Response to Program Rating for French and Francophone World Studies

By renaming the Department’s graduate program(s) French and Francophone World Studies in 2008, the Department anticipated the emphasis on global studies that the University has subsequently embraced. The term "Francophone" refers to the literatures and cultures of the French-speaking world, which includes Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, the Indian Ocean, North America, and the Pacific Ocean. Since the 1990s, the global emphasis of French Studies on their cultural and Francophone components has allowed us to expand connections established in the 1980s with other units on campus and to create new ones, as stated in the "Program Size" and "Program Characteristics" sections of the Strategic Assessment. Our graduate program currently interacts with more than ten departments (cross-listed courses, thesis committees, shared conferences). We were pleased to note that the Task Force acknowledged the international diversity of our graduate student cohort.

However, there are points of fact that the Department needs to address. Since 2006 the Department has worked to develop the Arabic language program within the unit because undergraduate Arabic language teaching fits into our strategy of building a successful graduate program around French and Francophone studies in two ways. In the short term, Arabic language instruction offers opportunities for TA support for incoming graduate students at a time when the College has been reducing the number of TAships. In the long term, expanding Arabic language and cultures will give our graduate students working on Africa an extra edge on the job market. We gladly welcome Swahili in our Department as of this semester because this language fits into our strategy of strengthening our graduate program in concert with our plans for Arabic. No graduate studies in Arabic are currently anticipated and for the time being one faculty member should be adequate. We are currently exploring new forms of synergy with other graduate programs within a new administrative structure, the Division of Languages and Cultures; however, the suggested merger with Religious Studies appears to us unworkable as presented in the Task Force Report. The report also states that the program recently expanded its focus to include Arabic culture. While it is true that the undergraduate Arabic language program dates from fall 2006, Arabic culture, as a part of Francophone cultures, has for a long time been a part of the teaching and research interests of faculty in the Department.

We consider the term "acceptable" to be an understatement of the quality of job placements for our PhDs, who have had considerable success in a tight job market as we described in the “Program Outcomes” section of the Strategic Assessment. The basis for the report’s statement of a 57% completion percentage for doctoral students in our program is unclear. Note that students in our terminal M.A. program should not be included in the data for Ph.D. completion. We also point out that for the past several years we have had a steady number of applicants with an increase this year. The median TTD of 7.1 years is consistent with our peer institutions. In the Modern Language Association’s Report on the Survey of Earned Doctorates (2005), the median total time from baccalaureate to doctorate for foreign language studies is 11 years. The median registered total time from baccalaureate to doctorate equals 9.2 years.

Given that The Board of Regents acknowledged the international reputation and strength of our program in 2008 when it was renamed French and Francophone World Studies, and that through our short- and long-term plans we participate in two of the crucial synergies prioritized by Dean Maxson in her letter of December 8, 2009 asking DEOs for a proposal that meets these very objectives, diversity and globalization, we contend that our program deserves to be rated in the “High quality” category. The Program in French and Francophone World Studies is built upon interdisciplinarity. We will continue to expand its outreach across campus through Crossing Borders seminars, cross-listed courses, a new teacher training course across language programs, participation of faculty on dissertation committees in a number of graduate programs, and further participation in interdisciplinary research groups across campus, possibly within the new administrative structure of a Division of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures.