

Review of
The College of Languages, Linguistics and Literature
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

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Review Process

The review of the College of Languages, Linguistics and Literature (LLL) took place in several complementary stages. First and foremost, departments engaged in the process of self-reflection resulting in individual self-studies, which form the foundation for the review. These self-studies were then analyzed by internal members of the review team and discussed (via teleconferencing) by the team's internal members and external member. During the site visit, the team met intensively with students, staff, faculty, chairs and deans to broaden our perspectives and augment our understanding of the college. Attached to this global review are the individual self-studies and analyses thereof and other supporting materials. It should be stated at the outset that this report cannot claim to capture the totality of the college's scope and areas of excellence and concern. At the same time, many themes emerged consistently throughout this process and these are the ones singled out.

Overview

LLL is one of the four Colleges of Arts and Sciences, comprising six departments and four centers. With nearly 190 FTE faculty and teaching close to 40,000 student semester hours, it is one of the largest units on the UH-Mānoa campus. Its diverse range of programs and intellectual inquiry are united around the study of languages – their acquisition, historical development, documentation, structural analysis, and literary production and interpretation. LLL represents a coherent, even cohesive, set of programs and faculty research and is, in fact, remarkable nationally in its structure. Several faculty remarked on the college's distinctive "brand" and the value of maintaining it.

In keeping with the Mānoa Strategic Plan, the college recognizes the university's sense of place and highlights the Asian-Pacific aspects of its fields in teaching and research – in its unusual and impressive breadth of language offerings (teaching, e.g., Thai, Korean, Ilokano), its strength in language documentation, linguistics and second language study, and its attention to Asian-Pacific and Hawaiian literatures. Bolstered by this emphasis, the college also has had a National Foreign Language Resource Center since their inception in 1989, and, more recently,

major funding from NSEP to serve as a Korean “flagship” institution. Its Language Learning Center, under very able leadership, has built an impressive environment for student learning.

There was, however, a sense among the reviewers that the college did not have a compelling vision for its future. As one faculty member expressed it, the college acted in “default” mode, passive and responsive to events as they arose. To the extent that this characterization is accurate, it is unhelpful to the college’s health and success. As recommended below, a partnership between the college and central administration that combines a strong vision with planning and new investments will allow for the excellence necessary for the university’s ambitions.

Faculty

Excellence in faculty scholarship can be found throughout the college, albeit unevenly. Several of its graduate programs are internationally recognized. The Department of Linguistics has a long history of innovative scholarship, especially in the area of language documentation, and has a long list of distinguished alumni. (It should be noted, however, that the self-study emphasized that the scholarly activity was currently too heavily clustered in a minority of the faculty.) Second Language Studies is considered one of the premier programs in the country and the programs in Japanese and Korean, within EALL, stand out in the Anglophone world. In other departments, individual faculty have impressive records of accomplishments, but there was some concern expressed that the commitment to scholarship was not universally held or was even discouraged by relatively heavy teaching loads (a 3/2 load, standard in most of the departments, is unusual at a research university) and limited research support.

The college faculty also have a strong commitment to teaching. They have won many teaching awards, including 26 Regents’ and Chancellor’s Excellence in Teaching Awards in the past ten years, pride themselves on their close contact with students (“we know all their names”), and, in the case of English, all tenure-line faculty do some of their teaching in the first-year composition program, a rarity at a research university. Two of the six departments (Linguistics and SLS) are fundamentally devoted to graduate education, but even these departments participate in the undergraduate curriculum. All of the LLL departments contribute

significantly to the general education courses for students throughout the university. In fact, they have a strong sense of the important role they play in providing a liberal education critical to a multicultural and thriving democracy.

There are also numerous examples throughout the college of curricular innovation. A very partial list would include the development of LLL 150, a team-taught Global-Multicultural foundation course, a new 200-level sequence in English, greater incorporation of new media into upper-level LLEA courses, and five new tracks for the MA in SLS. It should also be recognized that the nature of much of the teaching in LLL entails relatively small classes. This is driven in part by pedagogy – composition and language courses are effectively taught only in small contexts – and in part by the breadth of its language offerings – so-called LCTLs (“less [or least] commonly taught languages) tend to have modest enrollments. Some courses currently offered with lower enrollments could be effectively taught to larger audiences, but the nature of the LLL curriculum cannot be ignored in enrollment planning. This more intimate faculty-student engagement can also help with student retention.

Several departments reported on the decrease in the FTE of tenure-line faculty and the concomitant increase in non-tenure-line lecturers and instructors. From an historical perspective, in the case of LLEA, the tenure-line faculty have decreased from 35 to 19 over a 30-year period; in English, over roughly the same time, the numbers have dropped from about 70 to 52. At the same time, in recent years at least (we did not see long-term enrollment data), the total number of students studying in the college has increased. Perhaps the best indication is the increase in BA degrees awarded, from 146 to 207, and MA degrees from 70 to 96, in the 10 years from 1996-97 and 2006-07. There is a deep concern that faculty lines will not be replaced or even returned to the college for (re)allocation. Putting aside the larger national trend of replacing tenure-line faculty with adjuncts, the pronounced decrease in the number of faculty with a research emphasis reduces the intellectual capital of the college, threatens the university’s standing as a research institution, and limits the students’ ability to benefit from attending such a university. This issue will become acute as the demographically anticipated retirements increase.

Students

There is concern on campus about the relatively low six-year graduation rate for undergraduate students, currently about 55%. Several reasons were offered for this fact, from the high percentage of commuter students and their need to work to poor preparation, inadequate advising and too many requirements (although all the chairs indicated that it is possible to graduate with a major in their department within the 124-credit minimum). It was not clear which of these explanations or to what degree account for the low graduation rate, but most likely all of these factors play a role and improving this graduation rate will require efforts from many quarters.

Unfortunately, no undergraduate students attended the session arranged for them, although one would perhaps not expect deep interest on the part of undergraduates in a college-level review. From the student surveys, some of their chief concerns seem to be access to courses and major programs and inconsistency in the quality of instruction. Troubling is the fact that only 64% rate student morale as “high,” only 67% believe the program quality is high enough to attract students, and less than half (46%) believe that their departments have an open environment for addressing legitimate student complaints.

The graduate student surveys expressed a variety of criticisms, but the students interviewed spoke very favorably of their faculty, their programs, the advising they received, and revealed an impressive degree of involvement in the workings of the department. Their area of complaint focused on student support—in three areas: 1) level and availability of GA stipends; 2) inadequate funding for conference participation and professional development; and 3) lack of transparency in the criteria for allocating GA positions within departments. The third issue can be readily resolved; the first two will require a commitment of greater funding and are critical if the college/university is going to attract the best students and prepare them for an increasingly competitive profession. There is also the more immediate issue of the impact of the mandated shift from 0.25 to 0.50 GA positions. Students are very involved in departmental committees and in several cases are active in student-led interest groups. Linguistics, in particular, should be commended for the degree to which their students participate in major conferences.

Staff

The clerical, fiscal staff and academic support specialists with whom we met seem very committed to the college and university. In these conversations, too, arose the theme of being handicapped by a lack of decentralized decision making. We also heard that it is becoming more difficult to fill positions and these vacancies exacerbate the demands on a relatively thin support staff. It seemed that more APT should be added to the college staffing, especially in English, where, despite its size and complexity, there is no staff person at this level.

Organizational Structure

A recurring issue in the two days of the site visit was the proposed appointment of a new dean of the Colleges Arts and Sciences and a to-be-determined new organizational structure. While the evaluation of this restructuring formally lies outside the scope of this review, it was too important and pervasive a concern not to be addressed here. Since 1982 the Colleges of Arts and Sciences has been a college in name alone and has operated as four independent colleges divided along disciplinary lines. To some extent this reflects a general national trend in which large heterogeneous colleges of arts and sciences have broken up and formed smaller, more coherent units of arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, etc. If one surveys the existing structures of arts and sciences units it is quickly apparent that no one system is best and any decision about a new structure must take into account not only the obvious (and not so obvious) structural advantages and disadvantages but local history and practices. A point made several times was that LLL is distinctive and there was a corresponding concern that in a unified arts and sciences this distinctiveness would be lost. This concern goes beyond the inevitable and reasonable anxiety about change and loss of autonomy and extends to the perceived loss of a competitive advantage. Any new structure should take this into account. More generally, many faculty also expressed concern that with a larger structure their access to and relationship with a dean who understood their field and interests would be attenuated. Here, too, a new structure should strive to balance the advantages of smallness with the comprehensiveness of larger size.

Also disconcerting to many is the current “interim” status of the dean. The current interim dean has the respect and appreciation of the faculty and should be commended on his leadership of the college. But it is more than a little puzzling that the “interim” title seems to be routine in arts and sciences. The current LLL dean has held it for seven years, and in fact, all but one of the arts and sciences deans have “interim” status. While some argued that the nomenclature was an irrelevant issue, most faculty saw no good in the prolonged holding pattern indicated in the “interim” titles, as it sends a message of uncertainty and creates an environment of temporizing and immobility. Furthermore, many believe that the dean’s position is overly constrained, as it has limited budgetary authority in regards to faculty lines especially. Each campus develops its own balance between centralized/decentralized decision making and authority, but it should be pointed out that it will be very difficult to recruit a new dean of arts and sciences if s/he does not have adequate resources and authority to strengthen the college. Finally, it is critical to include the college community in this process. As one faculty member remarked, faculty feel a “loss of voice” in this important process and inclusion of these voices is essential to a successful transition.

Summary Recommendations

Some of the following require action by the central administration, others by the college and/or departments. All levels of the university will need to be engaged in the important steps to move forward towards fulfilling the goals outlined in the strategic plan “Defining Our Destiny,” one in which LLL must play a critical role.

1. Resolve expeditiously through appropriate consultation the issue of the new structure of the College of Arts and Sciences. This process must involve and be clearly communicated to all the stakeholders.
2. Identify the dean of Arts and Sciences and charge the dean, working with faculty, students and staff, to create a clear vision for the college, consonant with its strengths and the overarching mission of the university.
3. Give the dean, and concomitantly chairs and program directors, more autonomy in budgets thereby allowing for better decisions and more efficient processes.
4. Where appropriate, decentralize procedures, giving deans and chairs greater ability to be responsive and to effect change.
5. Invest in the research capacity of the college, in part by allocating more tenure-line faculty in response to compelling strategic plans for excellence.
6. Develop a more extensive culture of scholarship, in part by routinely rewarding faculty scholarly achievement, facilitating their participation in conferences and improving the research infrastructure.
7. Establish a system of faculty mentoring for junior faculty.

8. Consider a better system of post-tenure review, perhaps including external evaluation, with an emphasis on faculty development,
9. Address the profound inadequacies of the facilities, including toxic classrooms, non-functioning elevators and overcrowded offices.
10. Improve the learning environment by increasing the number of “smart” classrooms and support for more faculty to incorporate new media into their teaching.
11. Work with the college to develop an equipment budget and reasonable replacement cycle for computers and other essential equipment and improve the IT support for the departments.
12. Improve communications both within the college and between the college and central administration.
13. Develop a more comprehensive and coordinated student advising system.
14. Revisit the current complex system of undergraduate requirements to promote student learning and improve graduation rates.
15. Increase support for graduate students and communicate clear criteria for allocation of support.
16. Establish more development opportunities for support staff.