



University of Colorado **Boulder**

2016 Program Review

Department of Spanish and
Portuguese

Academic Review and Planning
Advisory Committee Report

Approved

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Maciel'.

04/14/17

Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs: Date

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Process Overview

The review of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese (SPAN) was conducted in accordance with the 2016 review guidelines. The Academic Review and Planning Advisory Committee (ARPAC) conducts and writes the final reviews of all academic units on the Boulder campus. The unit prepared a self-study report during 2015, which was reviewed during January 2016 by an internal review committee (IRC) composed of two CU Boulder faculty members from outside of SPAN, who also met with department personnel and carried out surveys of undergraduate and graduate students. The IRC found much of the content of the self-study to be accurate but noted issues for clarification by the unit. The unit provided a reply to the internal reviewers, considered further below. An external review committee (ERC), consisting of two experts within the discipline from outside of the University of Colorado, visited the unit over April 6 and 7, 2016. They reviewed relevant documents and met with faculty, students, staff, university administrators, and ARPAC members. The internal and external reviewers' comments and recommendations are cited at appropriate points throughout the report. This public document reflects the assessment of and recommendations for SPAN as approved by ARPAC.

Academic Review
and Planning
Advisory
Committee
(ARPAC)

Marie Banich, Professor, Institute of Cognitive Science

Sanjai Bhagat, Professor, Leeds School of Business

Adam Bradley, Associate Professor, Department of English

Erin Furtak, Associate Professor, School of Education

David Korevaar, Professor, College of Music

Clayton Lewis, Professor, Department of Computer Science

Jack Maness, Associate Professor, University Libraries

David Mapel, Associate Professor, Department of Political
Science

Susan Nevelow Mart, Associate Professor, School of Law

Academic year 2016-2017
voting members

Bryan Taylor, Professor, Department of Communication

Non-voting members

Jeff Cox, ARPAC Chair, Vice Provost and Associate Vice
Chancellor for Faculty Affairs and Professor of English and
Humanities

Bob Boswell, Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and
Community Engagement and Professor of Molecular, Cellular,
and Developmental Biology

Katherine Eggert, Quality Initiatives Officer and Professor of English

Bill Kaempfer, Senior Vice Provost and Associate Vice Chancellor
for Budget and Planning and Professor of Economics

Mary Kraus, Vice Provost and Associate Vice Chancellor for
Undergraduate Education and Professor of Geological Sciences

Ann Schmiesing, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
and Professor of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures

Staff

Andre Grothe, Office of Faculty Affairs

Unit Overview

The campus' standardized description of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, and information regarding comparable units, can be found on the Office of Data Analytics' (ODA) website at (<http://www.colorado.edu/oda/institutional-research/institutional-level-data/information-department/academic-review-and-0>). ODA updates profiles annually in the fall semester. This report cites the ODA data for SPAN posted in October 2015, the most recent update available; these figures reflect the state of the unit in academic year (AY) 2014-2015.

As the department expresses on its website, and cites in its reply to the external review committee (ERC), SPAN "is committed to providing an excellent education and an intellectually stimulating environment to undergraduate and graduate students alike. Teaching lies at the core of [SPAN's] mission, as does innovative and relevant scholarship in all periods of Latin American and Spanish literature and cultures as well as Hispanic Linguistics."

The unit offers two BA majors (Spanish and International Spanish for the Professions), an MA with options in Hispanic linguistics and Peninsular/Spanish-American literature, and a PhD.

Personnel and governance

As of November 1, 2015, the department had 13 tenured and tenure-track (TTT) faculty, 12 instructors and senior instructors, and four lecturers (one full professor has since retired, and a new assistant professor has been added, so the TTT number remains unchanged). The department is supported by one classified staff member. The self-study, prepared later in 2015, lists a second classified staff member. While the unit notes in its self-study that two staff members is not much, they do not request additional

support. The TTT contingent consist of two full professors, nine associate professors, and two assistant professors. The department website lists eight instructors, two senior instructors, and four lecturers.

The department is led by the chair and two associate chairs designated by the chair (one for undergraduate and the other for graduate studies). The chair is advised by an elected executive committee with representation by rank: a full professor, an associate, an assistant, and a senior instructor. The executive committee also performs merit evaluations; the bylaws specify that performance will be evaluated for a four-year span, with the most recent year being more heavily weighted. There is a provision for special consideration of a very productive year if no raises are available for a year during the evaluation period.

Both the internal and external review committees question whether it is appropriate for non-tenured/tenure-track faculty to participate in TTT faculty merit review. The unit's reply clarifies that only senior instructors can serve on the executive committee and that their role on it is important in representing a vital department interest. Their inclusion also addresses the 2009 ARPAC recommendation that the department enhance the role of non-TTT faculty.

Research, scholarship, and
creative work

The internal review committee finds that “tenure-track faculty in SPAN are active and visible scholars who produce notable numbers of research volumes and refereed articles and book chapters.” The external review committee notes that the department houses “renown[ed] scholars in Peninsular, Latin American, Modern, and Early Modern languages and literatures,” and that it is “a department of productive and invested scholars.”

Office of Data Analytics information supports this assessment. The unit ranks second of 17 units in rate of publication of books and monographs and third of 18 units in refereed articles. Grant support is minor and has declined, likely because of the expiry of a rare, substantial grant a few years ago.

Undergraduate education

The Office of Data Analytics unit profile show 184 majors, about in the middle of the units being reviewed, down by almost 60 percent over five years. The student to TTT faculty ratio for majors is about 14, in the upper third of units being reviewed. The data show 208 minors. Total undergraduate student credit hour production is 12,123, representing a five-year decline of 30 percent. Tenured/tenure-track faculty delivered 15 percent of these credit hours, near the least among units being reviewed.

In the most recent ODA survey of graduating seniors, 84 percent of respondents say that the program met their educational goals (in the upper third of units being reviewed). More specific survey items also received generally positive responses, for example on effectiveness of courses, though students gave lower ratings to items relating to advising on courses and careers, for which the unit is at or just below the middle for units being reviewed.

The internal review committee reports that “the undergraduate program itself meets with considerable student satisfaction, according to the undergraduate survey results. For example, 86% of the 128 respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their overall experiences in the unit and just 4% were unsatisfied,” based on their (larger) student survey. The internal reviewers commend SPAN for “the flexibility shown by the department in offering more options to its students. “

The external reviewers report a variety of student concerns, but the department reply to the ERC states that the committee met with only three students; this will be addressed in the Analysis section below.

The internal review committee asked the unit to discuss the decline in majors. The unit reply notes that declines have occurred recently across the humanities, but also notes that it has added a new minor that has likely drawn away some majors and that total student credit hour production could be a better way to assess the unit's teaching contribution. This shift would also recognize student interest in new courses that the department is offering in the English language. However, as mentioned earlier, while the decline in student credit hours is indeed less than the decline in majors, it is still substantial: 30 percent in five years.

The internal review committee also asked the unit to comment on the low proportion of tenured/tenure-track-generated student credit hours. The unit replied that all TTT faculty teach three undergraduate courses per year, with limited banking, suggesting that TTT faculty are fully committed to the undergraduate program. The low proportion of credit hours results from the substantial size imbalance between lower division courses, taught by instructors, and upper division courses, taught by tenured/tenure-track faculty. The IRC suggests that having more TTT faculty in lower division courses could help to attract majors. The unit responded that few majors come through the lower division courses, already having more advanced skills when they come to CU Boulder.

The unit is actively revising its undergraduate program and planning new courses that it hopes will increase student interest. The internal review committee asked for clarification on how these new courses would be staffed and how the unit estimates demand; the unit reply says that faculty will be reallocated from existing courses that will be offered less often and that they formed demand estimates from survey data.

The external review committee questions the unit's efforts in exploiting educational technology, in adopting current best pedagogy, and supporting "its heritage Spanish-speaking population." The unit cited ways in which it does use technology and defended its pedagogical practices. Instructors in the department are active participants in ALTEC (the Anderson Language Technology Center), which supports the unit's response. The unit's reply also indicates that it has added a new faculty member (jointly with Linguistics) expressly to develop programs "geared toward heritage speakers." Elsewhere the unit argues that a new hire in Mexican-American studies would also help address this need.

Graduate education

The unit offers an MA with options in Hispanic linguistics and Peninsular/Spanish-American literature and a PhD. The Office of Data Analytics unit profiles show 35 MA students and 27 PhD students in the reporting year, with three MA and two PhD degrees awarded. Completion rates for the MA are at the top of 13 units being reviewed, while for PhD students the rate is in the middle.

The internal review committee feels the self-study gives "an accurate picture of the successes of the graduate program, which are clear." They mention increased quality of graduate

students, decreased time to degree, and graduate placement. However, they did note some concerns: a decline in MA enrollment (a drop of two-thirds over five years), lack of student placement data, and dissatisfaction expressed in the student survey.

With respect to enrollment, the internal review committee notes that the unit has been making its graduate admissions more selective, and therefore intentionally reducing numbers, but questions whether quality has increased, given relatively low GRE scores. On this point, the unit reply says that they do not use GRE scores in their admission decisions. Further, the unit notes the general decline in enrollments in the humanities and uncompetitive financial offers to students as major concerns. The reply does not address placement data.

Points of graduate student dissatisfaction noted by the internal review committee include financial aspects, like a reported “lack of support for research, publishing, and travel to conferences,” and a mismatch between faculty and student interests. The internal review write that “according to our conversations, an increasing proportion of graduate students are interested in specialization areas in Latin American literature and culture, where the greater growth in employment opportunities is emerging. However, there are relatively few faculty in these areas at this time.”

The unit reply suggests that recent changes that make the PhD program more flexible may better accommodate student interests. It also asserts that the department does support graduate student research and travel, via “competitive grants open to all of our graduate students.”

The external review committee notes the financial problems already discussed in this report. It also identifies “an urgent need for formal and sustained professionalization in the form of workshops (e.g., grants and fellowships, academic job search, writing boot camps) and for diverse teaching assignments (e.g., content courses) to enrich students’ experiences and enhance their portfolios.” This concern is partially aligned with the lack of support the internal review committee identifies. It is possible that the “competitive grants” are too few in number to satisfy the demand or that students see the terms of the competition as unfavorable. The unit reply notes that some professionalization support is available outside the department, for example in the Graduate Teacher Program, but students may expect their own faculty to offer more specialized support.

The external review committee is critical of the MA degrees, arguing that they provide “little opportunity for the specialization that is required for the professional paths that students aspire to. Meaningful milestones (e.g., a thesis or qualifying paper in lieu of field exams) would allow students to better prepare for subsequent doctoral work elsewhere.” The unit reply to the ERC emphasizes that the main goal of the MA degrees is to form generalists and that graduate students are well aware of this.

Student survey comments offer some support for the external review on this matter. While overall satisfaction with advising is high, there is dissatisfaction about “clarity about program requirements (milestones, deadlines, finding an advisor)”; overall, “dissatisfaction” is the most common survey response on clarity of program requirements. Multiple written comments on the survey underscore this concern. There is also a high level of dissatisfaction with elective course availability, which may

suggest that students do not feel that the required courses meet their needs.

Space The unit's self-study presents an urgent need for improvement in the unit's premises, and the internal and external reviewers concur. Security in the McKenna Languages Building is inadequate. There have been break-ins and thefts, and department personnel do not feel safe.

Budget The self-study notes inadequate graduate student funding (as mentioned above) and salary compression for instructors and for TTT faculty. Recent changes in instructor pay has led to some senior instructors being paid the same as or less than some instructors. Because salaries normally are adjusted only at reappointment, there can be a lag in working out such inequities. The self-study argues that associate professors are also in need of relief. ODA comparative data suggest that associates are paid slightly less than peers, while assistants are paid a little more than peers.

Inclusive excellence The external review committee delivers a harsh indictment of the "ecology" of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, saying "the department is focused inward and it appears to be hampered by patent divisions between Peninsularists and Latin Americanists and by a highly hierarchical and gendered structure. Recent separations have disrupted the balance (the department has been described as 'formerly Eurocentric'), the junior faculty have little voice, and women have been absent from positions of power (e.g., chair, associate chair of graduate studies, and associate chair of undergraduate studies). To be sure, these lingering divisions sustain a disunity that precludes growth, and the class and the gender biases that pervade the climate are

impediments to curricular innovation and professional development.” Part of the basis for this assessment is the assertion that campus administration views the unit as “insular,” and inadequately engaged in “university governance and cross-departmental initiatives.”

The internal review committee gives no such assessment, and the unit reply to the the external reviewers pushes back, providing a list of cross-departmental activities, including cooperation with ALTEC and the School of Education, many faculty with cross-campus affiliations, and a list of campus-wide events. It could have added its cooperation with the Leeds School in offering the International Spanish for the Professions major, its role in the International Engineering certificate, and the recent joint hire with Linguistics. The unit also notes its small size and the fact that it has only one full professor other than the chair as accounting for smaller engagement with “campus governance.”

Data from the 2015 Faculty Report of Professional Activities (FRPA) suggest yet another perspective on campus faculty engagement. While two of the nine associate professors report healthy levels of service at college and campus levels, four report only a single activity, and three report none at all. There appears to be room for increased engagement by this faculty contingent.

The unit reply does not discuss the alleged division between peninsular and Americanist faculty, nor the alleged gender issues. Comments from the students suggest that there may be issues that need to be investigated. For example, students were concerned about tensions between professors specializing in Peninsular literature and those who study the cultures of the Western hemisphere. Graduate students at times find that

department divisions impact their studies. Individual faculty members and staff are seen as disrupting what could otherwise be a congenial community. Many students expressed concerns about gender issues in the department, which is seen as being patriarchal and authoritarian by some. Students note a lack of faculty diversity and particularly a lack of women in unit leadership roles. Students also indicated a fear of retaliation for speaking up.

Past Reviews

The unit has done a good job in responding to the recommendations from the 2009 review. In particular, as recommended, it has

1. Increased its cooperation with Anderson Language Technology Lab, the College of Engineering and Applied Science, and the Leeds School of Business;
2. Succeeded in mentoring several junior faculty with few senior colleagues;
3. Revised its bylaws to enhance the role of non-TTT faculty.

However, the current review suggests there is still work to be done on other issues raised in the last review, including preparing students for the job market, improving relationships between faculty and graduate students, and establishing a visiting scholars program.

Considering the recommendations to higher levels of administration in the previous review, problems in funding graduate students and instructors and problems with the McKenna building remain.

Campus Context

As discussed earlier, the department has strengthened its connections with other campus units. But, as also discussed above, the administration holds an impression that the unit is “insular” and insufficiently engaged with its college and campus.

The unit shares in the baleful effects of two broad campus trends. First, financial support for graduate students is uncompetitive, and indeed simply inadequate, given Boulder’s increasingly high cost of living. Addressing this issue, especially in fields with limited grant funding, will be a major challenge. The best thinking across the campus, and likely a willingness to experiment, will be needed.

Second, humanities enrollments are dropping. The department is responding proactively, with a variety of new programs aimed at outreach especially to students who participate in the department while majoring elsewhere. But more of this will need to be done. Further, the cooperation of units to which students are flocking may be needed in conveying the importance of languages and the humanities.

National Context

The external review committee asserts that the Department of Spanish and Portuguese “has not remained abreast of disciplinary developments and curricular and pedagogical trends. Thus, while we recognize that the humanities may be declining vis-à-vis the sciences throughout the nation, the situation appears to be compounded for [SPAN] as the department confronts changing faculty and student demographics. As a consequence, [SPAN] appears to be languishing relative to other humanities departments at CU, and of equal importance, relative to sister departments at peer institutions.” Unfortunately, the external reviewers provided little insight that can guide a response to this assertion (and the unit contests it, especially with regard to curriculum and pedagogy). But there may be some common ground between the external reviewers’ position and that of the unit itself with respect to heritage speakers as students in the program. The external reviewers suggest the need to do more to support this group in particular, and SPAN’s self-study also addresses this need: “we need to engage more firmly with Latino students, heritage speakers, and international students. We are keenly aware of the fact that Spanish is not strictly a foreign language in the United States. It is also undeniable that Latino/a culture is interwoven in the fabric of our society and that the flow of people and information in the Western Hemisphere and across the Atlantic pose a challenge to a paradigm grounded in Nation- States and the borders that separate them.”

To address this challenge, the unit proposed to add a linguist specializing in second language acquisition and heritage speakers, jointly appointed in the Department of Linguistics; this has since been accomplished. It also proposes to add a faculty member in the field of Mexican and Mexican-American studies.

Analysis

The external review committee and the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, while disagreeing on a good deal, agree on the value of increasing the unit's attention to US Spanish, in part to support the interests of students who are heritage speakers. A faculty hire in Mexican and Mexican-American studies, as proposed by the unit, would be helpful. Given the history and demography of Colorado, some would suggest that this is overdue.

ARPAC agrees that such a hire would be desirable but is concerned that there may be difficulties in developing a successful hiring proposal. In particular, the fact that current TTT faculty teach a modest share of the unit's student credit hours may be a barrier to adding to the faculty. Evidence demonstrates that the faculty is fully committed to its undergraduate program, and student survey results show that faculty are doing a good job, but TTT faculty are not contributing to undergraduate education at the level of their colleagues in other units. This makes a new hire difficult to justify.

In addition to addressing this deficit by developing new undergraduate courses taught by TTT faculty, as discussed above, the unit may wish to explore the possibility of joint hiring with other units to attract a new faculty member in Mexican and Mexican-American studies. Cooperation with School of Education (the BUENO [Bilinguals United for Education and New Opportunities] Center) or with units that participate in the Latin American Studies Center, such as Anthropology, might be appropriate.

Undergraduate
education and support

The unit is doing good work in developing new courses, curricular structures, and interdepartmental initiatives to compensate for

the loss of majors. There may be more options to be explored, however. Currently, few majors come through the unit's lower division program, and this limits the ability of tenured/tenure-track faculty to attract new student interest. In response, the unit should design a major that would attract and cater specifically to learners not prepared to skip past the lower division offerings. Further, other units have found that general theme courses, offered to lower division students by TTT faculty, attract student interest, expose prospective majors and minors to TTT faculty, and serve to increase faculty cohesion, as TTT faculty rotate through these general courses.

Graduate education and support

Graduate student comments indicate that more attention to mentoring on professional activities is needed. Programs offered outside the unit cannot give students confidence that they are learning the professional practices of their discipline. In relation to this, an examination to assess post-graduation preparedness of MA program enrollees advisable. That a program seeks to produce "generalists" does not mean that students do not need and deserve help in planning their futures. Specific student placement information, missing from the self-study and replies, would also be a valuable addition. Current students would gain from knowing what past graduates have done and are doing, how they found their opportunities, and advice on how best to prepare. It can also help tailor course and curricular offerings and advising.

The unit should look into student concerns about lack of conference travel support. Given that funds are available by competitive application, are the funds adequate? Are they distributed equitably?

Students and the external reviewers also suggest that greater clarity and better communication about degree requirements and milestones would be helpful.

The unit will be participating in the new Consortium of Doctoral Studies in Literatures and Cultures. The unit should strive to take full advantage of this new structure to strengthen its graduate programs.

Space Physical safety in McKenna is a continuing problem. In the last review the concern was fire; now it is crime. A thorough security review and refit is essential.

Campus engagement The unit has been active, since the last review, in developing a number of cross-campus cooperative initiatives. But there remains an impression of “insularity.” Given the current level of service activity among the associate professors, there is room for increased college and campus service by some faculty, which can benefit the unit as well as the campus. Having members serve on college and campus committees builds visibility and creates opportunities for collaboration with other units: good citizenship brings rewards. Further, associate professors will find that lack of college or campus service is a barrier to promotion.

Inclusive excellence The unit ranks first among units under review in the number of underrepresented minorities on the faculty and in the proportion of students in these groups, both undergraduate and graduate; these proportions of students have increased over the last five years. The proportion of female faculty is a bit below the middle of the comparison group, while the proportion of female students, undergraduate and graduate, ranks above the middle of the comparison group. As noted above, comments from graduate students and the external reviewers show that there are issues in

the treatment and role of female faculty and students. Only 39 percent of graduate students agree that the unit “encourages a climate that is tolerant and respectful of diversity.”

A number of comments from graduate students raise disturbing questions about gender equity, respect for students, unacceptable behavior of faculty toward students, and, especially troubling, fear of retaliation if students express their concerns. It is unacceptable for these issues to go unaddressed.

There are also suggestions of “political” tensions within the faculty between Peninsularists and Latin Americanists that affect relationships with students and perhaps other aspects of the unit’s work, as discussed earlier.

ARPAC feels that some of these issues may be exacerbated by the unit’s faculty mentoring policy, which is that mentoring is “available” but not required.

Recommendations

The members of the Academic Review and Planning Advisory Committee (ARPAC) address the following recommendations to the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and to the offices of the dean and the provost. It is the committee's intention that the recommendations serve to benefit program improvement and development and to further the mission of the University of Colorado Boulder.

To the unit

1. The unit must take prompt action to address serious climate issues affecting faculty and students. Working with the Office of Faculty Affairs, the Graduate School, and the College of Arts and Sciences, the department should establish an advisory board of faculty from other units to assist SPAN in undertaking the following:
 - a. Investigating students' experiences of feeling disrespected by faculty, including with regard to gender, and their concerns that they have no recourse when mistreated, fearing retribution. With the help of appropriate offices, establish safe channels of communication for students. Follow the investigation with such firm action as may be needed to correct abuses. Establish benchmarks that will allow progress to be assessed;
 - b. Working with Faculty Affairs to carry out constructive discussions within the faculty to improve collegial relationships and ensure adherence to standards of collegial behavior. Learn from other units that have disciplinary divides how these can be managed in a professional and constructive manner;

- c. Appointing a female faculty member to a significant leadership position, such as an associate chairship;
2. Establish a mentoring program for all junior faculty and instructors;
3. Seek ways to use the lower-division program to attract majors and minors. Measures could include creating a new track for students coming in from lower-division courses and developing general theme courses taught in English and on a rotation by TTT faculty. In developing these initiatives, attend to the needs and interests of heritage speakers and other students with interests in Hispanic American culture;
4. Concerning the graduate program:
 - a. Take full advantage of the new Consortium of Doctoral Studies in Literatures and Cultures to strengthen the graduate program;
 - b. Within the unit, develop a mentoring program on professional activities for graduate students, providing formal and sustained professionalization through actions such as providing workshops on applying for grants and fellowships, offering preparation for academic job searches, hosting writing boot camps, and creating diverse teaching assignments;
 - c. Create a database of graduate students' placements;
 - d. Develop career guidance for MA students based on the experiences of recent graduates;

- e. Develop improved advising materials for graduate students, clearly spelling out degree requirements and milestones;
- f. Establish practices that will broaden the range of topics for students to pursue and that will match students with the appropriate faculty members.
- g. Offer more options for degree fulfillment, such as a thesis and/or MA qualifying paper;

5. Contingent on progress in addressing the climate issues discussed above, develop a recruitment proposal for a faculty member specializing in Mexican and Mexican-American studies. Consider strengthening the proposal by cooperation with other campus entities;

6. Work with campus administration to initiate a thorough security review of McKenna and insist that changes be made to bring the building up to campus security standards;

7. The chair should make clear that college and/or campus service is expected of all tenured faculty and reflect this expectation in merit evaluation. In doing so, the chair should ensure that service tasks are equitably distributed and rotated among the faculty.

To the dean of the College
of Arts and Sciences

8. Consider establishing a faculty advisory committee from other units to assist the department in addressing the climate issues discussed above. Monitor current and continuing

progress on this, providing help as needed and intervening as necessary.

9. Contingent on progress on climate issues and in increasing the role of TTT faculty in undergraduate education, encourage the unit to prepare a request for a new faculty member in Mexican and Mexican-American studies;

10. Assist the unit in adjusting salary inversions between instructors and senior instructors;

11. Support the unit in obtaining a needed security assessment for McKenna and a Facilities Management-led building mitigation.

To the dean of the
Graduate School

12. Work with the unit to investigate students' experiences of feeling disrespected by faculty, including with respect to gender, and their concerns that they have no recourse when mistreated, fearing retribution. Establish appropriate, safe channels of communication for students.

To the Office of Faculty
Affairs

13. Assist the unit in conducting faculty discussions of collegial behavior and promoting improved collegial relations across sub-discipline boundaries.

To the Office of the Vice
Chancellor for
Infrastructure and safety

14. Conduct a thorough security assessment of the McKenna Languages Building and carry out such improvements as may be needed to bring the building up to accepted campus security standards.

Required Follow-Up

The chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese shall report annually on the first of April for a period of three years following the year of the receipt of this report (i.e., April 1st of 2018, 2019, and 2020) to the deans of the College of Arts and Sciences and of the Graduate School and to the provost on the implementation of these recommendations. Likewise, the dean shall report annually on the first of May to the provost on the implementation of recommendations addressed to the college. The provost, as part of the review reforms, has agreed to respond annually to all outstanding matters under her/his purview arising from this review year. All official responses will be posted online.