

UMBC'S DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES, LINGUISTICS, AND
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION (MLLI)
ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW 2019
UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL REPORT

The following is based on the review of the areas of the MLLI Self Study, the External Reviewers' Report, the CAHSS Dean's Response, and the Post-APR Action Plan that relate to undergraduate education. At the time of the review in the Fall 2019, there were 26 full-time members of the MLLI faculty, 15 of whom were tenured/tenure track faculty and 11 of whom were Lecturers, as well as a pool of adjunct instructors and graduate students on whom the department relies on to teach many of its language classes. The department serves approximately 220 undergraduate majors, 240 minors, and 42 students enrolled in a certificate program, as well as nearly a quarter of UMBC's students through their GEP courses.

A. UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM

The MLLI Department offers a single undergraduate major with three different concentrations within it: Linguistics, Language & Literary Studies, or a single language concentration in either French, German, Russian or Spanish. Across the different concentrations of the MLLI BA, students are required to take a three-course interdisciplinary core taught in English, which includes MLL 190: The World of Language, MLL 230: World Language Communities, and MLL 301: Textual Analysis. The department also offers minors in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Applied Linguistics, as well as certificate programs in Chinese, French, German, Korean, Russian, Spanish studies, and Intercultural Communication.

In addition, the department offers the language courses through the 201 level that are required as part of UMBC's General Education Program (GEP), as well as courses offering GEP "Culture" credit. The department also offers cross-listed courses and participates in other kinds of collaborations with other programs on campus, including Asian Studies, Education, GWST, Global Studies, Media and Communication Studies, as well as the Intercultural Living Exchange, Intercultural training, and the Humanities Scholars Program.

B. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

MLLI's Self Study gives an overview of the overall learning goals of their curriculum, the more specific learning objectives for the core courses, linguistic concentration, and language concentration, and the ways that they assess these (p. 11-25). Across their undergraduate program, they identify two principal commonalities: "First, the common three-course core focuses on the interrelationship between language, culture and society and develops the conceptual skills to analyze linguistic and cultural attitudes and discourses. Second, all areas emphasize the development of strong written and oral communication skills; develop a sound grasp of the history and heritage of the target culture with a clear understanding of the social,

economic and political dynamics that have shaped the fabric of the society; stress cultural/intercultural competency; and last but not least, emphasize critical analysis and information literacy” .

Since 2012, the department has been assessing the extent to which they are achieving the learning outcomes they have identifying by having the faculty in key courses collect feedback from student and summarize the course outcomes though a range of indirect and direct measures.

C. STATE OF THE DISCIPLINE; PROGRAM MODIFICATIONS; PROGRAM CHANGES

The reviewers praised MLLI’s integration of the study of language, linguistics, and intercultural communication, along with its attention to social justice and community engagement, the great strength of the program and for the university, uniquely positioning it in the U.S. They wrote:

MLLI offers an innovative curriculum consisting of the weaving together of several disciplinary areas that are commonly separate: Languages, Linguistics and Intercultural Communication. The degree requirements reflect this truly interdisciplinary approach to the acquisition of languages and cross-cultural competencies. Most language programs in the nation focus on either Language and Literature or Language and Linguistics. The Intercultural Communication linkage of those areas is unique and prepares students for international careers and for success in multicultural, pluralistic societies. But, and this is of great importance, the emphasis on intercultural communication recognizes that culture and language are inseparable: a deep understanding of another culture must include the language. Another clear thread of commitment that runs through the Department is attention to social justice, community engagement and active citizenship. The reviewers observed examples of these commitments in programs such as the Digital Story Telling project and internship placements. Graduates from the program report professional placements in institutions and businesses that reflect these same values. MLLI’s alumni placements demonstrate the success of their unique model.

Since the previous APR in 2012, MLLI has made a number of changes, which they describe in their self-study, many of which extend these strengths. They have added number of new initiatives, community projects, international telecollaborations, student research opportunities, and other teaching innovations. They have also added minors in Arabic and Japanese. Some of these changes are related to the dramatic shift in their faculty, where in “from Fall 2013 to Fall 2018, 11 full-time faculty members left due to retirement or resignation, and 10 new members were hired.”

The MLLI faculty are also in the process of making several changes to their major concentrations and securing approval from MHEC. These changes would change the title of one of the existing concentrations from Linguistics to Applied Linguistics, change the title of another from Language and Literary Studies to Language and Cultural Studies with the addition of a notation of the particular language/culture in focus, and adding a new two-language concentration option.

D. RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNDERGRADUATES

MLLI undergraduates have a number of opportunities to conduct and present their research under the supervision of department faculty, as described in the self study (p. 67-68). Each year, 2-5 majors undertake a selective independent Honors Thesis research project, and 4-5 students present their work at URCAD. Over the past five years, two MLLI students have secured URAs and three have had their work published in the UMBC Review. In addition, six separate faculty members have brought undergraduates onto their own projects as research assistances, supported by the Supplement for Undergraduate Research Experiences and the Hrabowski Fund for Innovation.

E. UNDERGRADUATE ADVISEMENT

The MLLI department has an extensive advising plan and is active in advising undergraduate majors throughout their time in the program, something detailed in their Self Study (p. 63-65). Staff conduct outreach to newly declared majors and keep students updated through social media. At the start of each semester, staff contact each registered student asking them to complete a “Student Advisement Sheet” to help tailor advisor assignments, and then provides them instructions to contact their assigned advisor, although the student can switch advisors at any time. There is also a reception for majors at the start of each school year, at which time they request that students complete “Student Profile Form” to file with the MLLI staff.

As the Self Study states, “all full-time faculty are advisors.” Advisors are trained by the Office for Academic and Pre-Professional Advising as well as the MLLI UPD, making sure the faculty understand how to contact students, conduct advising, understand the options available to students, access UMBC and department advising records, and make notations in the Advising Notes.

The department reports that the procedures for advising their majors work well, however they are still working on ways to connect with minors and certificate students as well as to coordinate advising lists between the registrar and department.

The MLLI Department also coordinates with the Office for Academic and Pre-Professional Advising and with the Registrar to provide information about the GEP Language requirement for students and evaluates applications for equivalency.

F. COUNCIL OF MAJORS; UNDERGRADUATE HONORS; AWARDS; RECOGNITION

MLLI’s Self Study describes a vibrant array of opportunities for students to engage with the curriculum, the faculty, and with each other. In addition to the independent research and honors thesis opportunities and research awards noted above (D), the department encourages study abroad and internship opportunities. While there is not an active MLLI Council of Majors, students have the opportunity to get involved in area clubs within the department: Arabic, French, German, Korean, Russian and Spanish, some of which sponsor their own awards and associated honors societies. In addition, there are an exciting range of other program-related clubs and events that students can get involved with, from department-wide welcome receptions and award events, to the Russian Chorus and Korean Dance Club, from the Chinese Lunar New Year and the Spanish program’s Quinceañera celebrations, to the annual departmental MLLI

Film Festival, to name just a few. There are also lectures, career events, and community service activities for students to participate in. One of the standout opportunities for MLLI students is the residential Intercultural Living Exchange language clusters program (ILE: <https://mlli.umbc.edu/ile/>), which unfortunately is threatened by a diminishing budget and the loss of the program's G.A.

G. FACULTY DEVELOPMENT; TEACHING QUALITY

The reviewers praised the quality and engagement of the faculty at all ranks. They commended that T/TT faculty, many of whom teach across disciplinary areas, undertake new course preparations each year, mentor individual students, and organize students-centered events, in addition to their own research activities. They also praised the MLLI lecturers who have taken the lead on teaching and curricular innovation. Further, the reviewers were impressed by the expertise and dedication of the adjunct instructors on whom much of the language instruction rests, some of whom teach up to six courses each semester while being considered part time

Both the Self Study and the Reviewers' report make it clear that the MLLI instructors are not only very busy, they are effective and committed teachers who continually strive to improve their approach. The reviewers were impressed particularly by the faculty's use of technological and format innovations in their courses, saying that "MLLI is at the forefront in terms of utilizing instructional technology and taking advantage of hybrid/online course designs."

In the language courses, the department is largely reliant on adjunct faculty and GAs, as well as lecturers. In the Self Study, they point out that these faculty not only have native or near-native proficiency in the languages they teach, but they also "receive extensive methodology and technology training and are evaluated through at least one yearly classroom observation and review of each semester's Student Course Evaluation Questionnaire scores." They go on to note, "It is gratifying to note that students regularly rank instructors of our 101-201 language courses (a requirement for most students) above the UMBC mean in 'teaching effectiveness.'"

For an extensive discussion of the department's approach to teaching excellence, see pages 37-51 of the Self Study.

H. RECOMMENDATIONS; ADDITIONAL COMMENTS; SUMMARY EVALUATION

In additions to the strengths in the program and the faculty noted above, the Reviewers identified key challenges, opportunities, and concerns for the MLLI undergraduate program in their report.

Among the challenges, they noted the decline in the number of majors and enrollment in upper level classes in recent years. They say that this is something consistent with declining enrollments in traditional language classes across the country; however, they note that this might be more temporary for UMBC's programs as it may be partially related to the dramatic faculty turnover. In any case, they recommends reconsidering the prerequisites for 400-level courses, limiting them to only what is necessary for success in the course, in order to cut down on barriers to enrollments. They also recommend including a 400-level course in the

requirements for the certificate and minors. The Dean reinforces the importance of examining the major and minor “in light of enrollment trends, and to revise its curriculum accordingly.”

Each of the APR documents also note difficulties around assessment. The reviewers recommend additional, focused reviews of online and hybrid classes, the assessment of majors through a standard upper division course or perhaps a capstone, and the assessment of language program courses in a common 300-level course. These Assessment processes are something that the department says in the Self Study that they need to revisit, looking for more consistency and stronger direct measures. They say that they plan to work with the Faculty Development Center on these issues, as well as on curriculum mapping may help identify key areas on which to focus. This is reinforced by the Dean’s letter and supported by the Action Plan.

Related more to the GEP service classes than the major, another area to examine is the D/F/W rate in Spanish 201. Each of the APR documents identify this as a trouble area that needs to be addressed right away.

The largest concern from the reviewers focused on the lack of faculty. In particular, the reviewers were concerned about the mismatch between the numbers of faculty in certain areas with the areas of growing student interest. In particular, they observed that Korean was particularly lacking faculty even as demand of it is rising. This is an opportunity for growth, as well as a current cause for concern. The Dean reinforced this need as something that needed to be addressed right away in his letter.

The reviewers made further recommendations for augmenting existing areas of strength and increasing student recruitment to those areas through faculty hires that would support this. However, the Dean recommended curricular development first and then requests for faculty if needed to support it. The reviewers also argued for the importance of drawing in adjunct instructors, upon whom so much of the language teaching rests, to the program and compensating them more fully, and to funding GAs who also contribute to teaching.

This review revealed a strong and complex program which pulls together language training, linguistics, and intercultural communication in a way that is both unique and especially promising. They recommended reaching outside of UMBC, marketing the program to both professionals and community members, and also reaching across the campus, extending connections between this and others at UMBC, saying that “intercultural training could become a hallmark and important component for many degrees both within and outside of the College.”