution as a whole - UTC should consider increasing support for faculty study abroad directors who manage programs instead of outsourcing management to vendors, specifically through a centrally-funded stipend for programs lasting 4 weeks or longer. Directing or co-directing a study abroad program requires training, expertise, and a significant investment in faculty time that goes well beyond teaching a summer class. Planning, communication with international partners, orientation management, budgeting, care on site – all these activities take considerable effort, and should be

compensated fairly. This would be in line with best practices established by the Forum for Education Abroad, the primary U.S. professional organization devoted to education abroad. Standard 5.2.2. states that "Personnel involved in all aspects of the program shall be equitably remunerated, qualified, and trained for their roles to meet the program objectives for all students." Paying for travel, lodging, and living expenses is an appropriate basic commitment, but a stipend would formally recognize the effort that goes into developing and maintaining faculty-led programs, which are often more cost-effective for students than programs whose administration is outsourced.

- 5) If languages are included as options in the Humanities track within the general education redesign currently underway, I recommend exploring the development of a credit by exam process by which students would have the option of purchasing, for a nominal fee, credits for courses falling before the class they place into if they earn a high enough grade (for example, a B). For example, a student placing into 3<sup>rd</sup> semester French and earning a B in that class, thus certifying their placement, could then go back and purchase the credits for (instead of just bypassing) the first two semesters. This process would contribute to student success by accelerating time to degree and could attract new students into the study of languages and literatures. It would be important for intermediate-level language courses to also be included in the gen ed options.

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